



4 Steps to Producing Your Show (Before asking for money)

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So you want to do a show...

As a young producer I frequently get calls from friends in the business. “I’ve written a show! So what do I do now?”

The questions typically revolve around how to raise money. What I’ve found is that nine times out of ten, they’re not ready to start raising money just yet.

There are logistical and conceptual questions to be asked before you begin looking for funding. If you take the time to do some big picture planning (and write it out!) before getting started, the rest comes much easier. In my initial conversations with young writers or producers, I’ve found it’s valuable to start off by walking through these four steps...

1. Set a goal

What is the goal of *this* production? Developing the piece? Hearing the music aloud? Trying different versions of the ending? Finding investors? Filling the house every night? Getting good press? Building name recognition?

There are a million possible goals. Define yours and be sure the entire team is on the same page about it. It’s like working for an organization with a Mission Statement. In every major conversation about the direction the organization is going or when considering major changes, you think about the mission. Are we taking the best step toward accomplishing this mission? It’s no different with a show; the goals guide the process.

For example, the goal of this production may be to develop the music for future iterations. This will inform budgetary and staffing decisions. Maybe you don’t fully realize certain elements of production— don’t hire the most expensive lighting designer for this one, or go with a minimal set— but you do secure the venue that will be best for this style of music, and allocate additional resources toward orchestrations, music rehearsals, a Musical Director and musicians.

2. Create an elevator pitch

How do you speak about the show? When someone asks about the piece, what do you say? It is important to talk through this with your team, so the key players share a common language in how they present the work.

Why now? Why is this the piece that we need to be putting in front of people? I'm like a broken record with this one. If you can't articulate *why this piece needs to happen now*, do you expect people to invest their money in the piece or to come see it? It doesn't have to be some revolutionary reason, but you've got to know why in order to have a successful pitch.

3. Budget, budget, budget

The best advice I've heard on creating a budget? Hire someone who knows how. There are many parts of putting on a show that can be DIY. There are areas you may be able to scrimp. But it's important to leave these decisions to someone with the expertise to figure out what those areas are.

The General Manager should be one of the first people you bring on. Even before that, it's beneficial to have an idea of the scope you intend for the production. When I meet with writers or creators with the idea to do a show, I ask for as many specifics on what scale of project they have in mind. It's helpful if to provide examples of other shows that have done what you're trying to accomplish (similar production value, length of run, venue, etc.).

When you start asking for money, your potential investors will want to see how it will be spent. Here are a few of the line items people tend to forget to budget for...

- Hiring a lawyer
- Insurance
- Payroll fees and taxes
- Printing
- Contingency Funds (what if something takes longer, or there are setbacks?)

Do some research on how much things typically cost. Don't underestimate the cost of labor. Think through every department's needs (or hire someone who can do that). Are you expecting the musicians to bring their instruments? If so, are you budgeting for their transportation? Are you planning on minimizing time in the space? This may mean more manpower will be needed to get the show loaded in. Will you have to go into overtime?

It will almost always be more expensive than you anticipated. Figure out what you realistically think things will cost, and then add 20%. It's good to set your budgetary expectations correctly from the start. Don't leave it up to chance or you'll find yourself seeking funding that won't fully cover your vision.

4. Find the right team for the piece

When I speak with writers or directors, right off the bat they'll often have a list of who they want to hire. Choosing people because you've worked with them before or because of their flashy credits is okay, but I like to take a step back first...

Think about your goal. From there, make a list of what you're looking for in collaborators. What are the things you value in a team member and how will these people help you reach this goal?

A few questions you might ask in choosing collaborators...

How do they approach the work? Do they think more dramaturgically or technically? What do they value? Process or product? Do they have a specific aesthetic? Before you think through names of individuals, figure out what qualities you are looking for. Let the needs of this particular production drive your team decisions.

If you can tackle these four steps and feel secure in these areas, you're well on your way to putting up your show. Writing or choosing to produce a show is a huge accomplishment in itself. The next step can be extremely daunting. Taking the time to write down your show's "business plan" will not only help you sort out the details for yourself, but will also be invaluable when you get in front of the people with the money.
