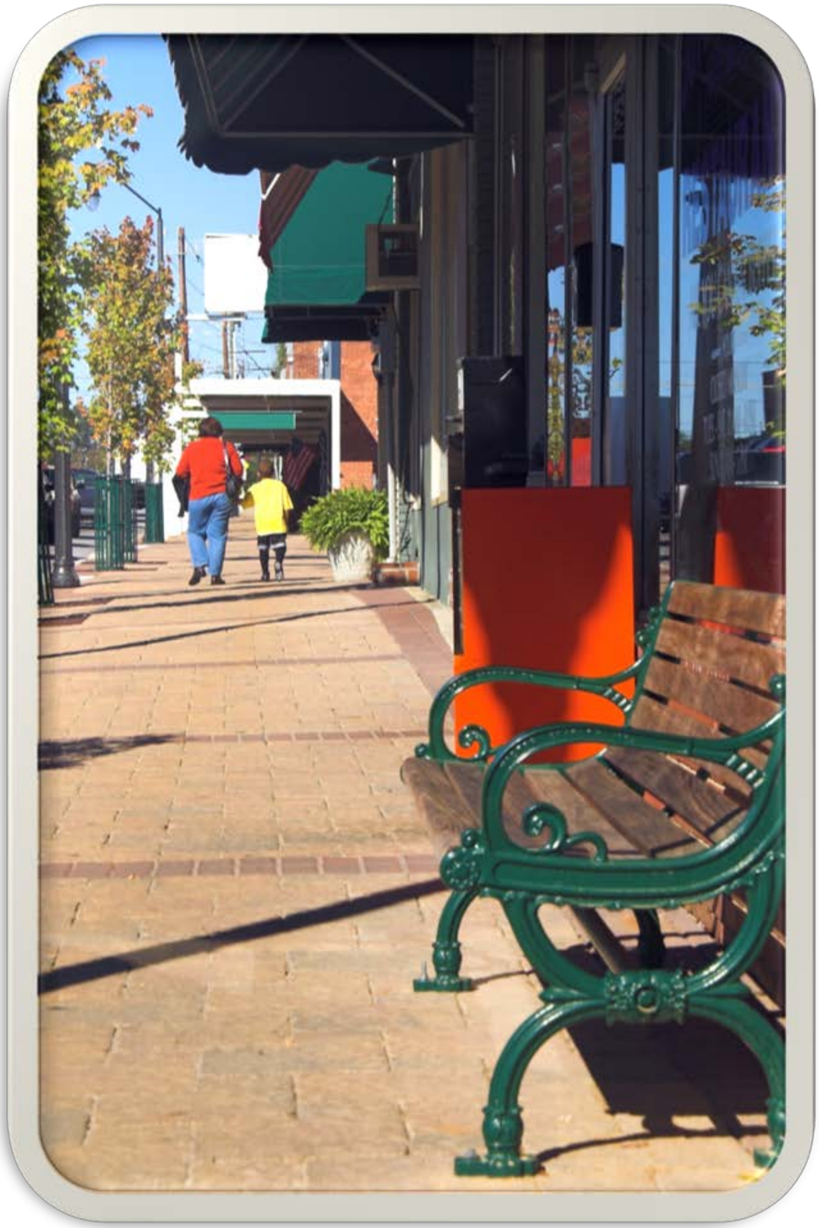

first impressions
SASKATCHEWAN

COORDINATORS GUIDE

The First Impressions Model was originally developed in 1991 by Professor Andy Lewis of the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, Center for Community Economic Development. This community assessment process has been implemented successfully for over twenty years by communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Materials utilized in First impressions Saskatchewan is adapted from the original University of Wisconsin program as well as similar initiatives implemented in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba.

We thank these forerunners for leading the way.

seda

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1. Introduction

The First Impressions Program was originally conceived as an assessment tool for communities that oftentimes have a difficult time being objective about their own surroundings. It can be challenging to view our communities as others see us (through the eyes of a customer, visitor, potential new resident or business). Our views are often skewed by over familiarization, lack of differing perspectives and expectations, and a reluctance to be completely honest with our neighbors when dealing with difficult issues – such as the appearance of buildings, customer service or maintenance of public facilities.

The original developers of First Impressions believed that communities require an accurate and honest picture of the present before they can visualize the future. Too often communities attempt to make improvements with little outside evaluation.

First Impressions is a straight forward concept and easy to implement. It offers a fresh perspective on the appearance, services, and infrastructure of a community and points out the strengths and shortcomings from the perspective of first time visitors.

1.1 Benefits for your community

A First Impressions Community Exchange can provide useful information to guide the following community development and planning activities:

Community Strategic Planning:
Implement *prior* to a strategic planning process to identify strengths and weaknesses, assets, and priority issues or:
Utilize *part-way* through a strategic planning process to assess whether you are addressing the right issues and opportunities.

Community Economic Analysis:
To confirm or build on what you have learned from a statistical analysis.

Community Service Assessment:
To assess services (information, public facilities, etc.) for visitors to the community.

Downtown Revitalization:
To identify specific issues, such as signage or parking, that need attention in your downtown.

Tourism Planning:
To identify local tourism strengths and weaknesses, including accommodation, customer service and quality of attractions.

To assess a specific tourism product. Is the town ready for a festival? Are you creating the impression you want? Are you providing visitors with what they want?

Investment Attraction:
To get a sense of how a potential investor might view your community.

Business Retention & Expansion:
To provide additional information about the services and infrastructure available to local businesses, as a complement to business retention and expansion efforts.

Quality Service:
To assess the effectiveness of a quality service training initiative that your retail and hospitality sector has implemented.

1.2 Method

Volunteers from two somewhat similar communities (size, location, common challenges) agree to engage in unannounced exchange visits and then report on their findings. Participants became "secret shoppers" for the day to discover what they can about their sister city. They follow procedures and reporting guidelines provided in a fully developed guide and copied for each participant. The guide ensures the evaluations and reports are thorough and somewhat uniform and minimizes the training of volunteers.

