Before every consultation
Ask the same core questions of every finalist, take notes immediately after each meeting, and compare the complete experience - communication, contract, contingency planning, and fit - not only the price.

Questions for every vendor

- Are you available for our date, locations, and required hours?
- Who will personally perform the work on our wedding day?
- How many weddings do you accept on the same day or weekend?
- What is included, what costs extra, and what taxes or service charges apply?
- What deposit is required, when are payments due, and are payments refundable?
- What does your cancellation, postponement, and force-majeure language say?
- What happens if you are ill, delayed, or unable to perform?
- Do you carry appropriate business and liability insurance?
- Can you provide a written contract and recent references or complete galleries/examples?
- How do we communicate, how quickly do you normally reply, and who is our contact?
- What decisions or materials do you need from us, and by what dates?
- Are travel, parking, meals, setup, breakdown, overtime, and gratuities included?
- How do changes get approved and documented?
- What is one issue couples commonly overlook with your service?

Our notes

Venue

- What spaces are included, and what is the rain or extreme-weather alternative?
- What is the comfortable seated capacity after accounting for dance floor, stage, bars, and service areas?
- What are the required minimums, service charges, security fees, and overtime rates?
- Are tables, chairs, linens, china, glassware, lighting, sound, or staffing included?
- Which vendors are required or prohibited? Is there a fee for outside vendors?
- What are the setup, delivery, rehearsal, event, and breakdown windows?
- What are the sound limits, music cutoff, alcohol rules, candle rules, and decor restrictions?
- Is there sufficient power, climate control, accessible access, parking, and restroom capacity?
- How are wildfire smoke, power outages, heat, rain, wind, or evacuation handled?
- Who is the venue manager on the wedding day, and what do they handle?

Our notes

Planner or coordinator

- Which planning duties are included, and which remain the couple's responsibility?
- When does active coordination begin, and how many meetings are included?
- Do you review contracts, manage the budget, and track payment dates?
- Will you create and distribute the master timeline and vendor contact sheet?
- How many assistants will be present and for how many hours?
- How do you manage family dynamics, late vendors, timeline changes, and emergencies?
- Do you receive referral commissions or require preferred vendors?
- Will you direct the rehearsal, ceremony processional, room reveal, and key reception moments?

Our notes

Photographer

- Can we see two or three complete wedding galleries in settings similar to ours?
- How would you describe your editing and posing approach?
- How many photographers and continuous hours are included?
- How do you handle dark rooms, harsh sun, rain, and tight timelines?
- Do you carry backup cameras, lenses, lighting, memory cards, and data storage?
- Will we receive high-resolution files and personal printing rights?
- How many edited images are typical and when will they be delivered?
- Are engagement sessions, albums, travel, overtime, and sneak peeks included?
- How long are files backed up after delivery?

Our notes

Videographer

- Can we see full films as well as highlight reels?
- What films, lengths, cameras, audio sources, and drone coverage are included?
- How do you capture vows, readings, speeches, and ambient sound clearly?
- Will your team coordinate positions and lighting with the photographer?
- Are music licensing and revision rounds included?
- What is the delivery timeline and how will files be delivered?
- Do we receive raw footage, and if so, in what format?
- What is the plan if drones are prohibited or weather prevents flight?

Our notes

Caterer and bar

- What is included per guest, and what service charge, staffing fee, rental, or tax applies?
- Can the menu accommodate allergies, dietary restrictions, children, and vendor meals?
- When is the tasting, and is it included?
- Who supplies china, flatware, glassware, linens, serving equipment, ice, and water service?
- How many servers and bartenders will be assigned?
- How are final counts, substitutions, leftovers, and late arrivals handled?
- Is the bar hosted, limited, consumption-based, or cash? What stops unexpected overages?
- Who obtains alcohol permits and liquor liability coverage when required?

Our notes

Cake or dessert

- How many servings does the quote provide, and how are serving sizes calculated?
- Are tasting, delivery, setup, stand rental, florals, toppers, and cutting included?
- How will the dessert be protected from heat, sun, insects, and humidity?
- Can you accommodate allergies or dietary needs without cross-contact guarantees you cannot support?
- Who provides storage before service and boxes for leftovers?
- When must the final design and serving count be confirmed?

