

# Working on a budget

## Doing public engagement on a small budget

When it comes to public engagement we often don't have the luxury of large budgets. However, for the researcher this shouldn't be daunting as some of your key skills (such as forward planning, making connections and being resourceful) will enable you to put together a great event with relatively little money. It's your chance to be creative and problem-solve!

With this being said, it is also important to be realistic about the size of your budget and what will be feasible with this amount. For example, trying to be over-ambitious with your format could ultimately cause you a lot of stress. And big and flashy doesn't always translate to the best event. What your intended audience really wants is something that is engaging and tailored to them.



## Getting everyone involved

Budgets will often stretch further if the activity is a team effort between you and your cultural/community partners. For instance, by working together you can share:

- free knowledge and advice;
- networks that will help you promote the event to your intended audience without large marketing campaigns;
- responsibility for delivering the event e.g. by sharing staffing roles on the day;
- materials that can be used as part of the event e.g. artifacts for a display or object handling.

If your cultural or community partner has a public venue, such as a museum or gallery, they may also be able to provide a free space or a slot in a programmed series of activities. However, it is important to discuss this in advance as they also have budgets to consider and this may not be a financially viable option for them.

## Setting audiences' expectations

It is important to produce a high quality event that will engage your attendees. However, this doesn't mean you have to promise them the world. A good 'hook' and interesting subject matter can make or break an event and can often be what drives high attendance numbers, rather than the promise of glitz and glamour.

Don't feel that you have to oversell your event, because if it doesn't match reality attendees will be disappointed. For example, if people know they are coming to a community produced display rather than a professional exhibition they will set their expectations accordingly and enjoy it for what it is. You could even sell your activity as a community effort in which their participation is going to be important to making the event a success.

## Essential vs. 'nice to have'

One way to ensure you are spending your budget wisely is to write a list of what you think you will need and then order the items from essential to desirable. You will often find that some of the 'nice to have's' aren't necessary or you can find cheaper alternatives. For example:

1. Paying a performer/artist for their time and work = yes this is the ethical thing to do.
2. Having the event professionally photographed and recorded = Do you need both? What will they be used for?
3. Putting money towards online marketing = free options are available.
4. Providing catering at a short event = unnecessary, avoid running the event over meal times or have a cash bar.

Make sure you continue to apply this thinking to new items that come up throughout the organising process. It's easy to let miscellaneous materials, new features of an event or travel expenses slip through the net and the cost of these can pile up. And if you decide a certain feature is essential, remember to shop around for different quotes to find the best deal in terms of quality and cost-effectiveness.

## Be creative!

If you're running an event on a budget you might need to think outside the box. For example, if you want to do a craft workshop don't use all your budget on buying art materials. Instead, collect together recycled cardboard, fabrics etc. – it's cheaper and better for the environment.

You can lean into the DIY nature of your event – make craft posters or zines as a takeaway piece about your research. Make a feature out of doing things by hand and save yourself money on professional print and design work.

One obvious issue with this approach to public engagement is that it can end up taking a lot of planning and time to bring it all together. Again, be realistic about what you can fit into your busy schedule and ask colleagues and cultural/community partners what they can do to help. They might not be able to offer money, but they can often provide time and talent.



## Top tips on how to save money

- **Venue:** Is one necessary or can you do a walking tour for example? If it is, think carefully about the type of building you need e.g. local libraries and community centres will be cheaper than corporate buildings.
- **Materials:** Can you use recycled goods? Are there things that you can borrow (say costumes from your university's drama department) rather than buying them brand new?
- **Volunteers:** Can colleagues, community partners or friends donate their time and volunteer? They can either help on the day or in preparing/making things for the event.
- **Local focus:** Who can you get involved from your local community or university? For example, don't spend all your money on travel expenses for your speaker, make use of the talent you have around you!

# Breaking down your budget

Before you start spending on an event, try to breakdown the budget into essential areas of expenditure. Don't forget to shop around and compare quotes to ensure you are getting the best deals. Make sure to update your budget breakdown as preparations for the event develop, keeping an eye on whether costs have gone up or down in a particular category. Below are some categories you might want to consider when mapping out your budget.

Areas of expenditure	Cost
<b>Paying for specialists who will add significant value to an activity</b> E.g. performers/musicians/artists. Remember to take into account their prep time, delivery time and any materials needed. Specialist needed:	£
<b>Venue hire for an off-campus space that will appeal to your audience</b> E.g. room hire, AV hire, furniture hire (see 'Finding the Right Venue' training resource for help with this) Venue: Additional hires needed:	£
<b>Catering/consumables that are essential to the activity</b> E.g. for a historically themed meal, tasting sessions. Food and drink cost: Crockery and glass hire or purchase needed:	£
<b>Essential materials and equipment that are key to the delivery of the event</b> E.g. props, craft materials, tech. Try to hire or borrow these where possible. Materials and equipment needed:	£
<b>Essential transport</b> E.g. hiring a coach for a bus tour. Transport needed:	£
<b>Marketing costs that are going to help you reach your audience</b> E.g. print costs for flyers. Contact your university's Marketing team for help with this and keep your marketing proportionate to the size of your event. Marketing needed:	£
<b>Documentation costs to create a record of your event</b> E.g. photographer, podcast maker, videographer. Think about what you will use these for and how you plan to create legacy from your event. Documentation needed:	£
<b>Total</b>	£

*Psst. You might find it easier to make this table in Microsoft Excel so that the totals automatically update and you don't have to do too much calculating.*