The knowledge gained through a First Impressions Community Exchange is then presented back to each community via a final report and presentation. This process can be the basis for positive and effective community action.

1.3 Community Readiness

First Impressions are a good starting point for communities that sense they need to address community issues influencing the community's ability to attract tourists as well as potential new businesses, and residents. First Impressions is an excellent tool for communities that have done an extensive objective analysis of the community but lack an external or subjective evaluation of the community.

We do not recommend implementing a First Impressions Community Exchange as a standalone initiative. We do suggest your community may be ready for this process if the following are in place:

Acceptance of Constructive Feedback:
First Impressions provides a community with an honest appraisal of their community, as seen through the eyes of a visitor. This means the final report will offer a fair amount of constructive criticism (along with praise). A community that has already received a fair amount of criticism from local leaders, or media, may not be ready for a First Impressions exchange. Most importantly, are local leaders, residents, business owners, and community groups ready to act on constructive feedback?

Commitment and Leadership:
A community or sponsoring organization must be willing to organize the exchange, pursue a willing exchange community, and make sure the final report is compiled, delivered, and presented by an agreed upon date. Is there an organization that will take the lead to coordinate and implement the exchange? Will key community representatives be involved (eg: Municipality, Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement District).

The provision of a Project Coordinator is vital to the success of the exchange. This individual needs to be skilled at organizing, facilitating and report writing. The Coordinator will need to organize the exchange, pursue a willing exchange community, coordinate the team visit, make sure the final report is compiled and sent, and organize the local report-back meeting and action planning.

In addition to the Coordinator, you will require a diverse team of volunteers representing a variety of perspectives. Can you recruit a team willing to commit a day to conduct a community visit and to prepare a report? Two to three team members must be willing to travel back to the exchange community to present the report. Team members must also be able to be objective, and provide constructive feedback.

Adequate Resources are in Place:

Are your community organizations and partners willing to invest/cover the costs to implement the program? Costs may include copying of the assessment guide, travel to the exchange community, meal costs for team members during the community visit, possible accommodation costs (if an overnight trip format is chosen), photo processing costs, report-back meeting room, and refreshment costs.

It is Complementary to Other Initiatives:

The First Impressions exchange offers a fresh perspective on a number of elements/sectors of your community. Have you identified the elements/sectors on which your community needs the outside perspective? Will the First Impressions process support or enhance existing or planned initiatives in the community? Is there a strategic planning process underway that will benefit from the first impressions imitative?

Commitment to Follow-up:

Just doing a First Impressions exchange will have little impact unless some thought is given to how the results will be shared with the broader community. Hosting a “town meeting” is an effective vehicle. This typically means sharing what the visitation team saw in the community they visited as well as the impressions of the visiting team. This can be done as a presentation with images that illustrate observations made in the final report.

This is best followed-up with some type of action planning– getting groups of individuals to commit some time to address specific issues raised in the report. If the community has a long track record of participating in community development programs or plans with little follow-up, this may not be the appropriate program to implement. On the other hand, if the local media is involved and informed of the results, it will be difficult for the community to simply ignore the final report.

2. Getting Organized

2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

2.1.1 Sponsoring Organization Role

The sponsoring organization will identify a volunteer or salaried Coordinator for the First Impressions Community Exchange program to organize their half of the exchange. The sponsoring organization will also prepare a budget for the exchange. (See Section 2.5 Program Costs).

2.1.2 The Coordinator's Role

Ideally, the coordinator needs to be skilled at communication, planning, writing and presenting. Coordination responsibilities include:

- Recruit a "sister town/village/city" willing to do an exchange with your community. Use the Exchange Commitment Form (found in Appendix A of this guide) to solidify a commitment to a time line for completing the exchange.
- Organize the trip to the exchange community.
- Provide a brief orientation for your team members.
- Recruit a team of 5-6 volunteers from your community who are willing to conduct a community visit.
- Participate in the community visit.
- Collect comments and photos from team members (recorded in the Team Member Guide Booklet).
- Prepare a written final report and PowerPoint presentation based on the findings of the team.
- Coordinate a community event where you can share the final report with your community and begin planning for action. You will also need to present the findings of your report to the exchange community. This is typically done as a "Town Meeting" using a Power Point presentation with key photos and comments. Don't forget to publicize your event through media releases and invitations!

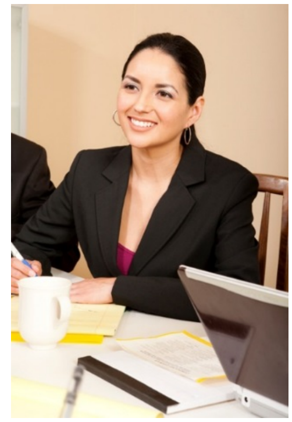
2.1.3 Visiting Team Members

Visiting Team Members travel together to the exchange community. While in the community, they complete the First Impressions guide booklet, while playing a designated role (see section 4.5).

In advance of the visit, one team member will explore the exchange community's web site and provide their first impressions of the community based on the web visit. All Visiting Team Members should participate in the preparation of the written report to the exchange community. At least one Visiting Team member will accompany the Coordinator to present the report to their exchange community.

2.2 Support from SEDA

SEDA staff will support member communities/organizations in implementing a First Impressions Community Exchange via one of the following two options:



BASIC SUPPORT (free to members)

- provision of electronic copies of a Coordinators Guide and Visiting Team Guide Booklets; provision of presentation templates to assist in community and volunteer orientation and final reporting;
- virtual coaching support;
- assistance in identifying appropriate exchange communities.

ENHANCED SUPPORT (fee for service)

- brokering a term of reference between the two communities;
- coordinating participating communities including the community visits;
- print copies of all team materials are provided;
- facilitating final report meetings;
- supporting community action planning based on the outcomes of the final reports.

