

Wedding Vendor Hiring Guide



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Wedding Vendor Hiring Guide

Choosing your wedding vendors can be an overwhelming task. If you have hired a reputable wedding planner, you can breathe a little easier, because they've already done the legwork for you, know the behind-the-scenes industry details and can make recommendations based on your specific needs and personality.



That said, reality dictates that not everyone is in a position to hire a full-service wedding planner. While wedding planning is my full time job and it pays my bills, I am not going to sit here and tell you to go into debt to hire a consultant.

The best way to spend your budget, no matter if it is \$65 for a courthouse wedding or six- or seven-figures for a lavish affair, is to hire professionals who will do a quality job and deliver the services and products promised.

With that in mind, I've put together this Wedding Vendor Hiring Guide. In it I give you questions to ask vendors to help determine if they are right for you, and some tips and advice on decoding some of the wedding jargon you'll run into during your engagement. I don't list every vendor type here, but hopefully this guide will get you started on the right foot.

Why am I doing this? Because you deserve a great wedding, regardless of your budget and regardless of whether or not you hire my company to help you in your planning process. Also, and any wedding professional can attest to this, some of the "1287 Intrusive Questions You MUST Ask Your Vendors" lists floating around on wedding sites and in bridal magazines are just downright ridiculous. I want to give you some insight into what professional wedding planners ask when they interview vendors for their clients so that you and your fiance can make an educated decision when it comes to who you hire for your wedding day.

Congratulations on your engagement and here's a toast to a stress-free wedding!

xxox.

Liene





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Churches or Ceremony Venues

If you are getting married in a church, synagogue or other house of worship, there are some key questions to keep in mind. Many churches book up for wedding dates far in advance, so it should be one of the first items you reserve, and if getting married in a certain church is important to you, then it is something you should book even before finding a location to hold your reception.



Are there any requirements for pre-marital counseling or classes?

Some pastors and priests require that you attend a certain number of pre-marital counseling or marriage preparation classes in order to get married in their church while others don't. Decide as a couple if this is something you want to do before you commit to getting married in a certain location.

Are there any dress code requirements for the bridal party or guests?

There have been brides who have gotten to the door of their church only to learn that their bare shoulders aren't allowed and had to find a makeshift shawl in order to walk down the aisle. Check these requirements up front, and if needed, budget for a bolero or dress with sleeves for the ceremony portion of your wedding.

Are there any restrictions on photography or videography?

Not allowing photo or video for parts of the wedding isn't a dumb rule - for some religions and denominations it violates or interrupts the sacredness of the ceremony. Be respectful of this and do your photographers and cinematographers a favor by finding out beforehand where and what they can or cannot shoot. If they are not allowed to document any part of the ceremony, you may face the tough decision of choosing between getting married at that particular church or finding another location that allows for photos.

Are there any guidelines or rules involving floral or decor?

In some churches, the floral arrangements are considered a sacrament and so they are left as an offering and can't be taken to the reception. In others, live plants can only be used as it is symbolic of God's creation and coming from the earth. Yet, in other churches, silk is preferred so that water damage or other allergens don't mar the sanctuary. Some places allow pew decorations and aisle runners; others don't. Again, these rules aren't arbitrary,





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there are reasons behind them, so be sure to know what you are agreeing to when you sign a contract to reserve the space.



Are there rules concerning music?

Do you have to use the church organist? Does the music have to be live and on "pure" instruments (e.g.: a real piano vs an electric piano) or can you pop in a CD with a prerecorded song for your processional? Are there certain types of music that are considered inappropriate for this particular house of worship (e.g.: some churches allow percussion instruments and others do not)? The answers to these questions can directly affect your wedding budget and should be taken into consideration when you are choosing a ceremony location.

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Reception Venues

Choosing a venue for your wedding reception is a task that should also be checked off closer to the start of your planning. The space you decide on can help set the tone for aesthetics and the overall vibe and atmosphere you want your guests to experience. When meeting with your venue's sales representative, here are some questions to keep in mind:



What is included in the site rental fee?

