



TECH NOTES

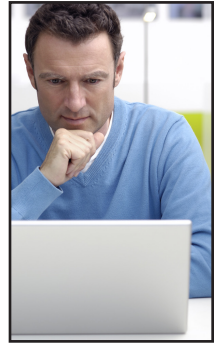
Selecting the Right Laboratory Partner

The selection of a laboratory is a serious consideration for your business. Much like selecting the right business partner, selecting the right laboratory demands that both parties have the goals and commitments needed for success. For a laboratory these goals and commitments include analytical accuracy, with defensible data, delivered on a timely basis. A laboratory that is unable to deliver on these goals and commitments can cost your business financially with unnecessary expenses or fines, or perhaps worse, damage to the reputation of your business.

SEVEN FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Every business decision is based on multiple factors that ultimately determine the best solution for a given situation. Selecting the right testing partner is no exception. It matters not that you are a public or private sector organization; each factor is important when evaluating a laboratory partner. Since no business has the same particular needs, it is impossible to place these factors in a definitive order. However, it is imperative that each factor be given proper attention and weight in the evaluation process.

- **Experience and reputation**
- **Analytical capabilities**
- **Laboratory capacity**
- **Customer service**
- **Laboratory certifications**
- **On-site laboratory review**
- **Analytical Cost**



• EXPERIENCE AND REPUTATION

In evaluating the experience of a laboratory, review a listing of similar projects completed by the laboratory. Question the laboratory extensively if it appears they are venturing into an area with little or no experience. Remember, a laboratory's lack of experience can be costly to you with expensive delays or inaccurate data. Evaluate a laboratory's performance record. An experienced laboratory can bring valuable benefits to your project. Proper sampling techniques and up-to-date knowledge of regulations can translate into real dollars for you!

• ANALYTICAL CAPABILITIES

Determine the analytical capabilities of a laboratory. This includes verifying that a laboratory has the equipment, personnel and certifications to perform your analytical testing needs. This is especially important when your testing requirements are directly related to regulatory compliance. In the current business atmosphere where core competency is popular (i.e., doing only those tasks you do best and outsourcing the remaining tasks) it is of utmost concern that you know if the laboratory you select will be performing the analytical processes, or simply acting as a middleman between you and a third party. Unless you perform audits of each third party laboratory, then you cannot be certain of the results. It is important that you understand what tests are being subcontracted and are familiar with the laboratory.



• LABORATORY CAPACITY

A laboratory's capacity (sample throughput) can have a direct influence on its ability to provide analytical data in the time frame you require. If a laboratory overstates their sample volume throughput, crucial reporting deadlines can be missed. Missed deadlines can result in fines or compliance violations, or a loss of competitive edge. These unplanned costs, both financially and to your reputation, quickly offset any discounted pricing you may have received from your laboratory partner.



• CUSTOMER SERVICE

A key indicator of a professional laboratory is the manner in which your inquiries are addressed. Prompt, dependable and responsive customer service representatives are a must for a successful laboratory partnership. It is also beneficial to establish a good working rapport with your laboratory's customer service representative for consistent in-depth understanding of your compliance requirements.

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Today there are many ways to communicate with customers other than by telephone. E-mail, Internet and social networking are now forms of business communication. The days of “phone tag” are quickly passing. How is your laboratory partner setup to handle questions promptly and accurately?

• LABORATORY CERTIFICATIONS/REGISTRATIONS

As important as laboratory certifications and/or registrations are, keep it in the right perspective. Certifications are not a guarantee that a laboratory will provide quality data, but rather that they are capable of providing quality data!

Certifications are sometimes required to deliver compliance data. Know what certifications and methodologies are needed for your project and request a review of the laboratory’s certification documents. If your project does not require a certified laboratory, request to see the laboratory’s Performance Evaluation (PE) data. This will help determine the laboratory’s ability to provide quality data.

When comparing laboratories, a certified laboratory or approved laboratory should be considered over a non-certified laboratory because certification processes are comprehensive appraisals of key laboratory abilities in areas such as:

- Proficiency testing
- Personnel qualifications
- Quality assurance program
- Analytical methods documentation
- Facility evaluation
- On-site visits



• ON-SITE LABORATORY REVIEWS

One of the most time consuming and perhaps costly facets of the laboratory selection process is the on-site review. While some knowledge of laboratory processes is helpful, it is not mandatory. Common sense and some pre-visit homework can prepare even a laboratory novice to gather valuable information from an on-site review. A pre-printed auditor’s guide or assistance from a certifying agency or consultant may be helpful. Arrange to speak with the chemists and technicians. These are the ones who perform the laboratory work. The on-site review is a prime opportunity to confirm or dispel claims made in a laboratory’s marketing brochures and sales pitches.

After your on-site review you may be pleasantly surprised to discover that you have gained a brief but insightful education into the laboratory world!

• ANALYTICAL COST

The final item on the laboratory evaluation list is cost. As with other purchases, price should be considered in proportion to the services being offered. It is important to consider value-added services provided (or not provided) by the laboratory; (i.e., sample acquisition, report submission to regulatory agencies, consultation services with knowledgeable laboratory personnel and long term analytical record retention). The evaluator must be aware of “bargain basement” prices which may mean “bare bones” service. Review and evaluate price structures thoroughly and remember “let the buyer beware!”



SUMMARY

The laboratory arena is an ever-changing business. For survival, laboratories may seek your business by offering a full menu of services at rock bottom prices. While these strategies may be very appealing at the time, keep in mind that compliance may not be challenged by a regulatory or certifying agency until several years after the data has been submitted. Are you confident your laboratory will still be in business three, four, or five years later when questions are raised? Will the data be defensible? Having the support of a professional laboratory company is imperative. We hope the information we have shared with you here will help you evaluate the best laboratory for your testing needs today and in the years to come.

McCoy & McCoy Laboratories, Inc. meets all the criteria of an experienced, professional testing laboratory partner. We stand ready to assist in any environmental, chemical, or food grade testing challenge confronting your company.

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