2.3 Finding an Exchange Community

SEDA staff can help you identify a community with which to conduct the First Impressions Community Exchange. The community should have comparable characteristics, such as size and economic base. When identifying possible exchange communities, try to choose communities that are similar to yours in some of these respects:

- population;
- proximity to an urban centre or major population centre. Are your communities both bedroom communities or equally remote?
- economy – major industries or employers. Is employment based on tourism or manufacturing or resource sectors?
- distance to major highways;
- common economic issues – dependence on a single industry, declining downtown;
- demographics – the proportion of seniors, etc.;
- unique geological/natural feature (river, lakes, valleys, etc.); and
- proximity to each other – your exchange community should be within a reasonable driving time to allow for maximum visiting/assessment time but should be far enough away so the Visiting Team Members are not familiar with the community.

The best matches are communities that are similar but not identical. There should be sufficient differences to enable the communities to learn from each other, but not so many that they cannot relate to each other. Once you have identified some possible match communities, you should contact the appropriate community representatives to determine:

a) Whether their community would benefit from First Impressions Community Exchange; and

b) If their community has the capacity to implement an exchange within the desired timeframe.

Exchange communities should discuss and agree on:

- Timing for the community visits – when visits will be completed;
- Timing for visiting team reports – when reports will be completed and presentations made to each exchange community;
- The focus of each assessment; for example, an exchange can encompass the entire community or be designed to focus on specific areas such as tourism, downtown revitalization, industrial development or other issues;
- Boundaries of the geographic area to be visited;
- Format for the visits – one full day or afternoon-evening-morning, weekend or weekday;
- Budget – will each community cover their own expenses?

It is advisable to set out the terms of the exchange in writing, signed by representatives from both communities. A sample Terms of Reference is provided in Appendix A.

2.4 Timing and Format

The exchange visits should occur within a month of each other, to reduce the variability of perceptions due to the change of seasons. Report-back meetings should take place within four to six weeks of the exchange visit, to use the information while it is still fresh in everyone's mind.

Consider whether to conduct the visit on a weekday or weekend. Note that municipal offices and other organizations you will want to visit may be closed on weekends. Your decision about timing will depend on the services and areas on which the exchange community wants feedback.

The format for the visit should be based on discussions with the exchange community, as well as volunteer availability and input. The visit can take place within a day, or it can be spread out over two half days (afternoon-evening-next day morning).

If you are conducting an exchange in a large community, it is advisable to take two or more vehicles for the exchange visit. This will provide the necessary mobility for the team members as walking between locations may not be practical given the short time frame.

Refer to sample visit agendas in Section 4.0.

There are advantages and disadvantages with both of the aforementioned formats:

Trip Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Overnight Visit	*Suitable for communities located more than a three hour drive apart;* *Provides an opportunity to assess the community's night life, dining and accommodations quality;* *Provides the Team with more time to meet to review findings and identify gaps yet to be covered during their visit.*	*Requires a greater commitment of volunteer time;* *Involves accommodations and meal costs.*

Same Day Visit	*Visiting team does not require accommodations and will be back home on the same day;* *This option is often more viable for volunteers.*	*Does not allow for assessment of overnight accommodations and night life;* *Does not allow for extra time to complete all sections of the questionnaire;*

Flow Chart of Timing and Tasks

Timing	Component	Tasks
	Preparing to Engage	• Identify local Coordinator and an Alternate Coordinator (if possible) • Identify budget and resources
1 to 2 months prior to the visit	Recruitment and Orientation	• Recruit and orient the visiting exchange team (typically 5 to 7 volunteers) • Distribute Team Guide Booklets • Complete the 'Prior to Visit' section in the guide booklet and return to the Coordinator • Tentatively assign role playing to each member • Assign teams (of two) • Assign sites (such as the downtown, library, schools, real estate offices, parks, banks, shopping areas, or housing) to team members
1 month prior to the visit	Preparing for the exchange	• Confirm dates, logistics, equipment and supplies • Collect information about the exchange community – assign one member of the visiting team to source information from the municipal office, economic development corporation, chamber of commerce, tourism office, etc without letting the exchange community know
1 week before the visit	Preparing for the exchange	• Set time and place to meet on exchange day and advise the visiting team • Give each team member a copy of the agenda for the day • Secure cameras and digital cards or films • Exchange cell phone numbers and enter them into the team guide booklets
	Exchange Visit	• Provide visiting team members with the guide booklet • Confirm role playing assignments • Designate photographers advising them to complete the photo log in the guide booklet • Travel to the community in teams and complete guide booklets

3 to 4 weeks after the visit	Exchange Reporting and Presentation	• With the assistance of visiting team members, the Coordinator prepares the report and presentation • Coordinator liaises with the exchange community's Coordinator to identify a date, time and place for the report back meeting • Visiting team members complete the program evaluation forms and return to the Coordinator – Coordinator submits them to SEDA • Coordinator and 1 or 2 volunteers meet with the exchange community to present report
4 to 6 weeks after the visit	Action Planning	• Coordinator identifies method and participant groups that will be used to identify priorities based on the Exchange Report and develop an action plan for those priorities

2.5 Program Costs

The sponsoring organization will allocate a budget for the exchange to reimburse volunteers for some of their expenses.

Costs that your volunteers will incur are:

- travel costs (gas, accommodations if overnight); and meal costs.

In addition to the exchange visit costs, there may also be costs for:

- copying the team guide booklets;
- mailing notices for a report-back meeting;
- meeting room rental (for a report-back meeting);
- photo developing (depending on the camera used); and
- preparation and copying of the report.

3. Preparing for Your Visit

3.1 Supply Checklist

Ensure the following are secured before the exchange visit:

- Maps;
- Visiting Team Member Guide Booklets
- Extra pens and pencils
- Cameras – and film or digital cards
- Cell phones to make calls amongst team members during the visit.

