

GUIDE TO BUDGET 101



MELBOURNE
FRINGE

Polygamy, Polygayou, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by Duncan Jacob.

Image description: three performers on stage, one in glittered dress and a veil; one in shorts and blue cropped top; one in glittered jumpsuit.

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This resource is designed to help you put on an independent event. Please note that this document was created in April 2021 and all information was accurate at this date. If in doubt about the contents or if you have a question, get in touch with our Participants Services team at artists@melbournefringe.com.au.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY (Budgets and Grants)

Yuck Circus, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by J Forsyth.

Image description: a circus performer in black cropped top and shorts is holding ariel silk hanging from the ceiling and the lighting gives them a pink glow.

Creating a detailed and realistic budget is key to producing a successful independent arts event – you significantly increase your chances of making a profit or breaking even if you are aware of all the money coming in and out.

By planning your budget early on you will avoid nasty surprises along the way, and have a much better idea of what your bottom line may be.

Budgeting is an ongoing process – remember to continuously update your budget as costs come in. If you go over budget on one item, you might need to scale back on another. Or if an item has come in under budget, you might be able to spend a little more on Facebook ads, for example.

One person should be responsible for monitoring all expenses and updating budgets, but everyone involved in the event should have knowledge of the budget constraints.

Budget Template

The exact costs in your budget will depend on a range of factors such as the type of event and your venue – use the budget template linked to below as a starting point. You can add or remove income and expenses relevant to you and your event. Some expenses are common to all events, others will be specific to yours; some will be fixed, others have some flexibility.

If you are planning on entering into a profit-share model for your creative team, check out [this amazing guide from MEAA](#) for useful tips and agreement templates.

[Download our editable budget template here.](#)

BUDGET TEMPLATE			
Income			
Funding			
Creative Victoria			
City of Melbourne			
Australia Council			
Council/Other			
Box Office @ 30%	2683.23	(See next tab)	
Crowd Funding			
Artist Contribution			
Other			
In Kind			
Total Income	2683.23		
Expenses			
Wages and Fees	0	Rate	Weeks
Performers			
Director			
Stage Manager			
Production Manager/Assistants			
Writer			
Box Office/Front of House			
Designer			
Marketing/Publicity			
Producer			
Superannuation @ 9.5%	0		
Workcover @ 3%	0		
Per Diems			
Production Costs	0		
Rehearsal Venue Hire			
Performance Venue Hire			
Equipment Hire			
Lighting			



Need more tips?

The ATO and Fair Work have good resources on calculating tricky expenses in a consistent way.

Check out the [Live Performance Award](#) and [Vehicle and Travel Expenses](#).

Some Key Expenses Explained

Venue Hire

It is essential to have a clearly defined agreement in place with your venue and to understand all the terms of that agreement so that no unexpected expenses bite you later. [Download our venue hire agreement template here.](#)

Public Liability Insurance

It can be wise to consider Public Liability Insurance for your show, and many venues, festivals and funding providers require you to have PLI as part of your contract. Some venues cover their artists, some don't - so it's worth asking your venue first. Sometimes you're able to obtain short-term cover (like the umbrella PLI cover at the Fringe Festival), or you may prefer to look at policies that cover you all year round (e.g. Duck for Cover, AON Performers Insurance).

Contingency

Although you may have researched realistic costs and conservatively estimated your income, things can still go wrong. A standard budget contingency figure is 10% of your total expenditure.

Marketing and Advertising

Remember to decide on who your target audience is, what kind of people are most likely to buy tickets to your event – this will inform how and where you spend money on marketing and advertising. Tailor your marketing spend to things these potential ticket-buyers are most likely to notice.

Income

We recommend caution in projecting income. It is much better to be conservative and be pleasantly surprised when you exceed your expectations. It is often too late to cut back on costs once you realise your income targets are not going to be met. Don't forget to factor in ticketing charges when calculating your income.

Accessibility

Accessibility provisions ensure people with disability or who are Deaf can enjoy your show. Accessibility includes Auslan, Relaxed Performance, Audio Description, Tactile Tours, and Captioning. For more detail on how to provide accessibility at your shows, download our [Producers Guide to Access.](#)

Settlement

At the end of your season your ticketing provider (or venue) will generally send you remittance advice of all your sales, minus any ticketing charges or other costs owed. You'll likely need to provide an invoice, which means you will need an ABN (or a [Statement by Supplier Form](#)). For some handy information on how to invoice, check out the [business.gov.au resources.](#)

Bringing in Money



Cam Venn, *3 Minutes to Save the World*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by J Forsyth.

