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ASK THE EXPERT

By Jeannette T. Goldsmith, Principal,
McCallum Sweeney Consulting



Where to Overhaul Your Aircraft

Finding the right MRO site is more than just selecting the right piece of land—you have to evaluate the labor force as well.

Q

If you were going to build an aircraft MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul) operation, what location assets would you look for?
—Anonymous reader

The Expert Says: There are two primary assets on which I would focus my search: an appropriate site/airport, and access to qualified labor and appropriate training resources.

The first step in your search should be to find an airport that will meet your specifications. These specifications will vary, of course, depending on the types of aircraft you intend to service and/or the programs you would like to pursue in the future. For large commercial transport cargo conversions, runway length would be a screening tool. For corporate/business jet MRO work, proximity to a large metropolitan area (i.e., customer base) might be an important criteria.

Once specific airports have been selected based on your screening, the second question you need to answer is whether or not these airports have a site suitable for your operations. This could be either available land on which to build a new facility or available hangers that could be modified to suit your needs.

(A particularly fruitful consideration may be communities within your search region with closed military facilities. These installations will have available land and/or buildings that might be appropriate for your operations. But make sure to do your homework on the older military facilities—not all communities have the means to keep the infrastructure in adequate repair.)

A few other elements to watch for: First, is the facility close to residential areas or other less-compatible developments? If yes, how will this impact your ability to do engine run-ups and testing? Again, depending on the type of work that you will perform at this MRO, air permitting might be an issue for you. If you are doing a considerable amount of painting, then you will obviously want to consider the air quality of the region and how this might impact ability to permit the new facility in a timely manner.

Once you have identified sites/runways that will work for your particular MRO question, the next step is a thorough evaluation of the community's labor force. There are several sources that will help you get a glimpse of the quality and skill sets of the existing workforce. The first (and in our opinion, the best) source for this information is current employers. Companies with operations similar to yours will naturally have the most useful feedback; however, employers in other industries can still provide a wealth of knowledge on the ability to recruit, train, and sustain a quality labor force in the area you're examining.

One characteristic that might be an important asset to look for is the presence of an active military base and the number of personnel who separate from that facility each year. These individuals tend to be extremely well-qualified, and may also have aircraft maintenance experience.

Other key things to check for are relevant, high quality, customizable training resources (look for community and technical colleges that offer airframe and powerplant mechanic training, for example); operating cost structure (i.e., wage rates, utility rates, tax burden, the ability of incentives to offset that tax burden); and if your business is dependent on military or defense work, the strength of the federal delegation representing the area.

See previous questions answered by Ask The Expert:

- 2006/09 » [What are the risks and advantages of locating a company overseas? Where can I find this information?](#)
- 2006/09 » [My company has various warehouse facilities around the country. Is there a national database where I can find information on light industrial warehouse space?](#)
- 2006/08 » [All the locations I'm considering for my expansion claim to offer the same advantages—central location, skilled and abundant labor, etc. What tests can I apply to narrow down my options?](#)

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