3.2 Recruiting Visiting Team Members

The Coordinator recruits team members who will travel together to visit the exchange community. The size of your team will depend on the size of your partner community. Communities with a population of 1500 or fewer require at least four people on the visiting team. Communities with a larger population may require as many as 10 team members to check out various areas of interest.

Before trying to recruit team members, decide how they will be reimbursed for their expenses, such as lunch and mileage to the partner community. Select team members who represent a variety of perspectives in your community. Their varied perceptions will enhance the assessment process and their participation could broaden interest in your own community and economic development efforts. There are no "experts" in this process. Each person's perceptions and first impressions are valid.

Recruit volunteers who are outgoing, can make an objective assessment and can provide constructive feedback to the exchange community. Look for some volunteers who have report writing and presentation skills, and familiarity using a digital camera.

Try to include a combination of the following:

- business owner;
- local government official;
- teacher/someone from the education sector;
- professionals (physician, dentist, lawyer, architect);
- realtor;
- newspaper editor or reporter;
- banker;
- community volunteer;
- retiree;
- parent;
- young single adult;
- high school student or youth.

Try to recruit volunteers who are not familiar with your exchange community so that they can truly offer a first impression. When recruiting, clearly communicate:

- the time commitment;
- what you expect from the volunteers;
- the learning opportunity that this program offers to them; and
- any costs they might incur.

4.0 The Visit

4.1 Agenda for the Visit

The exchange community and your Visiting Team Members should all agree on the format/agenda for the visit. (Section 2.3 Timing and Format) Have team members add the itinerary for the day into their Team Guide Booklets (space is designated for this on the inside back cover).

Here are two possible format options:

One Day Format		Two Day Format	
Time	Activities	Time	Activities
8:00 am	Meet in the home community and prepare to travel to exchange community	8:00 am	Meet in the home community and prepare to travel to exchange community
10:30 am	Arrive in exchange community Complete "5-Minute Impression" Drive through to assess community entrances, residential and industrial areas	12:30 pm	Arrive in exchange community Complete "5-Minute Impression" Drive through to assess community entrances, residential and industrial areas – have lunch
11:30 am	Split up and role-play to assess other areas: municipal services, tourist attractions, etc. The timing of visits should be based on hours of operation.	1:30 pm	Split up and role-play to assess other areas: municipal services, tourist attractions, etc. Timing of visits should be based on hours of operation as they will likely close at 4:30 pm
12:30 pm	Enjoy lunch and assess the downtown and retail areas	6:00 pm	Enjoy dinner and assess the downtown and retail areas
1:30 pm	Continue to explore the community and gather information from community residents	7:00 pm	Continue to explore the community and other evening entertainment and recreation areas
3:30 pm	Meet to review progress and ensure all sections of the booklet are completed	8:30 pm	Meet to review progress and ensure all sections of the booklet are completed
4;30 pm	Complete assessment	Overnight	Stay in local accommodation; try to include different types of accommodation

5:00 pm	Tour community for photos	9:00 am	Complete assessment Tour community for photos – visit municipal and recreation areas not visited the day prior
6:00 pm	Travel home	12:00 pm	Travel home

4.2 Getting Ready

Last Minute Checklist

- Meet at an agreed upon location.
- Make sure each team member receives a Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet and pen.
- Ensure photographers have their cameras and a copy of the photo log (in the Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet).

4.3 During the Visit

Coordinators:

- Encourage team members to split up during lunch (or dinner) so a variety of dining establishments can be evaluated. Avoid fast food.
- .Remind team members to save receipts if lunch expenses are reimbursed
- Before team members separate into small groups, agree on a time and place to meet.
- Encourage each individual to complete his/her guide booklet so that everyone's first impressions are captured.

Team Members

- As a group, identify the main approaches to the community. Each team member will record his/her observations of each entrance.
- Drive through neighbourhoods, recording observations in the housing section of the guide booklet.
- Collect written materials such as newspapers, tourism brochures, bulletins, and community calendars.
- Look for positives as well as problems. If you see a problem, try to think of a way to remedy the problem.
- Look for things that you could implement in your own community.
- There is no wrong way to do this, remember, two people may see the same thing and react differently –that's OK!
- Take individual notes before you forget your thoughts on an area and before discussing it with other team members. Your individual first impressions count.
- Take pictures – use the photo log in the Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet.
- Regroup partway through the visit to identify any sections of the guide booklet that still need to be completed.

4.4 On the way home

- Team members expand on their comments in the guide booklet.
- Team members discuss plans for preparing and presenting the team's report to the exchange community.
- The coordinator collects the written guide booklets within one day of the completed visit to ensure that the First Impressions are captured.
- Ensure that photos are provided to the Coordinator following the Exchange.

4.5 Team Member Role Playing

To assess the exchange community from various perspectives, your team members can role-play during the visit.

Consider the following roles:

- new resident, or someone considering moving to the area;
- someone trying to locate the property for development;
- someone interviewing for a job in this or a neighbouring community;
- someone looking to set up a business in the community;
- tourist travelling through who has decided to explore;
- shopper; or
- a student planning to attend college here(if applicable).

The role you choose will determine some of the places you may visit and questions you may ask. Your questions might include:

I've never been here before. What is there to do for recreation?

How do I get to …?

Which restaurant would you recommend here? Where would be a good place for lunch?

My family and I may stay here while passing through on our way to a wedding next month. Are there any good places to stay?

I'm thinking about moving to a smaller (larger) community, maybe something like this community. Are the schools good here? Where is the best place to look for housing?

I am considering opening a business here, what services are you missing in the community?

Is there a list of industrial or commercial buildings for sale or lease?

Are commercial building sites available? Do commercial building sites have services, such as hydro and water?

I have half a day to spend in this area this summer/fall… what would you suggest I/we do?

5. After the Visit

5.1 Sharing the Findings of your Visit to the Exchange Community

Once you have completed the visit, the Coordinator (and some Visiting Team Members) will complete a report that summarizes the comments from your entire team.

A presentation will be made to the exchange community. This presentation should occur within four to six weeks of community visits.

