Episodic Series Budget Builder — Quickstart

Slate & Ledger • real SAG-AFTRA/IATSE rates, modeled for a season • 2026-2027 edition

Open it

Open the workbook in Excel, Google Sheets, or Apple Numbers. Save a copy under your series' name first and keep the original blank to start over. For a single (non-episodic) project, use the Micro-Budget Film Budget Builder instead.

1 Set up (Assumptions)

- Set **Episode Count** first — almost every season total is built from it. Then choose Union or Non-Union, your union tier (if Union), crew type and shooting city.
- **Total Shoot Days** defaults from Shoot Days per Episode × Episode Count — type the real number for uneven episodes, or run **import_schedule.py** to pull it straight from Schedule Builder.
- Fringe & Payroll Burden (~23%) and Overtime Allowance (~15%) drive every wage calculation — adjust them if your real numbers differ.

2 Enter costs

- **Cast Budget / Crew Budget:** turn each person on (Yes) or off (No). Series regulars and season-long crew go at **Season-Level** (multiplied by Episode Count); guest cast and episode-specific hires go in the **Per-Episode Grid**. Don't count the same person in both.
- Union tiers fill in the real, published SAG-AFTRA day rate automatically. Micro-Budget, Student Film and SPA are negotiated — type your own rate; it starts at $0.
- Season-Long Crew already has real IATSE floors for the Director of Photography, Sound Mixer, Gaffer, Key Grip, Production Designer and Editor, plus a real DGA minimum for the 1st Assistant Director when **DGA Signatory?** is Yes. Everything else on Production & Other Costs is an editable placeholder — replace it with your own real quotes.
- **Locations & Props:** list real locations, props, vehicles, animals and minor roles with a season-wide scene count — or let **Budget Seeder (Episodic)** fill this in straight from your scripts. Production & Other Costs' Set Dressing/Props, Locations, Vehicle and Animal rental lines read straight from there once turned on.
- Different directors for different episodes? Use the **Directors grid** (From/To Episode #) above Season-Long Crew on Crew Budget — don't let two rows' ranges overlap for the same episode.
- Need more Per-Episode Grid rows? **Copy an existing row** and Insert Copied Cells — a blank Insert Row won't carry the formula or add to the subtotal.

3 Check your total

- **Season Top Sheet** is your total, split into season and per-episode.
- **Tier Check** warns the moment your *most expensive single episode* — not your whole season — goes over your union tier's per-episode cap. A red bar at the top of the cost tabs flags the same thing immediately.
- **New Media (Deferred):** no budget cap and no per-episode check. Nothing is owed to cast until release or sale — set that trigger on Assumptions when it happens.

4 During production & sharing

Actuals tracks real cost against budget, episode by episode — import Schedule Builder's export to pull real shoot dates in. Financing one episode as a proof of concept before the rest of the season? Set **Full Budget?** to Yes for it in Season Top Sheet's Per-Episode Cost Detail table, then run this file through the **Presentation Budget Generator** — it adds an itemized "Episode N Budget" tab with that episode's real costs plus a traceable share of every season-level cost. Not sure what a placeholder cost should be? The **Resources** tab has real marketplaces and directories for both the Season-Level and Per-Episode sections.

SAG-AFTRA tier caps and day rates are the exact same real, sourced figures as the film budget builder's own Rate Tables tab; rates change annually — confirm current figures at sagaftra.org/lowbudget before finalizing a real budget. This tool covers US SAG-AFTRA only, not ACTRA, UK Equity or BECTU. Residuals aren't modeled here — this covers what the season costs to make, not what it earns. Research and planning estimates only — not legal, financial, or production advice. One-time purchase — no subscription, no account, no server. Provided “as is”, 2026-2027 edition.