# So You Want to Start a **Fiction** **Podcast?**

A how-to series by Multitude in collaboration with Patreon.

PATREON + MULTITUDE

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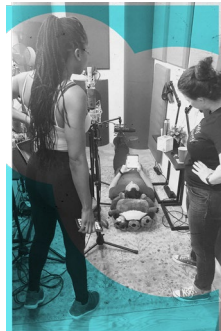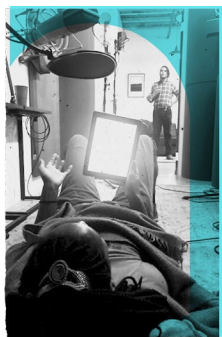
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TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION, BUT IT IS BECAUSE FICTION IS OBLIGED TO STICK TO POSSIBILITIES; TRUTH ISN'T.

——

**MARK TWAIN**

"

RATE AND SUBSCRIBE, FIVE STARS.

——

**MOST PODCASTS**

Hello! If you're reading an introduction to a giant resource about making fiction podcasts, you're probably a big nerd like us, and you're in the right place.

This is a resource for guidance on creating fiction podcasts*. It will cover the entire process, from ideation and scriptwriting to marketing and promotion, and everything in between. There is a lot in here that is also useful for non-fiction podcasts, so if you're here for that, thank you for coming too.

We are the first ones to say we are not experts. Honestly, how can you be an expert of podcasting yet? If you compare this medium to movies, we're just about at that part in *Singing in the Rain* where we need to reckon with Jean Hagan having a terrible voice for the talkies.

What we do have is our recent crucible of creation. The team at Multitude has written, directed, recorded, edited, sound designed, and released **NEXT STOP**, an audio sitcom. We think it's a good listen, and we paid attention to what we were doing as we did it.

We started this process back in 2019, writing it in early 2019 and recording it in January 2020. The world into which we're releasing our show and resource is very different than the one in which we created them. Some of the recommendations we make reflect the more-normal world we were living in during pre-production and production, particularly around in-person casting and production. Continue to use your discretion on what is best for your cast and crew.

At Multitude, we are committed to creating **free resources** to share with the audio community. Because the medium is forming and stretching in amazing ways, we want to help that growth along

the way. Through trial and error, we want to share our experiences to hopefully make yours a little bit easier on the way up. As we always say, in our writing and in the password to our wifi, a rising tide lifts all boats. And the tide is coming fast and furious, to our ears' delight.

We will be sharing nearly everything from our many Google Docs surrounding NEXT STOP, including our budgets. We were able to have a $75k budget because of **Patreon Capital**, who provided a cash advance on **NEXT STOP**'s and other Multitude shows' Patreon pages.

That $75k number is important for both groups of people who could be reading this.

For the independents out there: we hope that this is a guide to shoot for. If you are doing this by yourself or using crowdfunding, do not feel that your show is invalid if you do not spend that much. Eventually, we hope you are able to have a sizable budget, and that you are able to pay yourself some chunk of change, because artists deserve to be paid. You can see how we save money in places, consolidate jobs, and value our time. Your art is a business, so we hope this helps you treat it as such.

To the companies diving into fiction podcasting: the $75k budget should be your absolute basement floor. Although we did get the cash advance from Patreon, this is still ultimately our own money earned by our own small business. If we had outside funding and didn't have to cut corners or consolidate jobs, that number would easily have reached $125k or more (some series have reached up to a half-million!). If you have the opportunity to become the company that pays artists what they're worth and respects their work, you could become a beacon of hope in an increasingly muddled media landscape.

We also know that sometimes companies spend a lot of money on unnecessary stuff. This guide can help

you with that. For example: hire a sound designer and let them just be responsible for the sound design instead of also becoming a de facto producer; don't buy Facebook ads.

We hope this helps you as much as possible. If you have follow-up questions or ideas on how this guide could be expanded, please let us know.

Go create your world, and we're happy we helped.

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**MULTITUDE**

\* FICTION IS A HUGE CATEGORY. IT CAN INCLUDE IMPROVISED FICTION, ROLE-PLAYING GAME PODCASTS, OR SCRIPTED FICTION PERFORMED BY ACTORS. WE'RE REFERRING TO THE LAST CATEGORY. IN THIS PAPER, WE'LL BE REFERRING TO SCRIPTED FICTION AS "FICTION."

INTRO: PREFACE

# Idea & Script Development

You want to start a fiction podcast? Great, welcome to the club! From movie directors to high schoolers, everyone is getting their hands dirty in audio fiction. And for better and for worse, there have never been more podcasters, podcast listeners, or opportunities to collaborate than there are now.

Coming up with an idea for a fiction podcast may seem to be closer to other creative endeavours, like writing a movie script or a novel: you wait for inspiration, it hits you, you write it, you become famous and meet David Boreanaz. The American Dream!

But in reality, you still have to contend with the podcast landscape, standing out in a crowd of big-budget public radio creations, chat shows about libertarianism, and approximately one million Dungeons & Dragons shows.

Therefore, this section is split into two sections: podcast idea development and writing & script development.

## Idea development, or a fiction podcast is still a podcast

You have your premise and your writer is raring to go. But hold on—did someone already tell this story?

A fiction podcast needs to stand out in the increasingly crowded podcast landscape. Ultimately, your show has to answer "How am I unique?" Maybe there's a genre hole that needs to be filled, like NEXT STOP stepping into the American sitcom space for audio. Maybe there is a story that hasn't been told from your voice or perspective yet. Maybe your structure is different, or you have special access to people and places and talents that others don't. Maybe there's an adaptation that hasn't been done yet (still waiting on that Titus Andronicus pod). Make sure you know what makes you *you* and how you stand out from the crowd.

That also involves understanding the landscape you're entering. For any art form, loving a thing is a prerequisite to making that thing. If movie makers need to watch tons of movies and writers need to read tons of writing, then you need to listen to tons of podcasts!

Listen broadly and thoughtfully. If you're attentive as you listen and take good notes, you will be well-prepared to make informed choices about your own work. So it is to your benefit to become an expert in the podcast genres you're joining. Listen to shows that cover similar subjects or genres, as well as shows that you love but might not be directly related to what you're working on. And you gotta take notes!

Here are some questions to ask yourself while you're listening:

- How does this podcast describe itself? Do you agree, or would you describe it differently?

- Who do you think is this podcast's target audience? It is never "everyone." Be specific.

- How long is each episode? How much does length vary between episodes, or how has it changed over the lifespan of the show?

- How does the show sound? How is it edited? How do they use music, silence, or sound design?

- What moments grabbed your attention? When did you find yourself zoning out?

- If you met this show's team at a party, what would you ask?

> More questions available on our Do Your Research **template**!

Although podcasting is still in its nascent stages, we've passed the point where Just Being Better is enough to make you different from other shows. Find your own approach. And hold on to these notes—this will be the basis of your marketing plan, helping you to identify and reach your audience.

Remember: you are not asking, 'How am I going to crush my competition?' Podcasts that share something with yours are your colleagues, not your competition. If you don't have the patience or desire to listen to a lot of shows in your genre, you might need to reconsider your game plan. Building relationships with fellow podcasters is also the best way to grow your show, as we'll cover in our Marketing section, so make sure that your new community is one you really love.

## Who is the writer?

The story of NEXT STOP is almost apocryphal to us at Multitude. We're at KCBC, a brewery in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. We're sipping sour berry beers, talking about podcasts, as we always do. And Brandon Grugle, who would go on to become the series director, said, "Man, there aren't really that many podcast sitcoms out there. You know, like, Friends-esque sitcoms." And Eric, our head of creative, goes, "I know. But that's stupid." A few days later, Eric hits everyone up in Slack: "Dammit, Brandon. Here are three sitcom scripts."

That was in February 2019. Immediately, we did two things. First, Eric made Brandon sign a contract to make the scripts at some point (and confirm that Eric was his muse).

Second, we gave Eric writing deadlines and notes on those first drafts. Immediately, it signalled to Eric that his work was valuable and something we wanted to pursue. Even though we didn't know what we

were going to do with them, or if this show was ever going to get made, we treated this as a real project, something we wanted to make.

This also quickly solved an important question: who is the Writer? (Note the capital W, so you know it's a big deal.)

The closest comparison to fiction podcast scripts are television scripts: they're about the same length and there are multiple episodes that come out in succession. So you need to decide who is steering the story ship. If you want to work with others or you have a cadre of people who like to work together, have a writers' room. We are not TV writers and cannot speak to the dimensions of what that might look like. But from watching enough Saturday Night Live, we know there is a head writer who is in charge and makes the tough decisions. For a podcast writers' room, that head writer is probably the person who came up with the idea, and they're the one who knows what they want to see in the final product. Putting someone in charge from the jump helps to break ties if the opinion is split on something and puts responsibility in one person's
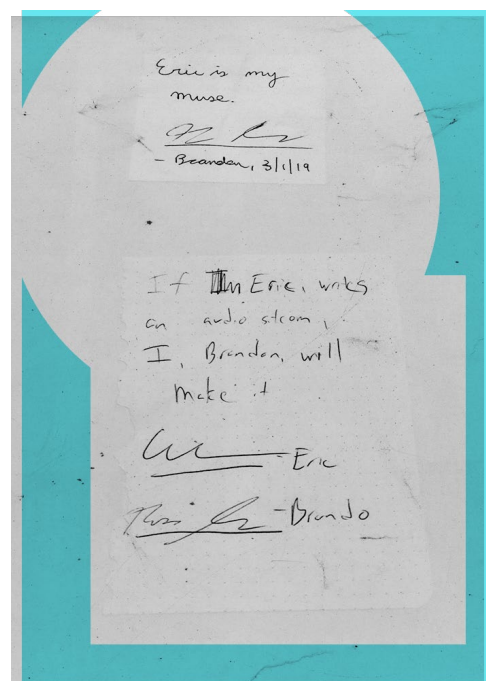
hands to make decisions, which is so important in a creative endeavor.

