

ASK THE EXPERT

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Getting the Most Out of Location Scouting

It is important to think strategically when planning to visit potential sites for a new plant.

Q: We are planning to tour several properties in order to identify a location suitable for a manufacturing facility. What will ensure that each site visit is productive?



The Expert Says: A productive site visit will not only enable your team to become more familiar with the property and community of interest, but upon completion of the client team's site visits and supplementary assessments, you should be in a better position to further narrow the list of candidate locations.

Typically when we take clients out in the field for site/community visits, we have a limited amount of time to complete this step of the process. We generally are dealing with the most senior executives of a company, and they have significant demands on their time. Therefore, we may visit just four to six locations and spend only a couple of hours at each location. Even if your team has more time to allocate to each location, you will still need to think strategically about what must be accomplished during the site visits.

How the visit agenda is arranged is up to the client team, but I find it helpful to conduct a brief tour of the site upon arrival in the community. This way the team will be more familiar with the property and the property's surroundings when the formal discussions begin. Next, we typically will meet with representatives from the local economic development team to review information previously provided and secure responses to questions that have not been answered to date.

Since most of our projects are deadline driven, we will often focus the majority of the discussion on items that can significantly slow or halt the overall project schedule. Examples may include mandatory utility infrastructure improvements, transportation network enhancements, and state and local permitting. We also tend to spend a considerable amount of time discussing the experience and resources of local workforce training institutions.

The list below includes those entities that we often request be represented during our site visits.

- Landowner or agent
- Utility service providers (electric, gas, water, sewer, telecom)
- Railroad service provider
- Local permitting/zoning department
- State environmental permitting
- Industry training provider

This list may grow or contract based on time allowed, the specific area of expertise of team members, and unique project requirements.

If your schedule allows, it is also very beneficial to spend time with human resources representatives from a few of the larger manufacturers within the region. They can provide insight into the local labor pool that is unattainable from public resources. It is imperative that you conduct these meetings privately. Their willingness to meet with you and candor may surprise you.

Don't expect custom incentive proposals to be presented during your site visits unless requested by your team. The point of the site visits is to make sure that each candidate is suitable for the project. Once you have narrowed the candidate list to finalist locations, you can better tailor your request for assistance. The selection of a poor site cannot be overcome with incentives.

Each visit will typically conclude with a more in-depth site tour by vehicle and possibly by air, and a windshield tour of the community. A more thorough community tour may be necessary if you intend to relocate several members of the company team to the new production facility location, so plan accordingly.

Try not to think of the decision-making process as site selection, but rather as site elimination. By eliminating those sites that do not fully align with your key project requirements, you should be left with locations that you can select from and be successful.