

NSW University Theatrical Society

Budgeting Advice

Budgeting for Your Production: Area by Area

Distributing money is one of the roles of a production's producer. The advice which follows should be useful to any producer as well as any director writing a proposal to put on a NUTS show. When writing a proposal a director will effectively have to do a bit of producing themselves. Having said this, these guidelines contain useful information for any NUTS' designers or crew members. When budgeting for a conventional theatrical production the principal expenses to be considered are venue hire, rights, publicity, technical effects, set, props, costumes, make-up and administrative expenses. Below, under a series of subject headings, you'll find advice on budgeting for each of these areas of your production. Most sections are effectively a list of things you'll need to consider. You won't want to forget about any foreseeable expense because unforeseen expenses may beset you as it is. In a major production it will probably be the individual members of your production crew that do the detailed budgeting within their budget delegations. However, you will do some of the initial research into costs. You will also be the one that checks and approves the plans of each crew member before they run off and execute their plans. It is easy to spend more money than your budget allows. Be careful to avoid this so that you aren't left out of pocket.

Venue Hire Expenses

Minor productions typically hire Studio One for 6 days at a cost of **\$385.00** (1 days to bump-in, 1 night's dress rehearsal and 5 evening performances plus lamp levy). It is often possible to hire the Studio for an extra day or two to accommodate extra bump-in / rehearsal time but this is not the given norm. NUTS will pay the additional venue hire if your production has a labour-intensive set or other complex technical requirements, however this needs to be detailed in your budget. NUTS, unfortunately, cannot always secure this extra time in the space but factor it into your proposed budget if you think you'll need it.

Lo Myers Studio is only hired out to NUTS under special conditions because it is in near continuous use by the School of Theatre, Film and Media (STFA). Lo Myers requires us to have technical staff supervise your bump in and bump out and this should be included in your theatre hire budget. NUTS is happy to pay for technical staff if it is requested by the Production Unit. The Production Unit now charge a \$50 lamp levy to all theatre hire bills. NUTS is aware of this and has accommodated it into theatre hire. Figtree is unavailable due to construction but we should regain access in 2010.

If hiring a venue other than those of the STFM you may be obligated to hire technical staff to supervise your bump-in/bump out, security staff and/or cleaning staff. Find out how much these people will cost and if they are included in the venue hire fee. Lighting equipment, sound equipment and other extras (i.e. a piano or rostra) may also be excluded from the venue hire fee. Once again, find out how much they will cost. The lighting equipment provided for free with a venue may be inadequate. In this case, the cost of hiring lights will need to be factored into your budget. In short, the actual cost of hiring a venue is rarely the price that you will first be given over the phone.

Set Expenses

Your set budget will contain four main types of expense: furniture/set pieces, construction materials, tools and set dressing materials. All of these costs, in particular tools, may be partially or wholly defrayed by making use of NUTS' resource buying scheme. Construction materials will usually be required to build at least some of your set. However, before deciding that you need hundreds of dollars worth of wood, be sure to find out from NUTS' Tech Officer what set pieces and materials NUTS already owns. If you're building a conventional box set you may find NUTS already has pretty much everything you'll need. It is almost always cheaper and easier to buy, hire, borrow or find ready-made furniture or set pieces than build your own; it usually looks better as well. You may, however, need to build set pieces if they are out of the ordinary, cannot readily be found, or if the real thing would be too big and/or heavy to manoeuvre on and behind the stage. When determining the cost of sourcing/constructing something do some research. Ask your friendly NUTS' Tech Officer, ring up or visit suppliers. Plucking figures out of thin air is a waste of time. Also remember that materials doesn't just mean timber and paint. Small items such as screws, coach screws, nails and glue all add up. Castors are particularly expensive. You may also need blacking and/or other fabric for your set. NUTS has a stock of fabric which has been used on other productions. You should find out what we have before buying more by contacting NUTS' costumes/props manager. Set dressing is the process of 'clothing' the bare timber of your set to turn it into something worth looking at. Set dressing expenses for a conventional interior might include curtains, wallpaper, a painting, ornaments, books on a shelf, etc. Most such items can be borrowed or bought cheaply but, if your set is an Edwardian home, set dressing might end up being your principal set-related expense. The set for a minor production might cost anything from **\$5 to \$200**. The set for a major production might cost anything from **\$100 to \$500**. When deciding how much money to spend on your set, remember that a strange or fantastical set is likely to cost a lot to construct but the cost of dressing a realistic period set might make such a set equally expensive. A minimalist set or a modern interior should cost you relatively little.

