

LOW BUDGET PRODUCTION



Most documentaries are produced on a low to medium budget, with small production teams, and using accessible digital technologies. Documentary filmmaking favors the use of very inexpensive cameras (smartphones, DSLRs), and the use of very simple resources for production (natural light, house lights).

Topics that work best on a low budget

- Any story where you have unusual access to a person, group or location. (your own community, your family, a friend).
- Remote locations. Communities underrepresented in commercial cinema.
- Address issues important to today's world.

How to produce without a budget

- Get as much stuff as you can for free.

- Make a list of people who can help you.
- Make a list of unusual spaces and locations to which you have access.
- Make a list of resources you have at your disposal (smartphone, homemade light, reflector, a microphone, etc.) Also list vehicles, props, costumes-anything you have or can borrow from family and friends.
- You can do it all alone, or you can help yourself with a friend or two. It's always better to have help, but remember that it will add to the complexity of the logistics of time, transportation, and food. For your first project try doing something that you can produce on your own.
- Apply to local and international funds.
- Use crowdfunding as a fundraising strategy, as well as to promote your project.

Organizing the production

Once you have defined your script, you will need to make a production sheet, where you will include the days of shooting. Each day you must organize what you will shoot, in which locations, with which people and with which equipment. This will allow you to organize your time and that of others very well, as well as maximize your resources.

Organize the production by locations (so you won't have to return to the same place several times). Each time you travel to a location, record everything you need in that place.

There will always be minor expenses in a production (e.g., buying batteries, transportation, food). You should take this into account in your production sheet.

Production sheet

Day: (April 16th)

Locations: (Forest)

Participants: (Interviewee 1, photographer, director)

Time and Schedule: (10am- 1pm : 3 hours)

What will be filmed: (Interview and B-roll of interviewee in the forest)

Equipment needed: (Smartphone, batteries, microphone, tripod, light bouncer)

Legal issues

You can only film in private spaces (indoors and outdoors), with the express authorization of the owner. It is advisable to have a release of filming rights filmed at that location.

Likewise, you may only use an interview if the person has signed a release, which is a document that expressly allows you to distribute the interview and images you have filmed of the person.

Public spaces sometimes require government permissions. Ask about local laws in this regard.

Applying for funding

If you are applying for local, national or international funding for your project, you will need a production portfolio.

This folder includes a synopsis of the project, a list of possible interviewees and locations, a biographical sketch of the production team, and the budget broken down into production items (equipment, salaries, transportation, food, purchase of archival material, licensed music, etc.). The purpose of this folder is to convince of the value of the project and the capacity of the team in charge of carrying it out. It also allows you to analyze the required costs.

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Photos: Joel Redman / If Not Us Then Who.