

The venue contract AV checklist

Eight things to confirm before you sign — so the venue's audio-visual charges don't blindsides you, and you keep the freedom to choose who runs your event.

A field guide from Straight Street Event Services · Cambridge, ON · Serving the Toronto/GTA and Southern Ontario

Most venue contracts are signed months before show day, long before anyone is thinking about microphones and screens. That is exactly when the audio-visual decisions get made for you — quietly, in the fine print. By the time the AV quote lands, the leverage is gone.

It doesn't have to go that way. In most venues across Canada you have more room to negotiate than you're told, and you're allowed to bring in your own AV partner. The trick is to confirm a handful of things before you sign, while the venue still wants your business. Work through the eight points below as you review the contract, and tick each box once it's answered in writing.

The checklist

☐ 01 · Exclusivity Read the “exclusive in-house AV” clause carefully

If you're told the venue has an “exclusive in-house audio-visual vendor,” read exactly what that means. Usually it means they are the only vendor the venue holds a contract with — not the only vendor allowed to work in the building. In most Canadian venues you can bring in an outside AV company. Venues sometimes promote the in-house option because it pays them a commission.

Confirm in writing: *that an external AV provider is permitted, and what (if anything) the venue requires for that to happen.*

☐ 02 · Access times Book enough time for set-up and dismantle

Once the contract is signed, the venue can keep your production crew out until your booked time begins. A small meeting needs at least a few hours either side; a larger event can need a full extra day or more just to load in and out. Check the time your AV partner actually needs before you lock the dates.

Confirm in writing: *the load-in and load-out windows, and any charge for early access.*

☐ 03 · Internet Get internet rates in writing — before you mention outside AV

Internet is usually managed and priced by the in-house AV company, and the cost can climb sharply once they know you're bringing your own provider. Lock the per-service rates into the contract first. As a rough guide: about 5 Mbps per delegate for browsing and email, a 10 Mbps wired line for connected presentations and video, and a symmetric 15 Mbps wired line (at least two of them) for webcasting or a hybrid event. Heavier streaming can need 50 Mbps or more.

Confirm in writing: *per-service internet rates and the speeds you'll actually need for your program.*

☐ 04 · Oversight / “AV concierge” fees Push back on the charge for using an outside vendor

Some venues add an “oversight” or “AV concierge” fee when you use an external AV company. The in-house company already has staff on site as part of their venue contract, so this is usually a charge for a service that's already covered. It's negotiable — ask for it to come out.

Confirm in writing: *that no oversight or concierge fee applies to your outside AV provider.*

☐ 05 · Power Expect a fair connection fee — not per-day, per-unit pricing

Power is mission-critical, so a fair fee is reasonable. But you shouldn't face penalty pricing just because you chose an outside vendor. In many parts of Canada it isn't permitted to resell power — you should see a one-time connection fee, not a charge per day or per unit used. There should be no charge at all for ordinary 15-amp wall outlets. Bigger events may need 50-amp, 100-amp or 200/400-amp three-phase service.

Confirm in writing: *power service rates stated as connection fees, before you reveal your AV intentions.*

□ 06 · Rigging **Get rigging rates stated up front**

For liability reasons, many venues make rigging labour an exclusive service — and sometimes chain hoists and truss as well. That can be reasonable, but the rates should be transparent and in the contract, not discovered later.

Confirm in writing: *rates for rigging labour and points, plus chain hoists and truss if the venue requires its own.*

□ 07 · Offices, green rooms & storage **Reserve the back-of-house rooms early**

Production office, client office, talent green room, case storage — these get forgotten until it's too late, and then the venue charges to add what should often have been complimentary. Book rooms near the event space, on the same floor, while you still have negotiating room.

Confirm in writing: *which nearby rooms are included for production and talent use.*

□ 08 · Capacities **Treat the stated capacity as a starting point, not a plan**

Published capacities are for comparison; they rarely account for a stage, backstage area, aisles or fire-code clearances. A room listed at 1,800 can seat closer to 1,200 once production and safety requirements are in. Get a floor plan built for your event before you count on the number.

Confirm in writing: *the practical seated capacity with your stage and production layout in place.*

If you only do three things

Working through all eight is ideal. If you're short on time, these three protect the most money and control:

1. **Get internet and power rates in writing first** — before you mention an outside AV vendor. This is where surprise charges hide.
2. **Confirm you can use an external AV partner**, and have any "oversight" fee removed.
3. **Lock in your load-in and load-out times** so your crew can't be shut out on set-up day.

Bonus: two lines for your RFP

The strongest move is to protect your choice before negotiations even start — in the RFP itself. Only venues willing to accommodate you will respond, which puts you in a stronger position from day one. Here is sample language you can adapt (have your own contract reviewer check anything before it goes in an agreement):

In your RFP — freedom to choose

Due to the nature of our program, [your organization] intends to use our own AV provider for much of our audio-visual requirements. They may rent equipment or labour from the in-house provider on site as needed. Please address, in your proposal, our requirement to exclude any added fees, charges or requirements to [your organization] or our AV partner.

In your venue contract — no hidden fees

[Your organization] reserves the option to use our own AV provider for all audio-visual needs with no additional charge, fee or penalty to [your organization] or our AV partner — including supervisory move-

in/out labour, room preparation, podiums, basic power, staging or lights in the meeting room, flat outside-vendor fees, and internet priced higher than the in-house rate.

Want a second set of eyes before you sign?

This is the part of an event most planners shouldn't have to navigate alone. On almost every event we produce, we help our clients review the venue's AV terms and reduce the in-house markup before anything is signed — standard venue charges like rigging and power may still apply, but the surprises don't.

If you have a venue contract in front of you, send it over. We'll tell you plainly what to question and what it should cost — no obligation.

Get your free quote: straightst.com

Straight Street Event Services · AV production partner since 1997 · Consumer Choice Award winner for Kitchener-Waterloo (2016–2019, 2026) · BBB A+ accredited · 4.9★ across 30 Google reviews · Member of the Canadian Audio Visual Providers Association.

GTA venues we've worked include the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Enercare Centre, Royal York Hotel, Sheraton Centre Toronto, The International Centre and the Toronto Congress Centre.

(519) 893-3668 · info@straightst.com · straightst.com

Your Event Goals. Our Expertise. That's Straight Street.