5.1.1 Preparing the Written Report

This report should include a cover letter that provides a profile of your visiting team roles/perspective taken, the date the visit took place, the amount of time spent in the community, a general summary of the visit, and contact information. Include photos from the visit to the report.

The report can be prepared using a few different approaches. Here are two:

1. Using the report template, the Coordinator prepares a draft report based on the completed guide booklets collected from Visiting Team Members at the end of the trip. The draft report is then circulated to team members for comments. If possible, the Coordinator should facilitate a group meeting with Visiting Team Members to finalize the report.
2. The Coordinator facilitates a group meeting, where one team member records, in the report template, the individual comments shared by team members for each section of the guide booklet. The report is then refined by the Coordinator and circulated to team members for review.

The time required for report preparation varies but will take at least a few hours and in most cases, from 1-2 days. This will depend on the amount of discussion among team members and whether or not photos are integrated into the written report. Summarizing multiple comments will also take time. A report with bullet points is fine as long as the key messages contained in the report are clear.

Once the report is finalized, a copy should be sent to the Coordinator from the exchange community, at least one day prior to the public presentation.

5.1.2 Preparing the Presentation

The Coordinator and at least two members from your visiting team will prepare and make a presentation to your exchange community. Use volunteers that are comfortable presenting reports and providing constructive feedback.

The presentation is a visual report of the guide booklet you completed, using the digital pictures you took during your visit. Include positive images to help the community celebrate their assets and achievements, along with photos that show areas and issues that need to be addressed. It is important to remember that high-resolution digital photos will add considerable “bytes” to the size of the report file, which will make it difficult to circulate by electronic mail. It is advisable to reduce the resolution or size of digital photos prior to inserting it into the written report format. The high-resolution copies of the photos can be retained for use in the slide presentation.

An electronic slide show template is available from SEDA to use for the slide presentation. Use a couple of bullet-point slides for each section of the guide booklet, along with the photos.

Provide an electronic copy of your presentation to the exchange community as part of your report. They will be able to use the pictures as "before" pictures for reports on projects that they undertake as a result of the feedback you have provided through the First Impressions Community Exchange.

5.1.3 Guidelines for giving constructive feedback

Providing constructive feedback is vital to the success of the First Impressions Community Exchange. Constructive feedback is not the same as advice: it is descriptive rather than evaluative. The challenge is to provide information that will help the exchange community improve while minimizing critical comments that elicit a defensive response. At the same time, most communities appreciate frank, honest comments rather than "sugar-coated" observations.

Provide specific feedback rather than general, and focus on things that can realistically be changed. Give feedback that is accurate and based on observations. Provide positive feedback first, and then describe areas that you feel need attention from the community. Ensure that the feedback message is clearly understood.

Focus on the value of your message to the receiver.

Use phrases like – "From our/my perspective; we observed that..." as opposed to

"You don't have, you should have," etc.

Receiving constructive feedback is also part of the exchange process. When you are receiving feedback, listen to the whole message - for positive feedback and suggestions for improvements. Be open. Listen closely without making excuses. Do not explain, defend or deny. Ask for clarification and allow time to absorb the information. Recognize that a community cannot "grow" unless it is open to constructive feedback.

5.2 Getting Feedback from the Team that Visited Your Community

The report-back meeting is an opportunity for you to hear from the team that visited your community. The meeting should occur within four to six weeks of their visit to your community.

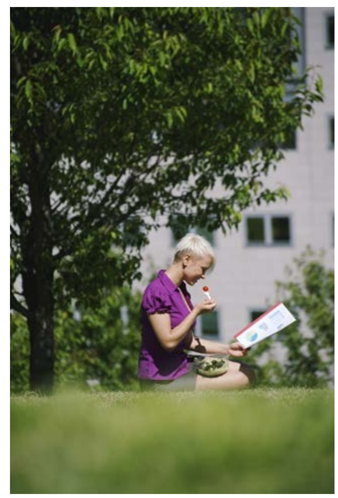
Invite community leaders, business owners, municipal representatives, economic development organizations, residents and the media (see Appendix B for media release template) to hear the report. This event is a chance to identify issues in your community that needs attention, to celebrate the community's assets, and to inspire volunteers to get involved in community and economic development activities.

This meeting is an extremely important part of the First Impressions Community Exchange process and requires careful and thoughtful planning. It can be elaborate or simple; it can involve just a small group of community leaders, or be an open meeting with social time to allow for networking.

Possible Agenda:

1. Welcome and introduction to the First Impressions Community Exchange Program. Explain how the program works. Introduce sponsor organizations, Coordinator, and Visiting Team Members.
2. Presentation (verbal and visual) by the exchange community.
3. Review of major points found in the final report. These points could be complemented with photos taken by the visiting team.
4. Review of things learned from the exchange community visit (What did your visiting team see and learn from their visit to the other community that could be applied to your own community?).
5. Action Planning
6. Consider breaking up into small groups to begin addressing some of the issues presented or found in the final report. Ask small groups to identify some possible actions, and then prioritize the actions

5.3 Communicating and Sharing Results



It is important to share the results of the First Impression Community Exchange initiative with your community. By increasing public awareness of the initiative as well as the recommendations that your exchange community has made, you gain support for the action planning and implementation phases.

You will need to be creative in finding ways to share the results with the broader community as not everyone:

- reads the local paper;
- has access to the internet;
- listens to the local radio station; and/or
- watches the local news channel.

A combination of approaches needs to be used. In addition to working with the media, consider using newsletters, websites, flyers, posters, invitations and presentations to community organizations. Your message needs to reach people where they gather.

Regardless of the approach that is used, your marketing and communication material need to be clear and concise so that people will read/hear and understand the key message. It must also motivate people to get involved.

As the media will play an important role in developing community awareness and highlighting successes, the following section provides some guidelines for approaching the media.

