

The Ultimate Guide to **Campus Safety Apps**



911cellular

Overview

Throughout my 30+ years in law enforcement, I've had the privilege and honor of working alongside so many selfless people who work behind the scenes to improve their communities. When I first got involved with technologies for campus safety, the possibilities were endless. Could we replace, or at worst, supplement existing blue light towers? Could we streamline 'See Something, Say Something' workflows so that powerful information is delivered directly from the community to the right people? These ambitions were exciting to consider, but only with the help of campus first responders was I able to focus these ideas to build a useful solution.

It's because of these members of the campus law enforcement community, and the kindness they showed me, that I've written this guide. It's my hope that you can find this guide useful and, wherever you end up, feel positively about the process and outcome of your campus safety app evaluation.



Evaluating safety apps

The bulk of criteria you should be conscious of when evaluating campus safety app vendors can be lumped into three categories:

- ▶ Feature set
- ▶ Customizations
- ▶ Marketing & awareness plans

Feature set

The best campus safety applications are ones that encompass many of your existing safety programs into the technology. The mobile application should act as a 'one stop' for your campus communities safety needs. The following features should be part of any offering you're considering:

Panic button

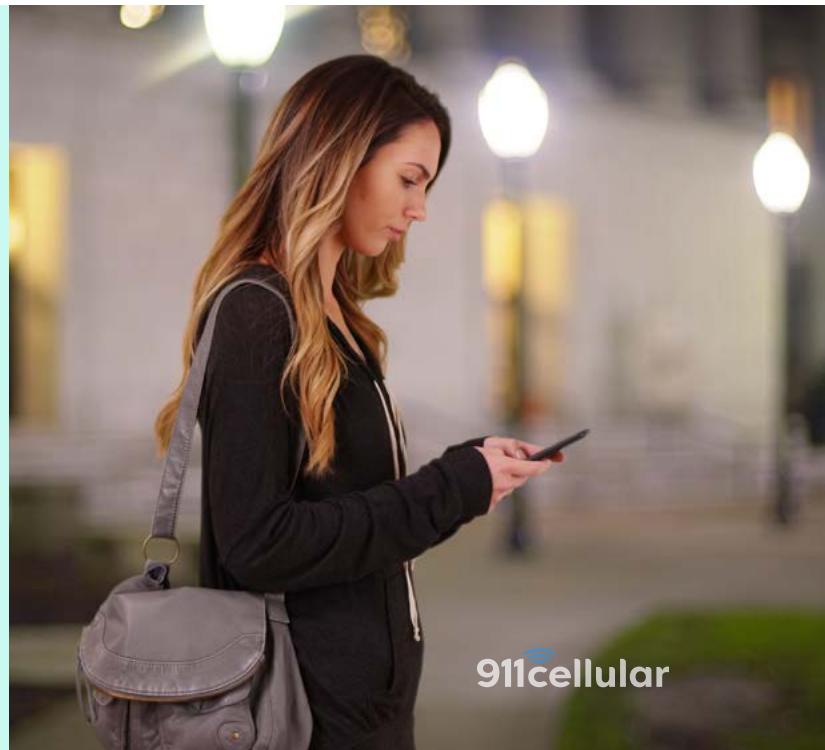
The vast majority of campus safety applications feature a panic / duress button. This feature is an important and useful tool that is being used throughout the nation to supplement (even replace) stationary blue light towers.

Generally, the panic button feature will contact public safety and / or local authorities when activated. Most mobile app panic buttons will also send a location to responders.



PRO TIP

When evaluating the panic button feature, you should consider ease-of-use; it's not realistic to assume people will have the mental capacity to search for and locate the app during an actual emergency. Instead of forcing this tough workflow on your community, ask vendors what they have done to make this feature workable in reality. Specifically, smartwatch integration and widgets are great ways to create a much more user friendly workflow.



Submit a tip

Tip submission features are popular within robust campus safety apps. This feature provides a platform for your campus community to quickly and discreetly send information to campus security and other departments. The submit a tip feature is being used nationwide to supplement 'See Something, Say Something' efforts.



HOW IT WORKS

The feature allows users to enter text while attaching photos / videos, then sends that information directly to security. Most vendors will allow for the anonymous submission of data to protect the user's identity.



PRO TIP

When evaluating the submit a tip feature, you should ask vendors about their information sharing policy (this will be important if you need to know the identity of an anonymous tip submitter). As well, be sure to ask about your ability to respond to tip submitters. Our data shows that initial tip submitters are significantly more likely to continue sending information if they are thanked for their efforts.

Safety resources

The safety resources feature is core to any campus safety app aiming to be a complete solution. Having this feature is a great way to ensure your community has access to important safety literature when they need it most. Recently, we've found that the safety resources tool is being utilized instead of the emergency procedures 'flipbook'. Effectively, it's a way to save your campus money and provide a better tool for your community.



