



**FIRST
IMPRESSIONS
COMMUNITY
EXCHANGE
TEAM MEMBER'S
GUIDE BOOKLET**



for Downtowns



"Seeing things in a whole new light"

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Rural Development Division

DOWNTOWN FIRST IMPRESSIONS VISITING TEAM MEMBER INFORMATION

You have volunteered to be a member of your community's Visiting Team in a First Impressions DOWNTOWN Exchange. Thank you for your commitment.

Along with other team members, you will make a short *incognito* visit to the downtown of a community you are not familiar with. You will record your first impressions of the downtown. You are not expected to offer expert advice – you are simply expected to give an outsider's honest viewpoint on various aspects of the community's downtown.

Activities during the Visit

Once in the exchange community, your team will drive into the downtown area, noting the quality of directional signage and the gateways/entrances into the downtown. Each team member will tour the downtown, interacting with residents and visiting downtown establishments, including restaurants, retail stores, professional services and government offices. During the tour, you will record your observations in this booklet, using the questions provided and take photos to support your observations.

You may be asked to play a particular role while in the community. For example, you could play the role of someone who is considering moving to the community, a tourist, or someone looking to open a business. The role you have will determine some of the places you visit and questions you ask, which might include:

- “I’ve never been here before. What is there to do?”
- “Where would you recommend we go for lunch?”
- “I might bring my family here on our way to a wedding next month. Are there any good places to stay?”
- “Where can I get information on commercial space to buy or lease in this community?”

You need to be **discreet** as you record observations and seek out information about the downtown. Before you leave the community, your team should reconvene to see if any additional photos are needed.

By the time you return to your own community you should have filled in all sections of the Questionnaire booklet for the areas you addressed during the assessment. The Coordinator will either collect all completed booklets or facilitate a team discussion to enable members to share their observations and come to agreement on the key messages to be included in the written report and slide presentation.

You may be asked to attend the presentation of your team’s report to the exchange community. This will involve traveling back to the community a few weeks after your visit and presenting your team’s observations at a public gathering.

Time Commitment

There are preparations you will need to make before the visit as well as follow-up reporting tasks.

The pre-visit preparations may take 2 hours of your time. You will need to review the Questionnaire, maps and checklists, and participate in arranging trip logistics. The Coordinator will give you detailed information on meeting spots, things you need to bring along, and will discuss any arrangements for covering costs such as fuel and meals. You will be provided with any necessary equipment, such as pens, a clipboard, a questionnaire booklet and a camera.

Depending on the distance to your exchange community, travel time by car may take up to 2 1/2 hours each way. Typically, the visit itself will take 6-10 hours. The follow-up report writing could take anywhere from 2 hours to 2 days, depending on the length of the report and the number of photos included.

In addition, one or two members of the team with skills and experience in making presentations will be selected to present the results of the team's work to the exchange community within 4-6 weeks of the visit. Providing constructive criticism and praise always requires some diplomacy. Careful attention to the words and phrases contained in the report is necessary. Preparing for this presentation and going back to the exchange community to present it could add another 1/2 day to the time commitment. Depending on your role on the team, your volunteer commitment may range from 1 to 3 working days.

A Learning Opportunity

The exchange element of the First Impressions program is based on the notion that all communities can learn from their peers. A First Impressions visit can give you new insights about your own community.

Tips

- You'll get better information if residents do not know you are assessing their community.
- Try to discover not only their warts, but also the ways in which they shine!
- Feel free to record additional community strengths and weaknesses not included in the questionnaire booklet.
- Appear to be shopping, conducting business, or making a social visit.
- Strike up casual conversations with residents.
- Be observant.
- Have a good time!

Thanks and Good Luck!

About the Questionnaire

Remember to use this questionnaire as a guide. There may be variations to the questions that are more fitting to the community you are visiting.

Where you are asked to rate something, use the following as a guide:

- 1** **Needs urgent attention/action**
- 2-4** **Needs improvement**
- 5** **Satisfactory**
- 6-9** **Good/Very Good**
- 10** **Excellent! You should be telling others about this!**

In the spaces provided, give specific (rather than general) comments on both the positive aspects of the community, and areas where you feel changes/ improvements could be made.

Name of Visiting Team Members: _____

Date(s) of Visit: _____

Weather During Visit: _____

Impression Prior to Your Visit

The Five Minute Impression

Downtown Entrances / Gateway

Directional Signage to the Downtown

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Downtown Entrance / Gateway #1

Location / Street:

Is there a clear entrance / gateway to the downtown?

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Impression of the downtown from this entrance:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Downtown Entrance / Gateway #2

Location / Street:

Is there a clear entrance / gateway to the downtown?

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Impression of the downtown from this entrance:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Downtown Entrance / Gateway #3

Location / Street:

Is there a clear entrance / gateway to the downtown?

