



Strengthening Emergency Response

ACROSS HIGHER EDUCATION

A Perspective on Connected, Coordinated Response
Through True Interoperability®

PREPAREDNESS · COORDINATION · EXECUTION

EXECUTIVE GUIDE · AUGUST 2026



Preparedness is evolving. Execution is the next frontier.



Colleges and universities nationwide have long recognized that emergency preparedness is a shared responsibility. Across the country, institutions have invested in planning, campus safety technologies, training, and partnerships that strengthen their ability to protect students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

The question is no longer whether campuses have emergency plans or capable technologies. Increasingly, it's whether those capabilities can work together when an incident requires multiple departments, multiple agencies, and multiple jurisdictions to respond as one.

Campus emergencies rarely remain confined to a single organization. As an event unfolds, the campus, its responding agencies, and even neighboring institutions may all be making time-sensitive decisions based on rapidly changing information. The effectiveness of the response depends on more than individual capabilities. It depends on how well those organizations coordinate.

This guide explores why coordinated execution has become the next phase of campus preparedness and how True Interoperability® helps institutions strengthen that coordination while preserving the technologies and workflows they already rely on.

“ The next evolution of preparedness isn't adding more technology. It's enabling existing capabilities to work together when they matter most.

IN THIS GUIDE

01**Executive Summary****02****The Next Chapter of
Campus Preparedness****03****Plans Don't Respond.
People Do.****04****Why Interoperability
Matters****05****Lessons in Practice: The
First Ten Minutes****06****Coordination Begins
Before an Emergency****07****Questions for Institutional
Leaders****08****About Mutualink**

Institutions are re-examining readiness. Coordination is the answer taking shape.

Higher education across the country has never treated preparedness as a static exercise. Institutions have strengthened planning, technology, training, and partnerships across campus and community. Those efforts have served their campus communities well.

Today, preparedness is entering its next chapter. Institutions across the country are re-examining what readiness requires. External after-action reviews and comprehensive campus safety assessments are underway, federal attention on Clery Act compliance has sharpened, and campus safety leaders are asking harder questions about how their plans and systems would perform together under stress.

Today's operating environment makes those questions especially pointed. Many campuses sit inside densely layered jurisdictional geography. A single incident can involve multiple agencies and neighboring institutions within minutes, and can cross city, county, and state lines before it resolves. The same institution preparing for a fast-moving campus emergency may also spend days coordinating with municipal and state emergency management during a hurricane, winter storm, wildfire, or other prolonged incident.

Every emergency is different. All of them share one requirement: organizations must be able to work together effectively under changing conditions.

THE QUESTION

How would our plans and systems perform together under stress?

ASKED ON CAMPUSES NATIONWIDE



TODAY'S PREPAREDNESS LANDSCAPE



“Preparedness is no longer measured solely by planning. It is increasingly measured by coordinated execution.”

Notification isn't coordination.

**One communicates information.
The other enables organizations to act together.**

When an emergency notification is issued, the alert is timely, the message is clear, and the system has done exactly what it was designed to do.

At that same moment, a different challenge begins. Within minutes, the campus and every agency responding alongside it must establish a shared understanding of the situation, exchange trusted information, and coordinate decisions across organizations that operate independently every day.

Preparedness ultimately isn't measured by how quickly information is sent. It's measured by how effectively people and organizations work together once it arrives.

FROM READINESS TO RESPONSE

01 PLANNING
Defines roles and responsibilities

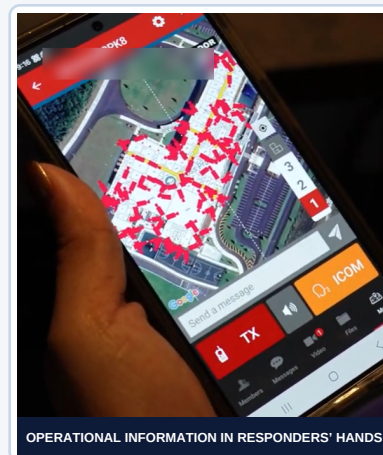
02 NOTIFICATION
Sends the alert

03 COORDINATION
Creates shared understanding

04 EXECUTION
Turns decisions into action

DIGITAL FLOOR PLANS: ON FILE IS NOT IN HAND

Most institutions already maintain digital floor plans. Having them is planning. Coordination is the arriving responder from another agency seeing the building layout, entry points, and camera locations while still on the way to the door. When floor plans move with the response in real time, a document on file becomes information in responders' hands.



“ Emergency plans provide direction. Coordination determines execution.

Emergencies don't unfold within the boundaries of systems, departments, or jurisdictions.

The nation's colleges and universities have spent years building capable technology environments. Each system performs its individual function exceptionally well.

The challenge isn't that these capabilities operate independently. It's that emergencies don't. Information must move across departments, disciplines, and jurisdictions so everyone can make decisions with confidence.

True Interoperability® provides a secure interoperability layer that enables authorized organizations to collaborate while preserving the systems, workflows, and operational control they already trust.

Technology enables that outcome. Coordination is the outcome that matters.



CONNECT

Enable existing technologies to work together without disrupting established operations.

