BRIEF 2.4 : HOW TO DEVELOP AND EXECUTE SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL TRADE MISSIONS

Trade missions are among the most powerful tools in a subnational diplomat's toolkit, but only when done right. When grounded in strategy and evidence, they open markets, attract investment, build long-term relationships, and increase a region's global visibility. When connected to tangible outcomes, they increase public trust in the value of diplomacy and local leaders' global engagement. When poorly planned or following the latest fad, they consume scarce resources with little to show for it.

While no cookie-cutter approach exists, this brief draws from case studies to guide city, state, and regional governments through six critical steps for designing and executing trade missions that deliver real results for their communities.

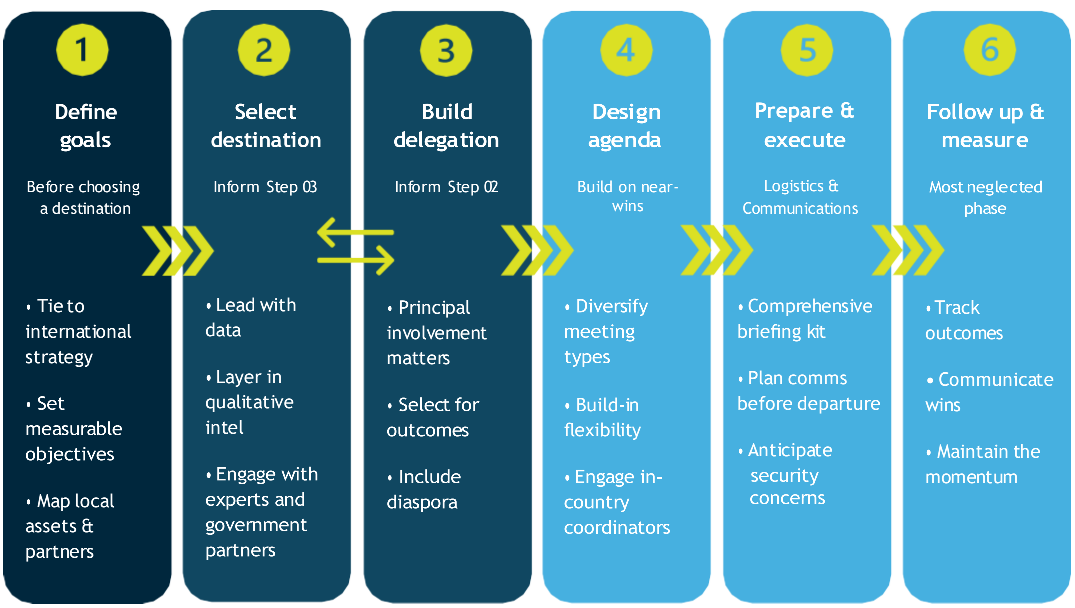
1. The Challenge:

Trade missions are often misunderstood, dismissed as junkets or celebrated uncritically as diplomatic wins regardless of what they actually produce. In reality, they are sophisticated instruments of economic statecraft. Across the United States, governors and mayors lead hundreds of trade missions each year, spanning dozens of countries and sectors. In 2025 alone, the Queensland, Australia's ministerial trade and investment mission program traveled to 16 markets across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia and included more than 150 meetings and engagements.

However, the effectiveness of international trips varies enormously. The risks of poorly planned missions and junkets are real: resources misspent on high-profile travel that generates no follow-up; relationships built with the wrong partners; agendas that drift from economic priorities; and political capital expended without measurable returns. Public skepticism about the value of international travel by elected officials makes the stakes higher still.

Successful missions share a common architecture: clear goals tied to a broader strategy, evidence-based destination selection, a delegation assembled to open doors and close deals, a results-oriented program, rigorous logistics and protocol preparation, and — critically — disciplined follow-through and communications.

2. Strategic guidance: six steps to a successful trade mission



STEP 1: DEFINE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Link the mission to your international strategy. Trade missions do not work as standalone events. They deliver results when integrated into a city or state's broader international engagement strategy, advancing defined priorities. Before choosing a destination, ask: how does this mission advance our economic development agenda? What relationships or deals are we trying to accelerate? What would make this trip a tangible win for our constituents? Why now – what events or relationships under development merit the timing of this trip? Be mindful of the political calendar as well; for example, launching a trade mission during sensitive periods like annual budget negotiations can undercut the impact of a mission and make it harder to demonstrate clear wins publicly,

For more on building an international strategy, see Section 1 of the Toolkit.