Some venues include basic elements in their site rental, and for some it is simply the space. Find out if tables, chairs, china and flatware, house linens, security, etc are included in the fee or if you will need to budget more and use an outside rental source. If certain items are featured in sales photos, find out which are standard and which may be upgrades (chiavari chairs, for instance, are almost always an upgrade). If you are holding your ceremony at the same location as your reception, be sure to ask if there is also a separate ceremony fee.

Does the venue have any required vendors or can you bring in anyone you like?

Before signing a contract with a venue, check to see if they have any vendors you must use. For example, you may be required to choose from a list of three florists or five caterers who have contractual agreements with that venue. If you and your fiancé are big foodies and the caterers at your dream venue are less than gourmet, you may want to choose another location to host your reception. You may also be required to use certain rental companies for chairs and linens. Check to see who you will have to contract with by default if you use a certain venue and whether you like those vendors and if they fit your budget.

Are there noise ordinances or other building code restrictions?

This one is a huge issue, so make sure you ask up front! Do city codes require that your dancing music be shut off by a certain time (indoors or outside)? Are you allowed to have open flame in the ballrooms or will you need LED candles instead? Does the venue provide an on-site engineer to sign off on tent staking and set up or will you have to provide your own? Are there food and beverage restrictions? At many of the historic sites in Washington DC and Boston, for example, red wine is prohibited indoors and only certain drinks may be served in an effort to keep tipsy guests from ruining elements in a 250 year old venue.





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What maintenance and remodeling projects, if any, do they have on the calendar for the coming year?

If half the hotel will be torn up for a remodel during your wedding, are you okay with that? If you're getting married at a country club or golf course and they are reseeding during certain months, will not being able to have grassy areas for photos or splotchy lawns in the background mar your vision for your day? As a bonus, if these things don't bother you, you may have some room to negotiate since venues tend to have fewer bookings during major renovations.



What are the venue's policies in regards to movement, set and strike?

First, some wedding industry definitions: movement refers to moving equipment and other event production materials, set refers to set up, strike is at the end of the event when everything is torn down and packed up.

Because of liability and insurance issues, each venue has different policies regarding what they will help with in regards to event production. If you're counting on their staff to help with setting up decor or moving a Chuppah, you may be in for a surprise when they tell you they can't. Don't assume that the venue's employees will be the labor force you need to make your day a success - find out before you sign any contracts.

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Catering



Food is one of the most important elements in a wedding reception, in my opinion. While your menu doesn't have to rival that of a five-star restaurant, it should still taste good and be served hot and on time. Choosing a caterer that can fit your budget as well as meet your culinary desires can be a challenging, yet fun, part of your wedding planning process. When meeting with caterers, or while interviewing venues that have an in-house chef, be sure to take notes on their answers to the questions below:

Can they accommodate special dietary needs?

These days most chefs and caterers should be able to provide a vegetarian or vegan option to guests who may require one (and it should go beyond serving only a salad), or a gluten-free meal to guests with special dietary needs.

What are their plus/plus rates and does the service charge include gratuity?

When you receive a quote for food and beverage it will normally say something like \$125++ per person. The plus/plus means plus tax, plus service charge. So if the service charge is 22% and tax is 8%, you are adding an extra 30% to your bill that you need to budget for. Also, some companies include the gratuity in the service charge and some don't. If they don't, you're looking at another 20% on top of the 30% on top of the base menu price.

What resources do they need on site?

Some caterers prepare all their food offsite and just need a staging area with power sources, some arrive with a traveling kitchen, and others prefer a full kitchen to prepare all of the food on site. Ask your caterer what they will need from the venue so that you can make sure they are accommodated. When it comes to preparing a hot meal for 100 or more guests, it is best to have no surprises as far as sparse power outlets and other necessary food prep needs on the day of your wedding.

What is their staff to guest ratio?

This will vary based on whether you are doing food stations, a buffet, or a plated meal, but make sure that your caterer plans to provide an adequate number of servers to meet your guests needs. One server per eight reception tables is going to ensure the food arrives cold and late and leave guests hungry and grouchy.





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Do they have the appropriate food handling licenses and such for your state?

The wedding industry is largely unregulated, however the food and beverage industry is one of the exceptions. There are specific federal and local laws set that food service providers have to follow, so make sure that your caterer has all their paperwork on file and up to date.