Image description: a performer in beard, wearing a paper box over themselves, and holding steering wheel.

Maybe you've decided you need some extra cash or you can't afford to spend your own savings on your art project. Whatever the reason, here are a few things you might want to look for:

Grants

There are many different types of grants:

- Professional development – grants for the development of your artistic career
- Project development – for helping you create a specific show, event, or idea. These grants can go towards things like rehearsal space, research materials, and paying yourself a wage while you make art
- Presentation grants – these are for helping you to put on your show or event. The final outcome, rather than the development period. These grants can go towards things like venue and equipment hire, and paying yourself and your team.
- Local Government – every local government has grants, call them to discuss your idea.

Our tip? Sign up to the [TNA](#) and [Auspicious Arts](#) newsletters. It's a great way of finding out what's on offer!

Our Hot Tips For Writing Grants

(so you'll actually get the money)

1. Decide whether you should spend your time applying at all

Writing grants takes a lot of time and energy and they're really competitive. Who are you asking for money from? What are they looking for? What do they prioritise? Read the funding body's guidelines and ask yourself: does my project match what the funding body wants? You should really weigh up your chances of success and decide whether or not you want to spend the time writing a grant, or whether you'd rather fundraise a different way, like running a crowdfunding campaign.

2. Talk to someone

You should always, always, always (did we mention always?) call the funding body and talk to them about your project. Ideally, not on the day that it's due. Maybe a couple of weeks beforehand. That way, they'll have more time to talk to you about your project and whether it's a fit for their funding criteria. These people are pretty much all amazing and will be so full of tidbits and info and tips and tricks, you're silly not to use their amazing free services. See also point one – talking to someone can help you decide whether or not it's worth your time applying at all.

3. Why why why?

The most common question grants assessors want to know is WHY? Why should this work be funded? Why is it important that it is made? How is it advancing the artform or why is this voice important in our artistic landscape or how will it increase our understanding of the world around us? If you can answer some big questions like this, then your chances of success are instantly much much higher... as long as you can articulate these answers!

4. Be clear and concise.

Don't waffle. Don't use weird artwank speak. Just talk about the project using simple, straightforward language. If there's anything you're unsure about in the project it'll probably be unclear in the application. So use this as an opportunity to shape the content of the project as much as possible. The project can change, but be certain in the things you're trying to achieve with the project and how you will do that.

Make sure you open by saying what the project is – don't assume it's clear – is it a cabaret show, an installation, a play...? Some projects assume form and content knowledge when actually you just need to tell the assessors what you're doing right from the start.

5. Innovate.

Rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly, most grants are focused on innovation. They want to know how the work is exploring something new, something different, some new frontier. This can be artistic, thematic or in ways that it advances your career. One way or the other you need to explain how this project will take the arts somewhere else – by investing in the development of the artform itself, telling an important story or investing in you as an artist.

6. Sell yourself

Speaking of you – this isn't the time to be modest. Panels trust people as much as they do projects. Sell your credentials. List all your great successes. Don't hold back. You want to convince a panel that you're going to make something pretty damn amazing.

7. Know your numbers

Panels will interrogate budgets and they know what looks weird - it's easy to pick up when you're trying to fudge the numbers or where you've just made it up. Make sure your budget makes sense. Always try to have at least three other players in the income - for example, in kind support (such as venue hire or anything you've locked in for free) plus any partnerships and sponsorships that you might have secured. We also recommend including a contingency plan in your application - just a paragraph or two explaining your plan B if other grants, income, venues etc. fall through.

8. Think about your support material

Support material – letters of support from partners or past collaborators, videos of previous work, etc – is super important. This can be just as much work as the application itself. The general vibe when asking someone to write a letter of support is that you should write it for them, and then send them the text and they'll put it on their letterhead and sign it. So use this as an opportunity to say some more great things about you and your project. And choose video excerpts carefully. The shorter the better.

9. Why not?

Panels will try to find reasons not to fund you. Why? Because there are too many good applications and not enough money. They desperately look for any holes in any applications to find any reason to knock someone off the list. So make sure you give your grant a once over to check for any mistakes, gaps in budgets, missing support letters, timelines that don't make sense... Find it before someone else does.