Set specific, measurable objectives. Define what the mission is designed to achieve before the itinerary is drafted. The more specific the objectives, the easier it becomes to build a program that achieves them — and to demonstrate impact afterward. Typical goals include:

- export promotion and cultivating a pipeline of export-ready firms seeking market access,
- attracting foreign direct investment into the region,
- strengthening the region's global brand and visibility in priority markets,
- advancing a specific deal, partnership, or announcement,
- establishing collaboration on education through school and university exchanges, and
- deepening cultural and civic ties through sister city relationships.

Map your resources and local assets. Begin with a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify government agencies, local universities, business associations and incubators, foreign-owned local firms, chambers of commerce, and diaspora groups. Inventory existing international ties and evaluate whether they can be deepened through a mission. Identify upcoming conferences or inbound delegations that could serve as complementary touchpoints.

Insights from the Field

San Antonio: Aligning goals before selecting a destination

"Our mission to Korea was based on three main pillars: investment, sister city, and alternative energy. Initially, we assessed that the primary reason for the Mayor's trip would be to travel to our sister city in Gwangju. However, in order to leverage his presence in Korea, our EDO aligned an investment mission as part of our trade mission as well. Their focus city was Seoul, one of our target global metros for foreign direct investment as per our international strategy known as the Metro Priority Plan, a data informed approach validated by industry stakeholders.

The San Antonio owned utility company also participated in the trade mission with a goal of learning more about energy solutions that would inform their work with alternative energy generation and storage.

Our three goals for the mission were as follows:

- *Build new relationships in Seoul and create more awareness about San Antonio as a destination for Korean investment to expand into the US market, especially Texas;*
- *Maintain and strengthen our sister city relationship with Gwangju by identifying new areas of collaboration especially as it relates to economic development and innovation;*
- *Exploratory mission for the utility company to grow relationships in alternative energy"*

STEP 2: USE EVIDENCE TO PRIORITIZE THE RIGHT DESTINATION

Use data to drive destination choices. The selection of a trade mission destination is one of the most consequential decisions in the planning process — and one of the most frequently driven by convenience or political preference rather than evidence.

Lead with what the market wants, not what you want to sell.

A common planning failure is building a mission around a region's most prominent companies or flagship sectors regardless of whether they match what the destination market is actively seeking. The result is a mismatch: counterparts who are disengaged, meetings that generate little momentum, and a delegation that returns without the outcomes it anticipated.

Early destination research and in-market consultation should clarify which sectors, capabilities, and partnership profiles the host counterparts are genuinely looking for. Build the mission around that brief — even when it means potentially omitting well-established local companies or top features that are not the right fit for this particular destination at this particular moment.

Rigorous destination selection typically draws on the following factors:

Type of Data	Common Sources	Meaning and Usage
Existing Inward FDI	Chambers of Commerce, Industry Associations, Private Data Providers (e.g. fDi Markets, Rhodium Group), Citi InvestUSA state-level data	Identifies which foreign markets are already investing in your region. A strong existing FDI relationship signals familiarity, trust, and a foundation to build on.
Trade Flow Data	USA Trade Online, U.S. International Trade Administration, State export promotion agencies	Shows the value and volume of goods and services moving between your region and a target market.
Global FDI Trends	UNCTAD World Investment Report, Greenfield investment trackers	Reveals which markets are growing as sources of outbound investment globally and in your target sectors.
Industry Complementarity	Economic development organizations, local industry associations, U.S. Commercial Service market reports, World Trade Centers, Trade Show data	Assesses whether your region's economic activities and supply chains align with the target market's demand or supply gaps. Strong complementarity makes the commercial case for the mission and help identify specific companies and sectors.
Political Context and Priorities	U.S. Embassy country reports, State Department country commercial guides, federal trade framework agreements, federal/national foreign policy priorities	Assesses the diplomatic relationship and trade policy context. Active trade framework agreements signal mutual commitment. Sanctions regimes, political instability, or adversarial relationships may preclude engagement or require heightened due diligence (See Brief 3.1.). Synergies with allied partners around key supply chain objectives (energy, ag, minerals) create opportunities.
Diaspora Connections	Local census data, community organizations, cultural associations	Identifies cultural and community ties between your region and the target market. A large, active diaspora community provides built-in networks, cultural intelligence, and potential delegation members who can open doors that formal channels cannot. (See Brief 4.1.)
Transportation Connectivity	Airport authority data, port metrics, airline route databases, logistics industry reports	Measures the ease of moving people and goods between your region and the target market. Direct air service, active shipping lanes, and logistics infrastructure reduce friction for exporters and investors. Limited connectivity can itself become a mission objective — e.g. building the case for a new direct air route.

