

WAAP: The Budget Review

In my day-to-day existence, numbers and I don't get on. I'm a classicist and a writer - words are my weapons of choice, and I outsource all that numbers business to my friendly neighbourhood engineer. For whatever reason, budgets are the exception to that rule. There's just something about a well-presented Excel budget where all the line items come up green at the end.

Of course, green isn't a guaranteed colour when running a LARP event. As a hobby, we have a bad habit of expecting a full weekend's food and entertainment to cost considerably less than any other kind of three-day holiday. That makes balancing the budget a bit of a challenge. Especially when you add in a couple of excitable technology geeks tasked with building a war room from scratch.

IN THE BEGINNING...

We started with some educated guessing. We knew what the site cost would be, and how many people we wanted to run the game for. Everything after that was given a guestimate based on our collective experience of running LARP and corporate events, and how much Making Things costs. We weren't in this to make a profit, but nor did we want to end up paying through the nose for the project. So this is the budget we started with:

EXPENSES	No.s	Per Head	ACTUAL	BUDGET	Ops	COST	PAID FOR BY	Props	COST	PAID FOR BY
Caterng	60	£42		£2,520.00						
Ops				£500.00						
Props				£1,500.00						
Crew kit				£400.00						
Buffer/Post Event				£1,000.00						
Travel				£500.00						
Venue hire				£2,250.00						
PubLiab/Event insurance				£210.00						
TOTAL			£0.00	£8,880.00						
REVENUE	No.s	Per Head	ACTUAL	BUDGET						
WAAFs	30	£200.00		£6,000.00						
Pilots/DPCs	15	£150.00		£2,250.00						
Crew	15	£50.00		£750.00						
TOTAL	60		£0.00	£9,000.00						
FINAL			£0.00	£120.00						

TICKET PRICING

We had long discussions around pricing for this event. One of the biggest questions was whether we should charge WAAF and RAF characters the same amount. The game was designed primarily for WAAF, but couldn't be run without pilots. The RAF players, however, would be asked to spend a fair chunk of their time slightly out of game acting out what was essentially radio theatre for the benefit of those in the Ops Room. We intended to make that experience as enjoyable as possible, but it was still breaking character to essentially Monster/Crew bits of the event. In the end, we decided to give the RAF players a £50 discount to account for the impact on their immersion.

Next came the suggestion of patron tickets. This was something some of the organising team had encountered when playing Euro LARPs, and we rather liked it. It's uncommon in the UK - largely, I think, because the British LARP mindset hasn't quite finished evolving from 'everyone's a broke student' to 'many people now earn a decent wage'. This affects our standard LARP pricing (see the comment above about cost-values) and also whether we think anyone can afford to subsidise the attendance of others.

We knew from the start that we wanted to run this as a UK-Euro hybrid model, complete with Looking For Relationships (unknown on the UK scene), so we decided to throw patron tickets into the mix. We weren't sure what the reaction would be - whether anyone would choose to pay £50 more than they needed to, in order to help strangers join them - but we figured it was worth a try. In the end, we were delighted to receive enough voluntary patrons to cover everyone who requested a subsidised ticket. No one who asked for financial assistance had to be turned down, so thank you to those generous people!

The volunteer crew who helped us out by playing NPCs and voices on the ends of telephones each paid £50 to cover their food and accommodation. Members of the organising team paid the same as crew (or in Lauren's case the same as a WAAF player.)

CATERING

In the corporate events world, catering (also called DDR, or Daily Delegate Rate) generally comes out at £50-60 per person, per day. LARP caterers don't charge at this level, or they'd be priced out of the market. So we stuck £42 per person in the budget, and went looking for caterers who could provide predominantly vegan menus (we knew there'd be several at the event).

I don't remember how I came across Scott at Conspiracy Catering. He was the fourth person I contacted, and he responded with great enthusiasm about the setting:

"I enjoy the 1800-1950s era. Plenty of source material and fun, novel dishes to play with. Rationing is in effect, which makes mostly vegan much easier to hide in plot."

As he was volunteering (without prompting) to do a period-appropriate rationed vegan menu, at less than £30 per person for the weekend, I signed him up on the spot. From an originally budgeted £2,500, we ended up spending under £1,700 on catering.

PROPS

I made an error when I wrote the Props budget line-item, in that I lumped them in together. I ought to have split them out into War props and Story props, because the two departments had equally important needs and shouldn't have had to compete with each other over the pot.

The total props budget was £1,500 which, given we had to build a fair amount of tech, was quite conservative. Most of Story's prop budget went on In Game stationery - kitting out Larry's office, for example, and the custom-printed Cheltenham Gazette. The reproduction ID cards were £180 alone, and we held off on ordering those until shortly before the event when we knew we could afford to make them happen. Harry nearly cried with happiness when I gave him the go-ahead.