5.3.1 Writing a Media Release

A sample media release announcing the time and location of the report-back public meeting is included in Appendix B. In preparing a media release, ask yourself the following question: What does the public want or need to know about the exchange?

All releases should contain the relevant information needed by the media to file your story.

1 Decide what is the most interesting and relevant fact and put it first. Then in the same paragraph, supply the missing WHO, WHY, WHEN, WHAT, WHERE and HOW.
2 In paragraph two, use an example or anecdote, or a quotation from a key person to support the principal point that led off your release. The paragraph should be limited to two or three sentences. Use full names i.e., John Smith when mentioning a person for the first time, then last name only or Mr., Ms. Mrs., or Miss, and last name for subsequent references.
3 Three paragraphs are the recommended maximum in a media release. However, if you should find yourself with subsequent paragraphs, arrange the paragraphs in descending order of importance, so the release can be edited from the bottom up. The last paragraph repeats the value of the story (see headline), and suggests there is more to the story in an interview.
4 Keep the release as short and simple as possible. Use short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs; lots of verbs and few adjectives. Review it and delete unnecessary words and details; check and double check for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and accuracy.

Formatting Tips for a Media Release

1. Use the sponsoring organization's letterhead, or type the name and address of the organization at the top of the page.
2. Use double-spaced typing on 21.5 x 25.5 cm (8 ½ x 11 inch) paper.
3. Type only on one side of the sheet(s).
4. ·Use wide margins, approximately 2.5 – 5 cm (1 – 2 inch).
5. In the upper left-hand corner of the first sheet, put the name and address of the organization; and the name and telephone number of the contact person.
6. Approximately eight lines below on the right; type "For Immediate Release" or "For Release …: (give date and time)
7. Begin to type one-third of the way down the first sheet. The white space at the top of the first sheet is for the headline, the editor's instructions, and perhaps a re-write of the first few sentences. The editor will sometimes re-write the lead if he/she thinks the same story has been sent to other media.
8. Do not split words at the ends of lines, or sentences at the end of pages.
9. Try to end pages with complete paragraphs.
10. Try to limit the release to one page. If more than one page is needed for the media release, put "MORE" at the bottom of the first sheet and number the following sheet(s).
11. The following sheet(s) should also have the name of the organization and release date at the top.

12. At the end of the release, type “-30-“, or “END”.
13. Include the name, address and telephone number of a contact person.
14. Before sending the release, proofread with an eagle eye. Should you discover a major error after it has been sent, call and correct it right away.
15. The KEY to having the media use your information is to make it NEWSWORTHY, TIMELY, ACCURATE, AND COMPLETE.
16. Send media releases to a designated contact, a minimum of two weeks before the release date. Follow-up with a telephone call to see if the release has been received and to discuss the event further or answer any questions.
17. When contacting the media be aware of and call outside of their production deadlines. For example if you are working with a weekly paper that goes to press Wednesday morning, don’t call Wednesday morning.

5.4 Appreciation and Follow-up

Remember to send thank you notes to your own volunteer Visiting Team Members and to the Visiting Team from the exchange community.

6 Community Action

The First Impressions Community Exchange does not end with the Visiting Team reports. It is critical that each community consider the observations provided by the exchange community, and identify actions to address any identified shortcomings.

The report-back presentation and written report are meant to stimulate thought and discussion around the issues identified by the visiting team. It is recommended that each community channel this feedback into an action planning session to ensure that the issues are addressed or acted on while they are still fresh in everyone’s mind.

Your community can develop a list of possible action items:

1 based on the report you received from your exchange community and
2 based on ideas your visiting team picked up when they visited the exchange community.

6.1 Priorities and Action Plans

It is important to hold an action-planning meeting within one or 2 weeks of the report back meeting. Participation at the action planning meeting should include the Visiting Team Members, representatives from the sponsoring organization(s) as well as additional representatives from business related associations, the municipality, and consumers at large.

Although a general invitation to participate in the action planning meeting can be made at the report back meeting, it is important for the sponsoring organization and Visiting Team Members to identify key contacts that should be involved in the action planning phase and to personally invite/recruit these individuals to participate.

During the Action Planning meeting, you need to consider:

1. Which actions could be realistically carried out in the short term with the resources available to you?
2. What actions require planning to implement in the medium to long-term (1 to 3 years)
3. Which actions give the biggest "bang for the buck"?
4. What actions complement or build on other projects in the community?
5. How will these actions affect other groups/events/projects in the community?
6. Which actions could be delegated to other community groups?
7. Which actions build on the strengths or resources you have?

Use these questions and others to help you develop your list of priorities for your action plan.

Sample Action-Planning Exercise:

1. As soon as community members have reviewed the final report, hold a meeting to discuss the issues identified. It may be helpful to have someone act as a facilitator for the meeting.
2. At the meeting, work through the report and identify the issues needing action, both now and in the future. If you have a large enough group, break into smaller groups of 3 to 4 people to discuss different sections of the report. Record the recommendations on a flip chart so they can be seen by all participants.
3. Bring the small groups together and allow for each group to share what they determined were the action items. There should be an opportunity to discuss differences of opinion between the groups and to reach an agreement on the recommendations for each section of the report.
4. The next step is to prioritize the action items in each section and to determine who in the group or the community is best equipped to move forward with an action plan. For example, if the visiting team felt that the downtown area had some appealing but underdeveloped features for tourism attraction, this issue could be referred to as the local Business Improvement Area (BIA) coordinator. Where there is no such organization or individual, it may be up to members of the team to take leadership on some of the action items.
5. Establishing priorities within each section of the report can be accomplished in a number of ways.

Common techniques include the following ‘nominal group technique’:

a) Have each participant individually rank the items using a numerical scale with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important. The numbers assigned to each action are then totaled to identify the group’s priorities
b) Provide participants with a number of dots and having them assign one or more dots to the action items. Priority will be determined by the number of dots each action received.
c) Identify action plans that can be accomplished quickly and at minimal cost, thus providing the community with some quick wins and a springboard to move on to bigger projects.
d) Classify the actions by “must do”; “should do” or “could do”. Hold a group vote for each action or discuss the actions and their relevant importance until a consensus is reached.