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Wedding Planner



A wedding consultant should be one of the first professionals hired to assist you with your wedding. Bringing on a reputable wedding planner from the beginning can help alleviate stress as they can source venues and the rest of your vendors for you in far less time, and with access to much more information than you will ever be privy to as a non-industry insider.

Here are some questions to ask your wedding planner when interviewing them:

What time do you arrive on the wedding day and what time do you leave?

If you're expecting your wedding coordinator to oversee strike (the tear down and packing up of the reception) or counting on him or her to organize your grand exit, you may be surprised to learn that they only stay through the cake cutting or toasts. Don't get caught in a case of comparing apples to oranges when it comes to the wedding planners you interview. Find out exactly when your wedding coordinator will arrive and how long they will stay on your wedding day before you sign any contracts.

Will you oversee the wedding rehearsal?

If your wedding consultant coordinates multiple weddings per weekend, they may not include rehearsal coordination in their services as they may be at another event. Ask about this before you hire anyone.

What do you and your staff wear on the wedding day?

Seems trivial, but on your wedding day do you want your great aunt Betsy gabbing about how in love you and your new husband are or about the fact that your wedding planner is sticking out like a sore thumb by running around in dirty tennis shoes?

Some planners wear suits, some wear dresses, still others wear a less formal yet business chic ensemble. All black tends to be the service industry standard, but this will vary based on your planner's personal tastes and your location. Whatever their dress code, it should be professional and their hair and makeup should not look unkempt either.





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Do you receive commissions from the wedding professionals you refer?

In this case, commission is a prettier word than kickback, but it is the same thing. This is a very grey ethical boundary and is still a prevalent practice in the wedding industry. If a wedding planner has monetary incentive to refer you to certain wedding professionals, either from receiving a commission from them or by charging them to be on a preferred vendor list, you may not be getting the best vendors or the right people for your wedding. Ask if this is part of their business model and be sure to read the fine print in their contract before you sign.



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Photography



Quality wedding photography is one of the most important aspects of your wedding day, and I am a firm believer that couples should invest accordingly. After all is said and done - the food has been eaten, your guests have danced into the wee hours of the night, your flowers have wilted - all you have left aside from your new spouse (of course) to help you remember your wedding day are the photographs and your wedding film. Being that your wedding photos turn into a family heirloom, it is important to choose a photographer whose style resonates with your own and whose work moves you. Once you've narrowed the list down, here are some questions to ask the photographers you interview:

Is it possible to see a sample album from an entire wedding?

It is easy to showcase a few amazing photos, but being able to see an album with the entire wedding will help you know whether or not the photographer who are considering is consistent in their work. There are no do-overs in the wedding industry and you don't want to pay several thousand dollars only to find that your wedding photographer was having an off day. Look for someone who consistently produces images that you love.

How soon do we get to see the photos and how soon do we receive the wedding album?

Each photographer has a different workflow and a different timeframe for post processing your wedding photos. When meeting with your photographer, make sure that their timeline is compatible with your needs. As for the album, we've all heard horror stories of couples who didn't receive their albums until over a year after they approved their album images and layouts. Ask about album turnaround time (and keep in mind that you have a hand in this as you will generally need to either select the images you want included or approve a layout) and see if that will work for you as well.

What percentage of the album cost does the album credit typically cover?

An album credit is similar to a gift certificate in that it contributes to covering the cost of the wedding album, and does not necessarily mean that it covers the entire cost of the album itself. For example, if your wedding photography package includes a \$1000 album credit, but the albums normally run about \$2000, then the credit only covers about half the cost and you will have to pay the balance on top of the package price. Not every





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photographer's business model includes the album credit method, but if yours does, be sure to ask about a finished album's typical price (and number of pages or images) so that you can budget appropriately.



Do you include a disc of the images?

Including the full disc of images (which is an entirely different thing from a DVD slideshow) is a hot button topic in the wedding photography community and its practice varies with each photographer. Some will include it in their higher priced packages, some include it for a separate fee, some give it as a gift on your first anniversary after your wedding album has been delivered, and some do not include it at all. There are valid reasons for each of these approaches, and you need to be comfortable with the one your wedding photographer employs.