10. Ask for help.

Always ask a trusted friend or colleague (preferably one who doesn't know the project super well) to read the grant and give you feedback. If something is unclear to them it will be unclear to the grant assessor too, so it's super helpful.

11. Kiss them goodbye.

This isn't a joke. Melbourne Fringe swears by blowing a kiss at the computer screen whenever we click send on a grant. You have to send it into the world with love, or else what hope does it have? We actually do this. Every time.

12. Don't be mad or sad if you don't get it.

Waiting, sometimes for months, can be frustrating but try not to be too sad if your grant is unsuccessful. Most grant rounds are highly competitive – as in success rates are teensy tiny (sometimes under 10% of applicants get their grants) so know that the panel aren't rejecting you as an artist or this work – they're just having the difficult job of distributing very limited funds amongst far too many worthy projects. And don't be mad at the staff of the funding body – they don't make the decisions and they're just the messengers. Don't shoot them.

13. Ask for feedback

Always ask for feedback if you didn't get the grant as they'll often have some amazing tips for next time – if you have time, you can also ask if there's a chance to resubmit the project. They may well let you put it in again and with a few tweaks, it might get up next time. We also recommend asking for feedback for successful grants – sometimes the panel have really useful things to say which can help next time, plus it's always nice to get some positive reinforcement.

14. Assess grants yourself

Most of the funding bodies have the opportunity to put yourself forward as a grant assessor. This is the best way to learn how to write grants – you learn very quickly what gets up and what doesn't and why. Plus you get paid! You will realise how much work it is to read grants and what a tough job assessor have in choosing projects to be funded.

15. Make great art

Whether you get the funds or not, if the project goes ahead there's only one thing that matters – focus on the art to make sure the project is as amazing as it can be. That'd all anyone in the process wants as an outcome!

Grants

Most grants require you to be working a long way in advance, so consider keeping a list of grant deadlines throughout the year. We could publish them here, but they change so frequently and new grants pop up all the time, so it's best to sit down and do your own research to get all your grant ducks lined up in a row.

Creative Victoria

Creative Victoria is the State Government's arts funding body and has a broad variety of grants available to independent artists. At the time of writing they are running their Creators Fund, Creative Workers Fund and Building Audiences Fund which can all be applied for across all creative disciplines, alongside a range of other grants for more specific activities or artforms. Grant deadlines usually occur early year (Feb / Mar) or late year (Sep / Oct). Check out the [Creative Victoria website](#) to stay up to date.

Australia Council

The Australia Council for the Arts (often referred to informally as OzCo) is the Federal Government's arts funding body. They have a huge range of grants available for independent artists, but can be incredibly competitive and have a big focus on innovation and major new works. Deadlines are usually spread throughout the year. It's best to spend a few hours reading through the [various grant options](#) available and assessing what would best suit your project.

Local Government

All local governments have some kind of arts funding, although sometimes this is combined with other community development grants and doesn't specifically mention "arts" in the name and often the grants are limited to proposals of \$10,000 or less. Every local council will have different priorities for their funding programs, so always (ALWAYS) give the relevant council contact a call to chat about their funding program. It is often the case that emerging independent artists can obtain funding from local government bodies more easily than through the highly competitive Creative Victoria and Australia Council funding rounds.

Some helpful links for finding grants

- www.creativepartnershipsaustralia.org.au
- www.business.gov.au/GrantFinder
- www.arts.vic.gov.au
- www.australiacouncil.gov.au
- www.carclew.com.au
- www.countryarts.org.au
- www.helpmannacademy.com.au
- www.myerfoundation.org.au/grants
- www.ianpotterculturaltrust.org.au
- www.artshub.com.au/grants/list
- <http://arts.gov.au/funding>
- <https://www.arts.gov.au/funding-and-support/festivals-australia>
- <https://www.smartygrants.com.au/>
- [Auspicious Arts](#) (join their newsletter!)
- [Theatre Network Australia](#) (join their newsletter!)

Setting Ticket Prices



Your box office income will probably be your primary source of income, so setting your ticket price is an important decision.

Some key things to consider when setting your ticket price are:

- Your budget and costs – how much do you need to make to break even and pay everyone?
- What will the market accept – how much will someone be happy to pay to see your show or a similar show?
- Fees and charges – what do you pay and what will the customer need to pay? What needs to be included in the ticket price (e.g. per ticket fees and GST) and what will be charged on top of the ticket price?

