

***COORDINATOR'S
GUIDE***

The Ontario First Impressions Community Exchange program is adapted from:



The *First Impressions* model was originally developed by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, Center for Community Economic Development.

The Ontario model is also based on:



Community Swap: developed by the University of Illinois Extension.

We appreciate the willingness of the developers of First Impressions and Community Swap to share their ideas and resources.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS COMMUNITY EXCHANGE

COORDINATOR'S GUIDE

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) helps communities learn about their strengths and shortcomings as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The program provides a structured opportunity for communities to learn about the first impression they convey to outsiders. It offers a fresh perspective on the appearance, services and infrastructure of the community. Volunteer teams from partnered exchange communities do unannounced, one-day visits, record their observations, and give constructive feedback to their exchange community. The knowledge gained through a First Impressions Community Exchange can be the basis for positive and effective community action.

1.2 Expectations

The sponsoring organization(s) in the community participating in the First Impressions Community Exchange program will identify a **coordinator** to organize their half of the Exchange. The coordinator needs to be skilled at communication, planning, writing and presenting. The Coordinator will then recruit volunteers for a **visiting team**, and make arrangements for the team to travel together to the exchange community, within an agreed-upon timeframe.

“Visiting Team” members will:

- complete a community assessment Questionnaire during the visit;
- write a report summarizing the visiting team’s observations; and
- prepare a slide show to present report findings to the exchange community.

Each community will also host a report presentation by the visiting team from the exchange community.

After the report presentations, each community should develop an **action plan** to address any issues identified in the report.

1.3 Government Support

Ontario Government Rural Community Development staff will support communities to implement First Impressions Community Exchanges.

Government staff are responsible for:

- promoting FICE to rural communities and organizations;

- identifying potential FICE communities;
- orienting communities through the FICE process;
- providing guides and Questionnaire booklets;
- identifying appropriate exchange communities and brokering a terms of reference between the two communities;
- assisting participating communities to complete an exchange; and
- supporting action planning based on the FICE.

1.4 Benefits for your community

Like most communities, your community wants to provide a positive first impression to visitors. Each visitor might be a tourist, a potential resident, a potential business investor, or someone shopping in your community; all are important contributors to local economic health and growth. Everything and everyone in your community can have an impact on a potential investor; the first impression they make can be positive, or it could be the last impression they make.

First Impressions Community Exchange is beneficial to communities that are developing a vision and plan for the future, because it offers a *fresh* perspective on their community – an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses through a fresh set of eyes, from a first-time visitor. Your community can then develop a plan of action to enhance or build on your strengths, and minimize or address your weaknesses.

There are a number of reasons for asking people from outside your community to do the assessment. As a resident, it may be difficult to be objective, because you are too familiar with the community. You may overlook positive attributes that could attract someone to your community, as well as attributes that might come across as unattractive or problematic to someone new to the community.

Another reason for getting an outside perspective is that it may be easier for an outsider to provide constructive feedback to your own friends and neighbours on things like their customer service skills, the appearance of their sites, etc.

By participating in a First Impressions Community Exchange, your community will benefit from the feedback you receive from the visiting team, and your community volunteers will gain insights from their visit to the exchange community.

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

- Community Strategic Planning:
 - o at the beginning of a strategic planning process to identify strengths and weaknesses, assets, and priority issues;

- 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 the 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 a business retention and expansion (BR+E) survey; and
- Quality Service:
 - to assess the effectiveness of a quality service training initiative that your retail community has implemented.

First Impressions Community Exchange should not be used:

- on its own; it should be part of a strategic economic development process;
- if your community does not have the capacity and commitment to respond to some of the recommendations; nor
- if your community is not open to constructive feedback.

Regional Economic Development teams from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) can help you determine whether First Impressions is the right tool for your community. They can also advise on alternative or complementary economic development tools and resources.

- To develop a local downtown improvement strategy, consult the Downtown Revitalization guide available on REDDI.
- To assess local employment trends, labour flows, business mix, etc. use the analysis tools on REDDI – www.reddi.gov.on.ca.
- To identify issues important to local businesses, you could conduct a *Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E)* survey.