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Videography

Just like photography, your wedding film will be an aspect of your wedding that will become a family heirloom and an element that will help you remember your day. Fortunately, the days of cheesy videos are long gone and there are several companies now that produce high-quality wedding videos for their brides and grooms. Here are some of the questions to ask when choosing someone to document your day on video:



What is your turnaround time?

Similar to photography, each wedding cinematographer will have a different timeframe for editing and delivering your finished wedding video. Editing hours of footage from a wedding down to a film that you will want to watch for the rest of your life will take some time, so don't be surprised if you have to wait a little while to receive the final product.

How much input will the couple have in the process?

Do you get to select the songs you want included in the video? Do you prefer a more classic look or are you looking for a funkier styled video? Are there special effects you want included or not? Find out when you meet with your potential wedding videographers how much say you get in the final style of the film.

What is your shooting style? What do you do to be unobtrusive?

The last thing most couples want at their wedding is their videographer acting like paparazzi with a camera in their faces and their guests faces the entire time. What type of lighting do they use to as they document your day? Ask them about their shooting style and see if it fits with your style.

Who will have a lapel microphone during the wedding? What natural audio, if any, will be used in the finished product?

Some videographers do not use any audio feeds at all, so their final wedding videos do not include any of the vows, toast or other special moments that you may want to hear again. Find out what audio they will be capturing during the wedding day and how that is generally incorporated into the final wedding video. Also ask to see a complete wedding video, so that you can see first hand whether you like the way audio is or is not used.





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Officiant

Choosing an officiant is one of the most important tasks in your wedding planning because without them your wedding is just a fun and sentimental party. While a cheesy or obnoxious deejay or band leader can make or break a wedding reception, the same can be said for the officiant you hire for your ceremony. Here are some things to ask when selecting the person who will make your wedding ceremony legal:



Do you have any ideological or theological beliefs that would prevent you from marrying us?

Weddings are a sacred event, no matter how you personally define the word sacred, and your wedding should reflect who you are as a couple and what you value. If the officiant has a value system that doesn't align with yours and that prevents them from marrying you, thank them for their time and move on to the next interview. No need to be offended by their views; it is usually not a personal slight against you.

How much say do we have in the ceremony outline?

Again, your wedding should reflect who you and your fiance are. Will your officiant insist on you taking communion or having a sand ceremony if you don't want one? Will they be open to deviating from a preset outline or script to include readings or Scripture that is important to you?

Will you be present at the wedding rehearsal?

Not all officiants attend the rehearsal, so find out up front if yours will and if there is an additional cost. If they do not, make sure to let your wedding planner know so that they can be sure to go over the ceremony outline with them prior to the rehearsal. This will help your wedding coordinator cue you and your wedding party to any specific events in your ceremony (when to sit, when to kneel, and where to go for each, etc) that may be custom to you and your fiance's wedding.

Is your ordination valid in the state we are getting married in?

This may seem like a no brainer, but please ask and do not assume on this one. Also, if you are having a destination wedding in another country, and plan on flying in an officiant you really click well with, make sure that they can legally marry you in your destination location or arrange for a civil ceremony in the United States first.





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Florist

Wedding flowers can help pull a reception together and help give a cohesive feel to wedding photos. Plus, they're fun! I mean really, who doesn't love fresh flowers? Ordering wedding flowers is a little different than ordering a bouquet for your friend's birthday, so here are some things to keep in mind in your search for your floral designer:



Are any vases or containers needed to create the arrangement included as a rental or sale item?

Some florists will rent the vases needed to create your wedding centerpiece and others will sell them to you and include them in the cost. There are benefits to both the florist and you in both options. If the vases are rented, the florist can reuse them for other clients and you don't have to keep them. If they are included in the sale price, then the florist doesn't need to use costly storage space and you can give the entire centerpiece to an honored guest at the end of your wedding reception. The trick is deciding what will work best for your wedding and finding a florist who can accommodate your needs.

Do you use any dyes in the bridal or bridesmaid bouquets?

Artificial coloring is sometimes used to make a floral arrangement pop, but when used in a personal wedding bouquet, those vivid colors can easily transfer to your dress. While you may have the best intentions of holding your bouquet a little bit away from you throughout the day, it will inevitably brush against your wedding gown. Ask up front if they use dye in their flowers.

