

Financial Landscape

Guiding Question:

How can you establish clear, clean, and sound financial practices that serve your school and your students?

To build an effective budget, start by exploring the financial landscape for high schools in your community.

Step 1 – Research

You can learn a lot by looking at the actual budgets of schools in your community, network, or region. Gather 2-3 comparable school budgets from your locality or state and look at them closely. Be sure to talk to a few experienced people about what you can expect, how much flexibility you'll have, and what constraints you'll need to work within.

If you're redesigning an existing school, examine your current budget and ask questions about it, so you understand how much money is available and how it's allocated. Reach out to other high schools that have made student-centered innovations to understand how they have financed those.

If you're creating a new school, get in touch with people who are leading innovative schools in your community or state; ask to see their budgets and for any advice they might have. If your district or charter network uses a particular budget template, ask for it.

Step 2 – Reflect

Share your observations with your team and discuss these questions:

- Which school budgets did you explore? (Be sure to include your own, if you're redesigning an existing school.) What are your overall observations? What practices seem promising? What constraints or problems do you see?
- Who did you talk with, and what advice did they have to offer? Did they recommend any further sources of information or expertise?
- What additional questions do you have? Who might you reach out to for more insights and information? What are your next steps?

Example School Budget	Observations
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Advisors	Insights They Offered
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Additional Questions	Next Steps
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