

FREE FIELD GUIDE | 2026 EDITION

Get Hired On Crew

The working playbook for audio-visual technicians and stagehands who want steady calls as independent contractors.

Inside: how labor calls really get filled, the résumé format hiring coordinators actually read, gear and certifications that raise your rate, call-day conduct that gets you re-booked, and the business side of contracting — rates, invoices, insurance and taxes.

SECTION 01

How This Industry Actually Hires

Live events run on short-notice labor. A venue books a show, a production company wins the contract, and a labor coordinator has to fill a call sheet — sometimes 40 hands for a 6 a.m. load-in, often with less than a week's notice. Nobody has time to run a formal hiring process. They call the people they trust, then they call the people those people vouch for.

That single fact drives every recommendation in this guide.

The people who fill the calls

- Labor coordinators at staffing and production companies — they build the call sheet and are the single most valuable contact you can have.
- Crew chiefs and department heads (audio, video, lighting, rigging, carpentry) — they request specific people by name for their department.
- In-house venue AV managers at hotels, convention centers, theaters and casinos — steady, repeatable work.
- Union halls (IATSE locals) — referral lists and permit work in many markets, with their own sign-in rules.

What a coordinator is really deciding

When your name comes up, they are answering three questions in about four seconds:

- 1 Will they show up? On time, dressed right, phone answered. Reliability outranks skill.
- 2 Can I put them anywhere? A hand who can push cases, run cable, and set chairs without supervision is worth more than a specialist who only wants one task.
- 3 Will they cost me a problem? No attitude, no safety incident, no complaint from the client.

The reality check

Your first ten calls are almost never the fun ones. They are load-ins, cable pulls, chair sets and truck packs. Do them well and visibly, and you will be moved toward the console faster than anyone who tried to start there.

SECTION 02

Get Yourself Findable And Bookable

Before you contact anyone, make yourself trivially easy to hire.

The one-page crew résumé

Coordinators skim, they do not read. Use this order, one page, PDF, named *Lastname-Firstname-AV-Resume.pdf*:

- 1 Name, city, phone, email — and the phrase “available for on-call work.”
- 2 Skills line — departments and gear, in plain names: audio, lighting, video, rigging, LED wall, forklift, scissor lift.
- 3 Certifications — OSHA 10/30, ETCP, lift, forklift, first aid, driver's license class.
- 4 Show history — venue, event type, your role, month/year. Concert, corporate general session, trade show, theater, festival.
- 5 References — two crew chiefs or coordinators with phone numbers. This is the section that gets you booked.

Your digital footprint

- A clean, professional voicemail greeting with your name in it.
- A LinkedIn headline like “AV Technician & Stagehand — Audio / Lighting / Rigging | Available for on-call work in [your market].”
- A short reel or photo set from load-ins and shows — get permission before posting anything from a client's event.
- An email address that is your name. Nothing else.

Register everywhere, then follow up

Apply to every staffing company, production company, and venue in a 90-minute drive radius. Then — and this is the part almost everyone skips — call or email the coordinator one week later, once, with two sentences: who you are, what you can do, and that you are available including nights, weekends and short notice. Repeat every four to six weeks until you are on the call sheet.

Say yes to the 5 a.m. Sunday call

Availability is a skill in this business. The person who answers the phone at 9 p.m. for a 6 a.m. call becomes the first person dialed next time. Early in your career, treat every awkward call as a paid audition.

SECTION 03

Skills, Gear And Certifications That Raise Your Rate

Bring these to every call

- Black clothing — blacks for show, work clothes for load-in. Black long-sleeve for stage duty.
- Steel- or composite-toe boots, broken in.
- Work gloves (leather for rigging/cable, plus a thin pair for fine work).
- Multi-tool or Leatherman, 10-in-1 screwdriver, adjustable wrench, small crescent and speed wrench.
- Headlamp or flashlight with spare batteries, gaff tape, Sharpie, zip ties.
- Phone battery pack, water bottle, snacks, earplugs.

Certifications, roughly by return on investment

Credential	Why it pays
OSHA 10 / OSHA 30	Many venues and unions require it; instantly separates you from walk-ups.
Aerial & scissor lift	Puts you on lift calls, which are chronically short-handed.
Forklift certification	Load-in and trade-show work; often a rate bump.
ETCP (Rigging / Electrical)	Senior credential. Long horizon, large rate impact.
First aid / CPR	Cheap, fast, and coordinators notice it.
CTS (AVIXA)	Corporate and integration-side credibility.
Class B / CDL	Truck and tour work; rare among new hands.