- In developing a strategy for investment attraction, you can use the *Municipal Readiness for Economic Development Guide* to assess local preparedness for visits by site locators.

2.0 Prior to the Exchange

2.1 Assessing Community Readiness

Before you decide to undertake a First Impressions Community Exchange, you need to consider the following:

Is Your Community Ready?

- **Fresh Perspective.** First Impressions Community Exchange is designed to provide an assessment of your community's strengths and weaknesses, from a fresh, outside perspective. Is this what your community needs? Is it the right economic development tool to use at this time?
- **Strategic Economic Development Process.** Is your community conducting a strategic economic development planning process? *First Impressions Community Exchange* can be a very effective component of an economic development plan, and is best used as part of a broader strategic process.
- **Accepting of Constructive Criticism.** *First Impressions Community Exchange* provides a community with an honest appraisal of their community, as seen through the eyes of a visitor. The report will offer constructive criticism (along with praise). Does your community have an open mind? Are people willing to listen to constructive feedback?
- **Community Commitment & Leadership.** Do you have the commitment of community and organization leaders to plan the exchange and to be part of the exchange? Are your community and organization leaders action-oriented and committed to responding to the feedback they receive? Is there an organization who will take the lead to make things happen?
- Do you have representation from the organizations that need to be involved? You will need buy-in from organizations that can implement the changes suggested by the FICE report. You should also try to involve those whose stakeholders will be affected by the actions taken, including:
 - o the Municipality;
 - o Chamber of Commerce;
 - o Business Improvement Area;
 - o tourism association;
 - o Community Futures Development Corporation;
 - o sector organization; and
 - o citizens'/residents' groups.

- **Clear understanding of the information your community needs.** The *First Impressions Community 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?
- **A Coordinator.** The Coordinator role is central and vital to the success of the exchange. This individual needs to be skilled at organizing, facilitating, training, report writing and presentation, as well as dealing with the media. 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.
- **A visiting team.** Can you recruit a diverse team of volunteers representing a variety of perspectives, 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.
- **A report-back meeting.** Are you willing to organize and host a “report-back meeting” in your community to hear the visiting team’s report? Is your community open to feedback – both positive and negative?
- **Follow-up.** Just doing a *First Impressions Community Exchange* will have little impact unless some thought is given to how the results will be shared and responded to. If the community is not prepared to commit to follow up, then the community is not ready to implement *First Impressions Community Exchange*. Does your community have the commitment and resources to develop action plans in response to the feedback?
- **Resources to implement the program.** 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.

2.2 Finding an Exchange Community

OMAFRA and MNDR rural development 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 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 education sector?
- distance to major highways;
- common economic issues – dependence on a single industry, declining downtown;
- demographics – 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 community representatives to determine:

1. whether their community would benefit from First Impressions Community Exchange; and
2. if their community has the capacity to implement an exchange within the same timeframe.

2.3 Matched Communities

Once exchange communities are identified, the coordinators/contact persons should share:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| § contact name | § phone number |
| § address | § e-mail address |

Exchange communities should discuss and agree on:

- ü timing for the community visits – when visits will be completed;
- ü timing for visiting team reports – when reports will be completed and presentations made to each exchange community;
- ü focus of each assessment; for example, an exchange can be designed to focus on tourism, downtown revitalization, industrial development or other issues;
- ü boundaries of geographic area to be visited;
- ü format for the visits – one full day or afternoon-evening-morning, weekend or weekday (see section 3.1 *Getting Organized, Timing and Format*); and
- ü 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 the Appendix.

3.0 Getting Organized

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Sponsoring Organization Role

The sponsoring organization will identify a coordinator for the First Impressions Community Exchange program and will support the coordinator in his/her volunteer efforts.

The sponsoring organization will also prepare a budget for the exchange. (See *Section 3.3 Program Costs*)

The Coordinator's Role

The Coordinator, working with the team members or the sponsoring organization, is responsible for:

- ü planning the visit to the exchange community (timeframe, format, etc.);
- ü securing community (e.g., Council) support and budget for the visit;
- ü organizing the trip to the exchange community;
- ü facilitating the preparation of a written report and slide show summarizing the findings from the visit, for the exchange community;
- ü presenting highlights of the report and making a slide presentation during a public meeting in the partner community;
- ü hosting a report-back meeting in your community to hear your exchange community's report;
- ü coordinating a media communications plan and identifying a media spokesperson; and
- ü liaising with OMAFRA (Southern Ontario) or MNDM (Northern Ontario) staff who facilitate the First Impressions Community Exchange program.

