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ASK THE EXPERT

By Jeff Forsythe, Senior Consultant, McCallum Sweeney Consulting



Drafting a Winning Site Search Team

Separating your location needs from mere desires will reveal important clues as to who belongs on your site decision team.

Q We are a smaller manufacturing company (150 employees) and we're looking at spots to open a second plant. Which managers/executives should we put on the team looking for sites, and how big should the team be?
—Kelley T., Prescott, AZ

The Expert Says: All site location projects are unique, and without more information on your project, it is difficult to recommend the precise number of executives and the areas of expertise that should be represented on your location team.

It is probably safe to say that most manufacturing projects will want operations, human resources, and finance represented on the team. To help determine your team size and the areas of expertise that should be represented for your particular project, I would recommend that the current team members begin by developing a list of "must" and "want" criteria that will be used to evaluate candidate locations. The "must" criteria are features a location must have to be considered, while the "want" criteria are those location characteristics that the company would like to have, but are not mandatory.

Developing "must" and "want" criteria accomplishes two things. First, it helps those persons who are already part of the location decision team come to a consensus as to what location characteristics are most important to the project. Secondly, the exercise exposes areas of expertise (e.g., finance, manufacturing, real estate, human resources, engineering, logistics, legal, information technology, etc.) that should be part of the team. (Be sure to utilize only those individuals with the expertise to establish if a location meets all of the "must" criteria and can determine the extent at which the site/community achieves each "want" criterion. Large teams can impede the process, so be prepared to make some tough team member decisions.)

For example, transportation costs can be important during the location decision process. A company may decide that their new facility must be within a certain number of miles of a predetermined centroid location (position of optimal inbound and outbound transportation costs) to be considered further ("must"), and the closer the site is to the centroid the lower the transportation costs ("want"). Using this example, one can clearly see that proximity to the centroid ("want") should be weighted heavily, and logistics should be represented on the location decision team.

Because the importance of any one factor varies not only across projects, but over the life of a single project, the demands on any one team member or functional representative will vary over the life of the project. For example, detailed financial

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analysis and incentive activity are usually more important in the latter stages of the project, so your tax and finance representatives may have modest demands on their time at the beginning of the project but significant demands later.

The dynamics of the team are important. Team members often convert their areas of expertise to areas of relative importance (e.g., the logistics representative will heavily weight logistics issues). Overall project management usually benefits from the participation of an experienced facilitator and location project manager. Service providers like site selection consultants play an important role in promoting the effective participation of various team members, while maintaining the team focus on the shared project goals.

See previous questions answered by Ask The Expert:

- 2006/10 » [If you were going to build an aircraft MRO \(Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul\) operation, what location assets would you look for?](#)
- 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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