

Preparing Budgets

by Joe Pappas

One of the most difficult aspects of being a band director at any level is anticipating the needs, the growth, and the budget of a band program. Many times we are faced with needs that exceed the annual budget and are forced to find other means to support our programs. With long-range planning and cooperation of a school district, you as a director should have success with preparing a budget.

Working in four different school districts, I have experienced three types of budgets. Each has advantages and disadvantages, but knowing these types and how they function, you will be able to organize your needs and be able to express your needs.

The first thing you should do is prepare a budget for the long haul, three to five years planning should be sufficient. Prepare your budget in three areas, music, new equipment or purchase needs, sub-divide these into necessary and "would be nice to have," and repairs. The average band budget will probably lend itself to 20-25% for new music, 15-20% for repairs and upkeep, and 35-60% for new or replacement of equipment or uniforms.

Once you have your ideal budget, your administration will give you the type of budget they are used to working with, I call these, "the red line," the "we'll see what we can do budget," and "the dollar amount budget."

The Red Line Budget

This is the budget that is submitted with a list of all your needs, wants, and "the nice to haves." You submit it and the administration basically "red lines" or cuts the items they feel are either not necessary or feel are too costly. In some years, this may work to your advantage, but for the most part, it is a disadvantage. In order for this one to be to your advantage, list the items and the cost in order of importance. Round off the figures and add five percent for shipping and price increases. It's always good to ask for more than you expect.

We'll See What We Can Do Budget

This budget is the most dangerous! You are at the mercy of the administration and may get any amount. In most cases, it will be less than you probably really need. You basically submit a list and the administrator goes through the list and picks what they feel is necessary to fit their overall budget. This is common in small schools. If you encounter this type of budget, ask for a meeting with your administrator and ask them to allow you to assist. The best thing you can do in this case is put down only the necessary needs and hope for improvement.

The Dollar Amount Budget

To me this is the best budget to work with in regards to developing your needs and long range plans. With this budget your administration gives you a specific dollar amount and asks you not to exceed it. If you are fortunate, you may have the three areas of music, replacement/repairs, and new equipment, all with their own dollar amount. This type of budget gives you the most control. If at all possible, ask your administration to work with you in developing a dollar amount budget. In some cases, you may be ahead with this budget.

Check with your administration concerning transportation costs, festival fees, etc., will they be covered by general funds or another budget. If they are not covered, you will have to include them in your budget or find another source to fund these needs.

In General

In general, developing your budget and working within the budget takes time and planning. Below are a few items to take into consideration:

Before submitting your annual budget, show your administration your long range plans and goals. This will assist in supporting your immediate and long range needs.

If possible, ask for "blanket purchase orders." This is a dollar amount you are given for a particular vendor. It's like a savings account; you draw from it as needed. It gives you flexibility with the budget for emergency needs and also allows you to fill your present needs.

If possible, have your music budget taken out of the school's general textbook fund.

Be sure to allow for needs in the second semester. i.e. music/scores for contest, entry fees for contest, repairs, and transportation.

When submitting the budget, be sure you have acquired the necessary bids for items (if needed), especially "big ticket" items. Include all the information for the item. i.e. vendor, catalog number, description (color, model, etc.) cost, shipping, and discount if possible. (This shows administration you are trying to get the most for the money.)

In preparing your music budget, figure the number of pieces you plan to perform on the program. Try to include a minimum of three new titles to be purchased for each program. Also keep in mind the number of performing groups you have. For solo and ensemble music, be sure to check for adequate scores and parts. Try to have the school pick up the tab as much as possible, only use fundraising and booster money if necessary. (Don't volunteer it, it will come back to haunt you!)

Know the absolute last day you have to close out your budget. This is helpful towards the end of the year in planning the next year's budget. Use left over money to purchase marching band needs, small items necessary to begin the new school year, summer repairs and maintenance.

If you don't have a blanket purchase order, make sure you always have a purchase order before making a purchase. Be sure to turn in the receipts to the proper agent. This keeps you in good graces with administration and secretaries!

With planning and open communication between you and your administration, budget needs are accessible and will result in success in your programs. Don't be hesitant to express the needs (after inventory and assessment of the band program, even if it is your first year in the system.)

Mr. Pappas holds a Bachelors in Music Education and a Masters in Music Education with an emphasis in theory and composition. He retired in 1999 from a successful public school teaching career as a band director of over twenty-seven years. Besides composing and publishing, Mr. Pappas is the director of the Jefferson College Community Wind Ensemble, in Hillsboro, Missouri. His Professional Affiliates include Phi Mu Alpha, Phi Beta Mu, National Educators Association, Missouri Band Masters, Music Educator's National Conference and the Missouri Music Educators Association.