

9 STEPS TO EDITORIAL BUDGETING

By Jessica Ross,
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When money's tight, it might seem like a waste of time to create a budget. You just can't spend much, right? But by planning in advance, and making careful choices, you can put together great lineups with standout stories for your readers.

1. Make sure you know how much money you have to work with each issue. Break your total budget down into a per-page amount by dividing your budget by the expected number of editorial pages you'll need to fill. Now you know about how much you should be spending per page (although the Contents page typically costs less, and some pages just have to cost more).
2. Come up with a list of your standard rates. This is all the kinds of expenses you might incur, from half-day or full-day photo shoots to quarter-page illustrations to your page or word rate for writing to your hourly rate(s) for fact checking. Consult historical records, like accounting reports and invoices, if you aren't sure what your typical costs are. Share your list of standard rates with everyone on your staff and ask for help making sure it's complete and realistic.
3. Develop your issue themes and dream lineups well in advance—before you have to commit to most of it. (See Kim Pittaway's hotsheet: *An Editor's Best Friend: The Editorial Plan*.)
4. Sometimes you'll have a marquee story or two to build a lineup around, or a theme you really want to work to, but try to envision the entire lineup as early as you can, even if you need to make some guesses.
5. Apply your table of standard rates to the future lineups you just developed. This will help you make your best guess about how much everything will cost, by story, cover to cover. Review the lineup as a whole and look for ways to save, such as combining items across several stories in one photo shoot. If overhead costs such as courier charges and pizza lunches fall into your editorial budget, estimate those and add them to your budget too. Add up all of your costs and compare them to your provided issue budget.
6. If you find you still have money remaining, consider whether you could add a story or a sidebar, swap in a better story, increase writers' rates, increase the size of an illustration, add more images to a story...generally add value for the reader and invest in your freelancers.
7. If you find you're over budget, look at which stories cost more in terms of the average per page expense than the budget per page amount you calculated in step 1. Decide if that story should be moved into another issue, or if you can move another story out of this issue and stretch the expensive piece over more pages to lower overall costs. Keep manipulating your lineups until your budget shows you as close to spending your entire budget as possible—without going over.
8. Meet with the rest of the magazine team to review the budget. This works well during your weekly or biweekly lineup meetings: as you gather to go over the status of all of the stories in the book, provide the working budget and review it with each story to make sure the expenses noted are realistic. If they're not, correct them and look for ways to make up any overages.
9. Encourage everyone to help you follow a "no surprises" approach. This means that everyone should have access to the budget, and they should check the stories they're handling to make sure the amounts you've noted are realistic, and that they should let you know right away if the costs will stray from the plan.
10. Track your costs as invoices come in. Note actual costs next to your budgeted costs. If they're not what you expected, find out why. Push back against surprises by asking for help in making cuts to other areas of the budget to make up for extra costs. Make sure all invoices come in as soon as possible, so everyone is paid promptly and you don't get an invoice months later that you'll have to absorb against the wrong issue.

If you can show that you can handle your money carefully, your publisher might agree to your proposals!

Now that you can predict your costs carefully and in advance, think about what kinds of spending would be a great investment for the magazine and why.

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