In the end, Story spent about £550, leaving £950 for the War department. Somehow, those guys managed to build a replica operations room, RAF card game with custom decks, and a more

complete piece of war-gaming software than is currently available on the commercial market, for only £1,150. It was over budget, and there were costs we could have shaved (like when the courier failed to deliver potentiometers to Nick's flat for the THIRD time, a month before the event, and we decided building period headsets from scratch was frankly more hassle than we needed, and got Amazon Prime Expedited Shipping on the case instead), but nonetheless it was an impressive job.

AFTER THE WAR

Our initial budgeting goal was to have enough money left over at the end to take the organising team out for Sunday lunch at the nearby pub. And a very nice lunch it was too.

After the cost of seven roasts was detracted, we had money left. This caused some confusion amongst the experienced LARP organisers. Much double-checking of spreadsheet formulae took place, but there was no error.

Some of that excess was assigned to cover the organisers' travel costs. This isn't standard practice, so we hadn't originally budgeted for it. Thorsten flew over from Germany several times for playtests and site visits, and had been fully prepared to fund those plane tickets from his own wallet. It was nice to realise he didn't have to. In future, I plan to budget for organiser travel from the start. Particularly if people are flying from abroad to make things happen.

After a very short discussion, which basically consisted of "I was thinking..." and "So was I", we sent £250 to the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome charitable trust. The venue was such an integral part of the game, and the staff there bent over backwards to make sure everything was as perfect as possible. It's a working museum and takes a lot to keep in good condition. Besides, there's a good chance we'll want to go back there for future events, so it seemed only right to show the place some love.

This left us with just under £600. We had, by this point, decided Allied Games would continue to operate. Rather than have our private bank accounts finance things like venue deposits and web hosting next time around, we now have a kitty.

In closing, and by way of comparison, here's the budget we finished with. Isn't it beautiful?!

EXPENSES	No.s	Per Head	ACTUAL	BUDGET
Catering	59	28	1652	£2,520.00
Ops			£287.96	£500.00
Props			£1,699.09	£1,500.00
Crew kit			£544.00	£400.00
Buffer/Post Event			£334.00	£1,000.00
Travel			£1,119.60	£500.00
Venue hire			£2,250.00	£2,250.00
PubLiab/Event insurance			£243.40	£210.00
TOTAL			£8,130.05	£8,880.00

REVENUE	No.s	Per Head	ACTUAL	BUDGET
WAAFs	30	£200.00	£5,825.00	£6,000.00
Pilots/DPCs	14	£150.00	£2,250.00	£2,250.00
Crew	15	£50.00	£680.00	£750.00
TOTAL	59		£6,725.00	£9,000.00

FINAL			£594.95	£120.00
--------------	--	--	----------------	---------

OWED	AMOUNT PAID
Harry	577.06 Paid
Nick	957 Paid
Liss	339.31 Paid
Thorsten	454.85 Paid
Ian	72 Paid
Lauren	paid

Ops	COST PAID FOR	Props	COST PAID FOR	Travel	COST PAID FOR	Buffer	COST PAID FOR
Web domain	6.98 Harry	Ops room (electr	478 Nick	Petrol	51 Harry	Organisers lunch	10 Harry
Venue viewing	24 Harry	ID cards	180 Liss	Petrol	50 Ian		34 Liss
Website	67.68 Liss	Stereograph	21.5 Liss	Flights x 3	543 Thorsten		22 Ian
Research material	39 Harry	Assorted	108.75 Liss	Airport taxi	30 Lauren		18 Thorsten
Bin bags	4.49 Liss	Headsets	287.76 Liss	Bus travel	58.6 Lauren		
Assorted	56.57 Liss	Printing	4.91 Harry	Airport taxi	98 Liss	Stow Maries donation	250 Alice
Crew snacks	20 Liss	Stationary	4.09 Harry	Any/van	163 Nick		
Organiser drinks	27.5 Harry	Tech (various)	114.65 Thorsten	Petrol	16 Nick		
Sky snacks	10 Thorsten	Newspapers	67 Harry	Man with van	80 Nick		
Lost property postage	29.74 Liss	Stationary (variou	179.67 Harry	Taxi for PCs	30 Nick		
		RAF playing card	140.91 Harry				
		Prop food	20 Harry				
		Ops Room (furnit	190 Nick				
		Amazon refund	-98.15 Thorsten				
TOTAL	287.96	TOTAL	1699.09	TOTAL	1119.6	TOTAL	334
BUDGET	500	BUDGET	1500	BUDGET	500	BUDGET	1000