



Selecting the Right Private Security Contractor

By Steve Casteel and Pete Dordal

As recent events have vividly demonstrated, failure to carefully select a private security company (PSC) can result in significant problems for government agencies seeking to protect people and assets both stateside in the US or overseas. Taking the time and making the effort to choose the right PSC is the surest way to minimize or avoid such problems. It also helps ensure you are working with a company that will deliver the services you need in the manner you require.

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Good contracted security starts with hiring quality personnel and managing them throughout the contract period. In today's economy, cutting corners may reduce initial costs but will usually result in longer-term problems. Good PSCs emphasize quality from the start: meticulous recruiting and vetting, rigorous training, and close supervision. The more thorough these programs, the better quality services – and fewer headaches – you can expect. Selecting a good PSC for your organization begins at the Request for Proposal (RFP) draft stage. Three essential areas of your RFP - Recruiting, Training and Management - will enable you to make distinctions between PSC candidates and ultimately choose the one best suited to your needs. Here is a check list of questions to assist in the process:

Recruiting:

- What are the specific criteria and qualifications for each staff position? What skills are you willing to tradeoff quality for cost?
- How does the PSC recruit its personnel? Are interviews conducted?
- Do they have dedicated recruiting offices and personnel in the countries where they will provide service? How long has the recruiting team been in place?
- What is the vetting process? Does it include criminal, employment, and military background checks?
- What is the PSC's applicant acceptance to rejection rate?
- Does the PSC maintain detailed employment records for all staff?
- What is the PSC's turnover rate for personnel? High turnover rates are a likely symptom of low morale, poor supervision, low pay compared to other options. It often leads to higher incident levels and vulnerability for your organization's image.
- What is the tenure of supervisory staff assigned to your contract?
- Does the PSC foster long-term commitment with career development programs and competitive compensation?

Training:

- Does the PSC have dedicated in-house training personnel and programs or are they outsourced?
- How extensive is the pre-deployment training new personnel receive before being assigned to your contract?
- Does training include ethics and integrity as well as education on the rules of engagement and use of force?
- What certifications are required and how are they maintained?
- What on-going and remedial training is required?
- Does the company maintain records of all training provided to each staff member?

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Management:

- What is the company's approach to security and risk management? Does it align with that of your organization?
- What is the security planning process? How does the PSC gather and utilize information for that process?
- What are the PSC's operational policies and procedures?
- What is the supervisor to security staff ratio? The smaller the number, the more quality can be monitored.
- What is the management reporting process that will enable you to oversee the performance of the PSC during the contract? On-site PSC managers will provide better onsite quality oversight, with verbal and written updates and ongoing valuable advice.
- Does the PSC's internal reporting process (daily, weekly, etc) enable you to access the specific details you may need for your oversight?

Additional Criteria:

- Does the PSC have a well-established, start-up model that can be adapted to your site?
- How extensive are the company's relations with government, business and social organizations in the country?
- Who are the company's other clients (historical and current) in your location? What services do they provide for those clients?
- What Quality Assurance programs does the PSC have in place to measure performance on your contract?

Achieving your objectives while keeping your people and assets safe requires experience, expertise and commitment to quality. It is not an area where cutting corners for the lowest cost produces the results you want and need. Beyond the obvious dangers of ineffective security, reputational risks can be considerable as recent headlines painfully document. Choosing your PSC wisely and well helps assure a solid return on your security investment.

Steve Casteel is Senior Vice President and Pete Dordal is Managing Director for GardaWorld's international operations.

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Contact us
Americas +1 (703) 539.5340
EMEA +44 (0) 20.7147.4250

garda-world.com

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