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Don't get too fancy. Head to edgier, trendier, neighborhoods. And definitely stay on time.

These are a few of the tricks cities are deploying in their all-out effort to woo Amazon.com Inc.'s new headquarters, a move the online retailer says could bring nearly 50,000 jobs and more than \$5 billion in investment over nearly two decades. Amazon executives have quietly visited more than half of the cities on [its list of 20 finalists](#), which are vying to host what it calls HQ2, according to people familiar with the matter. The visits, which started in recent weeks, have included Dallas, Chicago, Indianapolis and the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area.

Amazon hasn't provided much guidance on what it expects from the site visits. It has asked for breakout sessions on education and talent, plus visits to the sites it is considering, all within a strict time frame of two days, max. The rest is up to local officials. As a result, officials of candidate cities are scrutinizing the company's business practices to concoct the perfect 48-hour-or-less-visit that could win Amazon over.

Details of the visits are scarce. Amazon, which has said it plans to announce the winning suitor later this year, has advised HQ2 candidates to keep this phase private. And city officials are loath to spill any tricks that could give their rivals a leg up. Still, people familiar with the visits paint a picture of whirlwind trips with Amazon's small economic development team. Led by Holly Sullivan, it dives into data provided by the cities—such as the ACT and SAT scores of local high-school students—and asks a lot of probing questions regarding how much talent Amazon can attract.

Officials noted that while Amazon has some of the quirky features of a hotshot tech company—[it allows employees](#) to bring thousands of dogs to its Seattle campus and [gives out free bananas](#) at two campus stands—it doesn't offer many of the other trappings associated with working at a tech giant, like free meals.

Amazon is "a frugal-ass company," said one city official working to win the project. "They're making a 100-year decision.... All of the extra fluffy stuff is fluff." So many cities are nixing the fancy hotels, dinners at the governor's mansion, private planes and small gifts—all typical core aspects of a traditional site visit, according to people familiar with the matter. "We were concerned that if we went over the top, it would push them away," said a person involved in one site visit.

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Instead, they are attempting to be creative by bringing in university officials, younger people and professionals who can speak to talent and growth in the area. Officials are adding visits to trendier neighborhoods to highlight the draw for younger employees. And cities have even ferried Amazon executives around by bicycle and boat as modes of transportation. “Amazon is working with each HQ2 candidate city to dive deeper on their proposals and share additional information about the company’s plans,” an Amazon spokesman said in a statement, who confirmed site visits were taking place.

A few of Amazon’s desires are crystallizing, some of the people said. The company appears to be leaning toward a more urban site, despite requesting proposals that included sites in the suburbs. It also wants to come to a city prepared to handle its growth and the influx of high-paid employees. In its home base of Seattle, the company has faced criticism for contributing to traffic and higher housing costs. “They believe there is no American city that can provide for all their needs,” said the person involved in a site visit. Another person said the company expects to have to compromise no matter which location it selects.

Amazon has also placed particular emphasis on the tech talent pipeline: How much already exists locally, and how much Amazon can attract from around North America and the rest of the world. Some cities are offering financial incentives. New Jersey and the city of Newark [have offered a package worth \\$7 billion](#), while Maryland—where Amazon is considering a location in Montgomery County—has put \$5 billion on the table.

In the past, cities have gotten creative to attract or retain a coveted company. To try to keep JetBlue Airways Corp. based in New York, the city’s economic development corporation did its research. Officials found out the company hosted regular softball tournaments so they specifically pitched the airline on a location near a field. City and state officials also worked out a joint deal offering JetBlue co-branding rights to the “I (heart shape) NY” logo as well as the slogan, “JetBlue, New York’s Hometown Airline”—something that helped seal the deal.

[Washington, D.C., may have a leg up](#), having already hosted Amazon Chief Executive Jeff Bezos for visits when he considered acquiring the Washington Post, which he now owns. Mr. Bezos also purchased the former Textile Museum in Washington’s Kalorama neighborhood for \$23 million in 2016 and is currently turning it into [a private residence](#). — *Wall Street Journal*

Facebook Inc. is battling a backlash from lawmakers, regulators and users on multiple continents. Some of the sharpest criticism is coming from close to home.

