

7 Secrets to Selecting a Campus Contract Security Provider

When a campus law enforcement department doesn't have enough staff or the right type of officers, technological solutions can only help so much. Contract security companies just might be able to provide your institution with the personnel it needs to make its public safety functions complete.

- Robin Hattersley Gray, Campus Safety magazine

If you thought selecting the right integrator was important, vetting contract security providers is no less crucial. A well-trained and well-paid squad of security officers can do wonders for the security profile of an institution. Ill-equipped and inexperienced guards, on the other hand, can sometimes do more harm than good.

Here are some points you should consider so you'll select the right contract security provider for your organization.

1. A provider should have specialized experience.

Just like integrators, a contract security company being considered by a campus should have experience in the industry it is serving. Each industry has its unique issues, regulatory environment and how security interacts or doesn't interact with the public. All of these are critical elements.

2. Determine if the prospect has local infrastructure and can deliver services in the region.

A contract security company must be able to do what it says it is going to do at a particular location. That means it should be able to recruit and manage in or near the area where the campus is located.

3. Does the contractor have access to best practices used around the nation and in other industries?

Depending on the complexity of a security situation, this point can be very important. One benefit of using a national provider is that it usually has access to this information. Most likely, it has learned from the experience of peer institutions in other parts of the country.

4. The type of training contract security officers receive must be appropriate for your institution.

Some campus security officer responsibilities are relatively straightforward. Other duties, however, are complex and require a significant amount of specialized training.

If the prospective provider gives the type of specialized training to its officers that will meet your campus' requirements (e.g. JCAHO, Clery Act, HIPAA, residential life, patient restraints, workplace violence, CPR, AED, domestic violence), the chances of it being a successful partner will be increased. If that training is not provided, having in-house officers might be the better solution.

5. Consider hiring contract security for special events and construction.

Even if contract security isn't appropriate for your campus' daily activities, it might be the best choice for handling construction and special events (e.g. graduations, parking, parties, concerts, sporting events).

Novant Health's Director of Public Safety Tony Potter deploys contract security to newly constructed facilities just before they are opened. "In hospitals, all valuable, pilferable equipment must be installed two weeks before they put locks on the doors," he says.

Contract security is deployed by Potter in these situations to guard the doors on each floor of a facility. Often, when there is this type of arrangement, the services are charged to the construction budget rather than the public safety operating budget.

6. Cost is important but shouldn't be the only consideration when selecting a provider.

During an economic recession in particular, it is tempting to just accept the lowest bidder without taking into account other factors. Unfortunately, when it comes to contract security, this approach will most likely affect the caliber of officers a campus is assigned.

This is especially true when those cost savings are achieved by paying officers lower wages and reducing their benefits. "What I've learned is that there is a reason for higher rates," says Delaware State University Chief of Police James Overton. "By looking at the rates, you can tell if officers are making \$7-\$8 per hour or \$13-\$14 per hour." In other words, you get what you pay for.

7. Be certain the "honeymoon" phenomenon doesn't affect officer performance.

When a campus has a long-term agreement with a contract security provider, there may be a tendency for the performance to initially be excellent but then deteriorate several months into the contract.

"This happens with every company I've worked with," says Overton. "They first send me their best and brightest, but as time goes on, they replace them with persons who aren't as high quality because they are sending their best and brightest to the new contract."

Campuses should be clear with their service providers that the quality of performance will remain high for the duration of the agreement.

Appropriate Blending of Police and Contract Security is a Must

These pointers will help your department integrate police and security officers so they work together as a cohesive unit:

- ◆ Clarify each type of officer's responsibilities: Police do police work and security officers have their specific duties (e.g. monitoring CCTV, manning posts, checking IDs)
- ◆ Do roll calls simultaneously so both types of officers understand what is occurring on campus and what the others are doing
- ◆ Clearly indicate beforehand if security officers will be armed or unarmed
- ◆ Have prospective security officers interview not only with public safety but with other departments that might be impacted (e.g. residential life, campus administration)
- ◆ Have them train together when appropriate (e.g. sexual harassment, diversity)