



NEIGHBORHOOD

First Impressions

A program for small community or neighborhood 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 you ever 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 partner neighborhood before your upcoming visit? What are you expecting to see? Share some of what you know.

📷 Remember to take photos during your visit, adding comments to remind you of why you took them. If you are using an online version of this survey tool, upload the photos and comments as you go.

Five-minute impression

Take a five-minute drive through the neighborhood without stopping. What is your first impression? Find a place to safely pull over to the side of the road and write it down.

Neighborhood entrances

Approach the neighborhood from the major entrances. Rate and comment on each entrance.

Entrance #1: Road name and direction: _____

Circle one: A B C D F

Entrance #2: Road name and direction: _____

A B C D F

Housing

Grade and comment on the quality of housing in the neighborhood.

A B C D F

Grade and comment on the availability and affordability of housing in the neighborhood.

A B C D F

Comment on the condition of existing/older homes, vacant lots for new homes, new homes, apartments/rental housing, transitional housing, senior assisted living, and assisted living/group homes for those with disabilities.

Is there an adequate mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels?

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

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Education, health, & social services

Grade and comment on the visibility and availability of schools for a neighborhood 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, 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).

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 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 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

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Business & economy

Grade and comment on the overall appearance of buildings, displays, signage, and the streetscape in business areas. Does the neighborhood have a central business area? Was it easy to find?

A B C D F

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping options in the neighborhood.

A B C D F

Rate and comment on the signage of businesses in the neighborhood.

A B C D F

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

A B C D F

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

A B C D F

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

Grade and comment on the overall condition of the retail sector in the community or neighborhood.

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

What employers did you find in this neighborhood?

Does there appear to be a primary industry or type of business in the neighborhood?

Is there land where businesses could locate or expand? Would this community be an attractive location for industrial or business development? Why or why not?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Tourism

What features or populations make this neighborhood unique?

Is the community well known for anything like an attraction or event?

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

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

Grade and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions. Do you consider any of the attractions in the neighborhood to be underdeveloped?

A B C D F

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

A B C D F

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Government, infrastructure, & land use

Are municipal offices conveniently located, if present in the neighborhood?

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of the following infrastructure.

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Public transportation | A | B | C | D | F | Not applicable |
| Bus stops with shelters/shade | A | B | C | D | F | Not applicable |
| Bike lanes on street | A | B | C | D | F | Not applicable |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Streets | 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 |
| Parking | A | B | C | D | F | Not applicable |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 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 |
| Rain gardens | 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 |

Do you see compatible or conflicting land uses in the neighborhood (such as a park next to a museum or a housing area next to an industrial facility)?

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

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

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

A B C D F

Recreation, faith, & culture

Grade and comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following types of recreational facilities.

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 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 neighborhood appear to do for recreation/fun?

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

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

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

Grade and comment on the overall suitability of the following recreational facilities.

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 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 neighborhood have a vibrant nightlife?

Does the neighborhood have historical buildings or places? Are they well maintained?

Does the neighborhood 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 by marital statuses (single, married, divorced)? Why or why not?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Information from residents

Where do local residents recommend you stay, eat, or visit? One way to phrase a question might be: “Where would you recommend we stay, eat, or visit?”

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

A B C D F

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

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

Using your senses

What did the neighborhood **taste** like? Was there a specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or candy store that you will remember?

What did the neighborhood **smell** like? Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural, or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors (flowers, food, etc.)?

What **sounds** did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise (traffic, industrial, birds singing, water falls, music on the streets, trains, noon whistle).

How would describe the **environmental health** (air quality, litter, noise pollution)?

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the neighborhood 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.

Wrap up

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

What is the most outstanding feature of this neighborhood?

List three positive things you observed about this neighborhood.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three potential opportunities available to this neighborhood?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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


Would you find this neighborhood a desirable place to live?

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

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

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

Other comments:

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

Thank you for participating in **Neighborhood First Impressions!** If you have any questions, please contact the UW-Extension Center for Community & Economic Development: cced@ces.uwex.edu; 608-236-8136.



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, Laura Dombrock, and Ann Wied further revised *Neighborhood First Impressions* in 2014. In addition, Lisa McKinnon, Jay Moynihan, Victoria Solomon, Beverly Stencel, Diana Tscheschlok, Ingrid West, and Kristine Zaballos provided valuable input.

Questions about the the UW-Extension **First Impressions** program should be directed to:
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