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Impression of the downtown from this entrance:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Downtown Appearance

Overall appearance of the downtown

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Street Signage

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Visual Identify (banners, lights, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Street Furniture (benches, waste containers, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Landscaping, floral displays, trees:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Business Facades and Signage (exterior)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Window Displays

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appearance of Vacant Buildings / Stores

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appearance of Upper Floors

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Lighting (street lights... exterior façade lights, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Neatness/cleanliness (graffiti, litter, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does the downtown have any heritage buildings? Condition of heritage buildings (if any)

Is there a common architectural theme in the downtown?

Downtown Businesses / Services

Variety of Shopping

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Variety of Merchandise

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Quality of Merchandise

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Customer Service (greeting, assistance, information)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Store Hours (consistent? Convenient?)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located?

What other professional services are available (accounting, legal, etc.)? Are any missing?

Personal Care Services (health care, hair salon, massage, etc.)

Social Services (seniors, day care, employment, non-government organizations, etc.)

Residential

Describe the residential housing in the downtown (type, mix, quality, etc.)

Is the downtown a desirable place to live?

Local Government Services

Are municipal offices located in the downtown?

Visitor's Center, BIA office: services / facilities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community brochure/guide:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Business Directory:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Public Infrastructure

Is there Public Transit? (frequency, routes, access, condition of stops/stations etc.)

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Sidewalks (condition, access, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Streets (condition, configuration, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Public Space for Gathering/Community events (town square, and sell, garden, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Parking (cost, quality, availability, signage, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Public Washrooms (How easy to find? Quality?)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Amenities (payphones, drinking fountains, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is there Cell Phone/High Speed Internet access in the downtown?

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Area all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space etc.?)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Did you experience traffic or pedestrian congestion?
If yes, please specify location.**

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Accessibility of facilities and infrastructure for people with disabilities? Please comment?

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| YES | NO | |
|-----|----|--|

Tourism

Is the downtown a tourist destination? Is it a draw for tourists?

Does the downtown have a slogan/brand?

**Is the downtown well known for an attraction, event or festival?
Are there any annual events/festivals?**

Quality of existing downtown tourist attractions:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Are there any existing downtown events that could be
expanded/developed to appeal to tourists?**

Arts & Culture

Cultural Attractions (library, museum, heritage)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Visual Arts (gallery, sculpture, murals, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dramatic Arts (theatre, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Music (concerts, bandstand, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Accommodation & Food

Availability of overnight accommodation

Are there facilities to accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors?

Quality of restaurants

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Variety / mix of restaurants

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What restaurants did residents recommend? Were these restaurants in the downtown?

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

Faith/Religion

Number / variety / appearance of religious buildings; note the quality of any heritage features

Recreation Facilities

Public Rec. facilities (availability & appearance)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Private Rec. facilities (availability & appearance)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Information from Community Residents

Attitude of residents toward the downtown:

Youths:

Seniors:

Business Owners:

Did residents have any major concerns (e.g. safety, services, etc)?

Four Senses

Taste – Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

Smell – Is there a smell characterizing the downtown?

Sight – Was there any colourful or striking feature in the downtown that made an impression on you?

Sound – What sounds did you hear? Noise?

Other Observations

Environmental health (air quality, litter, pollution)?

Did you feel safe? Would you feel safe at night?

Did you have any strongly negative or positive experiences in the downtown? Be specific.

Wrap-Up

Mix of facilities and services in the downtown

Most outstanding feature of the downtown?

Would you consider locating a business here?

On a scale of 1 to 10, to what extent does the downtown fulfill the following functions:

| FUNCTION | Rating |
|--|---------------|
| Retail | |
| Professional / Commercial | |
| Personal Care Services | |
| Restaurants | |
| Visitor Accommodation & Services | |
| Community Meeting Place | |
| Residential | |
| Arts & Culture / Entertainment | |
| Institutional Services (govt, social services) | |
| Non-profit organizations | |

Based on the mix of businesses and services in the Downtown, a visitor could spend this amount of time without being bored:

_____ **Hours**

_____ **Days**

Rate the overall appeal of the downtown for each of the following groups.

Suitability (rating 1-10)

_____ **Youth**

_____ **Seniors**

_____ **Professionals**

List five POSITIVE things about the downtown:

1

2

3

4

5

List five SHORTCOMINGS (if any) of this downtown:

1

2

3

4

5

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

An idea we would like to borrow to implement in our downtown:

Other comments:

First Impressions Community Exchange Photo Log

PHOTOGRAPHER NAME:

| Photo # | Description | Location |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |

**First Impressions Community Exchange
Photo Log (Continued)**

PHOTOGRAPHER NAME:

| Photo # | Description | Location |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 12 | | |
| 13 | | |
| 14 | | |
| 15 | | |
| 16 | | |
| 17 | | |
| 18 | | |
| 19 | | |
| 20 | | |
| 21 | | |
| 22 | | |
| 23 | | |
| 24 | | |

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