

BUYER'S GUIDE

How to Choose a Security Guard Company

Eight questions that predict how a provider will actually perform on your property — not just what their hourly rate is.

Choosing a security guard company is a decision most property managers, business owners, and procurement teams make only occasionally — which makes it easy to compare providers on hourly rate alone. This guide walks through the questions that actually predict whether a provider will perform once they're on your property.

1. Licensing Is the Floor, Not the Whole Answer

Every legitimate provider should be licensed in the state(s) where they operate, and every officer they place on your property should hold the required individual license or registration. Ask for the company's license number and confirm it's active with the state regulator — this takes a few minutes and rules out unlicensed operators immediately. But licensing is a minimum, not a differentiator: it tells you a provider can legally operate, not that they operate well.

2. Ask How Officers Are Screened, Not Just Whether They Are

"We background-check our guards" isn't a standard — it's a marketing line. Ask for the specifics: what disqualifies a candidate, and for how long? Is it a one-time check at hire, or an ongoing standard? What does the interview and reference-verification process actually look like? A provider with a real, written screening standard will hand it to you without hesitation.

3. Training Should Be a Program, Not a Video

Ask what a new officer completes before their first shift on your property, and what happens after that. A real training program covers legal authority and use-of-force limits, de-escalation and professional communication, documentation and report writing, and site-specific post orders — plus a probationary period where field performance is actually evaluated, not assumed.

4. Get the Insurance Certificate Before You Sign, Not After

A provider should carry general liability and workers' compensation coverage, and should be able to name your organization as an additional insured on request. If a provider is slow to produce a Certificate of Insurance, treat that as a warning sign, not an administrative delay.

5. Understand What You're Actually Being Billed For

The lowest hourly rate is rarely the lowest total cost. Ask whether the quoted rate is fully loaded — wages, payroll taxes, insurance, supervision, and management overhead — or whether those show up later as add-ons. A rate that looks unusually low compared to competitors is usually explained by something: lower-paid (and higher-turnover) officers, thinner insurance, or less supervision.

6. Ask What Happens When Something Goes Wrong

Every provider looks capable when nothing happens. The real test is what their incident-reporting and escalation process looks like, how quickly you'd be notified of an incident on your property, and whether they can show you a real (redacted) example of what a shift or incident report looks like. If a provider can't produce a sample report, that's worth noticing.

7. Check References the Way You'd Check Any Vendor

Ask for references from properties similar to yours — not just their best-case client. Ask references directly about responsiveness, officer turnover, and how the provider handled a real problem, not just whether they're "happy overall."

8. Weigh a Regional Provider Against a National One Deliberately

National providers offer broad footprint and standardized systems. Regionally focused providers often offer more direct access to leadership, more customized post orders, and more accountability when something needs to change quickly. Neither model is automatically right — it depends on whether your priority is footprint or direct accountability.

A Quick Reference: Questions to Ask Any Provider

- ☐ What's your company and officer license number, and can I verify it?
- ☐ What disqualifies a candidate from being hired, and for how long?
- ☐ What does a new officer complete before their first shift?
- ☐ Can I see a certificate of insurance naming us as additional insured?
- ☐ Is your quoted rate fully loaded, or are there add-on costs?
- ☐ What does your incident-reporting process actually look like?
- ☐ Can you provide references from a similar property type?
- ☐ What's your officer turnover rate, and how do you manage it?