Connect with federal partners early — at home and abroad. Before finalizing your destination or agenda, engage the U.S. Commercial Service and the Commercial Section at the U.S. Embassy in your target market. Even when federal entities won't be directly involved in the mission, they often have visibility on other local events that may impact your mission and can help deconflict (or combine) activities on the ground.

At a minimum, request a country and security briefing from the Embassy abroad: they can provide your delegation with information that third-party contractors don't have access to. If you want more structured support, consider having your mission certified by the U.S. Department of Commerce (Certified Trade Mission). Certification lets you maintain local control while locking in Embassy backing on the ground — including, in some cases, help organizing promotional events that add credibility and open doors your delegation couldn't reach independently.

Cities that have engaged their Embassy counterparts regularly report better outcomes. San Diego's partnership with the U.S. Consulate in Marseille and San Antonio's coordination with the U.S. Embassy in Seoul are two examples of how pre-established federal relationships translate into strong programming once the delegation lands, including with promotion events hosted at the Consul's or Ambassador's residence). Informing the relevant Embassy or consulate in the United States can also facilitate connections.

Validate with stakeholders at home and partners in-country. Data analysis should be cross-referenced with qualitative input from local companies, EDOs, chambers of commerce, World Trade Centers, trade associations, and diaspora community leaders. Their read of a target market — which sectors are ready, which relationships are warm, which counterparts are credible — adds practical intelligence that no database can provide. Overseas offices or trusted in-country partners can assess demand, vet counterparts, prepare briefs, and pre-negotiate the meeting agenda — ensuring the delegation arrives to a primed environment.

Insights from the Field

San Diego's Office of the Mayor: A data-driven road to Manila.

The City of SAN DIEGO

Data played a central role in shaping the agenda of the trade missions to the Philippines. A market scan highlighted the Philippines' growing demand in sectors where San Diego is globally competitive – biotech, clean energy, communications technology, and defense. San Diego analyzed data in collaboration with the local U.S. Chamber of Commerce office, the Commercial Section in Embassy Manila, and World Trade Center San Diego. Airline data – documenting the numbers of travelers between San Diego and the Philippines based on connecting flights between the two destinations – reinforced a long-term regional goal: establishing direct service between San Diego and Manila. Port metrics, including origins and destinations of inbound and outbound commercial shipments revealed opportunities for logistics collaboration with major Philippine ports.

World Trade San Diego: Sourcing data from partners.

WORLD TRADE CENTER SAN DIEGO

Determining where a WTCSD trade mission should go is driven first and foremost by data. The organization places heavy emphasis on long-term trade and investment trends — often looking back 10 to 20 years — as well as on the industries in which San Diego holds a competitive advantage. This approach is rooted in WTCSD's participation in the Brookings Global Cities Initiative beginning in 2014, which emphasized market prioritization and evidence-based decision-making.

Equally important is alignment with regional stakeholders. WTCSD engages major employers and public institutions that shape business outcomes to ensure broad-based support and relevance. Local companies are asked about international expansion plans, joint ventures, or supply-chain considerations that could be advanced through a trade mission. Information-sharing with consulates and chambers of commerce helps identify potential investment activity among foreign multinationals.

For public institutions — such as the City of San Diego, San Diego International Airport, and the Port of San Diego — conversations tend to focus on future cargo or route-service opportunities, as well as larger diplomatic initiatives such as Sister City relationships. Universities and research institutions are consulted to understand opportunities related to R&D collaboration, student mobility, and talent pipelines. In this way, WTCSD trade missions are designed to serve a wide range of regional interests while engaging senior-level decision-makers whose collective participation carries significant weight.

STEP 3: ASSEMBLE A DELEGATION THAT OPENS DOORS AND MAKES DEALS

Establish clear leadership and governance. Designate a core team that includes city or state leadership, economic development partners, and business representatives. Clarify roles, decision-making authority, and communication protocols from the outset. The question of who leads — the mayor's or governor's office, the EDO, or the World Trade Center — depends on the local civics, the mission's objectives, and existing relationships. What matters most is alignment: all players should be working toward the same goals and speaking with one voice.