Please note that while it is not obligatory for the Coordinator to be part of the visiting team, it will be difficult for the Coordinator to lead the report preparation and presentation without having participated in the visit and community assessment.

Visiting Team Member Roles

Visiting Team Members travel together to the exchange community. While in the community, they complete the First Impressions questionnaire, while playing a designated role (see section 4.2). If appropriate, 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.

The coordinator will provide the Visiting Team volunteers with a "Visiting Team Member Information Sheet". (See *Appendix 2*)

Provincial Government Staff Roles

OMAFRA and MNDM staff will assist communities by providing an orientation to the community Coordinator, providing all resource materials and assisting the Coordinator with orienting the Visiting Team Members.

These staff will provide guidance for report preparation, with the aid of sample reports and a report template, but it is the community's responsibility to prepare the report. They will also attend the report presentations to facilitate action planning, as needed. They can also help to ensure the actions are implemented through follow-up communication with the Coordinator 3-6 months after the report presentation.

3.2 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 2 half days (afternoon-evening-next day morning).

There are advantages and disadvantages with both formats:

The **2 half-day overnight approach** requires more volunteer time, is more costly, but provides an opportunity to assess the community's night life, dining, and accommodation quality and availability. It can also provide the team with more time to meet to review findings and identify gaps yet to be covered by the visit.

The **one-day approach** means your visiting team will not require accommodation and will be back home the same day. However, this format will not allow for an assessment of night life/facilities nor enable team members to compile and present a preliminary report to community representatives.

(Refer to the agenda in Section 4.1)

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

For communities who participated in the 2005 pilot project, the average cost per community was approximately \$500, not including municipal staff or volunteer time.

3.4 Preparing for Your Visit

One or Two Months before the Visit

- Recruit a Coordinator
- Identify and agree upon exchange community
- Recruit Visiting Team members
- Provide team members with information on their responsibilities
- Contact the exchange community to agree on timeframe and format for the visit, and for the report
- Every team member should review the QUESTIONNAIRE and other program materials.

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; and
- 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.

Collect Information about the Exchange Community

Prior to the visit, the Coordinator should gather some general information about the exchange community. Sources of information could include the municipal office, the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation or other organization. One source of information could be the community's website; however, please note that one team member will be assigned to do a more thorough evaluation of the website in terms of the image or impression of the community that it projects.

3.5 Checklist for Visit

One Week before the Visit:

- ü Complete the "Prior to Your Visit" section at the beginning of the Questionnaire.
- ü Set time and place to meet on the exchange day.
- ü Send each team member a written itinerary for the day.
- ü Distribute the Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet, which contains the Questionnaire (included as Appendix 1); ask team members to review and familiarize themselves with the Questionnaire.
- ü Assign roles for role-playing (see section 4.2).
- ü Secure digital or film cameras (buy two or three rolls of film for each film camera; ensure batteries are charged for digital cameras).
- ü Designate photographers. Remind each photographer to complete the photo log (see Appendix 3) in the Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet.

Supply Checklist for Community Visit:

- ü Maps
- ü Visiting Team Member's Guide booklets
- ü Clipboards to use for writing in the car
- ü Extra pens and pencils
- ü Cameras (and film if needed)
- ü Photo log (in the Visiting Team Member's Guide booklet)
- ü Cell phone to make calls to clarify information, gather more details

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 3.1 Timing and Format*)

Here are two possible format options:

Sample Exchange Agendas			
One Day	Activities	Two ½ Days	Activities
8:00 am	Meet in home community and prepare to travel to exchange community	1:00 pm	Meet in 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	3:30 pm	Arrive in exchange community Complete “5-Minute Impression” Drive through to assess community entrances, residential and industrial areas
11:30 am	Split up and role-play to assess other areas: municipal services, tourist attractions, etc. Timing of visits should be based on hours of operation.	4:30 pm	Split up and role-play to assess other areas. Timing of visits should be based on hours of operation. For example, municipal services will likely be closed by 4:30 p.m.
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 retail areas Continue role playing to assess other areas Continue to assess public infrastructure Gather information from community residents	6:30 pm	Continue to explore retail, downtown area and other evening entertainment areas Continue to assess public infrastructure Gather information from community residents
3:30 pm	Meet to review progress – are all required sections of the Questionnaire completed?	8:30 pm	Meet to review progress – are all required sections of the Questionnaire 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
6:00 pm	Travel home	12:00 am	Travel home
8:30 pm	Arrive home	2:30 pm	Arrive home

Getting ready to go:

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

While travelling to the exchange community:

- ü Review the entire Questionnaire (all team members should have done this previously on their own).
- ü Use travel time to form small groups and plan a strategy for collecting information to complete the Questionnaire.
- ü Assign sites (such as the downtown, library, schools, real estate offices, parks, banks, shopping areas, or housing) to team members, who will review the corresponding section of the Questionnaire. More than one team member can visit each site, but ensure that all sections of the Questionnaire are covered.
- ü Confirm team members' roles to play (see Section 4.2).
- ü Remind team members to be discreet when asking questions. The visit is more effective if residents don't know the community is being evaluated.
- ü Remind team members to identify both positive and negative features of the community.

During the visit:

Coordinator...

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

Team members....

- ü As a group, identify the main approaches to the community. Each team member will record his/her observations of each entrance.
- ü Drive through neighbourhoods, recording observations in the housing section of the Questionnaire.
- ü Collect written materials such as newspapers, tourism brochures, bulletins, and community calendars.

- ü Look for positives as well as problems. If you see a problem, try to think of a way to remedy the problem.
- ü Look for things that you could implement in your own community.
- ü There is no wrong way to do this, remember, two people may see the same thing and react differently –that’s OK!
- ü Take individual notes before you forget your thoughts on an area and before discussing with other team members. Your individual first impressions count.
- ü Take pictures – use the photo log in the Visiting Team Member’s Guide booklet.
- ü Regroup partway through the visit to identify any sections of the Questionnaire that still need to be completed.

On the way home:

- ü Team members expand on their comments in the Questionnaire.
- ü Team members discuss plans for preparing and presenting the team’s report to the exchange community.
- ü Coordinator collects the written Questionnaires. Do not allow team members to complete the Questionnaire later. Their first impressions are most accurate!

4.2 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 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
- student planning to attend college here, etc.

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?
- Are there local business networks that I might join, if I were to open a business here?
- 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?

5.0 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. An electronic report template is available from government staff.

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

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

- Using the report template, the Coordinator prepares a draft report based on completed Questionnaires 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
- 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 Questionnaire. 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 Questionnaire 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 into the written report file. The high-resolution copies of the photos can be retained for use in the slide presentation.

An electronic slide show template is available from Ministry staff to use for the slide presentation. Use a couple of bullet-point slides for each section of the Questionnaire, 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 by 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

5.2.1. Hosting the report-back meeting

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 7) to hear the report. This event is a chance to identify issues in your community that need 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

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. Refer to the action planning tools in the next section.

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 etc... Your message needs to reach people where they gather.

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

Rely on the resources within your community to assist with developing effective communication materials. They may include representatives from the media, marketing and graphic design businesses, art and public speaking organizations, and educational organizations.

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

Guidelines for Working with the Media

There are five basic ways to market a story to the media:

1. Telephone interview with a reporter
2. Face-to-face interview with a reporter
3. Media Release

4. Invite the media to attend public events related to the Exchange
5. Media conference

Writing a Media Release

A sample media release announcing the time and location of the report-back public meeting is included in Appendix 6.

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., Kenneth Jones 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 is 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, etc.

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

- Use the sponsoring organization's letterhead, or type the name and address of the organization at the top of the page.
- Use double-spaced typing on 21.5 x 25.5 cm (8 ½ x 11 inch) paper.
- Type only on one side of the sheet(s).
- Use wide margins, approximately 2.5 – 5 cm (1 – 2 inch).