If you want to do it yourself, great! You're Aaron Sorkin, and you have a unified vision of goodness. But unlike Aaron Sorkin, you should listen to others who can help you (and don't write Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip). This is the tact that Eric took. He was motivated to write all ten scripts by himself and did it! But, he didn't do it alone.

## The writer has to work with others

Eric couldn't do it by himself, nor should he. So once he drafted scripts for all ten episodes of NEXT STOP, he shared them with the rest of the production team: Amanda, who is the Executive Producer; Julia, who became the Assistant Director; and Brandon, the Director. All of us gave our feedback on big-picture elements like the story arc, episode order, character development, and minute details like individual jokes. After a few rounds of us reading, Eric editing, and reading again, we were happy with the scripts!

None of us are professional writers, so us being happy with them only means so much. So we reached out to a writing consultant. The job is what it says on the tin: they consult on the writing and are there only for the writer's benefit. Bringing an outside consultant brought an unbiased opinion from a new perspective.

We reached out to Octavia Bray, a writer on *Raven's Home* who was incredibly enthused about working with podcasters. And her feedback really, really helped. We renamed so many characters (Gillian was originally named Cassie, which sounded too much like Cam), we fleshed out Ally's arc through the season, and even swapped the order of the second and third episodes to better suit the story.

No writer wants to hear it, but editors are incredibly helpful.

Another person who can help the scriptwriter are the people who will eventually turn the writer's words into audio. The writer has an obligation to the production not to write anything *too* fantastical, complex to record, or confusing for the listener. This doesn't mean taking the fun or interesting part out because it's hard. In fact, that's why people love writing genre pieces in audio fiction. A laser blast sounds like a laser blast and I don't need to 3D print it! But the emphasis here is on "fantastical." Writing something that is hard to picture in the mind is very difficult to process for an audience who can't see it. And it's going to be a hell of a time for the person who needs to sound design it.

Think about a conversation between friends at a party. If two or three people are talking, you'd probably be able to follow that conversation. But can you track five people's voices? Ten? Optimizing for audio is a writer's responsibility and a prerequisite for being a creative team player.

Eric realized he'd have to look the director in the face every day, so he kept this in mind. Most conversations have no more than five people in it, and there are discernable scenes with specific ambient noise (train station, apartment, crowded bar, etc). But Eric also stretched Brandon's ability to create something really cool. A lot of conversations happen over wires— via text, Slack, phone calls, and voicemails—and each has different sound design to create distinct ambiances for each form of communication. And there is a tap number. No spoilers.

Helping the writer work within the sandbox of audio is the job of someone that we're calling the Sound Director. Think of it like a cinematographer in a movie, selecting the equipment and techniques that will best serve the script as it's turned into an actual motion picture. A Sound Director's job is to figure out how—

technically, practically, logistically—the script will become recorded sound to make an actual podcast. Their job starts *before* the scripts are finished, having conversations with the Writer about what is possible, what boundaries can be pushed, and what wonder they can create together. In some productions, the Director or Producer may take on this role, but the important part is that someone helps the Writer think about how their story will translate to sound. Encouraging the writing and production sides of your show to collaborate closely from the jump will help everyone work more efficiently, dream bigger, and create a show everyone will be proud of.

Get writing! And remember—get off of Twitter, it is not going to help you!

# Assembling the Team

### INT – HOTEL ROOM – DAY

*JIMMY ACTIONMAN has his head in his hands. His old boss P, a distinguished British woman, has shown up, unannounced, holding a manila envelope filled with papers out to him. He's tired because he's done this so many times. But maybe, he can do one more.*

> **JIMMY**
>
> So what you're telling me is I need to make an audio fiction podcast? Or this whole casino is going to explode in seven days?
>
> **P**
>
> That's exactly what I'm telling you.
>
> **JIMMY**
>
> Well… I got just the team for the job.

*SFX: Really sick rock music kicks in.*

Much like a heist, you need to assemble a team to make a fiction podcast. People have specific sets of skills and all those people need to work in concert to steal the Declaration of Independence… I mean, run a show. So how do you negotiate that? And what are all the jobs?

## Take stock of who's around you

**NEXT STOP**, our new audio sitcom, wasn't originally going to be an independently-run Multitude production. We pitched it to a few platforms and studios, who would theoretically give us money and production help in exchange for exclusivity on their platform (or other things). We had a lot of meetings, showed them scripts, made slideshows with jokes on them, but everyone we pitched ultimately said no. *Ok, we thought, we will need to find another way to get money to do this, but we have a project we love and we'll figure it out.*

These vague, name-left-out stories are just to say that even without resources from huge companies or name-brand producers, you can look to the people around you to help get it done. If people have specific jobs and responsibilities, and you give them opportunities to do the things they want to do, they will rise to the occasion. But that trust and responsibility to do the best they can do comes from assigning definitive roles.

At Multitude, we had four people ready to take those roles on. Eric Silver had the writing chops to create the scripts, Brandon Grugle had the technical know-how to direct and do post-production, Julia Schifini had fiction podcasting experience to shape the production, and Amanda had the business skills to make the money work.

As for how your team dealves out the roles, no one should be yelling "NOT IT" and the last person who does so has to deal with the money. If your team has picked the roles they want, and you still have a job that needs filling, that is ok. That's when you find people with that skill-set and pay them, or do swaps or bartering, in return for their services. But pushing someone to do something they don't want to do only leads to ruin.

# WHAT ARE THE JOBS ON A FICTION PODCAST?

## PRE-PRODUCTION

**Writer:** Creator of Story

**Script Consultant:** Gives feedback on scripts for what the writer needs.

**Sound Director:** How do we turn the script into sound?

**Casting Director:** Post casting notices, run auditions, suggests picks to director.

## MANAGEMENT AND MONEY

**Executive Producer:** Is the project going well and in the right direction?

**Project Coordinator:** Logistics of rehearsals and production, making call sheets, catering.

**Line Producer:** Budget Keeper

**Studio Manager**

## PRODUCTION

**Actors:** Interpret characters!

**Director:** Keeper of the story, and works with writer to create realized vision of the story.

**Script Supervisor:** Make sure every word in script is recorded and keep recording on track.

**Engineer:** Run the audio session.

**Assistant Director(s):** Gut-check/consult director about performances.

## POST PRODUCTION

These jobs are self-explanatory, but they're all separate responsibilities!

**Editor**

**Sound Designer**

**Composer**

**Transcriptionist**

**Graphic Designer**

**Copy Writer**

We're going to get into the particular job duties of each role as we go through this resource. But for now, the important thing to note is that there are a lot of jobs and someone has to be responsible for each of them.

Here is how we split up the jobs amongst the Multitude team:

**BRANDON**
**Director**
**Editor**
**Sound Designer**
**Sound Director**

**AMANDA**
**Executive Producer**
**Project Coordinator**
**Line Producer**
**Studio Manager**

**ERIC**
**Writer**
**Sound Director**
**Copy Writer**

**JULIA**
**Casting Director**
**Assistant Director**
**Script Supervisor**

**OTHERS**
**Actors**
**Engineer**
**Script Consultant**
**Composer**
**Transcriptionist**
**Graphic Designer**

This was our main cost-cutting strategy: each of the roles the four of us took on should have been compensated as a stand-alone job, and each could have been done by a separate person.  As full-time podcasters, we had the benefit of being able to dedicate several days a week to NEXT STOP for months at a time, so we were each able to take on many responsibilities. If you are on a slimmer budget, that may be what you have to do. But for all the companies out there looking to make a fiction show, please hire and fairly compensate people for these roles. Experienced professionals bring valuable perspective, skill, and efficiency to their jobs. It's a disservice to your own production to ignore job duties or stretch your personnel if you have the funds to hire one person per job. Burdening your one technical person with the roles of studio manager, engineer, editor, sound designer, and sound director is not ethical, smart, or a good use of money.

## Who makes the decisions?

Splitting up jobs means someone is responsible for making decisions in each area of the production at the end of the day. And that usually breaks down to a triumvirate of the Writer, the Director, and the Executive Producer.

**The Writer** makes calls on the story and the literal script. Does this line need to be rewritten? Does this name make sense? What does *Character A* do in this particular situation? There are going to be a lot of questions like "Do you remember when THIS HAPPENS in the story?" The writer is the keeper of information, no matter how arcane it may be.

**The Director** is the steward of the Writer's vision, and they're responsible for how that is being communicated and delivered into audio form. They make ultimate calls on everything pertaining to the actors and production, such as whether more takes

are needed for a scene, how the scenes are blocked and the microphones are arranged (in collaboration with the Sound Director), and how the story is explored and interpreted outside of the bounds of the script. The Director also works closely with actors, advising them on their characters' motivations, or asking them to do another take in a particular style.

**The Executive Producer** is responsible for the production as a whole. They represent the intent and message of the studio producing the project and make sure everything is working smoothly on a macro level. They make calls on production organization, staffing, artistic intent ("Does this show represent Multitude's values?"), and they work with the director once everything is in post-production.

While it's important to have clearly defined roles, that doesn't mean that team members shouldn't get feedback from each other; fiction podcasting is the product of a team working together. But assigning clear-cut roles means that you know what to do, and, if people are disagreeing, who gets the final say.

The script is written, the roles are assigned, so now we're ready to dive into pre-production. Would you call these steps we called out pre-pre-production? Sure! All we know is that it's important to have these completed before you start bringing in the actors.

# Casting

You have the words, the team, and the wherewithal to get this done. Now how do you find the right actors to bring your characters to life?