The industry standard is to use an average of 30% capacity houses over your season as a guide to begin to work out what box office takings you will need in order to break even. Do your research to see what other events are charging so you can stay competitive. For example, in the 2019 Melbourne Fringe Festival the average full ticket price was \$25.50 and average concession price was \$20.50.

Just remember: you set your own ticket prices, so think about what your audiences will happily pay.

And don't undersell yourself! \$5 tickets aren't going to help you pay your actors, and don't assume that ridiculously cheap tickets will mean sell-out crowds looking for a bargain. Audiences can sometimes interpret low ticket price as low quality. Equally, don't set your prices too high, if your budget says you'll need to charge \$150 to break even, you might need to reconsider your costs.

Ticketing Price Types

You have a bunch of options in setting your ticket prices. Sure, you can just have a single ticket price, and there's nothing wrong with that. But often it's good to segment your prices with discounts for concessions, group bookings or slow nights (the "tightarse Tuesday" ticket types), or you might want to consider having higher prices for your busy nights. Some events even play around with dynamic pricing - where early bookers have big discounts while last-minute bookings pay more.

Concession and Child prices are usually optional for most presenters. You may only want to have one price for all tickets, in which case you can just set a standard full price. Or you can go deep and add all the different discounts available - just remember, each new ticket pricing type you add is a new set of marketing for you to do in order to get the most out of it! As a very general guide, most discounted tickets (e.g. Tuesday, Group, Mob Tickets and Preview ticket prices) are usually similar to Concession prices or a little bit lower.

Here are some ticket types we generally offer at Melbourne Fringe:

Standard ticket types:

- Full / Adult
- Concession: offered to valid concession card holders including students, pensioners, healthcare card holders etc. also offered to children if you don't have a separate child price.
- Child: offered to children 16 years and under. Fringe's policy is to offer children under two, who will be sitting on a lap free entry.

Preview: a discounted ticket for your first night or two is often a good way to test your show in front of a paying audience and bump up your audiences when the show is still running in.

Cheap Tuesdays (or Monday or Wednesday!): many venues have a tradition of Cheap midday tickets, often on a Tuesday, and it's often a good way to encourage audiences on what would otherwise be a slow night.

Group discount: a discount for group bookings is a great way to encourage people to organise friends to see your show with them. The smallest group discounts we'd recommend is groups of four or more. We also recommend setting your group discount at a very small discount to the concession price (e.g. \$1 less per ticket) - this means that concession card holders will also get a discount for group bookings.

Mob Tickets: At Melbourne Fringe we have Mob Tickets (discounted tickets for Australian First Nations audience members) as a ticket type - it's not a discount code, it's a type of ticket, same as full, concession and child is. can select to offer discounted tickets to Australian First Nations audience members. This is a small acknowledgement you can make to the traditional custodians of the land on which your event takes place.

Member discounts: At Fringe we offer 25% off full price tickets to our Fringe Dwellers; most venues will have a similar discount offer for their members, and offering this for your show is a great way for you to expand your audience base and best utilise your venue's mailing lists.

Fri / Sat anti-discount (i.e. "busy night surcharge"): many ticketing systems allow you to set different adult, concession and child prices for Friday and Saturday performances. Set higher prices on the weekend to encourage people to attend when it's generally quieter during the week.

Special offers, packages and promo codes: Separate to standard discounts (which are listed on your event listing / ticketing website - i.e. "discounts for anyone to see") you will often also be able to add in special offers and promo codes that are secret discounts you can use for your mailing lists or marketing campaigns. This might be an Early Bird offer (encourage people to book far in advance of your season) or it could be a special discount for a particular community - the options are limitless. Just be careful with the temptation to provide heavily discounted tickets at the last minute when a show isn't selling well; this will hurt you in the long run, as audiences will hesitate in paying full price if they know discounts are coming.

Let's Talk

Questions?

To chat more, please contact:

Participant Services Team
Melbourne Fringe

03 9660 9600

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Telia Nevile, *3 Minutes to Save the World*, Melbourne Fringe 2019.

Photo by J Forsyth.

Image description: an artist in black dress and black lipstick standing on a bar table, with a fridge and neo light behind them.