- 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.
- Approximately eight lines below on the right; type “For Immediate Release” or “For Release ...: (give date and time)
- 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.
- Do not split words at the ends of lines, or sentences at the end of pages. Try to end pages with complete paragraphs.
- 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).
- The following sheet(s) should also have the name of the organization and release date at the top.
- At the end of the release, type “-30-“, or “END”.
- Include the name, address and telephone number of a contact person.
- 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.
- The KEY to having the media use your information is to make it NEWSWORTHY, TIMELY, ACCURATE, AND COMPLETE.
- 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.
- 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.

Media Release Checklist

Before sending the release, make sure the following items have been reviewed:

- Is the release “newsworthy”?
- Is it properly addressed to the media outlet?
- Has it been addressed to a specific person?
- Are you aware of and meeting the media organization’s production deadlines?
- How will the release be sent? By mail, fax, email, courier, in person?
- Is the release brief and concise?
- Is the language appropriate to the audience? Writing at a grade 5 level is recommended so that it will be understood by the majority of the population.
- Have acronyms been spelled out?

- Is it on proper letterhead?
- Is the “-30-“ or “END” at the bottom of the body?
- Have all quotes been approved?
- Has a key contact person from your organization or project been identified? Has the contact person been provided with a copy of the final release?
- Have other key individuals and/or sponsoring organizations been briefed?

Media Interview Tips

Talk only about what you know.

A reporter may want you to talk about a topic outside your area of interest or expertise. If you're not knowledgeable about the topic, let the reporter know right away.

Emphasize the positive.

Prepare for the possibility of a reporter focusing on the negative aspects of the report about your community. Try to refocus the interview on the positive findings of the report and how the community can use the findings to make improvements.

Gain precious time.

A good technique to use when someone asks for an interview or for information is to gain time. Even if you're sure about the response you want to give, say you'll call back. By doing this, you have time to compose yourself, double-check your facts and organize them.

Plan before you speak.

Know your audience. Ask what subjects the reporter wants to cover and how long the interview will be. Assemble your material into short notes and make sure you've got the facts straight.

Don't even guess.

If you're unsure about something, don't guess. Offer to check the facts and call back right away. Guesswork does nothing for your credibility or your organization's reputation.

Give the facts, just the facts.

Give information, not opinions. Your opinions are not necessary and not called for. Remember, you are a spokesperson for the First Impressions Community Exchange initiative.

It's always "on the record".

People too often get caught in the "off the record" trap. If you don't want something printed or broadcast, don't say it.

“No Comment” is a comment.

“No comment” has become a comment in itself. It gives the wrong impression. Avoid it. If you have an especially good reason not to comment, say: “I’m sorry; I can’t give you that information right now.”

Honesty is the best policy.

Protect your credibility and your organization’s by always being honest with reporters.

Cultivate your contacts.

Ask media contacts about deadlines and respect them. Keep reporters informed. Praise their good work. Thank them in writing or by phone for covering your event/story. Remember, they are your conduits to the general public.

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.

6.0 Community Action... Now What?

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:

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

Setting priorities

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 FICE 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 FICE 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:

- Which actions could be realistically carried out in the short term with the resources available to you?
- What actions require planning to implement in the medium to long-term (1 to 3 years)
- Which actions give the biggest “bang for the buck”?
- What actions complement or build on other projects in the community?
- How will these actions affect other groups/events/projects in the community?
- Which actions could be delegated to other community groups?
- 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. This is a role that Provincial staff can play.
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 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 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:
 - having 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.
 - providing 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. This and the above method are commonly referred to as the nominal group technique. *A more detailed summary of this technique can be found in Appendix 7.*
 - identifying actions that can be accomplished quickly and at minimal cost. This provides the community with some quick wins and provides motivation for implementation of more complex or costly actions.
 - classifying actions by "must do", "should do" or "could do". *A sample chart is included in Appendix 7.*
 - holding a group vote for each action; or
 - discussing actions and their relevant importance until consensus is reached on priorities.

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.

An example on how to develop an action plan is included below and an Action Planning Worksheet is included in Appendix 7.

Funding to assist with action plan implementation may be available through a variety of public and private sources. Contact the Provincial Government staff in your region for information on funding programs.