6. Once priorities have been assigned, detailed action plans need to be developed for each area/item. As part of this exercise, you need to identify the small tasks or activities that are needed to complete the priority action. To help with this, try to visualize or brainstorm the various things that will need to be done to get from where you are today to where you want to be. List the steps in logical sequence. For successful implementation, it is important to assign realistic completion dates and responsibility to a specific person or organization.

   The development of detailed action plans may need to be completed at a subsequent meeting and/or be assigned to smaller working groups. If this is the case, ensure that a specific meeting or completion date is identified for the action plans. Here is an easy chart to guide the process:

ACTION	BY WHOM	DEADLINE	RESOURCES & SUPPORT		POTENTIAL BARRIERS	COMMUNICATION PLAN	EVALUATION
What needs to be done	Who will lead?	By what date will the action be done?	In Place	Needed	What individuals and organizations might resist? How?	What individuals and organizations should be informed of this action?	What will success look like?

7. Before closing the meeting, set a date for a follow-up meeting and a system to track the progress of the action items.
8. Report results from each follow-up meeting to the community through the local media and other sources. Invite additional community members to participate in the implementation of actions.
9. Consider organizing educational programs to address some of the deficiencies or assets identified as a result of the First Impressions Community Exchange.

Topics might include:

- Customer Service/Customer Care
- Downtown Revitalization
- Capacity-building for existing community-based organizations (Economic Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce)

- Community Economic Analysis, to provide an objective analysis of the community that would complement the subjective feedback from First Impressions
- Business Retention and Expansion

6.2 Coordinating Action Plans

Your sponsoring organization should take on a coordinating role, ensuring that projects:

- are distributed to a cross-section of community organizations;
- link to each other and support the broader community development plan;
- have realistic completion dates;
- are adequately resourced (human and financial), and that these resources are coming from a variety of contributors;
- have involvement from everyone that needs to be involved or has a “vested” interest; and
- are implemented, evaluated and reported on.

Once the action plan has been implemented, the sponsoring organization should work with the broader community in identifying further actions to contribute to and build on community assets. A follow-up First Impressions Community Exchange initiative is one method of identifying future priorities.

6.3 Celebrate Success

It is important to provide updates to the community on the actions undertaken as a follow-up to the First Impressions exchange. Congratulate those who have completed tasks and celebrate what has been achieved.

7. Follow-Up Evaluation

It is important that you also evaluate how effective the First Impressions experience was in helping you to identify priorities for community change. In particular, if you have received funding from a sponsoring organization or from the local Council to conduct the exchange, you will also need to report on how the funds were used.

Using the evaluation forms provided in Appendix C, determine how participating community members feel about the First Impressions process. It is important to do this from a few perspectives:

1. Community members who attend the report-back meeting and help implement any follow-up actions;
2. Visiting Team Members and Coordinator; and
3. Community leaders/sponsors of the exchange.

Members of the community who attend the Report-back presentation by representatives from your exchange community can comment on the usefulness of the information they gained and the plans for change and improvement that were sparked by the First Impressions Community Exchange.

Visiting Team Members should complete an evaluation form immediately after the report presentation. This evaluation form asks for feedback about team preparation, the Guide, the Questionnaire, and the information available for planning and reporting.

It may be useful for community leaders or members of a sponsoring group - for example, the Town Council or Chamber of Commerce - to complete an evaluation of the outcomes generated by a First Impressions Exchange. Appendix C includes a sample evaluation Questionnaire, "Evaluating First Impressions Exchange Outcomes," to help community leaders begin to think about how they might make plans for community projects as a result of what they learned through the exchange.

Appendix A

Sample Terms of Reference

Community A

Community B

First Impressions Exchange Commitment Form

Community A and ***Community B*** have partnered to conduct a First Impressions Community Exchange.

Purpose

The purpose of the First Impressions Exchange (FI) is to help ***Community A*** and **Community B** learn about their strengths and shortcomings through the eyes of first-time visitors. FI is a structured community assessment that enables communities to learn about the first impression they convey to outsiders. It offers a fresh perspective on the appearance, services, and infrastructure of each community.

Volunteer teams from ***Community A*** and ***Community B*** will undertake unannounced, one-day visits, record their observations, and give constructive feedback to the exchange community. The knowledge gained through this First Impressions Community Exchange is intended to serve as a basis for community action.

Expectations

Community A and ***Community B*** will:

- identify a coordinator to plan the First Impressions Community Exchange;
- recruit volunteers for the visiting team from their community, and make arrangements for the team to travel to visit and complete an assessment of the exchange community within the agreed-upon timeframe;
- prepare a written report and slide presentation on the visiting team's observations during the visit; present the report at a public meeting in the exchange community within the agreed-upon timeframe;
- host a public meeting within the agreed-upon timeframe, when the exchange community will present their report; and
- develop an action plan based on the report by the visiting team from the exchange community.

Roles and Responsibilities

Community A and ***Community B*** will identify a coordinator for each of their respective First Impressions Exchange projects.

The Coordinator, working with the team members of the sponsoring organization will:

- coordinate the visit to the exchange community (timeframe, budget, etc.);
- recruit volunteers for the visiting team, ensuring an appropriate mix of team members in terms of skills, profession, age, gender, etc.;
- organize the trip to the exchange community;

- collect completed team member guide booklets;
- facilitate the preparation of a written report for the exchange community;
- prepare a slide presentation featuring the highlights of the report and present the report at a public meeting in the partner community;
- host a report-back meeting to hear the exchange community's report;
- coordinate a media communications plan and identify a media spokesperson, if necessary; and

Visiting Team Members will:

- attend training/orientation meeting(s) in preparation for the visit;
- review the guide booklet prior to the visit;
- complete an assessment guide booklet during the visit;
- participate in the preparation of a written report for the exchange community; and
- if selected, present the team's findings to the exchange community at an agreed-upon time.