Build the delegation around outcomes. Each delegation member should be selected for their ability to open doors, provide sector-specific credibility, or sustain follow-up relationships once the mission concludes. Building a multi-sector delegation is as much about picking individuals as it is about creating alignment with regional stakeholders and getting buy-in. A strong delegation often draws from:

- chambers of commerce, World Trade Centers, and business associations
- universities and innovation hubs,
- state and federal economic development officials (including SelectUSA);
- exporters, businesses positioned to announce a “win” or a near-final deal or partnership
- smaller businesses that can benefit from market exposure;
- institutions — such as airports or ports — with specific partnership objectives in the destination market

Who’s coming?

- **Which government principals?** In certain cultural and political contexts, having the mayor or governor lead the delegation signals seriousness and can accelerate decision-making — prompting counterparts to send their own senior leaders and opening doors that staff alone cannot unlock. It can also become a distraction: VIP protocols, security requirements, and compressed schedules can get in the way of substantive business.
- **Which companies**? Prefer quality over quantity. Be clear with private sector participants about what is expected of them: they need to come prepared to engage — not to rely on consultants or government leads to do the work for them. Ensure companies are export-ready and credible in the target market, with the capacity to deliver.
- **Which staff?** A trade mission should not be a reward or a perk. Staff participation should be tied to clear deliverables — ideally as part of a long-term market ownership and relationship-building strategy, not a one-off trip.
- **Which in-market partners?** In-market consultants, local points of contact, and Commercial Service partners are force multipliers. They can support logistics, facilitate introductions, and bring local knowledge.

Delegations can also build around a theme or sector. Where possible, organize companies into sector groupings rather than mixed delegations: depth and coherence in one industry makes a stronger impression on counterparts and produces better results on the ground. For instance, Oklahoma’s trade mission to Taiwan (2024) was focused on drones and UAS, while the mission to Japan and Korea (2024) was focused on critical minerals processing and energy.

If possible, consider a regional play. Engaging neighboring counties, municipalities, or cross-border partners can pool resources, strengthen the delegation's credibility, and project a unified regional brand. For instance:

- In San Diego: delegations have also included partners from across the US-Mexico border, reflecting the interests and realities of the broader Cali-Baja binational megaregion, which has helped secure new trade and investment deals with partners from Mexico to South Korea.
- Additionally, Queensland’s unified global brand, *QueensLand of Opportunity*, provides a consistent narrative for partners and delegations, giving mission activities coherence and visibility.

Engage diaspora communities. Diaspora leaders and community members are valuable connectors in a trade mission. They have linguistic fluency, cultural credibility, and existing networks in the destination market. San Antonio's Korea mission was strengthened by the active involvement of prominent members of the local Korean American Association of San Antonio.

Insights from the Field

San Diego Office of the Mayor: A delegation that delivers

"Each member [of the delegation] was selected for their ability to open doors, provide industry insight, or sustain follow-up work once the mission concluded. This included two representatives from the Port of San Diego who helped facilitate meetings with two of the Philippines major ports to share best practices and consider ways to increase point-to-point shipping.

From the outset, the team recognized the importance of having the Mayor lead the delegation [to the Philippines]. In international contexts, a mayor's presence signals seriousness, accelerates decision-making, and prompts interlocutors to bring their own senior leaders to the table. Throughout the mission, Philippine partners consistently responded to the Mayor's involvement with greater engagement and urgency, often advancing discussions that had previously been exploratory. This factor was on full display as the Mayor's presence helped convene key leadership from the Philippines largest chamber of commerce, representing over 3,000 Philippines businesses; following a fulsome discussion in Manila, the chamber decided to add San Diego to its annual U.S. business visit for the first time.

The Mayor's engagement with the Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces, as well as the head of the Philippines Special Operations Forces, highlighted and encouraged partnership with a San Diego-based secure communications company, TrellisWare. The Mayor's presence was essential to secure these long-desired meetings with high-level interlocutors, and thereby advanced the company's goals and partnership with a key customer and U.S. ally."

STEP 4: DESIGN A RESULTS-ORIENTED AGENDA AND PROGRAM OF MEETINGS

Build the agenda around specific priorities and near-term opportunities. A strong mission program focuses on a defined set of sectors or objectives and builds on existing progress — attending an industry event, deals nearly ready for announcement, ongoing airline negotiations, university partnerships requiring activation, or emerging investment conversations that need political momentum. Avoid overprogramming: fewer, higher-quality meetings consistently outperform packed agendas that leave no room for relationship-building.