PRO TIP

When evaluating safety resource areas, it's important to consider what information you want to remain public and what information you want to keep confidential. Ask vendors if they've established a password protected area within the safety resources feature. This area can be used to store information for security personnel only.

Safety map

The safety map feature allows security forces to drop pins that represent important places onto a blank map. For example, security often uses this feature to display the location of weather shelters, defibrillators, police stations and local hospitals.



PRO TIP

The safety map feature can also be used to draw attention to locations where a crime has recently been committed. This should be considered in conjunction with your Clery reporting procedures. If you decide to do this, it's worth asking vendors if they can automatically expire crime pins so that your campus map isn't populated with old data (and so you don't need to remember to access the system to erase pins).



Safety timer

A safety timer feature is included in most of the widely used campus safety apps. This feature goes by different names; friend watch, safe walk, etc. This feature allows app users to designate emergency contacts and notify them when the app user is performing an activity alone (an activity that warrants monitoring their safety). Most safety timer implementations will send location information to emergency contacts so they can monitor the app user's position.



PRO TIP

Some implementations of this feature allow users to select public safety as an emergency contact. When considering this use-case, it's critical that you ensure your team has bandwidth before enabling this feature.

Customization

The second category that deserves attention is app customization. The level of customization each vendor's system allows for is important to pay attention to, specifically these three components:



App icon

Some vendors allow you to create your own icon, while others force you to use their generic one. The app icon is very important because it's how end-users will identify your app when they're trying to use it (potential emergency situation where time is crucial). Generally speaking, if your campus has a strong brand identity that resonates with your community, you will benefit greatly from having the ability to use your own app icon.



App name

The app's name is important in exactly the same way as the icon. If a custom icon resonates with your community, so will the app's name. Again, some vendors allow you to customize this, others do not.



Apple & Google store listing

In some cases, vendors will allow you to control the content displayed on the app store listings. This content matters because it's how potential end-users will judge whether or not they want to download your app. If you have the opportunity to control this content, you should consider doing so, as it can be the difference between having a user or not.



Marketing & awareness plans

App integration code

One of the easiest ways to dramatically impact downloads and usage of your system is to integrate your campus safety application into your campus's main mobile app (the app that's used to download lunch menus, class schedules, event listings, etc.). The vendor you select should be able to assist you in this effort by providing snippets of code that you can simply forward to your IT department. Once this integration is complete, an icon of your campus safety app should live inside your main app, making it a seamless experience for users wishing to go back and forth between the two.

Welcome week / orientation presentation

Welcome week and orientations are great opportunities to gain exposure for your system. Taking advantage of this period should be part of your marketing plans. If done effectively, you should be able to achieve at least a 50% download rate from incoming freshmen. Our experience indicates that most schools allow security forces to give a presentation at orientation events. This presentation is the perfect opportunity to deliver a short pitch about the benefits of your campus safety app.



Email campaign templates

Effective awareness campaigns rely on consistency. Using email awareness tactics is a great way to continuously deliver your message, especially after orientation is finished and classes are in full swing. Data suggests that six emails per year (one every other month) is most effective at raising awareness in this context. Be sure to inquire about each vendor's ability to take some work off your plate by providing you with email templates.

Social media campaign templates

Similar to email marketing, utilizing social media is an effective way to ensure you're promoting the campus safety app year round. Ask if vendors will assist you in the creation of campaign content. If they can, it makes your job easier... you can then simply turn the files over to your marketing team (instead of having to create campaigns from scratch).

Community engagement plan

A highly effective tool to facilitate downloads and usage is to build relationships with local businesses and community members. It's not that difficult to build win-win situations that can align all parties ("buy a sandwich, show your app and get a free soft drink"). These types of efforts and promotions can lead to a windfall of downloads and usage. Ideally, the vendor you select has team members who build these relationships on your behalf.



About the Author

Chad Salahshour founded 911Cellular after a lifetime of dedicated service as a law enforcement officer which began over three decades ago. Chad entered law enforcement in response to the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which killed his neice along with 258 passengers and crew members. Since that day, Chad took an oath to protect and serve others which continues to this day as his company develops unprecedented lifesaving software solutions.

Vendor evaluation form

For your convenience, we've provided a form for you to use (page 8) when evaluating various safety apps. (Tip: Don't forget about marketing! Evaluating the marketing strategy is absolutely critical to the success of your project. Any vendor who does not offer best practices and a definitive plan will add unnecessary stress to the project.)

Safety app vendor evaluation form

Vendor name: _____

Evaluation date: _____

Feature	Notes
Panic button	
Submit a tip	
Safety resources	
Safety map	
Safety timer	
Customization	Notes
App icon	
App name	
App store listings	
Marketing	Notes
App integration code	
Welcome week	
Email templates	
Social media templates	
Community engagement	