

UNCOMMON  COMMUNITIES

making our own future

A WINTHROP ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE PROGRAM

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A program for Community Improvement

Community: _____

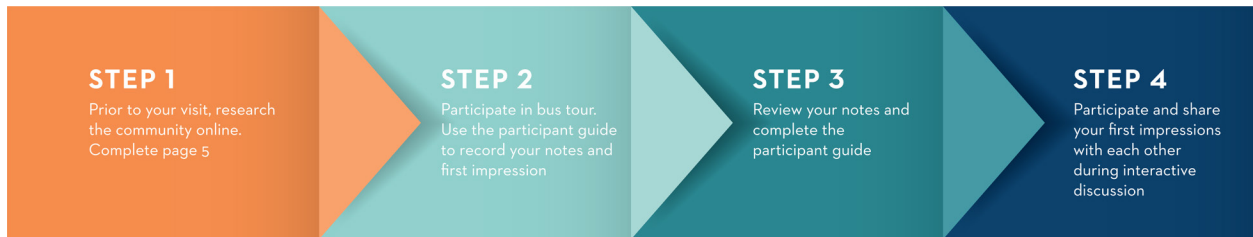
PURPOSE

The First Impressions program is designed to help a community learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of the first time visitor.

The assessment is modeled after the Connecticut First Impressions program that was adapted from the UW-Extension First Impressions Program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider in 1991 as a structured community assessment program that enables communities to learn about the first impression they convey to outsiders.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

As a volunteer, you will participate in a two-hour driving tour along with other session participants 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. You will record your responses in this participant's guide which will be compiled and presented back to the community.



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.

Before you attend each session, you'll need to review the questionnaire, maps and checklists. There will be a short training about how to record your observations, and logistics - including weather and safety information for the day of your visit.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Institute will provide pens, a note pad, and a map for use during your visit. In addition to the training, you will be asked to spend some time online reviewing visitor information for your host community. Consider taking a look at the community website, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Twitter, or other sources.

After the tour:

- 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 participants from each community to meet informally after their visits to discuss their experiences and share lessons learned.

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

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

Use descriptive sentences and give examples and suggestions. “Yes” or “No” answers don’t do a lot of good (i.e. There was no Chamber Office but some people said there was a “civic” club. No one seemed to know who the president was).

Remember:

- Try to find ways your host community shines – but don’t ignore the “warts.” Feel free to record strengths and weaknesses not included in this guide.
- 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 host 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:

9 - 10 = What I experienced far exceeded my expectations.

7 - 8 = What I experienced was better than my expectations.

5 - 6 = What I experienced met (but did not exceed) my expectations.

3 - 4 = What I experienced did not meet my expectations.

1 - 2 = What I experienced was far worse than my expectations.

YOUR VISIT

PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

Circle a grade for your impressions prior to arrival:

Poor

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Excellent

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 TripAdvisor and social media. Comment on the community website, if applicable, for its appearance, usefulness, and credibility of information.

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

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 the 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.

COMMUNITY ENTRANCES

Circle a grade for community entrances:

Poor

Excellent

1

2

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9

10

Approach the community from two 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.

+	-

DOWNTOWN

Circle a grade for downtown or central business district:

Poor

Excellent

1

2

3

4

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7

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9

10

Comment on the overall appearance of the buildings, displays, signage, and streetscape. Is the downtown walkable and accessible? Comment on the quality, availability, or necessity for parking in the downtown. Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for it to play a greater role?

+	-

TOURISM

Circle a grade for tourism:

Poor

Excellent

1

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Does the community appear to have a strong tourism sector? Why or why not? What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man-made)? Comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

+	-

HOUSING

Circle a grade for housing:

Poor

Excellent

1

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

+	-

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Circle a grade for business and economy:

Poor

Excellent

1

2

3

4

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7

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9

10

Is there a well-maintained industrial park? Why or why not? Would this community be an attractive location for small businesses/entrepreneurs? Why or why not?

+	-

EDUCATION

Circle a grade for education:

Poor

Excellent

1

2

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Comment on the availability and quality of schools (pre-school/kindergarten/Headstart, primary/elementary/middle schools, high schools, colleges/universities).

+	-

HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Circle a grade for health, social and emergency services:

Poor

Excellent

1

2

3

4

5

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10

Comment on the 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); community gardens, the availability of civic organizations and fitness centers; emergency shelters and services.

+	-

PARKS, STREETSCAPES AND BEAUTIFICATION

Circle a grade for public amenities:

Poor

Excellent

1

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Do areas of the community appear to be developing or declining? Comment on how effectively the community appears to be managing this. Does the community have historic buildings or places? Are they well maintained? What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing? Does the community appear welcoming to a diverse range of residents? Why or why not?

+	-

USING YOUR SENSES

Circle a grade for using your senses:

Poor

Excellent

1

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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 strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (children playing, hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets and 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?

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?

Would you consider living here? Why or why not?

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:



WINTHROP ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS SYSTEM