

COSPLAY CONTEST JUDGE BUDGET TUTORIAL

You're trying to convince your event leaders to give you the budget to properly compensate your cosplay contest judges, and need to give an estimate, but you don't know where to start.

This tutorial will walk through an example that you can adapt for your own use.

Overview

We'll use (2) hypothetical contests to generate a budget estimate including:

- Travel
- Hospitality & Support
- Appearance Fee



Example Contest Scenarios

Contest A

Small contest at a 1-day convention targeted at local, casual fans.

Contest sign-ups are first-come, first-served.

Pre-judging is for 1-2 hours with only reference pictures required, followed by a short show with an exhibition stage walk and some small awards.

Contest B

Large contest at a 3-day convention geared towards drawing in attendees from across the state/region.

Sign-ups are prior to the con with entry jurying by event staff.

Pre-judging takes place over several days, culminating in a stage show on Saturday night including a judged stage walk and a full awards ceremony.

Judges are also asked to present panels and appear at convention events over the course of the weekend.

Travel

Travel costs will depend on how far the judge is traveling; the best way to calculate the estimate is to throw some details into Google or a travel site to see where the numbers fall.

There are also more detailed resources available online such as:

- [Baggage Fees by Airline - Tripadvisor](#)
- [IRS Mileage Rates 2023 - Drivers Note.com](#)
- [Uber price estimator](#)

DON'T FORGET TO BUDGET FOR A JUDGE HANDLER AS WELL!

Contest A	Contest B
Targeting local judges who can drive or take public transportation in to the event	Exploring domestic judges who need transportation between their home and an airport, roundtrip flight, and transportation between the airport and the event. Judge and handler both have (1) "normal" checked bag and (1) "cosplay" checked item; judge may want to have an additional cosplay checked item
Gas for 15 miles: $\$0.65^* \times 15 = \9.75 Tolls: < \$5 Parking for 1 day: \$10	Uber from home to airport: $\$67 \times 2$ Round trip flight: $\$391 \times 2$ people Uber between airport and event: $\$43 \times 2$ (5) checked items: \$300
Estimated Travel: \$25	Estimated Travel: \$1,302 → \$1400

International judges may need assistance with getting a visa. Depending on whether judging a contest would be considered working, the type of visa needed might change. You may also want to consider finding a lawyer to help with certain aspects of the application process.

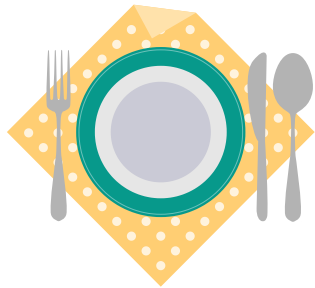
Hospitality

Judges (and their handlers) need a place to sleep, food to eat, and potentially other resources to navigate an event.

Hotel

Make sure judges have time to get settled before starting their event responsibilities.

Check to see if there are convention-specific hotel blocks with lower rates to save some money.



Food

If the event does not provide a food option (such as a stocked greenroom) for guests, then make sure to budget a per diem, or a daily allowance for a judge to feed themselves.

Additional Services & Support

If you already have judges in mind, you may be able to anticipate some accommodation requests and include those in your estimate.

For example - interpreters for judges whose first language isn't spoken English, or portable wheelchair lifts for stages without built-in ramps.

These expenses might actually sit with operations, tech, facilities etc. rather than you, but it's good to bring them up early if you know about them in advance.

Contest A

No hotel stay required

Lunch options available via food vouchers at the event: \$20

Estimated hospitality: \$20

Contest B

Hotel stay for judge +1: \$375/night
Check-in: Thursday
Check-out: Monday

Per Diem Stipend: \$80 per person x 3 days of the event

Estimated hospitality: \$1980 → \$2000

Appearance Fee

Appearance fees vary widely and not many cosplayers them posted publicly. The following is an approach I've taken in the past to estimate appearance fees.

Step 1: Calculate Hours Working at the Con

Figure out how much time the judge will be spending on contest activities.

	Contest A	Contest B
Pre-Judging	2 hours	4 hours x 2 days
Show	1 hour	2 hours
Panels & Appearances	0 hours	1 hour x 3 days
Feedback Sessions	0 hours	2 hours

Step 2: Add in Prep Time and Breaks

Incorporate all the extra time the judge will be "on the clock" such as arriving early to a panel, waiting in a greenroom, deliberation etc.

	Contest A	Contest B
Pre-Judging	2 hours + 15 min	4 hours x 2 days +15 min x 2 (arrival) +30 min x 2 (break) +15 min x 2 (calibration)
Show	1 hour + 30 min	2 hours + 1 hour
Panels & Appearances	0 hours	1 hour x 3 days 30 min x 3 days
Feedback Sessions	0 hours	2 hours + 15 min

Appearance Fee (cont.)