A succession of Silicon Valley rivals have stepped forward in recent weeks and months to speak out against the social-media giant, some reprising old points of contention, others reacting to revelations about [its handling of user data](#) and of deceptive or manipulative content on its platform. The list includes the chief executive of Apple Inc., an artificial-intelligence expert at Alphabet Inc.’s Google, and several former Facebook executives.

A mix of factors are behind the barbs, observers say, from genuine concern to a desire to keep the scrutiny of regulators and lawmakers focused on Facebook and away from their own companies. “Certainly a political stratagem would be to point to this one entity that’s just gotten into trouble and say ‘they’re the problem, not us,’” said Roger Kay, president of Endpoint Technologies Associates, a technology market-research firm.

The industry opprobrium has grown louder with the revelation in mid-March that Facebook user data was [improperly obtained by Cambridge Analytica](#), a data-analytics firm that worked for the 2016 Trump campaign. That incident has rekindled longstanding concerns about privacy practices at Facebook and other tech companies.

Apple Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook on Wednesday [criticized companies like Facebook and Google](#) for their practices of collecting personal data across different products and using that data to build user profiles. Speaking to an audience in Chicago, Mr. Cook, who has long sought to differentiate Apple on privacy matters, contrasted its focus on selling devices with Facebook and Google’s ad-based businesses that are built on user data.

Asked what he would do if he were Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Mr. Cook replied: “I wouldn’t be in this situation.” He called for regulation of data and privacy, saying the companies had failed to self-regulate and limit what they collect from users. He also said that Apple could improve its privacy efforts and the way it polices content available on its devices.

Facebook and Google declined to comment. Mr. Zuckerberg has apologized for the Cambridge Analytica episode. He vowed to look for potential abuses of personal data by app developers and tweaked the privacy tools so users will be able to track and change with more ease some of the social network's data about them.

Days earlier, François Chollet, an artificial intelligence engineer at Google, sought to draw a line between his company and Facebook. He tweeted that Google products like search and Gmail help users "to do more, to know more." Facebook's newsfeed, he wrote, "manipulates your worldview and seeks to maximally waste your time." Mr. Chollet pointed to his [blog post](#) about why he believes search engines are less dangerous than social networks. He declined to provide additional comment.

Michael Pachter, a longtime technology analyst at Wedbush Securities, said comments like Mr. Cook's are "exploiting an unfortunate situation at Facebook." The turn of events contrasts with Facebook's long status as an industry darling. Its journey from dorm-room startup to a profit-spewing juggernaut was the kind of legendary rise that tech entrepreneurs and investors sought to re-create. Mr. Zuckerberg held Facebook up as having a mission bigger than business, to bring the world closer together.

Problems with its image emerged after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, with revelations about how misinformation was spread on Facebook's platform and how [Russia allegedly used the company's ad-targeting tools](#) to influence U.S. public discourse. Russia has denied meddling in the elections, and President Donald Trump has repeatedly denied any collusion. That led to a broader discussion about other harmful impact.

In January, Salesforce.com CEO Marc Benioff, whose company sells business software services, said that the addictive nature of social media means it should be regulated like a health issue. "I think that you do it exactly the same way that you regulated the cigarette industry," Mr. Benioff told CNBC when asked how Facebook should be regulated. Some of the most cutting rebukes have come from people who know Facebook well.

In November, Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook, said that Facebook executives, including himself, were "exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology" by designing a platform built on social validation. Mr. Parker didn't respond to a request for comment. Facebook generally hasn't responded to the criticism, but it did after sharp comments from its former vice president of growth, Chamath Palihapitiya. "The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works," Mr. Palihapitiya said at a talk at Stanford University in November.

After his comments became public a month later, Facebook delivered a public rebuke. In a statement at the time, the company played down his understanding of the company's culture, saying he left in 2011. Mr. Palihapitiya later softened his comments with a post on Facebook, saying social media has been "used and abused in ways that we, their architects, never imagined" and that his former employer is "coming to terms with its unforeseen influence." He added, "My comments were meant to start an important conversation, not to criticize one company—particularly one I love." Mr. Palihapitiya declined to comment. — *Wall Street Journal*