Costume Expenses

When determining the cost of costuming your play you will need to consider how many characters you have to costume, how many costumes each will need, and the style of these costumes. The costumes for a minor production might cost anything from **\$5 to \$100** The costumes for a major production might cost anything from **\$50 to \$200** plus. Like set pieces, costumes can be bought, hired, borrowed or made for the show. Borrowing is always the cheapest option. If your play requires modern dress you may barely need to budget for costumes at all; your show's cast and crew may be able to supply everything you need. The next cheapest option is to go op-shopping. This strategy usually suffices for plays with a mid to late 20th century setting. In putting on a period play you will usually need to hire and/or make your costumes. This will increase your costume budget somewhat. Period costume is very expensive to hire. A non-realistic play will usually require at least some costumes be made. When making your costumes you will need to consider the cost of not just fabric but also trimmings, haberdashery, shoes and accessories. The cost of shoes and accessories also needs to be factored in when buying or hiring your costumes. Before you look anywhere else for costumes, you should contact NUTS Costumes/Props Manager to see what NUTS already has that you can use. You should be able to reduce your expenditure on costumes this way.

Prop Expenses

As with your set and costumes, the size of your props budget will depend on what you need and how they are sourced. For a conventional play, a reasonable estimate of the cost of props for you show can be determined by making a list from the script and then doing a little research. Again, you can rely on the advice of NUTS Costumes/Props Manager to help you estimate costs and find the cheapest places of

supply. NUTS has its own collection of props which you can make use of by contacting NUTS Costumes/ Props Manager.

Make-up and Hair

Your hair and make-up budget will usually not be large, especially compared to other production areas. The distance between audience and performer in both Studio One and the Fig Tree Theatre is such that conventional stage make-up is unnecessary. For this reason, NUTS' money should not be spent on naturalistic or everyday make-up (unless your play/project is staged in a bigger venue). You will, however, have to budget for make-up to achieve special effects such as blood, greasepaint to apply a clown face, etc. It is usual practise for actors to supply everyday hair accessories, as is the case with make up items. However, you should budget for things such as hair pieces, hair mascara, etc. if they are needed. NUTS has a hair and make-up box containing stuff left over from previous shows. If you want to know what we already have or, if you want advice on costing and sourcing hair and make-up supplies, you should contact NUTS Costume/Props Manager.

Rights Expenses

If you wish to put on a play that is still in copyright, performance rights can be a major expense. To find out how much rights for your play will cost you must first get in contact with the rights holder. Most playwrights have an agent, their contact information will often appear on the inside cover of the play next to the bibliographic details. If your play edition doesn't tell you who to contact you may need to contact the publisher. Another tactic is to contact one of the big providers of theatrical licenses and ask if they have the play or musical for which you're seeking the rights on their books. If they don't, they might be able to tell you to who does. In Australia, the rights to many plays are held by Dominie Pty. Ltd. (drama department). They can be contacted on 9905 0201. The rights to musicals are more broadly spread between agents.

Some musical licensors are:

Hal Leonard Australia

(Australian sub-agent for Music Theatre International (MTI) - the biggest musicals agent)

web: www.mtishows.com phone: 02 4365 5240 e-mail: nanette_frew@bigpond.com

post: PO Box 5130, Cheltenham East, Victoria 3192

Tams Witmark Music Library

(big and, unfortunately, USA based)

web: www.tamswitmark.com

post: 560 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10022 USA

Warner/Chappell Music Australia

phone: 02 9855 4099 e-mail: wcmsydney@warnerchappell.com

post: PO Box 353, North Ryde, NSW 2113

Dominie

phone: 9905 0201

The Really Useful Group

(Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals)

web: www.reallyuseful.com

David Spicer Productions

web: www.davidspicer.com phone: 02 9371 8458 e-mail: dspice@ozemail.com.au

post: 274 Military Rd, Dover Heights, NSW 2030

If the play you have is unpublished you will usually be in contact with the playwright. However, if you've dug up a little-known unpublished play from a library somewhere and don't know where to start, the answer is the internet. You may also need to go hunting if you have an edition published by a now non-existent publisher. Try starting your search at the website for the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC) (www.cisac.org) From there you'll be able to link to various writers' societies that you can ask about the play you intend to stage. You will not need to purchase rights for your play if it is out-of-copyright or if the author has waived their right to payment e.g. in the case of a student written play. As a general rule, copyright lasts for 70 years following the author's death.. The USA keeps extending the period of their copyright so that Time Warner and Disney can keep raking in the cash. Different rules may therefore apply to American plays.