Build in flexibility. Schedules abroad shift constantly. Meetings with senior officials or executives may be confirmed only days before the mission, rescheduled without notice, or cancelled on arrival. Design the agenda with buffer time and clear fallback options. Use trusted in-country consultants to help navigate last-minute changes.

Diversify meeting types. Effective missions combine government-to-government engagements, private sector matchmaking events, an 'Invest in [our City]' event, and institutional visits. The stature of a mayoral or gubernatorial delegation can be leveraged to organize targeted investment promotion events or business development sessions that local contacts alone could not convene. Attending prominent international fairs may help reach multiple prospects in one place for 3-4 days, but companies can also be very busy and in 'sell mode.' Engaging companies one-on-one in less busy times can enable deeper engagement and relationship-building.

Include cultural components strategically. Mission programs that include site visits and cultural moments not only keep delegates engaged but also reinforce community ties and deepen the nature of the engagement. Queensland International Trade notes the "*power of creative cultural storytelling integrated into Queensland's mission programs, particularly in markets where authenticity, human interest and trust build long-term influence*." While in Korea, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt visited the Korean War Memorial and brought a wreath to lay in memory of Oklahoma soldiers who fought in the war.

Insights from the Field

World Trade Center San Diego: Two tactics for FDI cultivation

"*San Diego's FDI-focused programming generally takes one of two forms.*

> *1) The first targets a broader group of foreign companies already engaged with embassy teams and exploring near-term investment. These firms are typically invited to an "Invest in San Diego" event, where the delegation presents an economic overview and conducts targeted discussions around partnership and expansion opportunities.*
> *2) The second approach focuses on a single multinational with an existing footprint in the region (such as ASML during the Netherlands mission in 2022) or one planning significant U.S. investment in the years ahead (as with Sanofi during the France mission in 2025).*

To support SMB international sales, industry partnering events are often effective. Working with trusted trade organizations in the host market—and allowing them to lead on local coordination — has proven critical. Similar to FDI efforts, the stature of the delegation can be leveraged to create targeted pitching or business-development opportunities. WTCSD employed this approach at the Port of Rotterdam in 2022, with the Mayor of San Diego and a host of port commissioners helping open doors for local companies.

Some modules require longer lead times, particularly those involving government action. Sister City announcements, for example, typically require approvals from city councils and mayors on both sides, even after committees have agreed to proceed."

FDI missions require a specific kind of preparation.

Attracting foreign direct investment is not a general networking exercise — it demands a specific offer, directed at specific targets, supported by data, materials, and a compelling regional value proposition prepared in advance.

Ideally, the mission should not be the first contact. The most effective FDI missions treat in-market engagements as a structured follow-up with companies already in the pipeline — qualified prospects where a senior-level visit can address specific investor questions and advance a decision. Cold outreach on the ground rarely converts. A broader investor event — such as an "Invest in [City/Region]" presentation open to a wider group of prospective companies — can serve a complementary purpose: building general awareness and filling the top of the investment pipeline for future missions.

STEP 5: PREPARE THE DELEGATION FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Develop comprehensive briefing materials. Every delegation member should arrive with a clear picture of the destination market, the mission's goals, and their specific role in advancing them. Standard materials include: a country and city overview with trade and investment snapshots; biographical briefs on all counterparts; run-of-show agendas with speaking points; business and cultural protocol guidance; gift selection and logistics information; and translation support and business card preparation where relevant. Weekly internal planning calls in the month leading up to travel helps align the full delegation and ensures no one is surprised on the ground.

Anticipate security concerns. Some countries require specific security briefings – law enforcement or federal partners can provide guidance on communication safety (not bringing phones or laptops), potential attempts for malign interference, and local instability (see brief 3.1).

Manage travel and logistics. Working with a reliable travel and logistics agency — and a destination management company for on-the-ground support — is important for missions involving senior government officials and business executives. Typical support covers international flights and hotel accommodations at preferential group rates; ground transportation and airport transfers; meeting room reservations; catering for investment events; restaurant reservations; and cultural or familiarization activities. More countries are requiring visas so anticipate and communicate requirements to delegates long in advance.

