

How to build a library budget: a checklist

Libraries are expected to make magic happen — often while understaffed, underfunded and under-resourced. That makes budgeting, a complex job at the best of times, especially high pressure for librarians.

We get it. Budgeting can feel like a herculean task, especially if you aren't working with the level of funding that your programming truly deserves. But with a measured, methodical approach, creating your library's budget doesn't need to be draining or stressful.

Of course, the specifics of what you'll budget for are highly region- and community-specific. But here are some general guidelines to help you along your way.

Where to start

- What did your library's projected budget look like last year, in comparison to your actual spending?
- Are there any current, pressing needs in your community that your library needs to respond to?
- Who is the audience of your budget? For example, your board of directors will likely have different questions they want answered than a community partner.
- If you're involved in any community partnerships, will those partners be contributing funds to the relevant areas of your programming? What about sponsorships and donations from local businesses or other nonprofits?
- What are the demographics of the community you serve? Your attention—and funds—should be more heavily distributed towards their needs.

What to include

- **Recurring yearly costs, with an emphasis on how the costs allocated towards them have changed year-over-year**
 - Staffing costs including compensation
 - Operational and maintenance costs for all branches
 - Ongoing, central pillars of your programming and services
 - Budget to purchase new materials, both physical and digital items
- **New programs and services that serve the community's interests and needs**
 - Highlight how these new initiatives respond to the community needs you identified above
- **Digital outreach and marketing**
 - Be sure to highlight that **these costs are no longer optional**, but mandatory for libraries to stay relevant
- **Online services**
 - Through digital newsstands like PressReader, patrons can access over 7,000 publications with only their library card
 - Other examples would be online educational platforms like LinkedIn Learning and Skillshare

How to put it together

- Is your budget easy to read and understand? Will viewers take away your key messages without too much effort?
- Use visual devices like graphs and charts to avoid overwhelming your audience with spreadsheets and text
- Lead with the simplest, most accessible illustration of your proposal possible
 - Follow up with a higher level of detail, but only if your audience requests it
- Focus on changes from last year's budget, and justifying why they are necessary
- Don't just state what your proposed budget is — at every step, explain your rationale and how it responds to the needs of your community

Looking Forward

For all the challenges of budgeting, planning the future of your library can also be incredibly exciting. How we share and consume information is changing more quickly than ever before, and if libraries think boldly—and budget carefully—they can be part of that transformation.

If you're envisioning bringing more digital services to your patrons, we'd love to talk.

Reach out to our team today, and learn more about how PressReader can help your facility in the year to come.