Step 3: Consider Lost Work Days

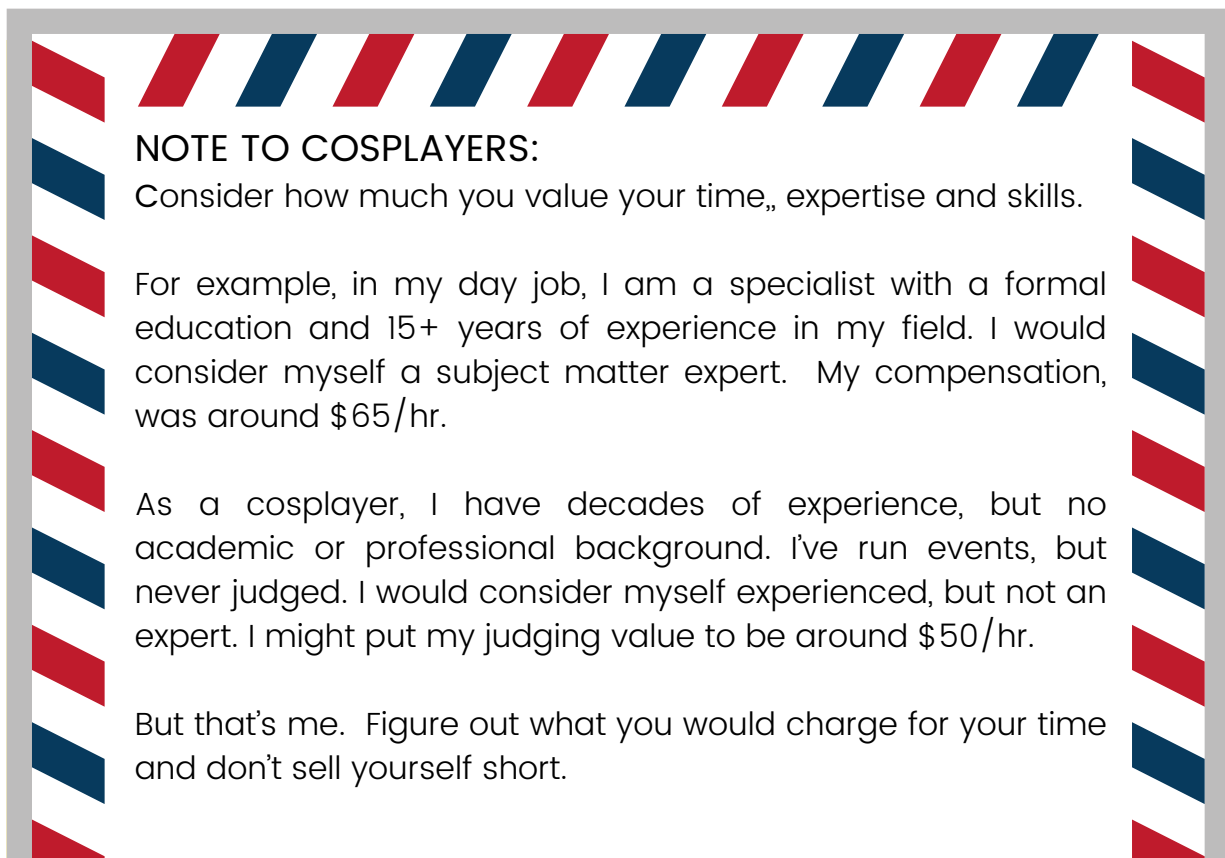
Whether a judge's fulltime occupation is cosplay or something else, they are taking a break/vacation to judge, which means they are losing out on income or consuming a paid benefit like vacation time. It would be reasonable for a cosplayer to request compensation.

	Contest A	Contest B
Work Days	None (Event is same day as arrival date)	4 hours PTO (personal time off) used to travel on Thursday 8 hours PTO to travel back on Monday

Step 4: Estimate an hourly rate

In most cosplay contests, judging is specialized labor, where each judge is bringing skills, knowledge, and years of experience to the table. But, like many industries, there aren't any standard rates to go by.

A cosplayer could be valued anywhere from \$35-75/hr or more depending on their background and qualifications.



NOTE TO COSPLAYERS:
Consider how much you value your time,, expertise and skills.

For example, in my day job, I am a specialist with a formal education and 15+ years of experience in my field. I would consider myself a subject matter expert. My compensation, was around \$65/hr.

As a cosplayer, I have decades of experience, but no academic or professional background. I've run events, but never judged. I would consider myself experienced, but not an expert. I might put my judging value to be around \$50/hr.

But that's me. Figure out what you would charge for your time and don't sell yourself short.

Appearance Fee (cont.)

If we plug my example hourly rates into each event and then round up for a bit of extra buffer we get:

	Contest A	Contest B
Lost Work Days	0 hours	12 hours @ \$65/hr
Judge Responsibilities	3 hours @ \$50/hr	15 hours @ \$50/hr
Prep/Breaks	1 hour @ \$50/hr	6 hours @ \$50/hr
Total	\$200	\$1,830 → \$1900



Keep in mind that well established cosplayers, with strong brands, extensive accolades, and robust qualifications may ask for more. If you're targeting top tier talent, make sure your budget estimate supports a top tier price tag.

Extra Expenses

Table or Booth

if you want to offer your cosplayer a table or booth in the autograph hall, dealer's room, or artist's alley, then you should budget to pay for the spot, as the event will be losing out on the ability to sell that space to someone else

Social Media Posts / Promotions

If you would like a cosplayer to promote your contest on their social media channels, make sure to budget for announcements. There are guides online that can provide ballpark numbers for what that might cost, such as

https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/influencer-marketing-costs-rates-pricing_

Exercise Grand Total

Let's compile all the estimates so far!

	Contest A	Contest B
Travel	\$25	\$1,400
Hospitality	\$20	\$2,000
Appearance Fee	\$200	\$1,900
Per Guest	\$245	\$5,300
Total Judge Budget (3)	\$735 → \$800	\$15,900 → \$16,000

Summary

While there are some situations where it's not possible to pay judges - such as events that are just starting to get off the ground with little funding - those should be the exception, not the norm. Many conventions or events have the capability to properly compensate cosplay judges.

If you're not able to secure a budget large enough to support your event, I would encourage you to adjust the scale and expectations of your contest rather than ask judges to work for less - wherever possible.

As you can see from this exercise, there are a ton of variables to play with to reduce the costs so that you can remain within your budget.