If you are buying the rights to a musical you will also need to budget for the hire of a set of books and librettos, and for a set of orchestral scores. You will often want to hire a conductor's score before you get everything else to allow your musical director to prepare and to allow you to use music from the show in your audition process. This will cost still more money. Furthermore, some rights providers will require you to use a courier. These cost a lot of money so, if it is at all possible, pick up and drop off everything yourself. Rights costs for a popular show will often take the form of a percentage royalty of the gross box office receipts along with a minimum per performance fee. Because you can't know how much money your show will take at the box office, you will need to compile a spreadsheet of how much will need to be paid at each capacity level.

Lighting and Sound

The sound costs associated with your production will usually only consist of a recordable CD onto which you'll record your show's soundtrack, and make sure you check with the Costume Store/Props Manager before buying, as NUTS often has a supply of these. But, if you're doing something particularly ambitious, you might need to hire speakers, cables and/or microphones. Typical lighting expenses include gels (transparent films placed in front of your lights to change their colour and/or quality) and gobos (metal stencils placed in front of lights so that they project patterns and/or shapes). Ask NUTS' Technical Officer if NUTS has any that you need. Quite a few gels come with each of the theatres on campus and there is a whole cabinet of them in Io Myers Studio that you'll be able to make use of for free – provided you plan ahead and ask the School of Theatre, Film and Media production manager, Mark Mitchell, nicely *before* you bump-in. The standard lighting set up in Studio One, the Fig Tree Theatre and Io Myers is more than sufficient for most productions. But, occasionally, you'll have to hire a light or two. Gaffer tape will be used in abundance by any member of your technical crew that can get their hands on it. Make sure you budget for a roll somewhere.

Publicity Expenses

Photocopied posters, flyers and programmes are the main publicity-related expense for any minor production. NUTS will cover most of this in the secretarial allowance that is allocated to them from the Arc each year, check with the NUTS Publicity Officer about this. When you need your photocopying to be done for posters, flyers etc just contact the Publicity Officer and they will organise it for you. Other Studio One publicity expenses include paint to place an advertisement on the canvas that hangs on the theatre's front wall (check with the Tech Officer first to see whether NUTS has the paint in stock) and, possibly, film and development costs for poster-art photos. \$50 is a typical Studio One publicity budget (not including secretarial allowance, which you don't need to include a figure for).

If you're producing a Major production your publicity budget will be larger and the expenses more diverse. You may have to budget for professionally printed posters, flyers and/or cards; photos and folders to

make up press kits; press advertising; and/or server space for a website. If you want to develop a website for your show, NUTS may be able to get you cheap server space and a place in our domain (i.e. www.nuts.org.au/thenameofyourshow). Advertising is expensive and the expense needs to be justified by the prospect of more audience members. NUTS usually agrees to advertise in the Sydney Morning Herald Theatre Directory for well known plays. It costs about \$250 per week for an advertisement of average length. The size and composition of your publicity budget will obviously depend on your publicity plan. It is highly recommended that a third of your budget be spent on publicity as publicity is the way in which you promote your show and get people coming along. NUTS is usually happy to pay for any good promotional ideas you come up with because, if they are good ideas, the investment should be returned at the box office. You and your publicist (if you have one) should contact NUTS' Publicity Officer for advice when developing a publicity strategy.

Administrative Expenses

Administrative expenses for your production might include phone calls, transport costs and copying of scripts, audition pieces, production schedules, designs, etc. Transport expenses must be incurred during your show's bump-in or must be cleared with NUTS' Treasurer first to be valid. Your administrative budget need only be tiny for a Studio One production and, even on a lavish major production, this budget shouldn't swell beyond \$50. Other Expenses If you are putting on a musical your orchestra may have expenses such as instrument and/or music stand hire. Other possible expenses for your show might include fog juice for a smoke machine, puppet building materials or rigging equipment. It all depends on your choice of production and your plans for it. All budgets should have a small contingency to cover any unforeseen expenses.

Expected Profit

When submitting your budget in your proposal, it is important that you include expected turn out for your show and as a result, expected revenue. It is important for you to be aware of how much money you will be making from your show, when you are drawing up your budget. NUTS ticketing goes as follows. For a Studio One show, NUTS charges \$5 for NUTS Members, \$8 for students and NUTS Associate members, and \$10 for members of the general public. For Fig Tree Theatre and Io Myers Studio it will generally be \$10/\$15 with a \$2 discount off the respective standard price for NUTS members (although this may change depending on the show). The NUTS Committee is unlikely to approve a budget where the expenditure is going to be a great deal more than expected income.

Once again, good luck and we hope to hear from you soon.

The NUTS Committee, Or Who to Contact About What

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