

The do's and don'ts of site selection

By Shelby Fiegel

Every city in Arkansas is impacted by the quickly changing landscape of the global economy. No longer are we only competing on a regional or national level, we are competing with communities all over the world. This reality has forced many cities to change their economic development strategies.

Understanding what companies expect and are looking for during the site selection process is more critical than ever; because if you can't give them what they want, you are removed from the list before they even set eyes on your city.

Lindsey M. Cannon, principal and director of economic development services with McCallum Sweeney Consulting, a Greenville, S.C., firm that provides site selection and incentives negotiation services to leading companies worldwide, has developed a list of "do's and don'ts" communities should consider as they develop their economic development strategies. Here are some helpful tips from the list.

Sites and buildings

- Do have a portfolio of various site sizes and buildings.
- Do have due diligence completed.
- Don't submit sites with impediments (streams, wetlands, etc.), but if you do, provide a mitigation plan (cost and schedule) for any impediments.
- Do understand the contiguous, developable acres.
- Do have site/building names that are short and easy to remember.
- Don't submit sites or buildings that don't meet the minimum criteria.

Responding to RFPs

- Do follow the instructions.
- Don't use previous projects submission without verifying they are the same.
- Do meet the deadline ... or get it in early.
- Do submit consistent information (double check your submission).
- Don't try to hide the truth. It will come out sooner or later (site consultants do not like surprises!).
- Don't leave questions blank.
- Do show property boundaries.

Maps and visuals

- Don't submit out-of-date visuals.
- Do make sure visuals match the information in the RFP.
- Do make sure visuals are zoomed in enough to see the property.
- Do clearly label utility lines, road names, etc.
- Do review the information submitted to you before submitting to company/consultant.

Site visits

- Do stick to allotted timeframe, especially the end time.
- Do prep the team prior to the visit, and have the right people at the visit.
- Don't assume everyone knows the site and the area.
- Do have extra visuals available.
- Do provide transportation so the team can travel in one vehicle. And clean out your car!
- Do have snacks/drinks available, especially for company representatives.
- Don't say, "Don't worry; that won't be a problem."



Workforce

- Do know how your workforce compares to the state, nation, and your competitors (both county level and for commuting areas).
- Do understand your talent gaps.
- Don't just look it up and stick it in a presentation. Interpret the data; tell your story.
- Do know your existing industries and what challenges they are facing.

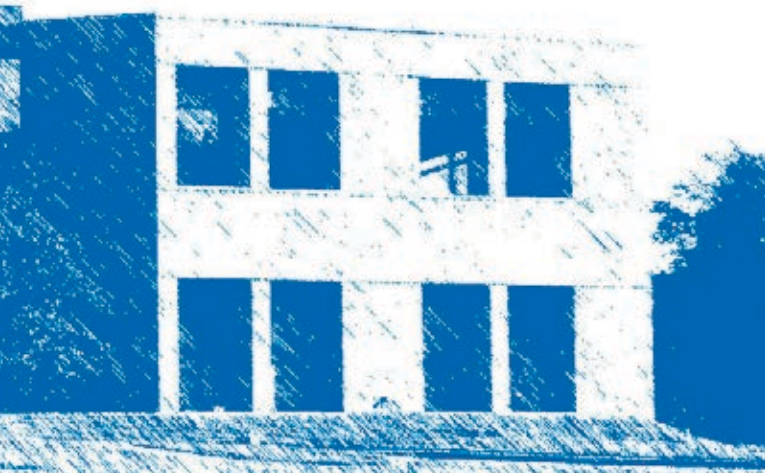
Marketing and communications

- Do update marketing materials as conditions change (e.g. new interstate interchange, tenant announced in the park, updated data, etc.).
- Do make sure individual contact information and up-to-date pictures are on your website.
- Don't send one email to all contacts (we don't care about your golf tournament).
- Do limit the number of emails you send.

In this competitive climate it's more difficult than ever before to successfully recruit new industry, so Arkansas cities must use every advantage to stand out from the crowd. Following these suggestions is a necessity for any community that is serious about business recruitment. Failing to follow this list could potentially lead to a new company choosing a different community to locate in.



Shelby Fiegel is assistant director of the Center for Community and Economic Development, University of Central Arkansas.



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