



A program for community assessment & improvement

Your name:

Your gender:

Your age:

Your contact information:

Community you are from:

Community you will visit:

Date of your visit:

Time spent in the community (hours):

Weather conditions on the date of your visit:

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Introduction

You have volunteered to be a member of your community's visiting team in a **First Impressions** community exchange. Thank you for your commitment to your community. Along with other visiting team members, you will make a short, incognito visit to an exchange community you are not familiar with and record your first impressions. You are not expected to offer expert advice—you are simply expected to give an outsider's candid viewpoint on various aspects of the community you visit.

Preparing for your visit

You will need to make some preparations before the visit and complete some reporting tasks afterward. We encourage you to take time to familiarize yourself with the questions in this booklet, which will make it easier to navigate the contents on the day of your visit. You may also have an online version of this survey tool available to you to upload photos and text from a smart phone or tablet on the day of your visit.

The pre-visit preparations or orientation may take a few hours of your time. You'll need to review the questionnaire, maps, and checklists and then participate in an orientation meeting to arrange trip logistics. This meeting may involve a review of materials, training about how to record your observations, and logistics—including weather and safety information for the day of your visit. The visit coordinator will give you detailed information on meeting spots, things you need to bring along, and any arrangements for costs such as fuel and meals. Your visit coordinator may also provide pens, a clipboard, a note

pad, a map, or a camera for use during your visit. In addition to the orientation, you may also be asked to spend some time online reviewing visitor information for your partner community. Consider taking a look at the community website, Facebook, Twitter, or other sources.

Typically, the visit will take 4 to 8 hours, plus drive time. Volunteers are encouraged to take the safety precautions provided by your site coordinator (e.g., remaining within the boundaries of the site visit), to carry a cell phone and sharing that number with members of the visit team, and to avoid situations that may be suspect. If ever you feel your safety is compromised, you are encouraged to enter the nearest establishment and call the site coordinator's cell phone and/or the local police, if necessary. Safety concerns will be addressed during the pre-visit orientation in more detail.

After your visit:

- Expect to attend a final team meeting to share and discuss your first impressions with each other. This meeting, perhaps in a focus group format, will help with the writing of the follow-up report.
- We strongly encourage the teams from both communities to meet informally after their visits to discuss their experiences and share lessons learned.
- At least one member of the team will contribute to a follow-up report.
- One or two members of the team with skills and experience in public

presentations will assist in a community presentation about the results of the team's work to the exchange community.

Providing constructive criticism always requires some diplomacy. Be sure to give careful attention to the words and phrases you use in the report.

Suggestions for using this guide

Be discreet as you record observations and seek out information about the community you visit. The intent is to get an honest feel for how visitors are treated in the community. Take lots of pictures if you can do so without being noticed. Otherwise, keep notes on the images you would like to capture and then take those photos at the end of your visit. Using a smart phone is recommended so pictures can be easily integrated into a community presentation. Your visit coordinator may provide you with a link to an online survey tool that can be accessed using a smartphone or tablet to upload image files while you are on your visit. Be sure to add notes about your images so they can be integrated into the final report.

Remember:

- This visit will result in better information if residents do not know you are there to assess the community. Try to find ways your partner community shines—but don't ignore the "warts." Feel free to record strengths and weaknesses not included in this guide.
- You can appear to be shopping, conducting business, or making a social visit. Strike up casual conversations with residents and be interactive.

- Be observant and take your role seriously—your sincere feedback is very valuable. Be sure to include details and comments, as they will be the most useful feedback for your partner community.
- Be sure to have fun.

Many questions in this guide ask you to provide feedback using a grade scale. Remember, people bring their own set of "lenses" to the visit. Use the following guidelines as you grade various aspects of the community based on what you experience:

A = What I experienced far exceeded my expectations.

B = What I experienced was better than my expectations.

C = What I experienced met (but did not exceed) my expectations.

D = What I experienced did not meet my expectations.

F = What I experienced was far worse than my expectations.

Your visit

Prior to arrival

What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit? What are you expecting to see? Share some of what you know.

