

First Impressions

Basic Version - Revised 2017

*A program for
community improvement*

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Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of the First Impressions community exchange program. 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 asked to give an outsider’s candid viewpoint on various aspects of the community you visit.

We ask you to think in terms of three perspectives:

- 1) as a tourist visiting the area,*
- 2) as someone considering moving to the community,*
- 3) as someone looking to start a business in the community.*

Purpose:

To help a community learn more about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor.

Your Group:

Ideally 3-6 people. Try for a mix of M/F and from different age groups. Great to have young people involved. Best if you can car pool and make the visit as a team if you can. It makes for a more enjoyable experience.

In Advance:

Please review the manual in advance so you are familiar with the type of questions you will be asked to respond to.

Feel free to check out the community online.

One person should contact the chamber or government office to request a ‘packet of community information’ to see how they respond.

The Visit:

Plan to arrive in the target community by 10:00am. You will want to spend two - four hours touring the community. You will do the initial drive through and ‘Five Minute Impression’ as a group. Once this is completed you should split into teams and decide which

team will drive first and which team will start with walking the downtown to visit stores, city hall, chamber, etc.

Try to have lunch in different establishments if possible. After lunch the teams should switch driving/walking.

Your Story:

Develop a story to explain your reason for visiting the community. You don’t want the word to get out that the visit is happening. You get to be an actor for the day. (“I’m looking for property in the area”, “I’m interviewing for a job in a neighboring community”, “Just traveling through and looking for a place to vacation next year”, etc.)

Photos:

Feel free to take photos of buildings, signs, etc that will help you better make your point about comments or suggestions you are making about the community. Please be discreet as you don’t want to tip local residents off about the visit.

Tips:

- 1) Consider having a small notepad for notes as writing in this manual is rather conspicuous.*
- 2) Take notes, notes and more notes. If you don’t this will all turn to mush before you can do your report. When driving stop frequently to do so.*
- 3) EXPLAIN why you feel certain ways about things...the detail is helpful. Here’s one case when more words will be better than fewer.*
- 4) Look for positives as well as problems. Every community needs to know what it is doing well so they can build on those strengths.*
- 5) There is no wrong way to do this. Remember, two people may see or experience the same thing and react differently. That’s OK.*
- 6) Have Fun!!!*

Thank you!!

1) What was my perception before visiting the community? What did I expect?

2) Did you check out the community in advance via website or social media? If you did, what did you learn about the community and what was your impression of their online presence? What impressed you? What might they improve?

3) The 'five minute' impression - take one drive through the community without stopping and without talking to others in your car. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence so you don't influence each other.

4) Community entrances - Check out EACH community entrance and as you approach the community, what do you notice first?

5) Driving - Downtown Business Area - evaluate the downtown for appearance, signs, quality of buildings, variety of businesses, etc.

6) Driving - Additional Business areas - are there additional clusters of businesses? If so, evaluate them for appearance, signs, quality of buildings, variety of businesses, etc).

7) Driving - Overall comments on residential. Are there differences between neighborhoods.

8) Driving...Business/Commercial/Industrial Park - Overall impression?

9) Driving - Parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities.

10) Driving - Hospitals/clinics/other health services.

11) Driving - Signs/Billboards - were directions to parks/schools/etc. clearly marked and easily understood?

12) Driving...Schools & Churches...what is your impression based on their appearance?

13) Driving - Lodging/Camping - what is the availability?

14) Walking - comments on appearance of businesses, displays, signs, etc.

15) Walking around - comments on business staff - did they greet you, were they able to answer questions about the community, were they helpful, would you hire them for your business?

16) Walking around - (Ask questions, directions, start conversations) - comments on people in general - were they friendly, did they know answers to questions, could they give clear directions? What was their attitude toward their community?

17) Community information - what information did you find on businesses, attractions, events, things to do, etc. Brochures, signs, message boards, kiosks? Did you find a community map?

18) Walking around - Chamber or City/Village Hall - were they open, did they have information readily available, were staff friendly and helpful? Were the facilities well signed and appealing?

19) General items -

- Parking

- Public Restrooms

- Wi-Fi & Phone signals

- Water fountains/benches

20) Using your senses -

- What did the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurants)

- What did the community SMELL like?

- What SOUNDS did you hear?

- What did the community FEEL like? (Emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc. or physical response, i.e. rough streets, etc)

21) List the 5 most positive things you observed about the community.

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**

22) Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours.

23) If someone asks you about this community six months from now what do you think you will say...in one sentence.

Your final thoughts...If you were...

...traveling as a tourist, would you have stopped here? Why? Why not?

Would you come back? Why or why not?

...looking for a business location would you consider this community? Why? Why not?

What could make this community more appealing to business?

...looking for a place to live would you consider this community? Why? Why not?

What could make this community more appealing to families?