



Before an event, know exactly what you're getting from your food provider.

✓ **What is your signature fare?**

Every catering company has its specialty, so ask about each caterer's expertise and defining style. By doing so, you'll know which company meets your specific needs—and you won't miss out on a caterer's signature, crowd-pleasing menu items. Ask, "How do you describe your food? What distinguishes you from other caterers?"

✓ **What can you do for guests with allergies and dietary restrictions?**

Special diets—like kosher, vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free—are a major concern for some guests, so make sure your caterer is prepared to handle food requests. It's always smart to ask how exactly the company approaches the issue, especially when it comes to last-minute requests.

✓ **Where does the food come from?**

Ask your caterer if local farms, vendors, and purveyors factor into the equation. If they do, consider noting it on the menus.

✓ **Are you licensed, with health permits and liability insurance?**

Don't get sidetracked by the look and taste of the food and forget to verify that the company has all its necessary health and safety permits. Is the staff going to wear masks or provide proof of vaccination?

✓ **What are your water and electrical needs?**

This is an especially pertinent question if the venue is an outdoor or a raw space.

Which rentals does your proposal include?

✓ This is a very important question to ask in advance—because rental inclusions or exclusions can represent a huge difference in the budget's bottom line. Ask "Are there any additional expenses that are not included in the current proposal?"

✓ **How will your staff dress?**

Don't forget to ask how the catering staff will dress, as that too affects the event's overall look and feel. If your caterer provides normal bistro attire—black slacks, white button-down shirt, and black tie—you may want to consider requesting something a bit different. Something that goes with your theme might better suit the event.

How do you handle tips for your staff?

✓ Ask about tipping up front to clarify this critical issue, which can also be a sensitive one. Communication on the topic also helps avoid embarrassment or an etiquette misstep. Ask if the company allows tip jars for bartenders. We feel it is inappropriate at any event to solicit tips.

✓ **Can you accommodate vendor meals, and, if so, what is the cost?**

Don't forget your on-site vendors need to eat—and don't forget to ask what that will cost.

✓ **What do you do with leftovers?**

Ask if the caterer has a procedure in place for dealing with left over food. Whether the desired result is sending qualified uneaten food to a nonprofit for folks in need, or bringing to-go boxes to distribute to staffers, this is an important issue of communication.