The production team owes it to the writer and their script to find the best people possible for each role. That may mean casting people intimately involved in the project so everyone "gets" what's going on. Or, you could cast from a pool of known regulars who are in the space, like pulling from a local theater area, or big-name actors that bring a fandom with them.

For us, we wanted to focus on casting from the widest pool possible within commuting distance of New York City. Since our sitcom revolves around a core set of roommates, we needed the ability to have everyone in the same room reacting to and improvising with one another. Although we were bound by the five boroughs, we had actually opened up our search. Instead of relying on the network of far-flung voiceover artists and fiction podcast actors, our search for people that hadn't acted in podcasts before widened our total pool to a huge range of actors from different disciplines and formats.

Be sure to set yourself up for success by budgeting enough time to do this. Casting is time-consuming! Setting up auditions, giving folks enough time to submit, going through submissions, scheduling and running callbacks, and making final decisions takes dozens of hours. In fact, it's an entire job: Casting Director. With expertise in creating and running auditions, a wide network of actors, and a highly-skilled ear for what each role needs, a Casting Director is essential to building a solid foundation for a successful production.

With our limited budget, we decided to fold Casting Director under Assistant Director Julia's responsibilities.

## How we casted NEXT STOP

We decided to cast on **Backstage**, a major website that hosts casting calls for TV, film, theater, commercials, and—hi!—podcasts. There's a reason why everyone uses Backstage, it's really, really easy to get your post out there. After paying the $17 submission fee, we set up a different casting call for each character we needed to cast. For each character, we described them as both real people and sitcom archetypes. For example: "Cam loves Survivor, works at a media job, and wants to be promoted so bad. He's also the goofball who maps the closest to Marshall from *How I Met Your Mother*." We were working in genre, and we wanted everyone to be on the same page for the work we were doing.

We also did not specify gender, race, sexuality, or age for any role unless one of those elements was absolutely essential to the character as written. We wanted to get the best people possible for each role.



Nov. 7, 2019

**DELTA**
Episodic
30-minute audio sitcom podcast
A Multitude production
UNION

Executive Producer: Amanda McLoughlin
Writer: Eric Silver
Director: Brandon Grugle
Work Dates: January 2020
Location: New York City

*Our friends are moving on. We're figuring out how to move forward.*

**DELTA** is a lighthearted, joyful modern audio sitcom inspired by 90s sitcoms like *Friends* and *Boy Meets World*. Three roommates must lean on each other to navigate their lives as their friends move on around them.

*Please submit resumes, reels, VO reels, and/or relevant work to casting@multitude.productions

Check the casting call doc **here**!

Once our casting calls were live, it was time to wait. Surely, no one would submit to a small fiction podcast, right? We were so wrong.

The reels hit us like a tidal wave. Fifty in the first few hours, then a hundred by the end of the day, and more and more and more. Who would have thought there were so many actors in New York City? (We're joking, we promise we're joking).

As Julia listened to all of the reels, she also prepared sides, or lines, for the actors to prepare from the script itself, for auditioning our top picks for each role. We wanted lines that showed the full range of the character. Very few characters are one-note, and you need to see how the person is while both yelling and whispering, if their character does that. The sides for Ally were from the final episode of the season, because that's when she does some of her most complex work. We also encouraged the candidates to send us up to three takes. The actor may not be picturing the role the same way as we were, so we gave them opportunities to make different choices for characters. Unsurprisingly, we ended up casting a lot of people who did three takes per side!

Once the choices were made, the sides were sent out, the actors sent back their audio takes, and we again sifted through for the final callback. This is where the casting director shines, building a profile of each actor with their reel and now the audio sides. Julia made her choices for callbacks and ran them by the other three members of the production team for input. Ultimately, the director would have final say, but as the one doing the legwork, the casting director has the most knowledge.

## God, I hope I get it, I hope I get it

We never thought we'd be living the Broadway director life, but one cold day in January, that's exactly how things shook out.



AUDITION DAY FOR NEXT STOP.

This section title was more of an excuse to make a reference to *A Chorus Line*, but running a theater-style audition was to our benefit since everyone—from actors to the former theater kids turned podcasters who ran the show—is on the same page about how this is going to work.

We invited groups of actors who auditioned to play the three main actors plus two important supporting roles, then mixed and matched them with actors from different groups to see how each person would work with others. We were looking for sparks of chemistry between actors, how comfortable and familiar they felt with the material, and if they felt confident to do (good) improv during the audition.

Logistically, we knew we had to keep these callbacks pretty tight. We're a small outfit and couldn't get actors to sit around for hours because we're not the only game in town. We made sure to schedule groups effectively to minimize wait times, and spread our

callbacks over two days to accommodate actors' scheduling conflicts. This is the right thing to do when respecting fellow creative professionals' time, but we're also building a positive association with Multitude, so they want to come back when we do our next production (or tell a friend about how neat our hallway was).

Brandon and Julia were running the callbacks, with Amanda available to listen in and help if needed. Eric disqualified himself because he was not ready to hear actors say his words out loud and instead played loud pop punk in his headphones the whole time. But since we defined our roles clearly, that was ok!

## Decision time

This is the final countdown. It's game time. Let's get some actors.

Some people might slot perfectly into place. Our Samuel Clemens was born to be Samuel Clemens, and we knew it. Some actor choices might be difficult, and that's ok. Two actors up for the same role may bring different energy or different choices to the character, and the production team needs to figure out which fits best for the production. We need to consider the chemistry each person has with the other actors, their ability to improvise with others, if they are comfortable within the confines of the studio, and if their voice can be distinguished from the rest of the people in the scenes. That last point is important; because it's a podcast and you can't see faces, voices must stand out to the ears of the audience.

After our director and casting director shared their thoughts with one another, the entire production team met for a rousing debate about who should be who. The Director and the Writer should have conversations about who the characters are and how the prospective actors embody that or make different

choices from what we'd envisioned so far. To keep your production team motivated and bought into the gig, it's crucial to make space to hear every relevant stakeholder's thoughts. But ultimately, the director has to make the call.

# Paperwork

With your cast finalized, it's time to get your ducks in a row. And by ducks, we mean paperwork.

## Contracts, or lawyers are actually very nice

As soon as the production team got together, we knew we wanted to be a union production. We support unions and collective bargaining, but more than that, we support putting your money where your values are. Particularly in an evolving industry like podcasting, taking cues from artist advocacy groups is a very good thing. We—indie podcasters and audio companies alike—are setting standards for our industry every day. With our actions, our budgets, and our treatment of freelancers, we are deciding every day if compensating artists and creators fairly becomes a foundational principle of our industry.

In our case, that meant adhering to the **SAG-AFTRA** (The Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) standards for new media productions. A quick PSA: hiring union actors and complying with union standards is not grossly expensive, impossibly complex, or a stumbling block for scrappy productions. Hiring one SAG actor doesn't mean all of your actors must also be SAG; you can hire non-union actors that are working toward becoming members. It just requires you to register your production with SAG, and to make sure that you're paying fair rates based on their minimums. Based on our total budget, that was $205 per recording session for actors and $105 for background actors. There isn't currently a definition of what a background actor means in podcasting, so we defined it as anyone with just a few lines in total.

On a scale from sending an email (1) to applying for citizenship (10), **registering** your production with

SAG is about a 2.5. A few forms, a few emails, and one contribution to their pension and health fund later, you're ready to go!

It's also important to sign a contract with anyone you hire. This is not just in case of a disagreement, either. A contract ought to reassure all parties involved, spelling out exactly what each is responsible for, when to deliver it, and what to do in the event of questions or delays. SAG and other unions provide contracts for producers to use with their members, so we used the SAG contract for our union actors. For our other actors, we used an agreement that our incredible lawyer, Hannah Samendinger, drew up.

In fact, Hannah gave us permission to share our Actor Agreement as a **template** for you to use. Please read it thoroughly—she explains what each section is for, why certain parts are required, and what decisions you can make to tailor your contract to your production's needs.

## Scheduling

Just like the pre-production research and planning we discussed in Part 1, preparing in advance for your production week (or day! or month!) will make your job easier, your budget stretch further, and your final product better.

First, start by making some schedules. Collect blackout dates for each person, then figure out the best time to get everyone in the studio to record. We planned to record two episodes per day, giving us four hours for each 30-page script. This is a pretty average pace for fiction podcasting. We had to account for multiple changes in mic setup (more on that in the next section), at least three takes plus an additional improvised take for each scene, pickups of individual lines, and breaks for the cast and crew.

Create your schedules with realistic timelines, but also with efficiency in mind. You want to budget plenty of time to get through your scripts without rushing. You can always wrap early for the day! At the same time, actors should not have to wait around all day to record one scene. Mark out the days and scenes on a production calendar, and write down who needs to be where on call sheets to anchor your team and help you stay on track.