Our notes

Florist and event designer

- Which flowers or design elements create our look within budget?
- What substitutions may be made because of season, weather, or availability?
- Does the proposal include vessels, candles, mechanics, delivery, setup, room flip, and pickup?
- Can ceremony flowers be repurposed safely at the reception?
- Who confirms rental counts, table dimensions, ceiling rigging, and venue restrictions?
- How will outdoor pieces withstand wind, heat, and direct sun?
- What happens to flowers and rentals after the event?

Our notes

DJ, band, or musicians

- Who will perform, emcee, and make announcements?
- Can we hear an unedited live performance or attend a public showcase?
- How do you learn our must-play, do-not-play, pronunciation, and announcement preferences?
- What sound, microphones, lighting, stage space, power, and weather protection are required?
- Is separate ceremony, cocktail, and reception sound included?
- What backup equipment and substitute-performer plan do you carry?
- How are breaks, overtime, special songs, and guest requests handled?
- Will you coordinate formalities with the planner and photographer before announcing them?

Our notes

Officiant

- How do you personalize the ceremony and learn our story?
- Can the ceremony be secular, spiritual, religious, bilingual, cultural, or blended as requested?
- Will you help with vows, readings, rituals, and the ceremony order?
- Is a rehearsal included or available?
- What microphone, arrival-time, and ceremony-location requirements do you have?
- Who completes and returns the marriage license, and how is that documented?
- What is the backup plan if you cannot officiate?
- May we review the ceremony script before the wedding?

Our notes

Hair and makeup

- Who will serve each person, and how much time is needed?
- Is a trial included, and what should we bring?
- Can you work confidently with our skin tones, hair textures, sensitivities, and desired styles?
- What travel, early-start, assistant, touch-up, extension, or false-lash fees apply?
- How are sanitation, allergies, and product sensitivities handled?
- Will you provide a written schedule that works backward from the photo start time?
- What happens if a stylist is ill or delayed?

Our notes

Rentals, lighting, and production

- Are delivery, setup, strike, stairs, distance, after-hours, and weekend pickup included?
- Who confirms exact quantities, dimensions, colors, and venue access?
- What happens if items arrive damaged, incorrect, or missing?
- Who is responsible for loss, weather damage, candle wax, or guest damage?
- Are permits, rigging approval, generators, cable ramps, and power distribution included?
- What is the final-change deadline and replacement policy?

Our notes

Transportation

- What exact vehicle, capacity, amenities, and accessibility features are guaranteed?
- Does paid time begin at the garage, first pickup, or scheduled arrival?
- Are gratuity, fuel, tolls, parking, wait time, cleaning, and overtime included?
- How do you account for California traffic and multiple pickup locations?
- What is the backup plan for a breakdown or missing driver?
- Who receives the final route, passenger list, contact numbers, and timing?

Our notes

Photo booth or specialty entertainment

- How much space, power, internet, lighting, and weather protection are required?
- What backdrop, props, attendant, prints, digital files, and sharing options are included?
- Can the design match our invitation or wedding style?
- How long are setup and operating time, and does idle time cost extra?
- What happens if equipment or connectivity fails?
- How and when will we receive the gallery or guest messages?

Our notes

Hotel block or travel service

- Is the block courtesy-based or financially guaranteed?
- What is the rate, cutoff date, attrition requirement, resort fee, parking fee, and cancellation policy?
- Can guests book multiple nights and room types at the group rate?
- Is there a complimentary suite, shuttle, welcome-bag delivery, or gathering space?
- Who monitors pickup and communicates changes to guests?

Our notes

Final decision check

Before signing

- [ ] We understand exactly what is included and excluded.
- [ ] Every promise that matters appears in the written contract.
- [ ] The payment, cancellation, postponement, replacement, and overtime terms are clear.
- [ ] We have verified the person or team actually performing the work.
- [ ] We feel respected, heard, and comfortable communicating with this vendor.