

Customizing Hospital Tours to Gather Lasting Candidate Impressions

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It's the final step in the courtship process. The on-site visit, a key piece in any recruitment effort, is a prime opportunity for both parties — your organization and the candidates themselves — to size each other up and weigh the realities of living and working happily together.

The on-site tour is your chance to not only put your best foot forward — with introductions to key staff and services — but to help the candidate understand the clinical breadth and depth that your organization has to offer. As recruiters, we invest a lot of prep time in coordinating community tours, housing reviews, travel arrangements, social events and other pieces of the site visit. But do we spend enough time devising a tour strategy that leaves enough room for the organization and candidates to gather valuable insight and lasting impressions of one another along the way?

Eight Simple Steps

Who among us has time to reinvent the wheel? With advanced planning and organization — and buy-in and participation from internal staff — you can frame the details for a “standard tour package” that can be easily customized on a case-by-case basis. By doing so, you can prepare your internal group with appropriate information, messages and interview questions in advance so that you are “ready to roll” as your recruitment cycle begins. Keep these eight steps in mind.

Map a Strategy. Establish a predetermined list of services as standard tour stops. Suggested clinical areas could include cardiology, emergency services, radiology, hospitalist services along with a medical inpatient unit, the obstetrical floor, endoscopy unit, or medical and radiation oncology. Review candidates' preferences in advance of each visit so you can make adjustments to add a particular area of expertise or interest. And naturally, if you have a new area or department to showcase or recently completed renovations, put them on the tour.

Pick Team Players. Once you've cherry-picked the choicest tour sites in your organization, then it's time to enlist buy-in from internal staff. The surefire recipe for success is to build a supportive in-house team that understands the value of effective recruiting (integral to advancing the organization's strategic goals) and pitches in to help. Look for top brass support in appointing key managerial contacts in each of your tour destinations. Seek administrators or clinicians who will greet, meet and brief — cheerfully spending 15 minutes to hit the high points in their respective area.

Arrange for VIP Attention. For most candidate tours, a clinical administrator is the perfect host for meeting and greeting. However, if you are recruiting for a key specialist, ask your medical staff decision-makers in the designated tour area to provide the orientation. For example, if you are touring a neurosurgeon, it might be more valuable to invite the chief of neurology to meet and develop an early rapport with the potential hire. It's also a good idea to get key primary care physician leadership involved in tours with specialists to be sure that both parties feel confident that they can develop a mutually successful referral relationship.

Educate and Enlighten. The hospital tour should educate the prospective physician about your "state-of-the-art" facilities and scope of clinical capabilities. Here's your opportunity to brag about novel approaches, new equipment and accomplished staff. To be best prepared, conduct an orientation for internal staff involved in the site visits — either collectively or as one-on-one meetings with the key individuals involved in upcoming hospital tours. Brief them on the types of messages to convey to candidates, equipment to showcase and questions to ask. Preparing them in advance is key so that they focus on what the candidate needs to know rather than what they might want to sell. It also provides an opportunity for you to review the annual recruitment goals, specialties that are strategic targets, and the importance of the recruitment (and tour) effort to the hospital's future success.

Package your Invitation. Let the candidate know what he or she can expect when they arrive. Your site visit itinerary is traditionally laid out on one page, covering the scope of everything that will take place during the one-to-two day period that the candidate is in town. Attach a separate campus tour schedule to the itinerary sheet and send that along, too. That way you can let the candidates know who is conducting the tour, their titles, and the clinical areas you will visit. You might consider asking a senior administrator to sign a note as a special gesture of welcome and tuck that into the package you mail to the candidate.

Additionally, you should also forward the itinerary to your hospital tour participants, with a note of special thanks (either from you or senior leadership) for their participation, willingness to help and importance of their contribution to the overall success of your healthcare organization. Brief those participating on the candidate's special interests and then follow-up with a telephone call to be sure there are no remaining questions before the candidate arrives.

Leave Time for Questions. Make sure your itinerary allows time for questions and answers, from the candidate as well as interview questions from the tour participants. Strive for a broad in-house participant group. That way you will be sure to gather wide-ranging feedback, and buy-in and support for the candidate if he or she is selected for the position. Do be firm about staying on schedule, though, so you don't impose on people's time.

Handle the Niceties. Your job as recruiter is to keep things running smoothly and on time. Plan on accompanying the candidate on the campus tour to easily guide him or her through the process and call ahead, as a courtesy, if the tour is running behind or early. After the tour, supply the person with a package of promotional materials that augment the clinical services orientation he or she received that day.

Solicit Expert Feedback. Ask your tour contacts to help you evaluate the prospective candidate. Put together an evaluation form so tour leaders can easily assess the candidate in the following areas:

- communication skills
- work ethic
- interpersonal skills
- maturity
- clinical judgment
- long-term interest
- managerial ability
- cultural fit within your healthcare organization and your community
- ability to work with your medical staff and administrators

Make it Personal

To recap, you can set up a “standard tour package” that feels like a custom-crafted event, served up on silver platter, to impress the most important and significant candidates by:

- identifying the key clinical areas to be included in the “standard” package
- adjusting the “standard” tour package to meet the specific needs and interests of each candidate
- designating a clinical or administrative representative in each area to provide a 15-minute orientation to their services and programs
- conducting an orientation session for hospital tour “guides” to educate them on the finer points of participating in a site visit
- preparing the internal group for each site visit, with background information that includes a copy of the candidate’s CV, a briefing on his or her professional and personal interests, and suggestions about the areas that you feel your tour guides should explore with each candidate
- reviewing with both the candidate and the internal tour participants, following the visit, on the candidate’s fit with the organization and practice opportunity

Attention to Details

Just like “location, location, location” describes the guiding principles of sound real estate investment, “details, details, details” is the universal key to successful hospital tour planning and indeed physician recruiting. As in all things, first impressions do count. You may only get one opportunity to convince the “perfect” candidate to choose your organization over another, so plan ahead to line up the most persuasive in-house experts who can speak to your organization’s success in providing a professional growth opportunity along with quality, compassionate care.



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