Here's your secret weapon for efficient scheduling: a Scene Breakdown. Someone on your production team—in our case, Assistant Director Julia—will read each script closely and take notes on the characters, props, and technical elements required to make each scene work. Using a format like this will help you capture all of the data you need to plan your production week and make it flow smoothly:

From there, take a look at what characters are needed when. If someone is needed for a scene or two in one episode, schedule them in the first slot of the day or the first one after lunch. If someone is present in several episodes for a few lines each time, condense their scenes into one shooting block. Compare that to your actors' availability so you can create a Production Calendar. This is your guide to your entire production, from script development to release and marketing.

| NEXT STOP: EPISODE 101 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Scene 1 | Scene 2 | Scene 3 | Scene 4 | Scene 5 | Scene 6 |
| Characters Needed | ALLY | ALLY | ALLY | ALLY | ALLY | ALLY |
| | CAM | CAM | CAM | CAM | SAMUEL | CAM |
| | ASHLEY | ASHLEY | GILLIAN | GILLIAN | | GILLIAN |
| | GILLIAN | GILLIAN | SAMUEL | | | SAMUEL |
| | | | STRANGER 1 | | | ASHLEY |
| | | | STRANGER 2 | | | STRANGER 6 |
| | | | STRANGER 3 | | | |
| | | | STRANGER 4 | | | |
| | | | STRANGER 5 | | | |



| NEXT STOP | | | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | W T F SA SU | M T W TH F SA SU | M T W TH F SA SU | M T W TH F SA SU | M T W TH F |
| Start Date: 11/1 | | | | | | | |
| **DEVELOPMENT** | | 4w | | | | | |
| Script Dev | ES | 4w | | | | | |
| **PRE-PRODUCTION** | | 6w | | | | | |
| Casting Prep | JS | 2w | | | | | |
| Graphics | AW | 4w | | | | | |
| Music | EC | 4w | | | | | |
| Auditions | JS | 1w | | | | | |
| Call Backs | JS | 1w | | | | | |
| Table Reads | BG | 2w | | | | | |
| **PRODUCTION** | | 5d | | | | | |
| Principal Photography | BG | 5d | | | | | |
| Reshoots | BG | 1d | | | | | |

PATREON + MULTITUDE

PART 4: PAPERWORK

From there, compile a shot list. This is what your production team will use each day to make sure everything you need to record gets recorded.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | **Setup** | **Character(s)** | **Prop(s)** | **A Cam** | **B Cam** | **C Cam** | **Notes** | **Best Take #** | **Script Time (Min)** | **Setup Time (Min)** | **Est. # of Takes** | **Shoot Time (Min)** |
| ▼ | SUBWAY PLATFORM | CAM | SCARF + PHONE | BINURA L | CLOSE MIC | | | 2 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 33 |
| ▼ | ▼ | ALLY ▼ | PHONE ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | | PHONE NOISES ON 3 | | | | 0 |
| ▼ | ▼ | ASHLEY ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | | PROPOSAL ON 3 | | | | 0 |
| ▼ | ▼ | GILLIAN ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | | 2/3 | | | | 0 |

**NEXT STOP: EPISODE 101**

SCENE #: 1    SCENE:    EXT - THE NEW JOHNSON AVENUE SUBWAY STATION    PAGES: 2 - 7

SCENE NOTES:    **BLOCKING: The crew walks down the stairs. Ally runs down the platform and returns, the other three are standing shoulder to shoulder looking at the new tracks. Left to right: Ally, Cam, Ashley, Gillian**

TOTAL SHOOT TIME FOR SCENE (HOURS):    0.6

If you are renting a studio, this is a great time to get in touch with your engineer, the person who is responsible for running the actual audio session. Talk to them about how long it takes to switch between mic setups, and make sure to budget in plenty of time for change-overs between scenes if needed.

Finally, use the script breakdown to create a list of the Sound Design & Foley you'll need to capture. This is a crucial part of your production week. Instead of leaving it to your Sound Designer to figure out how to make the sound when they run into it during post-production, work with them in advance to figure out what you need to capture and what can be purchased or licensed from online libraries. You can probably

make a lot of sounds in real life, and that means you've got to get some props.

We based all of these documents on film and TV templates we found online, so take a look at the many options out there and pick the one that works best for you!

Before the week started we also asked each actor for the pronouns we should use for them, any food allergies or preferences for the catering, and if they had hard stop times on any given day.

Then, it was time to record!

# Working with Actors

Actors! They're just like us, except they're really good at expressing their feelings! And, if you do your casting right, they're extremely talented, nice, and awesome to work with. You've gotten pretty far with your production team, but now you've got to let them in. Here's how to make actors feel appreciated and creatively fulfilled, both before and during production.

## Have a table to read

You should have a table read! What is a table read? Why, it's reading at a table! *crickets*

But seriously, folks, a table read is when actors sit around a table and read through all of the scripts aloud. This is a chance for everyone to get on the same page and hear everything out loud together. This could also be a point where the Writer may need to punch up or rewrite some scenes; the Director gets their first indications of how they can work with the actors; the actors start building chemistry and get some first-time jitters out of the way.

Some TV shows invite every actor to come to a table read, but with NEXT STOP, we were on a tighter budget, so we only invited our principal actors. We accounted for a day or two of table reads, which meant we would pay the actors for their time and feed them lunch—by focusing on the actors that most needed to attend, we were spending our money wisely. The production team would read for the minor characters, which is pretty funny in its own right.

We started our table read with the Writer laying out the world, the origins of the idea, and what the show is trying to creatively accomplish. This draws a helpful line for the actors—the Writer is the keeper of what's on the page, but the actors can make certain metatextual and auditory choices. And the Writer will probably (read: definitely) be excited to tell the actors everything, so give them their shot at the table read!

After that introduction, each scene followed a procedure. The Director gave context on the emotional arc and plot points in a scene, and the actors would read the scene through. After the Director gave feedback on character motivation, the Assistant Director would answer actor questions on continuity and facts about the text. Then the Writer would jump in and give any background and context on plot, including relevant inspiration points for performances, if needed.

We got through eight of the ten episodes in one day, and we called off the second day of table reading since the two episodes we hadn't read were sampled heavily in the audition sides. We waved goodbye to the actors, and got down to a table read debrief. Before the session, we made sure each member of the production team was clear on their area of responsibility and took notes about that specialty throughout the table read. We still had a few days before production started to prepare and tweak the script, blocking, sound effects and more, so we were happy to share these notes with each other.

And then, finally, it was on to production!

## Directing for audio

There are plenty of great books you should read about directing actors, like Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & Television by Judith Weston. And before you wade into the directing waters, read up on how to communicate with actors in a creative and open way. But it may feel a little different for scripted fiction podcasts. Mainly, how do you keep actors happy and engaged when you're shoving them into a hot, sound-proof box?

We've given this advice earlier in the guide, but it works for everything: respect the actors' time. This is their job, so treat that time with respect. And, you kind of have to, especially if you're following SAG rules: half a day is four hours, a full day is eight. If you go over that, you'll have to pay overtime, and that's on the Assistant Director to keep the pace.

When you're working, keep the flow and keep moving. In between scenes, open the studio door and let the air in. The best part about audio is that pulling from different takes is easier than video, so if an actor isn't nailing something in the middle of a take, don't worry! You can do another take or even grab that single line with pick-ups later.

An underrated part of acting in audio is actual blocking. Why try to sound design slamming a door when you have one in the studio? If the character is lying down in the script, have the actor lie down. If you want them running into a room, have them run into the

room! It'll remind the actors that this stuff is actually happening, not just conjured into the audio ether by sound design. And it's very, very fun.

Because the actors are stuck in a hot box, it's important to keep it light and fun. Give your actors room to improvise and be silly (because you tested for that in the casting process, so you know they can do it!). The Director can easily set a divide between "straight" takes and "fun" takes. The fun takes give actors an opportunity to experiment, which can lead to satisfying creative places. You can also start running the mic before the scene is supposed to start, and a few moments after it is over, to capture any fun, loose moments the actors may have.

Directing for audio also involves the Writer. If the actors keep riffing on a particular moment, like the proper way to pronounce ".gif," the Director can bring the Writer in to codify it and add it to the script. On the other hand, if lines are proving hard to say or
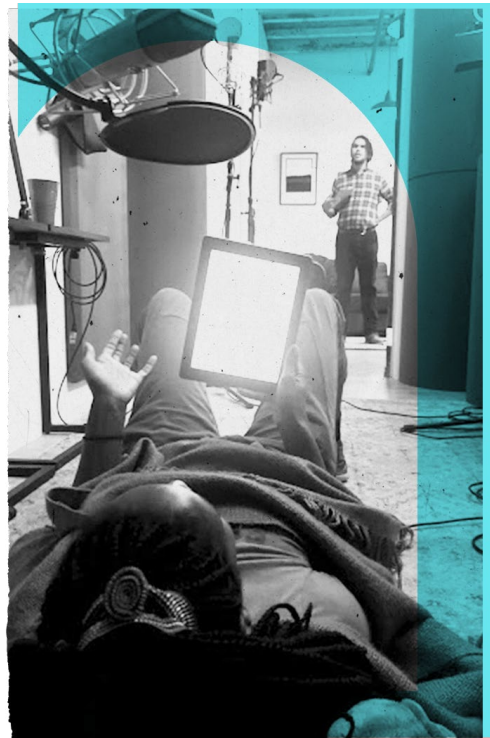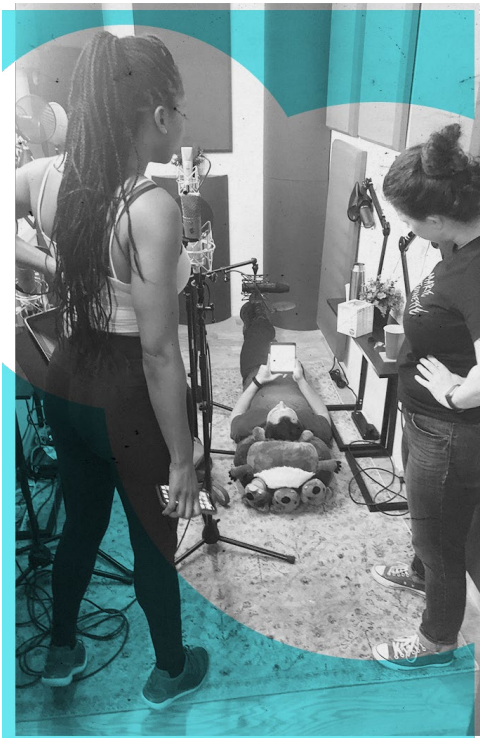
the actors don't know if a scene makes sense, the Director and Writer can rewrite lines or parts of scenes to have it move a little more smoothly.

