

What to ask when evaluating a security systems integrator

A practical question list for Colorado facility managers, GCs, and procurement officers.

Use this guide when you're vetting integrators for a new commercial security project, a system replacement, or a long-term service relationship. Most integrator proposals look similar on paper. The differences show up in the answers to a handful of specific questions, and in whether the integrator can answer them directly without deflection.

1 Manufacturer authorizations

Which manufacturers are you authorized by, and for which product lines?

Authorization is the single most important credential to verify, and it's also the one most often glossed over in proposals. An integrator can resell most hardware. Far fewer hold current authorization from the manufacturer to program, configure, and support the software platform that controls it. Software licensing, firmware updates, technical escalation, and warranty coverage all run through the authorized channel.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Can you provide written confirmation of current authorization status?
- For access control specifically, are you authorized for the software platform, the hardware, or both?
- How many of your technicians are currently certified on this platform?

2 Certifications

What certifications do your technicians hold, and how many on staff have them?

NICET certification covers fire alarm system design, installation, and inspection. It's required for code-compliant fire alarm work in most Colorado jurisdictions. CJIS (Criminal Justice Information Services) compliance is required for any integrator working in law enforcement, courts, corrections, or municipal facilities that handle criminal justice data. The right question isn't whether the company holds these. It's how deep that bench is. One certified technician on a 20-person team is a single point of failure.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How many NICET-certified technicians do you have on staff at the level required for this project?
- For government work: who on your team is CJIS-compliant, and what level?
- What manufacturer-specific certifications do your installers and programmers hold?

3 Local presence

Where are your offices, and which one will service this project?

Response time on a service call is a function of distance. An integrator based out of state, or one with a single Denver office covering all of Colorado, has a different response profile than one with offices in both Northern and Southern Colorado. Ask specifically where the service technicians are dispatched from. “We service all of Colorado” usually means “we’ll send someone from Denver when we can.”

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Which office handles service dispatch for our location?
- What's a typical response time for an urgent service call at our address?
- How many technicians are stationed in our region?

4 Service after installation

What does your service relationship look like after the install is complete?

The install is a project. The system runs for ten to fifteen years afterward. Most facility managers find out too late that their integrator's service model is built around new construction, not ongoing support. Ask how the integrator handles a system that needs attention three years after install. Ask what happens when a controller fails on a Saturday. The answers tell you what kind of partner you're hiring.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Do you offer service agreements, and what do they cover?
- What's the typical response time for service customers vs. break-fix calls?
- Who is the point of contact after the install is closed out?

5 References from similar projects

Can you provide references from clients with similar facilities to ours?

Generic references don't help. A reference from a single-tenant office building isn't useful if you run a healthcare campus. Ask for references from facilities that match yours in industry, size, and complexity.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Can you provide three references from facilities of similar type and scope?
- Have you completed projects in our specific industry (healthcare, education, government, multi-family, etc.)?
- Can we visit a comparable installation?

6 Project documentation

What documentation will we receive at project closeout?

Closeout documentation is where many integration projects fall apart. As-built drawings, programming records, device IDs, software credentials, and warranty registrations should all be turned over to the customer. If an integrator can't produce a closeout package from a recent project as a sample, that's the answer.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Can you show us a sample closeout package from a recent project?
- Will programming files and software credentials be turned over to us, or held by you?
- What happens to our documentation if we move to another integrator later?

7 Cooperative purchasing and procurement

Are you on any cooperative purchasing contracts or municipal preferred vendor lists?

For government, education, and healthcare buyers, cooperative purchasing contracts like OMNIA Partners can shortcut a competitive bid process while satisfying procurement requirements. Municipal preferred vendor agreements are a separate credential. They reflect that a public entity has already vetted the integrator and chosen to work with them on an ongoing basis. This question doesn't apply to every buyer, but for public-sector and quasi-public buyers, it matters.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Which cooperative purchasing vehicles are you currently active on?
- Do you hold preferred vendor agreements with any Colorado municipalities?
- Have you completed work under those contracts recently?

8 Scope and scale

What's the largest project you've done in the last two years, and what's the smallest?

The range tells you who the integrator is built for. A company whose smallest project is \$500,000 isn't the right fit for a \$30,000 camera upgrade. A company whose largest project is \$50,000 isn't the right fit for a 14-building campus deployment.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What size project is the best fit for your team?
- How many active projects do you typically run at one time?
- Who will be assigned as project manager for our work?

9 Subcontracting

Will any portion of this work be subcontracted, and if so, to whom?

Most integrators handle the security and access control work in-house but subcontract structured cabling, electrical, or specialty trades. There's nothing wrong with this. There is a problem if you find out about it on day one of the install.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What scope, if any, will be subcontracted on our project?
- Who are the subcontractors, and how long have you worked with them?
- Who's responsible if a subcontractor's work fails inspection?

10 Insurance, bonding, and licensing

Can you provide current proof of insurance, applicable Colorado licenses, and bonding capacity?

This is a baseline question. Any integrator bidding commercial work in Colorado should be able to produce general liability insurance, workers' compensation, applicable electrical and low-voltage licensing, and, for public-sector work, bonding capacity that matches the project size.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What are your insurance limits?
- Do you hold a current Colorado low-voltage license?
- What's your bonding capacity if this is a bonded project?

A note on red flags

A few answers should make you pause regardless of which integrator gives them:

- Vague responses on manufacturer authorization
- Inability to name the specific technicians who will work the project
- Reluctance to provide closeout documentation samples
- "We can do it cheaper if you skip the service agreement"
- References that all come from the same year or the same small client

None of these are automatic disqualifiers. All of them are worth a second conversation before you sign.

About ESI Technologies

We install and support commercial security systems across Northern and Southern Colorado. We hold current authorizations from Genetec, Axis, Gallagher, Avigilon, AMAG, and Salto. We have NICET-certified and CJIS-compliant technicians on staff, preferred vendor agreements with three Northern Colorado municipalities and a bid waiver with a fourth, and active cooperative purchasing through OMNIA Partners. Two offices: Fort Collins (Northern Colorado) and Colorado Springs (Southern Colorado).

To discuss a project or request a quote, call us at **(970) 999-1681** (Northern CO) or **(719) 602-7336** (Southern CO), or visit **esicorp.com**.

TEAR-OFF SUMMARY

10 questions to ask

Bring this page to your vendor meetings.

Pair each lead question with the follow-ups in the full guide.

- 1** **MANUFACTURER AUTHORIZATIONS**
Which manufacturers are you authorized by, and for which product lines?
- 2** **CERTIFICATIONS**
What certifications do your technicians hold, and how many on staff have them?
- 3** **LOCAL PRESENCE**
Where are your offices, and which one will service this project?
- 4** **SERVICE AFTER INSTALLATION**
What does your service relationship look like after the install is complete?
- 5** **REFERENCES**
Can you provide references from clients with similar facilities to ours?
- 6** **PROJECT DOCUMENTATION**
What documentation will we receive at project closeout?
- 7** **COOPERATIVE PURCHASING**
Are you on any cooperative purchasing contracts or municipal preferred vendor lists?
- 8** **SCOPE AND SCALE**
What's the largest project you've done in the last two years, and what's the smallest?
- 9** **SUBCONTRACTING**
Will any portion of this work be subcontracted, and if so, to whom?
- 10** **INSURANCE, BONDING, LICENSING**
Can you provide current proof of insurance, applicable Colorado licenses, and bonding capacity?

ESI Technologies · Commercial security integrator serving Northern and Southern Colorado
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