

THE PRE-EVENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

13 Questions to Ask Your AV Partner



SMARTSOURCE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Have this conversation at least three weeks before load-in. Three weeks gives you time to act on what you learn.

This guide is organized into four sections. You can click on the sections below to be taken directly to each part.

Take notes in the notes area at the bottom of each section as you go. The quality and speed of the answers tell you as much as the answers themselves.

If your current partner stumbles on more than two of these, that is not a bad day. That is a pattern.

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SECTION 01

THE PERSON IN THE ROOM

The company name on the contract is not the one that will be managing your event on show day.

1

NAME THE PERSON

"Who will be in my general session room on show day?"

STRONG ANSWER: Names a person. Follows with their last two or three events of similar format and scale.

RED FLAG: "We will assign the right person based on the show." Any answer without a specific name.

2

CONFIRM THEIR FULL PRESENCE

"Will that person be onsite for the full event — including all sessions — or only during setup and load-in?"

STRONG ANSWER: Confirms the named person is onsite for your full program dates. Can tell you their schedule.

RED FLAG: "We have support available throughout." Any mention of remote availability or rotation.

3

VERIFY THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR FORMAT

"What is the most recent event they ran that was similar to mine in format and scale?"

STRONG ANSWER: Gives a specific event: similar format, similar headcount, similar hybrid or in-person setup. Unprompted detail.

RED FLAG: "Our team has run hundreds of events." No specific event named. They give generic language.

NOTES:

SECTION 02

THE PRE-EVENT CONVERSATION

A partner who asks about your program before your room dimensions is a different kind of partner.

4

PROGRAM BEFORE SPECS

"What do you want to know about the program before we talk about equipment?"

STRONG ANSWER: Asks about your goals, your audience, your highest-stakes moments, your run-of-show. Program first, gear second.

RED FLAG: Asks about room dimensions, equipment preferences, or budget before asking about the event.

5

THE THREE MOMENTS

"What are the three moments in my event where a tech failure would be most damaging — and what is your plan for each?"

STRONG ANSWER: Identifies the CEO keynote, the product demo, the live stream moment.

RED FLAG: "We make sure nothing goes wrong." Does not identify the moments or gives a generic answer about backup systems.

6

RUN-OF-SHOW TIMING

"When do you need the full run-of-show and all presenter decks — and what do you do with them once you have them?"

STRONG ANSWER: States a specific deadline (48 hours for decks, two weeks for run-of-show). Explains how they turn it into a cue sheet and distribute it to the crew.

RED FLAG: "Just send them whenever they are ready." No specific deadline. No described process for using them.

NOTES:

SECTION 03

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

The best AV partners have already thought through what could go wrong before you ask.

7

THE MIC SCENARIO

"What happens specifically when the main mic fails mid-keynote? Walk me through it."

STRONG ANSWER: Answers in under 30 seconds. Describes exact protocol: backup location, who moves, what the speaker is told, time to resolution.

RED FLAG: "We make sure that does not happen." Any answer that does not describe what happens when it does.

8

BACKUP STAGING

"Where will the backup mic be physically staged during the event?"

STRONG ANSWER: Names the exact location: front of stage, tech table, with the emcee. Specific and stageable before the first session.

RED FLAG: ""We will have backup equipment onsite." No named location. Backup in a case somewhere.

9

THE STREAM CONNECTION

"What internet connection will the stream run on and how will it be tested before the event opens?"

STRONG ANSWER: Confirms a dedicated wired connection separate from attendee WiFi. Schedules a bandwidth test 24 hours before on the actual event-day network.

RED FLAG: "The venue WiFi should be fine." Any answer that does not mention a dedicated wired connection.

NOTES:

SECTION 03

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

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10

THE LATE START SCENARIO

"What is your protocol if something is not connecting and we are 10 minutes from the start of the general session?"

STRONG ANSWER: Describes a specific sequence: holding graphic live, status update to you every 90 seconds with a time estimate, crew roles assigned. I have done this.

RED FLAG: "We will get it sorted." No specific protocol. No mention of communication cadence to you.

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"I am always comforted by SmartSource's capacity to support me quickly and effectively all across the country. It's so important to have partners you can count on, day and night, rain or shine."

- Technical Director, Duncan

NOTES:

SECTION 04

SKIN IN THE GAME

You want a partner invested in your outcome, not just the invoice.

11

SENIOR REACHABILITY

"Who at your company is reachable on show day if something escalates — not a ticketing system, a person I can reach by phone or text?"

STRONG ANSWER: Names a specific person with a direct mobile number. Confirms that person is available on your event dates.

RED FLAG: "You can reach our support team." Any answer that does not include a named individual.

12

WHAT THEY WILL NOT DO

"What are the things you will not be able to do for us — where does your scope end or where should we bring in someone else?"

STRONG ANSWER: Names specific limitations honestly. Has already thought about how to fill the gaps. Does not oversell.

RED FLAG: "We can handle everything." No named limitations. Any answer designed to avoid the question.

13

THE DEBRIEF

"After the event, how do you capture what went wrong and how do you use that for the next show?"

STRONG ANSWER: Describes a structured post-event debrief document. Can point to a process. Uses learnings to brief for the next event.

RED FLAG: "We will be in touch after." No structured debrief. Treats every event as a blank slate.

NOTES:

READING THE CONVERSATION

You are not scoring points. You are reading a person.

Strong partners answer the failure scenarios immediately and specifically. They have been in enough rooms to have muscle memory for what can go wrong. They do not pause to think. They do not pivot to the company track record.

Pay attention to how fast the answers come. A partner who has managed your scenario before does not need time to think. A partner who has not will stall, redirect, or reassure you instead of answering.

NOTES:

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

IF THEY CLEARED MOST OF THIS:

- Get the run-of-show deadline in writing and add it to your project timeline.
- Confirm the named person in writing — name, role, your event dates.
- Schedule the tech rehearsal for the morning of the event before you leave this call.
- Ask for their post-event debrief format so you know what to expect after.

IF THEY STRUGGLED ON TWO OR MORE SECTIONS:

- Go back to the specific questions they could not answer and ask again — differently.
- Ask to speak with the actual person who will be in your room, not the account rep.
- Use the AV Partner Decision Scorecard to compare this partner against another option before you decide.

WANT SOMEONE ON YOUR SIDE FOR THIS CONVERSATION?

SmartSource® works with event planners running user conferences, SKOs, roadshows, and product launches. The first conversation is 20 minutes. It starts with your program and your risk, not an equipment list.

[BOOK A 20-MINUTE CALL](#)

QUESTIONS? VISIT [THESMARTSOURCE.COM](https://www.thesmartsource.com)

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