

Crime Lab

# Leasing Laboratory Space

Wed, 12/14/2011 - 1:48pm by Ken MohrCy Henningsen

In almost every project we have been involved with, the need for more laboratory space has been a major driver in the quest for a new or renovated facility or space. In addition to new construction or renovation, leasing laboratory space can be a relatively quick and cost effective way to gain more space. However, it has its own issues and isn't always the inexpensive option it may seem. This article will discuss some of the

pros

and  
cons

of

leasin

g

labora

tory space and will ask some questions which can help you determine if it will work for you.

One major advantage of leasing space is the vast reduction of upfront costs. A new building is expensive, and most of that expense is in the upfront costs: purchasing land, hiring a design team, and paying the contractor to construct the new building. Renovations may have other upfront costs. The major cost impact of leasing space is in the monthly lease payments. There may be some initial costs to leasing, (especially if you

## DEEPER INSIGHTS



**Exclusive Webinar:  
5 Habits of Highly  
Effective Data  
Collection**

Forensic

Is leasing laboratory space right for you?

*Is leasing laboratory space right for you?*

need to remodel the space) but it should not be comparable to building new. Even these costs may be non-existent if your landlord is willing to fit out the space, depending on the terms of your lease.

The second advantage of leasing can be how fast you can occupy the space. This advantage depends heavily on the type of space you are leasing. If you are leasing space which is designed for laboratory activities—it has the HVAC systems in place to support fume hoods for example—you may be able to relocate quickly. If you are leasing space not designed for laboratory activities, for example, converting office space into laboratory space, it may take longer for the space to be ready, possibly not any more quickly than had you waited for a renovation or a new facility to be ready.

There are some disadvantages to leasing laboratory space. One disadvantage is the on-going costs. Month after month you will be paying rent to your landlord. It may be five years, it may be ten, but there will come a time when the amount of money you have paid to lease space could have purchased a new building or equaled the cost of an addition or renovation.

Another disadvantage of moving into leased space is the lack of ability you might have to make changes to the space. For example, as a process evolves or you purchase new instrumentation you may need to add a sink or lab gas supply fixture to your space. Your landlord may not allow you to alter the space in this way.

There are questions that you may want to ask yourself, and your team, as you investigate the option of leasing:

- What type of lease space is available in your area? Space designed for laboratory functions has advantages over unfinished space or space designed for other functions.
- How far is the space from your current facility? Will this distance negatively impact case processing time?
- How are you going to move evidence back and forth from your current lab to the leased space and maintain chain of custody? If you courier it yourselves do you need to hire a new employee? Can you maintain secure evidence through a commercial carrier?

- Is the lease space secure? Can you maintain adequate access control to your space?
- How much experience does the person, or company, you are leasing from have in supplying laboratory space? In the current economy, organizations all across the country are sub-leasing space to help cut expenses. You may find a sweet deal for leasable space, but if this is the first time an organization has served as a lessor things may not go as smoothly as you'd like. Experience counts.
- What did the previous occupant do in the space? It is unlikely, but an incompatibility could occur, one potential incompatibility would be if the previous occupant worked with metals and you wanted to set up a gun-shot residue lab. Ask questions and investigate.
- What is your cost comparison for leasing versus buying? How long do you plan on leasing? In general leasing makes sense in the short term but becomes less appealing as time goes on.

Leasing can be a valuable way to add laboratory space as your forensic facility outgrows its current space, but it can also be more costly and complicated than it might seem. We hope this article helps you decide if leasing is right for your lab.

**Ken Mohr** ([kenm@crimelabdesign.com](mailto:kenm@crimelabdesign.com)) is a Principal and Senior Forensic Planner and **Cy Henningsen** ([cyh@crimelabdesign.com](mailto:cyh@crimelabdesign.com)) is an Equipment Coordinator with Crime Lab Design which provides architectural and engineering services for forensic and medical examiner facilities worldwide.