Timing and Format

The exchange visits will occur within the month of __________ 20____

Report-back meetings will take place within the month of ____________20___

Exchange visits will follow a one-day format and be conducted during a weekday.

Program Costs

Program costs may include the travel expenses for Visiting Team Members, meeting room rental, report preparation, and any remuneration for volunteer or staff time. ***Community A*** will cover their own costs to visit ***Community B*** while ***Community B*** will cover their own costs to visit ***Community A***.

Final Reporting

Once the exchange visits have been completed, the Visiting Team will prepare a written report for the community they visited.

The written report will be completed within four to six weeks of completion of the community visits. This report will include a cover letter that provides a profile of the visiting team's roles/perspectives taken, the date the visit took place, the amount of time spent in the community, a general summary of the visit, a summary report, explanation of Visiting Team Member observations, photos, and contact information.

Presentation

The ***Community A*** and ***Community B*** FI Coordinators and/or their designates will prepare and make a slide presentation covering the highlights of the First Impressions assessment. This presentation will take place in a public forum in the exchange community. Each FICE Coordinator will be responsible for planning and hosting the presentation by the exchange of community representatives. Every effort will be made to ensure that the presentation is well-attended, including participation by key community leaders, if possible.

Media

Community A and ***Community B*** will jointly develop a media communications plan and press release(s) for the project. A copy of the written report will be provided to the exchange community coordinator prior to any communication about the report contents with the media.

Agreed to this _________________ day of ______________________, 20___.

FOR (name of community or organization)______________________________________

____

(name)

____

(position, organization)

FOR (name of community or organization) _____________________________________

____

(name)

____

(position, organization)

Appendix B

Sample Media Release for Report Back Meeting

(Name of the community) Participates in "First Impressions Community Exchange"

Residents of (Name of the community) will have a chance to see our community through the eyes of first-time visitors as part of the Saskatchewan Economic Development (SEDA) "First Impressions Community Exchange." On (date), a group of community representatives from (name of exchange community)paid an unannounced visit to (name of community)to offer an outsider's perspective on our community. We reciprocated by sending a similar delegation to (name of exchange community on (date).

The exchange helps communities to see themselves the way tourists, prospective businesses, relocating families, and non-local shoppers might see them. Their first impressions of a community have a strong influence on their decisions to relocate to or shop in the community.

"After you've lived in one place for awhile, you sometimes take for granted the things that attract people to your community," says (Project Coordinator's name), of (organization). Or you may be unaware of aspects of your community that may be unappealing in the eyes of outsiders. The exchange gives a community an objective assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and gives participants a chance to gather ideas from other communities dealing with similar development issues."

Results of the First Impressions Community Exchange will be presented at a public meeting scheduled for(date, time, location). All are invited.

If you have any questions about the exchange, contact (Project Coordinator) at (phone number).

--END--

Appendix C

Project Evaluation

A. EVALUATION OF THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS PROGRAM

Questions for host community members

Name of your community:

Your position/role in your community:

1. Please list at least one new thing you learned about your community from the First Impressions Community Exchange presentation.

2. Do you plan to make any changes based on what you learned?

   Yes _______ No______ If so, what?

3. Do you have suggestions or comments about the program?

B. EVALUATING THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS PROCESS

Questions for Visiting Team Members

1. Were you adequately prepared for your role as a team member?

   Not at all ______________

   Somewhat______________

   Well prepared ____________ Comments:

2. Did you need additional information to better prepare yourself to participate in the First Impressions exchange? If so, what?
3. List the three most important or interesting things you learned as a result of your participation in the First Impressions team.
4. List three things you discovered about your own community following your visit to the exchange community.
5. How effective was the overall time frame of the First Impressions model in helping to identify community priorities for development/revitalization?

   Not at all__________

   Limited__________

   Effective___________

   Very effective_______________ Comments:

6. How effective was the overall structure of the First Impressions model in helping to identify community priorities for development/revitalization (planning, training, visit, report, etc.)?

   Not at all__________

   Limited__________

   Effective___________

   Very effective_______________ Comments:

7. To what extent do you feel the make-up/composition of the team was appropriate to the objectives of the visit?
8. What, if any, roles or skills do you feel were missing from the team?
9. Would you change any aspects of the visit? If yes, what?
10. What changes would you make to the Questionnaire?
    Additions:

    Deletions:

    Comments:

11. Would you recommend this program to another community?
12. What would you recommend in terms of changes/modifications to the First Impressions Community Exchange?

C. EVALUATING FIRST IMPRESSIONS OUTCOMES

Name: **Community:**

Date of Exchange: **Population:**

1. **Did you learn anything about your own community as a result of the partner community's report and/or from your experience going to the other community?**
   - Entrances
   - Appearance
   - Housing & Residential Areas
   - School
   - Faith/Religion
   - Culture & Heritage
   - Downtown
   - Other Retail Areas (malls, big box, etc.)
   - Parks/Recreation
   - Health & Emergency Services
   - Social Services
   - Municipal Government
   - Tourism
   - Marketing
   - Infrastructure
   - Industrial Area

- Hospitality

2. **Has the First Impressions Community Exchange influenced planning/actions/ strategies in your community?**
   - Community Strategic Plan or Official Plan?
   - Economic development plan?
   - Downtown Revitalization/Main Street or a similar program?
   - Others?

3. **Has information from the exchange been shared with others? With whom? (e.g., media reports, public meetings)**

4. **Has there been any additional use of the First Impressions report?**

   Audiences: Numbers:

5. **What did you learn about your community from the final report and Public Meeting?**

6. **Has the information been useful in community decision-making processes? How?**

7. **Have any changes been made (or will there be changes made) in response to the issues identified through the First Impressions process? Please describe briefly.**

8. **What was the most important outcome of the First Impressions program for your community?**