Who's funding? Trade mission funding models vary by jurisdiction and mission type. Transparency about costs and funding sources is essential to maintaining public trust and the political case for sustained international engagement. Most common models include:

- **Public funding.** City or state funds cover government officials and staff, while partner organizations cover their own delegates. Where public funds are used, a clear articulation of expected return on investment is essential — taxpayers, local media, and/or elected officials will ask.
- **Foundation and business group support.** Some states channel mission funding through dedicated foundations (California Foundation) or bipartisan business coalitions, reducing political exposure and increasing flexibility (Missouri's governor-led missions have been funded by the Missouri-based Hawthorn Foundation).
- **Private sector sponsorship.** Companies with a direct stake in the target market or sector may co-sponsor mission costs, typically in exchange for priority participation. In the City of San Diego, a local philanthropic organization supports the salary and travel of their top global affairs officer. Another local nonprofit, The Philippine School, funded staff and mayoral travel for their recent mission to the Philippines.
- **Participant co-investment.** Requiring delegates to self-fund a portion of their costs filters for commitment and reduces junket accusations. Delegations where participants have financial skin in the game tend to arrive better prepared and more focused on results.

Plan your communications strategy in advance. Before the mission departs, line up a communications plan: key announcements to be made in the destination market, media interviews for the principal, social media content from the delegation, and a toolkit for consistent messaging across participants. Capturing and communicating progress in real time — through daily blog posts, social media updates, or short video content — ensures that home-market audiences understand what the mission is achieving. A delegation social media toolkit helps maintain message discipline across multiple channels and spokespeople.

Additionally, consider asking specific stakeholders to publicly highlight particular engagements or wins, enabling more strategic amplification. Often it can be more impactful for individual businesses to share successes directly than for messaging to come solely from local government leadership.

Insights from the Field

World Trade Center San Diego: Line up communications in advance

Prior to arrival in the destination market, WTCSD prepares key announcements, media interviews, and daily blog content to capture and communicate progress in real time. Delegates are also provided with a social media toolkit to ensure consistent messaging, ensuring that the home market and local media clearly understand the trade mission's priorities and activities.

San Diego representatives take copious notes and pictures, to demonstrate the productivity of their staff while on a trade mission. Mission days are very long and often include many meetings.

San Antonio: Pre-trip preparation as a foundation for success

Briefing materials for all delegation members to South Korea included:

- *Country Overview: Republic of Korea (including a map showing cities traveled to);*
- *City Overview: Seoul and Gwangju;*
- *Trade and Investment Overview;*
- *Business cultural protocol Overview;*
- *Know Before You Go for Korea with Travel preparation tips;*
- *A bio book of the San Antonio delegation including contact info;*
- *A bio book of officials and business leaders we would meet during the mission;*
- *Runs of Show for events and special activities;*
- *Speaking points and speeches for events and special activities;*
- *Gift selection & preparation; and*
- *Translation and printing of business cards into Korean.*

"We held a group briefing session with the delegates one week before travel and shared all the relevant information and briefing materials. This included the most recent itinerary to weather expectations to dress code. These briefings can be held in person or virtually, but the goal is to inform all the delegation about the program and set clear expectations about roles, responsibilities, and even discuss the protocols of social media engagement.

Flexibility during the mission is important when it comes to the itinerary as it can change at any time. Meetings can be canceled, and some may not be finalized until close to departure. The ability to adapt to changes is particularly necessary if meeting with high-level business executives and government officials given the volatile nature of their schedules. Additionally, it is important to leverage existing connections when scheduling meetings and events for better ease. For instance, a distinguished professor at one of our local universities assisted us in finalizing meetings with senior politicians in country through his network. Our EDO contracted with a consultant to arrange the private sector meetings for the investment portion of our trade mission."

STEP 6: AFTER THE MISSION: COMMUNICATE OUTCOMES, EVALUATE, AND SUSTAIN MOMENTUM

Lead with metrics and tell a story. After the mission, communicate proactively and specifically. Highlight measurable outcomes: investment inquiries generated, deals announced, agreements signed, meetings convened, and media coverage achieved. Connect these outcomes to local priorities — jobs, economic diversification, innovation, and competitiveness. Use digital channels, local media, and mayoral or gubernatorial visibility to reinforce the narrative that global engagement delivers tangible local benefits. Specific post-mission communications builds public trust.