Search destination and tourism information via websites and social media. If the community has a website write it here:

Grade and comment on the community website for its appearance, usefulness, and credibility of information. Circle one:

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the usefulness and credibility of information you obtained about the community through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

A B C D F


Identify and comment on any other websites or online sources you used. Was there information you looked for but could not find online?

If you contacted the community tourism information office or visitor's bureau via email or phone, grade and comment on the friendliness and helpfulness of staff.

A B C D F

Identify the sense of the community you have from the online research ONLY. What is your gut reaction? Would you want to visit there with family or friends? Does this community seem to welcome you or others to visit or live there? Why or why not?

Consider your income, age, interests, hobbies, family, health/disabilities, race, and ethnicity in your response.

 Remember to take photos of this and other topics during your visit. Try to tag them to remind you why you took them. This will make it easier to use them later.

10-minute impression

Enter the community through the designated route and take a 10-minute drive without stopping. What was your first impression? Find a place to safely pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the community.

Community entrances

Approach the community from the other major entrances. Grade and comment on each entrance. While there may be an obvious main entrance, there are typically multiple ways to enter a community. In some communities there may be entrances for other modes of transportation.

Entrance #1: Road name and direction: _____

A B C D F

Entrance #2: Road name and direction: _____

A B C D F

Entrance #3: Road name and direction: _____


A B C D F

Entrance #4: Road name and direction: _____

A B C D F

Other entrances (airports, bike or snowmobile trails, boat landings, train stations):

A B C D F

 *Consider taking a photo about this topic.*

Downtown or central business district

Specify area: _____

Grade and comment on the overall appearance of the buildings, displays, signage, and streetscape.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the variety of shopping options.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the customer service you received during your visit.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the signage.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the window displays.

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the mix of facilities and services (housing, professional services, retail, recreation, accommodations and food, industry, parks, etc.).

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the accessibility of downtown merchants during evening and weekend hours.

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the quality, availability, or necessity for parking in the downtown.

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the walkability (presence or absence of footpaths, sidewalks, pedestrian rights-of-way, crossings, building access) of the downtown.

A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting.


A B C D F

[Blank response area]

Grade and comment on the quality of the natural environment in the downtown (trees, shade trees, flower plantings, pocket parks, green spaces, etc.).

A B C D F

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for it to play a greater role? What evidence leads you to this opinion?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Retail

Describe and comment on the mix of retail shopping available in the community (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores, etc.).

What retail goods do local residents appear to need to travel outside of the community to find?

What stores or services that you would expect to find were missing?

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a community of this size?

Are there stores or other outlets where residents and visitors can go to reuse, resell, and/or recycle goods (clothing, electronics, household items)?


What stores in this community would you travel more than 30 miles to patronize?

Grade and comment on the overall condition of the retail sector.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the variety of restaurants. Comment on location, cost, and types of foods available.

A B C D F

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Tourism

What unique features or populations exist in this community?

Does the community have an identifiable slogan or brand?

Does the community appear to have a strong tourism sector? Why or why not?

If they have a visitor's center, grade and comment on the customer service you received when you visited.

A B C D F

What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man-made)?

What natural, ecological, or environmentally related tourist attractions or accommodations exist in the community?

Grade and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations (hotels, motels, B&Bs).

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the customer service of front desk and concierge staff.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the availability and adequacy of facilities to accommodate a conference, wedding, or large number of visitors.

A B C D F

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Housing

Describe the residential housing mix in the community (apartment, townhouses, single-family, multi-family, etc.).

Grade and comment on the overall quality, affordability, and availability of housing.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the condition of the following:

Existing/older homes	A	B	C	D	F
Vacant lots for new homes	A	B	C	D	F
New homes	A	B	C	D	F
Apartments/rental housing	A	B	C	D	F
Transitional housing	A	B	C	D	F
Senior assisted living	A	B	C	D	F
Assisted living/group homes for those with disabilities	A	B	C	D	F

Do some neighborhoods or areas appear more or less welcoming to a diverse range of residents (people of color, racial/ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, diverse religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital status, etc.)? Why?

What are the most appealing and least appealing features of housing in this community? Why?