COORDINATE

Support trusted collaboration between authorized organizations while preserving operational independence.

EXTEND

Expand coordinated response beyond campus boundaries to include the agencies and partners who respond together.

“ Interoperability isn't defined by what connects. It's defined by what collaboration becomes possible.

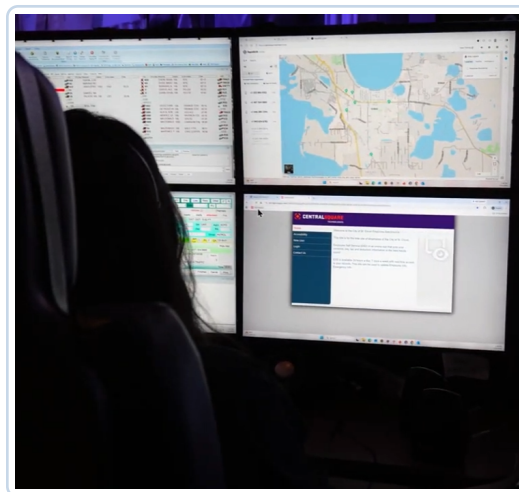
The First Ten Minutes.

Following the events of December 13 at Brown University, campus leadership announced an external After-Action Review and a comprehensive Campus Safety and Security Assessment, examining building access control, camera coverage, staffing models and command authority, technology, and training.

The purpose of examining an after-action review is not to assign blame or speculate on specific actions. It is to ask what every institution can learn, proactively, from the questions such reviews are designed to answer.

The lesson from post-incident reviews is consistent: institutions rarely lack capable components. What they discover under stress is that those components were not designed to function as one cohesive, real-time system.

Practitioners call this the first ten minutes gap: the distance between the moment a threat is reported and the moment every responding organization shares an accurate understanding of the situation. The challenge is not a lack of tools. It is the lack of interoperability between them.



A DISPATCH OPERATOR DURING A MULTI-AGENCY EXERCISE

Closing that gap is achievable, and institutions across the country have done it.

Proof in Practice.

“ At Southern Connecticut State University, interoperable technology was implemented specifically to address gaps in communication and situational awareness. The ability to share real-time information across agencies proved instrumental in improving coordination, not only during critical incidents, but during everyday operations as well.

JOSEPH DOOLEY · DIRECTOR, PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY SOLUTIONS

SHARED IN REAL TIME

VOICE

LIVE VIDEO

FLOOR PLANS



LIVE OPERATIONAL INFORMATION SHARED ACROSS THE RESPONSE

“ The most important review is the one conducted before the incident.

A coordinated response is built well before an incident occurs.

Through planning.
Relationships.
Training.
Exercises.
Shared expectations.

Technology cannot create trust between organizations. It can only support the relationships and operational practices that already exist.

A fast-moving campus emergency may require decisions measured in seconds. A hurricane, winter storm, or other prolonged incident may require coordinated operations sustained across multiple days, agencies, and jurisdictions.

The pace changes. The need for trusted collaboration does not.

When organizations can securely exchange voice, video, data, and other operational information while maintaining their own established workflows, they spend less time overcoming communication barriers and more time focused on the mission.



“ The effectiveness of an emergency response is often determined long before the first responder arrives.

Five questions to guide your next preparedness conversation.

Preparedness is never finished. As technologies evolve, partnerships expand, and operational expectations continue to grow, institutions are continually evaluating how prepared they are to respond.

01

If a significant incident occurred tomorrow...

could every responding organization access the information it needs to make timely, informed decisions?

02

As our institution continues investing in preparedness...

are we giving equal attention to how those capabilities work together during an incident?

03

Beyond technology...

have we built the relationships, governance, and trust required to support coordinated response?

04

When outside agencies respond...

can they collaborate using the systems they already rely on, or does coordination depend on workarounds?

05

When we conduct our security risk assessments...

do they evaluate how well our systems and partner agencies coordinate, or only what we own?

“ Sometimes the most valuable preparedness conversations begin with better questions.

Two decades of True Interoperability®.

For more than two decades, Mutualink has helped public safety, government, education, healthcare, and critical infrastructure organizations strengthen coordinated emergency response through True Interoperability®.

Mutualink provides a secure interoperability layer that enables authorized organizations to share voice, video, data, and other operational information while each organization keeps control of the technologies and workflows it relies on.

Mutualink does not replace existing systems. It extends their value by enabling trusted collaboration across agencies, disciplines, and jurisdictions.

Mutualink's approach is supported by U.S. patents and recognized under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security SAFETY Act, holding both Designation and Certification, the Act's highest level of review.



U.S. PATENTED
TECHNOLOGY



DHS SAFETY ACT
DESIGNATION & CERTIFICATION

The future of preparedness isn't defined by the next technology an institution acquires.

It's defined by how well people, organizations, and technologies work together.



CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Every institution's operating environment is unique.

Mutualink works with colleges and universities to facilitate conversations around coordinated response, interoperability, and strengthening preparedness while building upon the capabilities already in place.

If your institution is exploring what the next chapter of preparedness looks like, we'd welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation.

[Schedule an Executive Briefing](#)

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