Track outcomes over time. The most significant results of a trade mission often surface months or years after the mission concludes, as relationships deepen and early conversations mature into concrete investments or partnerships. Build a tracking system — even a simple one — that records contacts made, commitments expressed, and follow-up actions planned. Create public-facing resources (e.g., dashboards, websites, or reports). This can be as simple as a webpage which tracks city-led international engagement and lists up-to-date successes from trade missions. Return to this record regularly and connect new announcements to the relationships that seeded them. Good record keeping is the bridge between a meeting that happened years ago and an investment that is being announced today.

For more, see Brief 1.3 Proving Value: How to measure and communicate the local impact of global engagement.

Institutionalize learning. Conduct a structured debrief among organizers. Consolidate all contacts, the actual itinerary followed, and lessons learned. Send thank-you letters to key stakeholders and written follow-up to registered participants in investment events. Enter key contacts from the mission into the organization's CRM. Brief relevant city or state agencies on outcomes and implications for ongoing sector priorities.

Plan and execute systematic follow-up.

Following up is the most consequential but most often neglected phase of trade missions.

- Identify a specific group of high-priority leads — private companies or officials with whom there is a plausible near-term opportunity — and assign ownership for follow-up outreach by email or videocall within two weeks of return.

- Work with any in-country consultants to maintain momentum on the ground. Track follow-up actions and report progress to leadership at regular intervals.

- Plan and communicate the date of the next conversation or mission to signal that you're coming back: one-offs have limited impact, relationships are built over time.

Insights from the Field

What success looks like: outcomes from Queensland's trade mission to Vietnam and China

Queensland's 2025 trade missions have delivered significant visibility and influence across Asia. Highlights from a week-long mission to Vietnam and China in November 2025 include:

Vietnam: A rapidly expanding strategic relationship

- *Major media exposure: more than 13.7 million people reached through television, English-language and Vietnamese publications.*
- *Opened a second office in the market, expanding Queensland's physical presence to Hanoi in addition to Ho Chi Minh City.*
- *Elevated Queensland's profile as a long-term partner in education, agriculture, clean tech, tourism and innovation.*

China: Strategic visibility through high-impact storytelling

- *$100+ million in commercial outcomes and more than 1,200 business leads, a 46% uplift from the same mission a year prior.*
- *13 signed commercial agreements between Queensland businesses and Chinese partners.*
- *20+ million video views on popular Chinese social media platform Little Red Book featuring Queensland business delegate content, which became a Top 3 trending topic.*
- *3.15 million media impressions, including coverage in The People's Daily, China's most widely read outlet, plus national Australian financial press coverage.*

San Antonio: After the mission, communicate and evaluate

This step is perhaps the most neglected area of trade missions. The mission cannot be fully closed out without necessary reflection which can help foster the opportunities for the future. Follow up can take various forms:

- *Mission debriefs among organizers for constructive feedback on areas of improvement;*
- *Consolidation of all contacts and the actual itinerary that was followed;*
- *Thank you letters to key stakeholders;*
- *Written follow up with all registered attendees of the investment promotion mission;*
- *Capture of business cards of VIPs, leads and prospects into the CRM; and*
- *Coordination within country consultant on future follow up with a select group of companies.*

A truly successful mission not only provides short term gains in the form of new relationships and maintaining existing relationships but also can be the seed for a successful investment in the long term many years later. Good record keeping will connect the future not yet realized to a meeting or event that took place on a trade and investment mission in the past.

World Trade San Diego: Reflecting after the mission

Following the mission, WTCSD maintains an ongoing pulse on outcomes and wins. This longitudinal tracking is critical, as the true value of a trade mission is rarely immediate. In many cases, the most meaningful results surface months or even years later, as relationships deepen and early conversations evolve into concrete projects and investments.

Beyond these external outcomes, the connections formed within the delegation itself are often among the most significant impacts. Trade missions provide a rare opportunity to broaden the perspective of a region's most influential leaders and to align them around a shared commitment to promoting and strengthening the place they represent. At times, it takes stepping outside one's region—and seeing it through a global lens—to fully appreciate what makes home competitive, distinctive, and worth championing.

This brief if part of Meridian's Subnational Diplomacy Toolkit. If you are using this brief to apply an innovation locally or have questions or suggestions, please fill out this short survey.

This brief received substantial contributions from partners who shared their experience and expertise, including World Trade Center San Diego, the City of San Diego, the City of San Antonio's Global Engagement Office, a division of the Economic Development Department, and Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ), the global trade and investment agency of Queensland, Australia.

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