Does residential housing appear to be located near water sources subject to flooding (rivers, lakes, streams)? If so, does the community appear to have put in place any protections against flooding?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

What appear to be the major employer(s) in the community?

Does there appear to be a primary industry in the community (agriculture, tourism, mining, advanced manufacturing, food processing, etc.)? Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry?

Is there a well-maintained industrial park or improved land where industries could locate or expand? Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development? Why or why not?

Grade and comment on the appearance of industrial facilities.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the adequacy and availability of commercial services (high-speed internet providers, print shops, web design).

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the adequacy and availability of professional and financial services for a community of this size (engineering, insurance, legal, and accounting firms, banks, ATMs).

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the adequacy and availability of high-speed internet services in this community.

A B C D F

Education, health, social, & emergency services

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of schools for a community of this size (pre-school/kindergarten/Headstart, primary/elementary/middle schools, high schools, colleges/universities). How do local residents feel about schools?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of healthcare facilities (hospitals, physicians, dentists, optometrists, or other medical offices and clinics, long-term care or assisted living, and other health services such as chiropractic, mental health, yoga, massage). How do local residents feel about these services?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the variety and quality of retail food outlets (grocery stores, superstores, convenience stores, gas stations). Comment on location, cost, and types of foods available. Are healthy food options available?

A B C D F

Comment on any apparent ways that residents grow their own food or access food through local farms (community gardens, backyard gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture farms or drop sites).

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of emergency food services (food pantries, soup kitchens, community meals) for a community of this size. How do local residents feel about these services?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of social services (day care, senior center, counseling) for a community of this size? How do local residents feel about these services?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of civic organizations and clubs for a community of this size. Are there organizations and clubs that would appeal to a variety of age groups? How do local residents feel about civic involvement?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of private or public fitness centers or facilities for physical recreation. How do local residents feel about them?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of emergency services (police, fire, ambulance, and emergency medical) for a community of this size. How do local residents feel about these services?

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of emergency shelters to accommodate residents in the event of a heat wave, flood, or other disaster. Do they appear accessible to people without vehicles? Is there signage in the community indicating where these shelters are located?

A B C D F

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Government, infrastructure, & land use

Are municipal offices conveniently located?

Comment on the availability and quality of community brochures, business directories, or community profiles if they are available (either online or paper).

Grade and comment on the helpfulness of government employees.

A B C D F

Grade the availability and accessibility of the following modes of public transportation:

Local bus	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Intercity or regional bus	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Van	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Train	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Taxi	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Ride sharing	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Shared bicycles	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

If there are various modes of public transportation, comment on how easy it would be to connect from one to another, such as from a bus stop to a train depot.

Grade and comment on the availability and usefulness of public transit maps/schedules/websites, if applicable. If public transit exists, are people using it? If so, comment on the level of use.

A B C D F Not applicable

Grade and comment on the availability and apparent quality of each of the following:

Streets	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Bike lanes on street	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Street signage	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Street lighting	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Street crossings	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Traffic controls	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Sidewalks	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Bus stops with shelters/ shade	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

Grade the condition of bike paths/trails. If bike and pedestrian facilities exist, are people using them? If so, comment on the level of use.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on your sense of security/safety as a pedestrian or bicyclist in the community. Are there any apparent incentives the community offers for transit users, pedestrians, or bicyclists (parking closer to destinations, “bicycle benefits” discount programs)?

A B C D F

Are community facilities and infrastructure accessible for people with disabilities, the elderly, and people carrying luggage or pushing strollers, etc.?

Grade and comment on the availability and quality of the following amenities:

Benches	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Shade areas	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Drinking fountains	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Public art	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Landscaping/ streetscaping	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Wireless internet access points	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Public restrooms	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

Public trash containers	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Public recycling containers	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Household recycling containers	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

Grade the availability of parking outside of the downtown.

A B C D F

Grade the directional signage for public parking.

A B C D F

Grade the directional signage for pedestrians and bicyclists.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the availability and accessibility of bicycle parking near schools, retail areas, community services, and recreational facilities.

A B C D F

Do you see compatible land uses, such as a park near a museum, or conflicting ones? Are land uses (commercial, residential, green space) appropriately located?