Pick a department, stay cross-trained

Specialists get better rates; generalists get more calls. Be genuinely useful in every department and excellent in one. Learn signal flow, wrap cable over-under properly, label everything, and learn gear names precisely.

SECTION 04

Call-Day Conduct: How To Get Re-Booked

Getting the first call is marketing. Getting the second call is behavior. These are the habits crew chiefs actually talk about when your name comes up.

The non-negotiables

- Fifteen minutes early is on time. Know where the loading dock is, where to park, and who to check in with before you arrive.
- Check in with the crew chief by name, then stay where you can be seen and assigned.
- Never be idle in view of the client. If you finish, ask what's next or start coiling, sweeping, or striking trash.
- Phone in your pocket during the call, not in your hand.
- Do not touch a console, a dimmer, or someone's gear unless it's your assignment.
- Safety first, always. Speak up about a hazard, wear the harness, don't work under a load, and stop the job if you're unsure.
- Ask before you leave. "Anything else before I go?" Then sign out properly.

Communication that reads as professional

Situation	What to say
Offered a call	"Yes — confirm the call time, location, dress code and expected out time?"
You need to decline	Decline fast and once. "Can't make Thursday, but I'm open Friday through Sunday."
Running late (rare)	Call, don't text, the moment you know. Give a real ETA.
Unclear task	Repeat it back. "Copy — 40 chairs, six across, centered on the podium?"
End of call	"Thanks — put me on the list for next week, I'm wide open."

The re-book move

Send one short thank-you message to the crew chief or coordinator within 24 hours of every call, and restate your availability. It takes fifteen seconds and it is the single highest-leverage habit in this entire guide.

SECTION 05

Running Yourself Like A Business

As an independent contractor you are a vendor, not an employee. Nobody withholds your taxes, nobody insures you, and nobody chases your invoice. Set this up early, while the stakes are small.

Rates and negotiation

- Know your market's going day rate and hourly rate by department before you quote.
- Confirm the minimum call (often 4, 5, 8 or 10 hours), overtime rules, and meal-penalty terms in writing.
- Quote travel, per diem, mileage and lodging separately from labor.
- Raise your rate when your credentials or responsibility change — not mid-show.

Paperwork to have ready

- Signed W-9 (US) or your local equivalent, ready to email in seconds.
- A simple numbered invoice template: dates, event, hours, rate, expenses, total, payment terms, remit-to.
- A short services agreement or deal memo for direct clients.
- Certificate of insurance if you carry general liability — some venues require it.

Money and records

- Separate bank account for contracting income.
- Set aside a fixed percentage of every payment for taxes and pay quarterly estimates.
- Track mileage, tools, boots, certifications and phone as deductible business expenses.
- Log every call: date, client, hours, rate, contact name. It becomes your résumé and your collections record.

Getting paid on time

- Invoice within 48 hours of the call, while the coordinator still remembers you.
- State terms plainly — net 15 or net 30 — and follow up politely on day 31, then weekly.
- Track which clients pay slowly, and price or prioritize accordingly.

Classification matters

Contractor status is a legal category, not a preference. If a client controls your schedule, supplies all tools, and directs your work like an employee, the relationship may legally be employment. Know the rules in your state or country, and consult a tax professional about your own situation.

SECTION 06

Your First 30 Days

A concrete plan. Work it in order.

Week	Do this
Week 1	Build the one-page résumé. Fix voicemail, email and LinkedIn. Buy boots, blacks, gloves, headlamp and a multi-tool.
Week 2	List every staffing company, production company and venue within 90 minutes. Apply to all of them. Book OSHA 10.
Week 3	Follow up on every application with one call or email. Say the words “available nights, weekends and short notice.”
Week 4	Take every call offered, however inconvenient. Thank-you message after each one. Ask to be added to next week's list.
Ongoing	Add one certification per quarter, keep a call log, and re-contact quiet coordinators every 4–6 weeks.

Ten-point pre-call checklist

- Call time, out time, address and dock entrance confirmed
- Dress code confirmed (blacks or work clothes)
- Crew chief's name and phone number saved
- Parking plan and travel time with traffic buffer
- Tools, gloves, boots, headlamp packed the night before
- Phone charged plus battery pack
- Water and food for the shift
- Earplugs and any required PPE
- W-9 and invoice template accessible from your phone
- Alarm set 15 minutes earlier than you think you need

Ready for the next step?

This guide gets you hireable; a coordinator's short list keeps you working. Keep your availability and certifications current with us and we will match you to calls.

General information only — not legal, tax, or insurance advice; verify local rules.