It is important to note that the Director is the point of contact during production. If someone on the production team has a note or feedback, they should say it privately to the Director first. Having one voice giving feedback to actors will make everything simpler in the long run, and makes sure there is a single point person for communication between the actors and the production team. In our production, we also encouraged the team to go to the Assistant Director with questions or feedback, who then relayed that to the Director.

But that's only one part of the production. How do we set up the mics? How do we make sure everyone is fed? Let's ask the sound director and studio manager!

# Production Logistics

With your cast finalized and paperwork in hand, it's time to turn to the production logistics.

## Props and practical effects

Props are incredibly fun to find and record with! They also help those sound effects feel more natural and integrated into the world since you're recording it in the actual space of the scene. For example, it takes an incredible amount of time—and an incredibly skilled sound designer—to make it sound like an actor is ringing a gong. So spending $25 on a real mini-gong is extremely worth it. You can also get creative with more unusual props, like Julia did with this bag of oatmeal and water that stood in for nasty bag of rotten fish.

We like practical effects for the same reasons we like props: they're economical, they sound real, and they're engaging for the actors. If characters are side-by-side at a bar talking glumly into their drinks, replicate that in the studio! Using a practical effect

can be as easy as having an actor lie down if their character is prone on a bed.
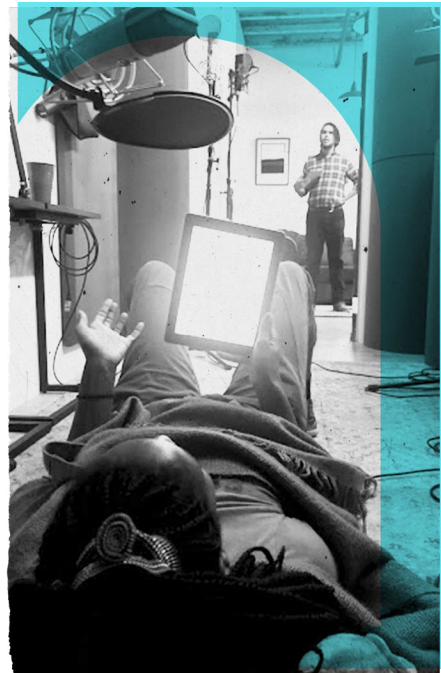
Let actors eat while talking if the script calls for it. Have them mime texting on their phone if their character is verbalizing a text. And if they storm out of a room or yell through a door, use your studio door to achieve that effect.

Each of these requires a different mic configuration and blocking, so be sure to take note of mic setup and mic choices as part of your shot list and production calendar.

## Equipment

Speaking of which: what mics should you use? If you're renting a professional studio, you likely have access to a wide range of equipment. You can choose condenser mics to capture dialogue, an ambisonic mic in the middle of your recording booth to capture total room sound and actor movement, and maybe even a binaural mic to capture the way we hear sound in the real world. This is what we used:

- Warm Audio WA-87 condenser mics for capturing the dialogue.

- Warm Audio WA-84 stereo mics for stereo field coverage of the entire room.

- Zoom H3 360-VR ambisonic mic for recording binaural (3-D) audio for the whole room. We ended up using a mix of this mic and the WA-84 for effects like crowds cheering, group booing, and excited mayhem after a proposal.

We spent about $2,000 on these mics. Since we own a studio that we also rent to other podcasters, buying these mics was an investment that made sense for our business. If we didn't intend ever to use these mics again, we would have rented gear or gone with what we already had instead.

We recorded into Pro Tools, saving the file every mouse click, and backing up the audio after each four-hour session. We started new sessions for each episode, then used markers and a lot of precise labels within each session to keep scenes and takes organized. Each of our files was backed up on two different hard drives, as well as a continuous cloud backup. This might sound excessive, but you may only have one shot to have this combination of actors, production staff, and equipment. It is much less expensive to budget a few minutes for saving and backup during lunch than to re-record later.

Another piece of equipment we came to rely on were tablets for scripts. Rather than instruct our actors to turn pages silently, which is already difficult when not in the middle of a performance, we sourced some old iPads from friends, family, and Craigslist. Each morning, we loaded the day's scripts onto the devices and set up music stands that clipped onto the mic stands, so actors didn't have to hold the tablets while performing.

## Production

With all of our logistics in place, the last thing to do was to make sure everyone was clear on their role before production began. Clarifying tasks and job descriptions for each role ensures that everything that needs to get done actually happens, and that no one ends up feeling like their toes are being stepped on. Here's how ours broke down:

- **Engineer:** Make sure equipment is functioning, switch mics between scenes if needed, run and monitor recording session (Cara)

- **Director:** Set up actors before scenes, give notes after takes, decide when to do more takes and when to move on (Brandon)

- **Script Supervisor:** Make sure every word gets recorded as written and keep track of changes as they happen. They also keep the production on track time-wise and often have to tell the Director they can't have another take. (Julia)

- **Writer:** If this works for your production, listen to performances and advise the Director if something sounds off or mistaken (Eric)

- **Executive Producer:** Keep an ear out for how the recording as a whole adheres to the feel and mission of the show (Amanda)

- **Line Producer:** Keep track of schedule and adherence to union rules (Amanda)

- **Studio Manager:** Maintain cleanliness and comfort of studio and waiting area (Amanda)

- **Production Assistant:** Set up meals, restock snack and drink area, clean up after mealtime (Amanda)

As we had hoped, our production week went very smoothly! Actors with conflicts left on time, no one waited around between scenes for more than an hour,

and—most important of all—the cast and crew had plenty to eat and drink. For each of our five days of production, we provided breakfast, lunch, snacks, and coffee/tea for 6-12 actors and five crew members. We had to do this because we were a SAG production, but also it's a nice and good thing to do. Trader Joe's was the most economical place to source our food, which ended up costing about $800 total, plus $200 for snacks and drinks at our wrap party. Buying in bulk from a high-quality but inexpensive store helped us keep our total spend well below what we initially budgeted. And everyone got addicted to Topo Chico.

Since we did not have the budget for a Studio Manager or Production Assistant, Executive Producer Amanda took over tasks like setting up meals, emptying trash, directing people to the bathroom, greeting actors as they arrived, keeping the coffee/tea bar stocked, and managing the temperature of the room. In general, the hardest part of our week was keeping the recording booth cool enough. Our **DIY studio** does not have its own HVAC system, so we have to rely on keeping the office cool, then using a fan to circulate that air into the studio between takes. If we had double the budget, this would have been a worthwhile addition, but instead we used a $25 fan and a regular window AC unit to keep the temperature manageable.

If the worst thing you can say about your production week is that the booth got warm, you've done well. Budget for some sparkling wine, toast with your actors after the final take, and then rest up for the next phase of making your podcast: post-production.

# Post-Production

For the previous sections of this fiction podcasting guide, we've been able to give you pretty concrete advice on how to do your best at writing, staffing up, directing, and recording. These are skills that can be improved and sharpened over time, but the base ideas of writing and being open communicators are skills many people have.

With post-production, you are wading into the territory of a specific skill set. People go to college for audio engineering and can stare at preamps, cables, and a Pro Tools menu and know what to do. We cannot tell you everything that you would need to know to have a lush audio landscape that will transport you to where you need to go.

## Get someone you trust and tell them what you're thinking

First and foremost, get your hands on someone who knows what they're doing and respect them. Hire a sound designer with experience and trust what they say. Think about them like a graphic designer or a composer: they are taking their sense of tone and audio color from you and will take your feedback, but they know what they're doing. You will be rewarded with your scenes sounding EXACTLY like what you think they should sound like.

But getting the perfect sound design comes from communication. The first conversation you'll have with your post-production person is what kind of style you want your audio fiction to sound like. We can break this down into three main traditional fiction categories:

- **A Radio Play:** Think the BBC or a 1950s radio soap opera. Everyone is recording in the same room, no one ever talks over each other, and sound effects are often performed live with the actors. It's a classic, but it may feel old-timey.

- **Television:** There is a main cast of a few people, with guest actors playing supporting roles. While less big and lush than film, the pacing is often much faster. There is a challenge of apeing a visual medium with an audio one, but it means that the audience has a stronger tether to the kind of fiction you're shooting for. Within the TV category, think about what kind of show you are aiming for. Is it a single-cam comedy, a multi-camera sitcom, an HBO-style prestige show, a network 42-minute drama starring David Boreanaz?

- **Film:** The focus here is on aesthetics and in-depth character study. It is beautiful and emotional and often expresses the artistry of a single filmmaker. This also tells one concise story, so it may lend itself to a smaller run of episodes. Also, it's freaking hard to do.

For NEXT STOP, we wanted to make a TV show. A sitcom is a TV show product and the audience would figure out what we're doing from the first goof. As we explained what we wanted to Brandon, he told us that from a sound design perspective, it was interesting to think that a TV show is not immersive. We watch it on a screen at home, instead of being immersed at a movie theater with surround sound, and we know it's a comedy show. In order to lean into that genre, Brandon used a binaural mic, which captures audio on a horizontal plane. That mic created that sense of audio on a "screen," instead of a surround-sound feeling. We also agreed on the fast pace with no breaks from the jokes and leaning into the tropes of a sitcom, like scene stingers, a theme song with lyrics, and no scoring below speaking.

We also had this initial conversation during pre-production so we could record the actors and most sound effects in the same room. Remember in the last section when we said how awesome it was to have the actors bouncing off each other, keeping the vibe up, and working with props? This is where that idea was locked in.