Comment on the apparent effectiveness of water management in the community (storm water drains, rain barrels, rain gardens, permeable pavement areas). Are there any large areas of standing water? If there is a river or stream, are there developed areas that appear to be close enough to be damaged by flooding?

Did you experience traffic congestion anywhere? If yes, where?

Do areas of the community appear to be developing or declining? Comment on how effectively the community appears to be managing this.

Recreation, faith, & culture

Grade and comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following:

Parks (mowed and unmowed)	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Public recreation facilities	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Private recreation facilities	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Non-motorized bike or walking paths	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Motorized trails (ATV, snowmobile)	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

What do **families** in this community appear to do for recreation/fun?

What do **young people** in this community appear to do for recreation/fun?

What do **senior citizens** in this community appear to do for recreation/fun?

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

Grade and comment on the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following:

Senior citizens	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Families	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Young adults	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Single adults	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Teens	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Children (6–12 years)	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable
Children (0–5 years)	A	B	C	D	F	Not applicable

Does the community have historic buildings or places? Are they well maintained?

Does the community hold annual events or cultural festivals? How did you hear about them? What did you learn about the traditions behind the festivals?

Does the community appear welcoming to people of all races and ethnicities (Hispanic/Latino etc.), abilities (wheelchair access, deaf/blind), religions (variety of worship opportunities), sexual orientation (LGBT individuals/families), or marital status (single, married, divorced)? Why or why not?

If you are visiting this community during night hours, please complete the following questions.

What night-time locations/venues appear to be popular? How did you hear about these?

Grade the appeal of the community's nightlife and entertainment options.

A B C D F

Grade the suitability of street and alley lighting.

A B C D F

Grade your perception of safety at night.

A B C D F

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Firsthand comments from residents

Grade and comment on the friendliness of residents of the community.

A B C D F


What do local residents recommend regarding lodging? One way to phrase a question might be: "We have only one night in this community; where would you recommend we stay?"

What do local residents recommend regarding events? One way to phrase a question might be: "We have only one night in this community; what is going on tonight that might be fun to do or see?"

If residents did not have answers to your questions, were they able to refer you to someone else who could provide assistance?

In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Did you sense community pride?

Did residents identify a particular issue to be of major concern?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Using your senses

What did the community **taste** like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or other food store that you will remember?

What did the community **smell** like? Were there any offensive smells? What about pleasant odors (flowers, food, etc.)?

What sounds did you **hear**? Please comment on the level of noise in the community (traffic, industrial noises, birds singing, water fountains, music on the streets, trains, clock chimes).

How would you describe the overall environmental health of the community (air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (children playing, hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, safety issues, smiling faces)?

Do you think your impression would be different if your visit occurred during a different time of day or at a different time of year?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Reflections

What local restaurant, specialty shop, or attraction would bring you back to this community in the future?

Would you consider locating a retail, professional, or nonprofit business here? Why or why not? Consider your income, age, interests, hobbies, family, health/disabilities, race, and ethnicity in your response.

Would you consider living here? Why or why not? Consider your income, age, interests, hobbies, family, health/disabilities, race, and ethnicity in your response.

Comment on the quality of information and assistance provided by residents and employees of local businesses.

Wrap up

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed and experienced?

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

List three positive things you observed about this community.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three potential opportunities available to this community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the three biggest obstacles or challenges facing this community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What will you remember most about this community six months from now (negative or positive)?

What have you learned that has changed your impression of your own community?

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

Describe one idea that you will borrow for use in your own community and describe how you will implement it.

Other comments:

 Remember to consider entering your responses and uploading your photos to our online tool.

Thank you for participating in **Community First Impressions!**



First Impressions

The UW-Extension **First Impressions** program was developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider in 1991 and revised by Andrew Lewis in 2002 and 2007. Laura Brown and Amy Greil further revised Community First Impressions in 2014. In addition, Lisa McKinnon, Jay Moynihan, Victoria Solomon, Beverly Stencel, Diana Tscheschlok, Ingrid West, and Kristine Zaballos provided valuable input.

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