

BUDGET ELEMENTS IN A PLANETARIUM OPERATION

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A common problem for many facilities is the lack of awareness of the total monetary requirements for an effective operation. A planetarium is not a movie theater – you don't just hire one person to wind up a movie reel and push the "start" button. A planetarium is an astronomy interpretation center for the schools and general public. It can take on many functions, only one of which is the production and presentation of shows.

Naturally, where a budget is set depends on the goals of the parent institution and its ability to help support the planetarium's function. How big to make the operation depends on things like:

- Potential audience.
- Variety and complexity of programs.
- How much production work is "in-house" and how much is contracted out.
- Size of the theater and staff.
- Level of related activities, like outreach, class instruction, workshops, media work, telescope/observatory operations, and special events.
- How much the planetarium staff will also be working in other "areas" (is their time split with other departments in a museum, teaching at a university, etc.?).
- How much the facility can be promoted and advertised.

So Just What *Are* The Items?

This doesn't cover it all, but it hits on some of the most general areas:

- Staff salaries and benefits.
- Show packages (commercially available productions for adaptation).
- Production services (you'll still need some of this even if you buy a "package!"):
 - Audio production
 - Narrator contracts
 - Original music or music libraries
 - Original artwork
 - Slides and video from catalogs or other planetariums
 - Photography and developing

- Royalties for the use of certain visual and audio material.
- Production supplies:
 - Photographic Film
 - Slide mounts
 - Slide masks, color gels, and other slide production materials
 - Audio/Video media
 - Storage drives and other computer-related hardware/software
- Technical production:
 - Projectors for special effects
 - Assorted motors, gears, wheels, wire, connectors, and a slew of optical components for the fabrication of effects
 - Cloth, wood, metal and other basic hardware for projector covers, shelves,...
- Technical maintenance and repairs:
 - Projector lamps
 - Replacement parts for a variety of projector devices
 - Electronic components
 - Specialized tools
 - Spare slide and/or video projectors
 - Small hardware parts
 - Computer hardware/software upgrades
 - Out-of-house repairs to audio equipment, projectors, etc.
 - Parts for telescope upkeep and development
 - Maintenance contracts for star machine, projectors, computers, etc.
 - Reserves for emergency repairs
- Dues and Subscriptions:
 - Science and astronomy periodicals
 - Books for research and reference
 - Membership in professional organizations
- Office expenses (paper, envelopes, printing, stationary, postage, etc.).
- Conference travel (necessary if you want a staff capable of producing professional material!)
- Advertising.
- Utilities.
- Equipment upgrade and replacement. A planetarium theater is a piece of technology, and like a computer, it needs to have parts replaced and modernized in order for it to stay running and "keep up" with the demands of the marketplace. Special fundraising campaigns should be *planned on* about every ten years to take into account the "larger" replacement items, like: star machines, sound, automation systems, video projectors and other major equipment items.

How Do You Pay For All This?

Probably the most perpetuated myth of planetarium operations is the expectation that they should be able to pay for themselves purely out of ticket revenues. Or worse, that the planetarium should "make money." Please understand – the planetarium is not a movie theater, it is an educational service much like a library, and you know what: that's ok! Just like a library, it represents a valued cultural resource and gets its support from a ***variety of fund raising activities*** (just like a museum!). These include:

- Gate receipts
- Sponsorship of programs, exhibits, or services
- Grants
- Endowments
- Special Events (Wine and Dinner, Ball, Auctions, Speakers...)
- Membership and "Friends" programs

For more information on these activities, consult Section E on fundraising issues.

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