## Communicating with your sound designer

Once the tone of the sound design is set, figure out what the role is that the sound designer will play. If they have experience, they'll know how they prefer to work, what they're responsible for, and how to choose a delivery schedule that makes sense. Once the delivery schedule is set, then both parties can adjust it if needed as they work on the first few episodes.

Speaking of what they're responsible for, let's talk about choosing takes. This is the Director's job; they deliver a list of takes of lines that they want and give it to the post-production team. But this is the beginning of the conversation between the Sound Designer and the Director. The sound designer should definitely speak up if they think a take choice doesn't work, and the Director will ask to hear the edits and sound design as it's happening.

Sound designers will also send drafts of what they're working on to the production team looking for feedback. Feedback should be clear and kind, and written down to be as easy-to-follow as possible. This is also part of the Director's job as a communication hub. They'll take all the notes and bring them back to the sound designer to have one, clear voice.

If you can, try to learn some vocabulary! It is the job of a composer or sound designer to properly interpret what you're asking of them, but there are certain words that mean standard things in post-work.

- **Boxy:** it feels like it is in a box, there is a build in the lower-mid frequencies

- **Not dirty enough:** it's not natural-sounding enough

- **Clipping:** you hear a digital distortion like something got too loud and then gets all weird

- **EQ:** the tool you use to manipulate the frequency content of your mix so that everything is balanced and clear

- **Compression:** reducing the span between the softest and loudest sounds so the average sounds louder and clearer

For us, Brandon was both our director and the Sound Designer, so we didn't explicitly deal with this relationship. But it was on the rest of the production team to filter notes to Brandon kindly and clearly.

## What are they even doing in there?

What ARE they doing in Pro Tools? And why does it take so long? Here's a breakdown of what goes on in post-production:

- **Audio Repair and Cleanup:** The post-production people have a lot of software that automatically gets rid of unwanted sounds. These processes remove plosives, bad mouth sounds, buzzes and hums from the studio, and help repair the bleeding of an actor's mic from one track into another.

- **Dialogue Edit:** After choosing the best takes, the Director then hands over that list to the production team. Then, it's that team's job to assemble all those takes together into a cohesive story. The editor also can cut or add silences to improve pacing and timing.

- **Adding the Sound Effects:** This may seem straightforward, but there's a lot to fill in here. First, the sound designer adds environmental sounds—anything in the background that makes the scene sound like its proper setting. If the scene is set outside on the subway, there should be other people murmuring in the background, and also trains breaking, other trains riding by, and maybe some birds for good measure. Then the sound designer adds the sound effects that need to be found, bought, or made if we didn't record them as foley during production.

- **Mixing and Mastering**: It's important to separate these two processes. Mixing is achieving a balance between everything in the session so they have the right volume in your ear. So, shouting is louder than whispering, but it shouldn't be so loud that it blows out your ear. Mastering is the final step. Its main process is bringing the overall volume level of the podcast to the -18 to -16 LUFS industry-standard level.

The production team will usually give notes after the dialogue edit, after adding the sound effects and then after the final mixing and mastering. Again, this all gets filtered through the Director as the communication hub.

# Wait, what about the music?

We never said anything about making music; that is a totally different job. We have seen in a lot of productions that they expect the Sound Designer and the Composer to be the same person. This is a huge burden, and the Sound Designer may not be the best at making music. That's why we reached out to someone else to make us music.

When we first contacted our composer Evan Chambers, we followed the same steps that we

would for a sound designer. We gave him a general sense of tone for the show, and sent some examples of works we liked and didn't like from the sitcom genre. Those examples were especially important for the composer; it can be particularly hard to make a specific style and type of music from nothing! We also set clear delivery dates and expectations from the jump which fit with the release schedule and the Sound Designer's work schedule.

Going in, we knew it was going to be a sitcom with a sound that was like classic 90s and 00s sitcoms. This means *Friends* and *Boy Meets World* themes, but not *Full House*.

Here is what we asked our composer for:

- Full theme, as if it was a full ~2-minute song.

- Short theme, the thirty-second clip that would play before episodes

- Theme, but no lyrics

- Stingers to separate scenes

- Montage music for a sequence in Episode 1

- Tap music for a dream sequence later in the season

All of those assets were delivered as 24/48 WAV format, plus the stems, or the individual tracks from the sessions.

Throughout the process, our Sound Designer and Composer were in constant communication. The sound effects and the music affect one another, so it was important to make sure that they were in sync.

**And they're off!**

Like we said at the top, just let your post-production team get it done. There were always opportunities for feedback, but we let Brandon do what he does best. And we got amazing work from him.

# Marketing and Release

The podcast is finished and you want people to listen to it. Go out there and market, young one! The path to podcast listeners is a long one, and there's no full guide to getting a million downloads. But there are some things to keep in mind as you get ready to share it out.

## You should pay for hosting

Your podcast needs to be uploaded somewhere to get sent out to the far reaches of the internet universe. But which host should you go with?

Here's the shot: There is no silver bullet for hosting. Audio data is squishy and murky, and no one has really cracked the code on giving perfect audience data.

Here's the chaser: Because you're looking for someone to securely hold your podcast for you, there are a lot of decent and affordable hosts out there. Check them out, see which one fits what you need and has a plan that works for you. Our biggest piece of advice is to pay for hosting. If you're getting it for free, that means the platform is making money off of you some other way: collecting data, murky IP ownership terms, or skimping on tech support to save money.

## Talking to the press

One of the best ways to build momentum for your podcast is to get reviewed on a podcast recommendation website or newsletter. This may seem obvious to you, but even the smallest newsletter has a devoted fan base that looks to them to recommend shows. Not only that, lots of websites that traffic in entertainment are branching out into podcast reviews.

A few weeks before the episodes come out, start reaching out to press and see if they're interested. You should have two important things attached to that email:

- **A press kit!** This is basically a very fancy About page—a document or webpage that gives a potential reviewer information about you and your show. Your show summary is a good starting point, but reviewers will want to know details like when the show started, who you are, how often the show comes out, and whatnot. They'll also want to download your show artwork, stream your trailer, and know how to get in touch if they want to email you. Make an attachable slide deck or PDF, or give them a link to a Google or Dropbox folder. If you want more inspiration, here's a link to a comprehensive guide on **podcast press** kits.

- **Early episodes!** Giving reporters actual audio will give them more to write about and make you look on top of your game. This may seem like you're spoiling your own show, but the audience needs to know what the show is about to get hooked to listen. And any good reviewer will probably leave out any major spoilers. If you're worried, you can ask for any article about your show to be embargoed until after your release date.

This may surprise you, but reporters are humans just like you and me. So the best way to communicate how much they should write about your show is to talk to them like people. The overarching idea here is to give, don't take. You're giving information for them to consider, not taking a spot in their next article. Keep your tone friendly and professional, and end your email by thanking them for their time. These journalists and editors get way more email than they can respond to, so it's not personal if they don't respond. The podcasting world is small, so you may see this person at a meetup one day soon.

Compose a polite, concise email to them describing your show and linking to your press kit. Then, save it in a document or your email app so you can easily use it as a template for next time (template **here**). If you don't hear back, don't sweat it. Reporters are busy and not every show is a good fit for their beat. Follow up once (politely!) and move on to your other marketing strategies.

The biggest thing to remember is to be yourself. You're not trying to go viral, you're trying to become a presence in someone's internet life. So sound like yourself, or what you think your show would sound like. The best way to do this is to read your tweets out loud as you write them. If you like it, someone else will like it too.

## Social media is your friend

Social media may seem scary, but it may just be the looming obligation of posting on everything constantly that is weighing you down. The easiest way to dispel the gloom is to set some parameters for yourself.

- **What platforms am I going to use?** Podcast listeners are big Twitter users and Instagram is a great way to add visuals to an audio medium. If you feel confident in doing both, do it! But if you have to teach yourself Twitter, then it's ok not to do it. Feel confident in what you're doing. Just create an account so you own your username, pin a tweet telling folks to find you on Instagram, and never check it again.

- **What is the mission?** Think about how you can add to your audience's experience by publishing content on social media that relates to your show. If you're a sitcom, you could quote-tweet those no-context meme accounts with commentary. If you're a horror show, you can write spooky flash fiction. If your show is about K-Pop singers, you better give your takes on K-Pop. You're not just sharing links to new episodes, though you'll do that too; you got to give something more.

- **What's your posting plan?** Don't feel obligated to share more than once a day on Twitter, or once every few days on Instagram. It matters more that you stick to a schedule than do a ton all at once and then trail off.

## Let's talk about transcripts

We're just going to be straight with you. You should have transcripts. It is a right, not a privilege, for audiences to freely access transcripts for your show.

If you need some more convincing, here's who transcripts are for.

- The d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Just like subtitles in a movie, transcripts open up the storytelling of your show for those who cannot access audio.

- Plenty of English language learners or people who know English as a second (or third or sixth) language would love to listen to your English-language podcast. But, they could use a written reference as they do. Reading along as they listen to the audio enables these listeners to access and enjoy your show.

- The same goes for those who have auditory processing issues. They want to participate in podcasting, but need text to help understand what they're hearing.

- Transcripts also help a great deal with search engine optimization (SEO). Google has been doubling down on reading podcasts and surfacing them, but your episode titles and description alone aren't always enough. Putting the transcript of the show on your website makes your audio way more searchable.

It will not take away from people listening to your show, no one is going to steal your script, and transcripts will not spoil potential listeners. I promise.

And, you're in luck as a scripted fiction podcast producer: you have all the language written out in scripts! Do a quick reformatting for readability, which we can help you out with **here**, re-listen to your episode for any improvisations or cut lines, and voila! Throw those bad boys on your website and you're good to go.

## Do I pay for marketing?

If you had an infinite budget, we would say definitely hire a marketing expert to help you. They'll hook you up with paid search on Google and good promoted social media posts—they'll also introduce you to a Rolodex of relevant contacts, write the emails you don't know how to write, and set you up with strategies that make sense for your show.

If you have a limited amount of money, that should probably go to other places right now, so you can tackle marketing yourself. The rolling tasks of marketing, social media, engaging with your audience take a lot of time. Sending one email won't make your downloads spike; building a community around the show and spreading by word of mouth is a slow, but effective, process.

It doesn't have to feel endless though! Take 15-30 minutes out of your day every day to respond to comments on your show's social media and reply to emails. Don't feel like you have to post more than once a day on Twitter or Instagram. And don't get bogged down in podcast reviews—it's good to have some to show that there are listeners, but there is no proof that an algorithm surfaces podcasts by that metric.

## More marketing quick hits

- **Have a website!** Pay a little bit of money to have a real website for the podcast. Remember — if you take yourself seriously, other people will too. And this is going to be really great for your press emails, so reporters can find all your information on that website.

- **Make a trailer!** Give 'em a taste of what is to come. We can tell you how to do that **here**!

- **Write down credits somewhere!** Preferably, you should at least put it in the description of each episode and on the website.

- **Make your description clear!** Space it out. It does no one any good if it's all one big block of text. Have sections like this: 1) episode summary BIG PARAGRAPH BREAK 2) advertisers BIG PARAGRAPH BREAK 3) socials for the show BIG PARAGRAPH BREAK 4) cast list BIG PARAGRAPH BREAK 5) crew list.

- **Bring other podcasters into the mix!** Use the template email you created for press outreach and contact some podcasters you respect whose audiences might be interested in your show. Ask if they would be interested in cross-promotion, where each of you recommends the other person's podcast on your own. Send some bullet points summarizing your show and a call to action sending listeners to your show's website. The most effective cross-promotions sound genuine, so appeal to that specific audience and their interests, leave listeners wanting to learn more, and close with a clear call to action.

- **Get weird!** Brainstorm new ways of spreading the word with your team and put people's skills to use. Want to make an online choose-your-own-adventure game to promote your

D&D show? Hand out recipe cards for your workplace dramedy set in a restaurant? Print roommate wanted flyers for your **sitcom about three roommates**? — oh wait, that's us! And now for the grand finale: our budget.



### And Finally, Celebrate!

We're so proud of you. You and your team created a massive creative project! You have to remember to celebrate your successes. Have a party, or go out somewhere with the cast and crew.

The best part about podcasts is that they can theoretically live forever, waiting for someone to pick your show and listen. You are fully contributing to the rich tapestry that is audio fiction, and people will find your show and love it. Good job!

# The Budget

And now for the grand finale: our budget.

You can find a link to our actual budget spreadsheet along with a template for you to use **here**.

We broke out each of the line items below, providing a description, expected price range, our timeline, and notes for each. As a still-evolving medium, there are no hard and fast scales or ranges for many of these expenses. To create our ranges we talked to dozens of fiction podcast producers and pulled from television, theatre, and film pay scales.

The most important thing to keep in mind as you put together your budget is to pay professionals what they're worth. If you're an indie shop and can't afford what they're worth, pay as much as you can, split profits fairly among team members, or barter/trade services. Our four core team members each took on multiple roles for this production, which we would have paid them for or hired new people for if our budget had been bigger. Since we are full-time podcasters who already work together, sharing roles and compensation worked for us.

But big companies making fiction shows have no excuse not to pay their teams appropriately. We must create the standards we want to see in our industry with our budgets, not just with our words. We can choose to create fair standards for skilled professionals, or to treat our colleagues like disposable work-for-hires. Wouldn't you much rather work in the former?

## PRE-PRODUCTION

### WRITER

- **Range:** $1,000-$10,000 per episode
- **We Paid:** $1,500 per episode ($15k total)

- **Timeline:** One year before production started. Paid half at the beginning of production and half after

- **Description:** The person or team that writes the scripts

- **Notes:** Scripted fiction podcasts don't exist without writers. So don't under-pay yours— even if you're bootstrapping production of your own scripts! We also split intellectual property ownership 50/50 between our writer and Multitude, since we had been involved as producers from the very beginning. If Multitude had purchased all intellectual property and adaptation rights to the scripts along with the right to make them into a podcast, we would have paid much more. Instead, we paid what we could and will be sharing in any revenue that we make on the show after earning back our advance.

### SCRIPT CONSULTANT

- **Range:** $250-$1,000 per episode

- **We Paid:** $300 per episode ($3k total)

- **Timeline:** Two months before production began. Paid in full upon delivery of notes on the last script

- **Description:** A person well-versed in script writing and editing who gives feedback to the writer about story structure, pacing, character development, and/or individual line edits

- **Notes:** Our script consultant works a day job in TV writing, loves podcasts and has written for audio. She consulted with our writer on story and character development, episode ordering, and individual lines. She delivered notes on the overall series after one week, then delivered episode-specific notes at a rate of 1-2 episodes per week.

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## CASTING FEE

- **Range:** Free-$200+ per listing

- **We Paid:** $17

- **Timeline:** 1 month before production began

- **Description:** Registration and listing fees to get casting calls in front of actors. Some sites charge you a fee for listing a job, while others take a commission based on the fee you pay any actor you find on their platform.

- **Notes:** Backstage.com charged a $17 fee for our casting calls. If we had compensated Julia for her role as Casting Director, we would have paid her a $2,000 project fee. We pulled this number roughly from TV Casting Director pay scales since there are no public comparisons currently available for podcasts.

## DOMAINS

- **Range:** $12-$50 annually for as long as you keep the domains

- **We Paid:** $18

- **Timeline:** 4 months before the show premiered

- **Description:** Domain names for your podcast website

- **Notes:** We also bought nextstoppod.com and nextstoppodcast.com, both of which redirect to our primary URL, nextstopshow.com. Having variations of your primary domain name that you can redirect to the main site helps make sure anyone who tries to type your URL from memory (which lots of podcast audiences do!) ends up in the right place. We registered @NextStopShow social media handles at the same time, to make sure we claimed the usernames before anyone else could.

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## PRODUCTION

### DIRECTOR

- **Range:** $1,000-$10,000 per episode

- **We Paid**: $1,100 per episode ($11k total)

- **Timeline:** Half upon signing (3-4 months before production), half upon delivering the final pass of notes on the final episode

- **Description:** The steward of the story, responsible for how that is being communicated and delivered into audio form.

- **Notes:** Directing is a big job. Hundreds of hours go into script review, preparation, casting, and production planning before anything gets recorded. And directing fiction podcasts is a specialty of its own! While directors from other mediums have important experience to bring to the table, an IMDB page is no substitute for podcast expertise. So hire well, compensate fairly, and then trust your director to translate the story to audio.

### SOUND DIRECTOR

- **Range:** $5,000-$20,000 per project

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** Would have paid half upon signing (2-3 months before production started) and half upon finishing production

- **Description:** The podcast equivalent of a cinematographer, selecting the equipment and techniques that will best serve the script as it's turned into a podcast.

- **Notes:** A crucial part of translating written words to audio is a Sound Director. In some productions

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(like ours), the director or producer may take on this role, but the important part is that someone helps the writer think about how their story will translate to sound. A Sound Director's job starts well before production, reviewing scripts and communicating with the writer. "Post-production" is best done in pre-production. This will make for a more efficient recording process and, ultimately, a better final product.

### SOUND DESIGNER

- **Range:** $75-$200+ per hour or $200-$5,000 per episode

- **We Paid:** $800 per episode ($8k total)

- **Timeline:** Half upon delivery of episode 1, half upon delivery of the final episode

- **Description:** The podcast equivalent of a graphic designer or composer, combining your vision with their own sense of tone and style to build a world around your recording using sound and music.

- **Notes:** Hire and pay a professional sound designer! This is an extraordinarily specific and hard-won skillset that will make an unbelievable difference to your final product. Many sound designers will calculate a per-episode or project rate based on the amount of time it will take to complete. If you have a budget cap, communicate it up front and ask what services the designer could provide for that rate—maybe atmospherics but no sound effects, or library SFX but no custom ones. "Do more for less" is not a workable strategy. We paid at the lower end of the range because our Sound Designer was also our Director, and compensated for both roles.

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

- **Range:** $800-$5,000 per episode

- **We Paid:** $1,000 per episode ($10k total)

- **Timeline:** Half upon signing, half upon delivering the final pass of notes on the final episode

- **Description:** Provide an insight and feedback on the production, take responsibility for managing cast and crew, and help the director make their vision a reality

- **Notes:** From initial script analysis to creating call sheets to giving notes on drafts, the Assistant Director is a crucial team member for the practical and creative sides of the production. The key word for ADs is "logistics," making sure that everything and everyone is in the right place at the right time.

### EDITOR

- **Range:** $50-$175+ per hour

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** (Would have paid half upon delivery of episode 1, half upon delivery of the final episode)

- **Description:** The person who turns the production recordings into an episode draft for the Sound Designer to work with.

- **Notes:** Hire and pay a professional editor! In our case, our Director was our Sound Designer, and we compensated him for both editing and sound design as one role. If you have the budget, pay for both tasks, or bundle the fees to an appropriate total rate if you pay one person for both roles.

### ENGINEER

- **Range:** $50-$300+ per hour

- **We Paid:** $50 per hour ($1,200 total)

- **Timeline:** Paid in full within one week of the last day of recording

- **Description:** The person in charge of the equipment and software in the recording studio. Sets up microphones, starts/stops the recording, monitors recording to make sure everything is being captured properly, and troubleshoots any issues that arise.

- **Notes:** Engineers are skilled professionals worth paying for. Have we said that enough times? After investing so much time and money into your production, the last thing you want to be worrying about day-of is whether your software or cables are acting up.

### STUDIO RENTAL

- **Range:** $100-$400+ per hour, plus a la carte services

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** Paid in full on the last day of recording, though some spaces charge a deposit upon booking

- **Description:** Renting a professional recording studio to record your show.

- **Notes:** Some studios recommend or mandate that you use their engineering staff, so be sure to ask for their policy and whether or not engineering is included in their hourly rate. We already built a **DIY studio** in our office (totaling about $15k over six months), which is why this line item is $0.

### ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

- **Range:** Variable

- **We Paid:** $1,786

- **Timeline:** 2-4 weeks before production began

- **Description:** Two additional mics, iPads and music stands for actors to use while recording, and props.

- **Notes:** It may be helpful to break out these line items in your own budget so you can allocate money for each. This vague "Additional" category can include microphones, props, accessories like music stands, and headphones or headphone splitters for everyone who will be listening in during production. Borrow what you can from colleagues and friends/family (like we did with Generation 1 iPads!) unless you're investing in equipment for future productions. We buy equipment directly from manufacturers when we can and use a vendor with great customer service like **Sweetwater** when we can't.

## POST-PRODUCTION

### COMPOSER

- **Range:** $2,000-$25,000+ project fee

- **We Paid:** $3,500

- **Timeline:** Half upon signing (1 month before production started), half upon delivery

- **Description:** Creates original music for your podcast, including but not limited to a theme song and stingers or transitions

- **Notes:** Your Sound Designer is not your composer! Some Sound Designers may have

both skill sets, but these are different jobs with different budgets.

### TRANSCRIPTION

- **Range:** $1-2 per minute of audio to be transcribed

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** 2-4 weeks before episode 1 launched

- **Description:** Turn the script into a properly-formatted transcript of the finished episode.

- **Notes:** Our Assistant Director handled this in our production, following our **transcript style guide**. Transcripts are posted for free on our show's **website**, and yours should be too.

### WRAP PARTY

- **Range:** $200-$1,000+

- **We Paid:** $222

- **Timeline:** 2 weeks after production finished

- **Description:** Have a party! Thank your cast, crew, and friends/family for helping you get this done. Have another one when the show comes out. More parties!

## TALENT

### PRINCIPALS

- **Range:** $205+ per session

- **We Paid:** $2,100 flat fee

- **Timeline:** Paid in full within five days of the actor's first day on set

- **Description:** Actors playing our main characters

- **Notes:** SAG requires at least $205 per 4-hour session for performers. Since our main characters had more lines than other characters, required more preparation, and attended a table read, we paid our Principals a $2,100 flat fee. That works out to $350 per day for the five days of production plus one day for the table read.

### PERFORMERS

- **Range:** $205+ per day

- **We Paid:** $205-$335 per day

- **Timeline:** Paid in full within five days of the actor's first day on set

- **Description:** Any performer with lines

- **Notes:** SAG requires at least $205 per session for performers. For any "day players," who appeared in one or two episodes only, we stuck to $205 per session. For characters that appeared in several episodes and interacted often with the core ensemble—think of the "Supporting Actor" award category—we upped that to $335 per session.

### BACKGROUND ACTORS

- **Range:** $105+ per session

- **We Paid:** $125 per session

- **Timeline:** Paid in full within five days of the actor's first day on set

- **Description:** There is no definition for podcasts, so we defined this as actors playing unnamed characters with fewer than 5 lines

- **Notes:** SAG requires at least $105 per session for background actors, but we upped that to $125.

## PRODUCTION LOGISTICS

### TRAVEL

- **Range:** Variable

- **We Paid:** $35

- **Timeline:** During production week

- **Description:** We had a couple of late nights and one very powerful thunderstorm during production, so we covered rideshares for our team. Some actors will require transportation costs, from local taxis all the way up to flight and hotel. This is where those costs go.

### CRAFT SERVICES

- **Range:** $25-50 per person per day

- **We Paid:** $730 total (~$20 per person per day)

- **Description:** A meal for actors working full days

## LEGAL, LICENSING, INSURANCE

### LEGAL

- **Range:** $500-$5,000 per production

- **We Paid:** $500

- **Timeline:** 2 months before production started

- **Description:** Create and/or review contracts for production cast and crew

- **Notes:** Never sign a contract without running it by your lawyer, and never write one yourself

either! Some lawyers charge hourly, others will charge a flat fee for writing or reviewing a document, and some entertainment lawyers work on commission. We already had a contractor agreement to use with our production staff, but we needed a new one for our actors. Spending a little money on legal review now will save you big headaches—and maybe big expenses—should something go wrong down the line.

### INSURANCE

- **Range:** $1,000+

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Description:** Production insurance to cover injury to our cast and crew, studio, or equipment during production.

- **Notes:** We had already bought a year's worth of production insurance for another project several months earlier, so we did not need to purchase it again for this one.

### SAG PENSION & HEALTH INSURANCE

- **Range:** 18.5% of total compensation paid to union performers

- **We Paid:** $2,164

- **Timeline:** Within one week of production finishing

- **Description:** Mandatory contribution to union pension and health funds.

### SOUND LIBRARY/SOFTWARE

- **Range:** $50+

- **We Paid:** $376

- **Timeline:** During post-production

- **Description:** Monthly or one-time-use fees for editing software, sound effects, etc.

- **Notes:** It is a lot of fun to record highly specific sound effects and foley yourself, but it's also time-consuming and can be expensive. So we set aside some budget for sound effect libraries that our Sound Designer's general library might not contain. For us, it was ambisonic atmospheres of various cities from BOOM Library and Pro Sound Effects, which we bought during a mega-sale on Black Friday.

### LICENSING

- **Range:** Variable

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Description:** Paying for the limited right to use music from a publisher or music library, scripts from writers, or intellectual property from publishers.

- **Notes:** We commissioned original music from a composer (see our Post-Production section) and paid for scripts while sharing IP with the writer, so we had no licensing needs.

## MARKETING

### WEBSITE

- **Range:** $100-$250+ per year

- **We Paid:** $115

- **Timeline:** One month before trailer dropped

- **Description:** A standalone website for your podcast

- **Notes:** You should have a website! Re-read our podcast marketing section to remind yourself why.

### FEED DROPS

- **Range:** $25-100+ CPM (per 1,000 downloads)

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Description:** Another podcaster recommending your show on theirs is a really effective way to build your audience, but previewing some of your actual audio can be even better. However, publishing your show in someone else's podcast feed costs money, unless you're a member of a podcast network or collective that shares promotional space freely among members. Most shows will calculate the price of a "feed drop" using CPM, which we explain in-depth **here**; the main takeaway is that the price is proportional to the number of people who will hear it.

### POSTERS

- **Range:** $0-$300+

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** Day trailer dropped

- **Description:** 'Roommate Wanted' flyers with a QR code to our website

- **Notes:** We dropped the NEXT STOP trailer while at a big podcast conference, so our writer Eric created a "roommate wanted" flyer in **Canva** to put up around the conference hotel. It was a fun, low-effort, no-cost way to get people talking about the show, and sure enough, by the end of the weekend several dozen people pulled tabs and visited the website via the QR code.

PART 9: THE BUDGET

### AD SWAPS

- **Range:** Trade or $15-35+ CPM

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Timeline:** 4 weeks before episode 1 premiered

- **Description:** Recommending another podcast on yours in exchange for them recommending your show on theirs.

- **Notes:** You may choose to swap recommendations for free, or to pay another show's host(s) to recommend your show using a CPM pricing model. Depending on who recommends the show, how long that recommendation takes, and where in the show it's placed, the CPM can vary from $15 (short mention at the top of the show) to $35 or more (dedicated mid-roll ad). We went the trade route.

## GRAPHICS

### LOGOS & ICONS

- **Range:** $1,500 - $5,000

- **We Paid:** $1,500

- **Timeline:** 1 month before trailer dropped. Paid in full upon delivery.

- **Description:** Podcast logo, promotional images, and banners for social media and website

- **Notes:** A graphic designer is worth paying for! Podcasts have a limited number of ways to catch the attention of a potential audience member, and your cover art is the biggest one. Find a graphic designer with experience making podcast art, or a designer you know who is willing to research podcasts and come up with

effective art. Send them examples of podcast logos you love and ones you don't, along with reasons why. Share your prep materials, a script, and a wishlist of what the art will communicate. Better yet, include a mood board of images that evoke the feeling/tone/color palette that you want your art to also convey. Then step back and let the expert work.

## CONTINGENCY & PRODUCTION FEE

### CONTINGENCY FEE

- **Range:** 10% of your total budget

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Description:** A "just in case" fund for any unexpected or unforeseeable changes, delays, or additional costs.

### PRODUCTION FEE

- **Range:** 15-30% of your total budget

- **We Paid:** $0

- **Description:** How the production company making the podcast gets paid for their work making the show, organizing the production, and distributing the final product.

- **Notes:** Multitude didn't make any money on NEXT STOP. That's okay with us—we got to pay three of our team members, make an exciting show, and hopefully earn a little ad revenue after earning back our advance. But if we were making a show for someone else, we'd need to pay our own overhead: rent, staff, health insurance, all of those expenses that go into making a company run.

We hope that these resources help you turn your fiction podcast from an idea to reality. This entire process was a huge learning experience for us—we've published a ton of **resources** for podcasters, but scripted fiction is in many ways a whole different beast. When we were teaching ourselves how to make a podcast, we didn't see nearly enough artistically-minded resources, for fiction or nonfiction audio, so we hope we can have filled in that gap for you.

Multitude is an internet creator experiment, and like we learned in high school chemistry, doing something new is better and more valuable when we can share our findings. Now go forth and run new experiments of your own!

**PATREON** + **MULTITUDE**