Do your fees include delivery and pick up at the end of the wedding?

Ask ahead of time if the florist will come back at the end of the wedding reception to pick up any rental vases or other decor items used in the floral arrangements. If not, you may need to arrange for someone to pack all of that up and deliver it back to the florist's shop. Also be sure to ask if their floral delivery will be in time to have the flowers for pre-ceremony photos.

Will you stay to pin on any corsages or boutonnieres?

Your wedding planner or day of coordinator should be able to handle this if your florist does not include pinning in their services.





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Will you include a physical mock up of our centerpieces for us to see prior to the wedding?

Creating a mock up can be quite costly and some florists include it in their prices while others skip it, thereby passing that savings on to you. Determine whether or not seeing a mock up of your wedding centerpieces is a priority for you, and then budget accordingly when hiring your florist.



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Wedding DJ

Wedding deejays have a long-standing stereotype as being cheesy. Fortunately, that is changing and there are more classy and dependable wedding deejays to choose from now than there were before. If you opt to have a deejay handle the music at your wedding, here are some things to ask when selecting one:



How much say do we get in the music list?

Some deejays will have a list of songs to choose from, some will be able to get additional songs that are important or sentimental to you, and some will be fully open to your suggestions. Find out before you hire how much freedom you have in selecting your play list.

What is your DJing style?

This question is open-ended on purpose. Some deejays love to interact with the crowd and get your guests on the dance floor by teaching a group dance routine and others are more reserved in their approach, but still get the dance floor packed. Figure out which personality type works best for you and your guests and then find a DJ whose style you click with.

What will you wear to our wedding?

This is a fair question as we've all been to at least one wedding where the deejay wore an outdated tux complete with a gold lamé vest. Ask what their standard dress code is and then give them some direction if your reception style is more casual or formal. If you're getting married on the beach and would rather they wore khakis with a white button-up shirt instead of a black suit, let them know. This type of information is very helpful for your wedding professionals, but is often overlooked in the planning process.



What type of equipment do you need us to provide at the reception?

Some deejays will have all of their music and computer systems in a self-contained kit that they bring to your wedding. If this is the case, ask to see photos of it as some of the self-contained kits stick out like a sore thumb in an elegant reception ballroom. Other deejays may need one or two six-foot banquet tables and linens to cover. Even if they provide their own linens, I recommend adding two extra tablecloths to your linen order so that the look of the room is cohesive and so you can ensure that they are the same quality and reach the floor.





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Invitations and Stationery

Your invitations set the tone for your wedding. They are the first thing your guests see and help them know the formality of your event, which helps them know what to pack and what to wear. Whether you order an invitation from a pre-designed suite in an album or have a custom invitation designer create stationery pieces for you, there are certain questions you should ask before flashing your American Express Plum Card:



What is your fee for sample invitations?

If you are ordering your invitations online or from a custom designer, a sample can be beneficial in knowing the actual quality of the paper and printing process being used. Samples are costly to produce however, so be prepared to pay if you want to receive some. Another factor is the need for the artists to protect proprietary information, and many custom invitation designers will charge a significant fee for samples and then apply it to your order later should you decide to use them. This protects them from people stealing their ideas (most people who won't think up their own designs also won't pay a sample fee) and still allows you to have something tactile as you make your decision.



Will I get to see a proof? Will it be printed or digital?

Before your stationery sets go to print, you should have the option to see a proof, which is a mockup of the wording and layout of your wedding invitations. Some companies will charge for a proof and some build the cost into the invitation's price. You may receive a hard copy in the mail (usually for a higher fee) or as a PDF file. I recommend going green and opting for the PDF file. It will save you time and your invitations can go to print more quickly.



How many revisions are included?

Each invitation company has a different policy for the number of revisions they allow before incurring an extra charge, so be sure to find out up front so that you can include this in your wedding stationery budget.

What is the turnaround time?

The turnaround time for your invitations is dependent on your design, the printing process you select as well as the number of revisions and proofs requested. Find out how long the design process is and then ask how long it will be until you receive your invitations after the final proof is approved.





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Additional Notes:

