

Beyond the Basics: Essential AV Strategies Every Association Event Planner Should Know

Many event planners tend to think about audiovisual (AV) services in terms of microphones, projects, and lighting. However, when done right, it is so much more. AV is the infrastructure that dictates how your attendees feel about your event, how your budget holds up under pressure, and how smoothly your team is able to deliver experiences.

Treating AV as a technical afterthought leaves you vulnerable to budget creep, last-minute chaos, and frustrated attendees. In this guide, we highlight five essential ways you can rethink your approach to AV so your next event is a success.

1. You Don't Need to Speak the Language

Planners often feel pressured to learn every technical term and piece of equipment, but that's not where your value lies. Your AV partner should be able to translate jargon into plain language and explain exactly why a piece of technology is necessary (or not). If you're handed a proposal that looks more like a parts catalog than a plan, push back and inquire about how each item supports your attendee experience.

- AV partners should explain recommendations in context.
- Ask "why" behind equipment lists to cut unnecessary costs.
- Avoid adopting flashy tech that doesn't fit your attendees or purpose.
- Push providers to highlight value over hardware.

Pro Tip: Treat your provider as a translator. If they can't explain tech in a way that everyone can understand, they may not be the right partner for you.

2. Site Visits are Essential

A contract won't tell you if the freight elevator is too small for your equipment, or if dock hours will force a midnight load-out. These small but critical details emerge during a site visit and missing them can create enormous labor costs and additional stress. Bringing your AV lead on walkthroughs ensures these questions are asked and answered before final decisions have been locked in. Skipping this step is one of the fastest ways to guarantee last-minute surprises and unplanned expenses.

- Ask about load-in access, freight elevator size, and truck routes.
- Verify ceiling height, rigging points, and line-of-sight limitations.
- Confirm exact room availability and turnover schedules.
- Check for restrictions on outside gear or labor prior to signing.

Pro Tip: A one-hour walkthrough with your AV team can help uncover five-figure risks before they hit your budget.

3. Communication Should Be Continuous

One of the most common mistakes planners make is trying to shoulder too much of the AV process themselves. Clear, frequent communication prevents surprises and builds trust between planners, venues, and AV leads. Even small updates such as time changes, revised agendas, and news speakers can have huge implications for setup and staffing. Over-communication can protect your budget and protect your events from unnecessary stress.

- Establish monthly check-ins early, then increase frequency closer to the event.
- Follow-up verbal decisions with written confirmation.
- Include AV leads for pre-event and post-event meetings for transparency.
- Document decisions so future teams aren't reinventing the wheel.

Pro Tip: If you're debating whether to send an update, send it. Surprises are far more costly than an extra email.

4. Labor Costs Can Be a Wildcard

Equipment costs are generally predictable with set prices in place, yet labor costs can be unpredictable. Overtime, double-time, meal penalties, and other factors can quickly inflate your budget beyond what you planned. The only way to stay ahead is to anticipate these risks early, plan them explicitly, and choose a partner that is transparent. By leveraging past invoices and asking your AV lead to factor in all the costs, you'll prevent "sticker shock" when the final bill arrives.

- Build in buffer for overtime, double-time, and weekend hours.
- Nail down load-in and load-out windows early to avoid rushed setups.
- Review last year's invoice to identify hidden labor patterns.
- Keep a contingency fund for unexpected onsite charges.

Pro Tip: Don't focus your negotiations only on gear. Labor can be a line item that can sink your budget if you are not careful.

AV is Strategy, Not Just Support

AV is a strategic tool that shapes the attendee experience and drives the flow of your entire event. By focusing on communication, labor control, and space planning, you'll eliminate the most common pitfalls long before showtime. Want to discuss how you can strengthen your AV strategy? [Get in touch with an expert here.](#)