

# Film Industry Roles: Unit Production Manager

## What Is a Production Manager?

A production manager—officially called a unit production manager by the Directors Guild of America—is responsible for budgets, shooting schedules, and managing the day-to-day business side of a production. The production manager also oversees what’s known as “below-the-line” crew. “Below-the-line” is a term for all the personnel on a TV show or film who are not the creative principals of a production. The production manager reports directly to the line producer as the chief administrator in the production office. Production managers do not make creative decisions on a production, but they do make budgetary decisions that can have major effects on the end product.

## 5 Key Responsibilities of a Production Manager During Preproduction

The responsibilities of a production manager vary depending on where a production is in its development process. During pre-production, the production manager focuses mainly on making a logistical plan and detailed schedule for the shoot. The production manager works closely with the producer, line producer, first assistant director, and others to break down a script for purposes of scheduling and budgeting. A production manager’s pre-production work generally takes place in the production office. Key duties include:

1. Locations. The production manager oversees the initial location scouting and manages any financial arrangements to secure locations.
2. Shooting schedule. The production manager works with the producers to make a shooting schedule that satisfies the scheduling restrictions of all cast and crew as well as location availability.
3. Budget. Creates a working budget that accounts for personnel, equipment, and locations.
4. Crew hires. Work with the line producer to hire crews and contract with suppliers.
5. Housing and transportation. Coordinates all necessary transportation and housing for the cast and crew for the duration of the filming schedule.

## 4 Key Responsibilities of a Production Manager During Production

Once shooting begins, the production manager’s responsibilities shift into overseeing the schedule and budget they’ve drawn up to make sure everything goes according to plan. During filming, production managers generally split their time between working in the production office and reporting directly to the set. Production manager responsibilities during shooting include:

1. Budget. The production manager oversees the working budget. They account for any budgeting changes during production and keep the director, producers, and studio abreast of any deviations from the initial budget.
2. Releases and permits. Production managers are responsible for making sure that all locations and cast have the prerequisite releases filed with the production office. They also ensure that all necessary permitting has been taken care of for each respective location.

3. Crew liaison. The production manager serves as a liaison between local authorities and the director and crew. This ensures that all local ordinances are being followed and the production doesn't risk getting shut down, while allowing the director and crew to focus solely on the shoot.
4. Production report. The production manager completes a daily production report, which shows how the day's shooting went and reports any deviations from the master shooting schedule.

### **What Skills Do You Need to Become a Production Manager?**

Production managers must have a wide array of skills and usually have ample experience in other areas of film production. Production management is a highly demanding field and aspiring production managers must have the following core skills:

- Organization. The ability to plan, organize, and administer a complex production with multiple people. A huge part of being a production manager is organizing and scheduling all the moving parts that make up a film set.
- Excellent budgeting and accounting skills. Keeping track of a film's budget is one of the most important jobs a production manager has.
- Excellent communication skills. The production manager must communicate and work with producers, the director, studio executives, crew heads as well as local government and authorities.
- Knowledge of film and TV production. The production manager should have a working knowledge of film and TV production beyond their specific job duties as they are required to communicate and coordinate with almost every department on a film set.
- Contacts. Having a working relationship with equipment suppliers and personnel recruiters can help a production manager enormously as they move from job-to-job. When starting a new production, being able to call on the services of people whose abilities you trust will go along way in helping you in your pre-production planning.
- Knowledge of laws and regulations. Production managers should be well versed in health and safety regulations, insurance, basic human resources issues, contracts, and labor law.