7. Before closing the meeting, set a date for a follow-up meeting and a system to track 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

Sample Action Plan:

After visiting the community in the fall, the visiting team suggests that the community's heavily-travelled southern entrance could be more inviting and should highlight the community's popular Summer Folk Festival.

The host community discusses the issue and concludes that the community does a good job with the southern entrance during the summer season, but there is room for improvement in the off-seasons. The issue is addressed with the following action plan:

Action	Completed	Priority		
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Improve the appearance of the community's southern entrance and use it to promote the Summer Folk Festival during the off-seasons				

Task	Time Line	Who	Actions	Evaluation Measure
#1	7 Days	Art	Contact the municipality to determine who is responsible for community entrance beautification and signage	Call made, information known within the week.
#2	21 days	Joanne	Meet with the individual responsible and form a working group with interested citizens	Meet with municipality Working group established
#3	90 days	Working group	Explore possibilities for off-season beautification, new signage, and funding source	Options developed Budget in place
#4	30 days	Working group	Present preferred option to council	Municipal approval
#5	60 days	Municipal or community group	Municipal or community group implement the recommendations	Beautified southern entrance Signage promoting the Summer Folk Festival year-round

Coordinating Action Plans

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

- are distributed across 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.

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.

7.0 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.

The Ontario Government provides all resource materials and regional staff support for First Impressions exchanges in the province. In return, the government requires communities to provide feedback on the resources and services provided, in order to ensure quality service to future participating communities.

Using the evaluation forms provided in Appendix 8, determine how participating community members feel about the First Impressions process. It is important to do this from a few perspectives:

- community members who attend the report-back meeting and help implement any follow-up actions;
- Visiting Team Members and Coordinator; and
- 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 First Impressions Community Exchange. Appendix 8 includes a sample evaluation Questionnaire, "Evaluating First Impressions Community 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.

8.0 Appendices: *Guides & Questionnaires*

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Sample Terms of Reference

Appendix 3: Visiting Team Member Information Sheet

Appendix 4: Photo Log

Appendix 5: Report Template

Appendix 6: Action Planning - Sample

Appendix 7: Working with the Media

Appendix 8: Evaluation Forms

Appendix 9: Ministry contacts

Appendix 1: 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.

Prior to Your Visit

What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit? What are you expecting to see? Please comment on what you know about this community.

For Visiting Team Coordinators:

How easy was it to get information by mail and telephone about the community you are visiting? Are you satisfied with the quality of information received? Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

Please rate and comment on the community's online materials and information (only answer if you were assigned the task of reviewing the community's website).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs Urgent Attention				Satisfactory					Excellent

The Five Minute Impression

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, what was your first impression?

Community Entrances – Road/Highway

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

Entrance #1

(Road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs Urgent Attention				Satisfactory					Excellent

Entrance #2

(Road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs Urgent Attention				Satisfactory					Excellent

Entrance #3

(Road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs Urgent Attention				Satisfactory					Excellent

Entrance #4 _____
 (Road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Needs Satisfactory Excellent
 Urgent Attention

Community Entrances – Air, Rail and Bus Terminal (if applicable)

Entrance #5 _____
 (Air/Rail/Harbour/Bus terminal)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Needs Satisfactory Excellent
 Urgent Attention

Entrance #6 _____
 (Air/Rail/Harbour/Bus terminal)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Needs Satisfactory Excellent
 Urgent Attention

Entrance #7 _____
 (Air/Rail/Harbour/Bus terminal)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Needs Satisfactory Excellent
 Urgent Attention

Housing and Residential Areas

Drive through as many neighbourhoods as possible, including the Downtown.

How would you rate the overall quality of housing in the community?

Quality (rating 1-10)
Type of housing
 Existing/Older Homes
 Senior Citizen Housing
 New Construction
 Apartments/Rental Housing

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

What are the most appealing features of the housing in this community? Why?

What are the least appealing features of housing in the community? Why?

Please comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (e.g., roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation and green space).

How would you rate the **overall appeal** of housing to the following groups?

Appeal (rating 1-10)
Group
 Single young adults
 Young families
 Middle income
 Senior citizen
 Upscale/professional

Education, Health, Social and Emergency Services

Education

Comment on the availability and appearance of schools.
Pre-school/Daycare:

Primary/Elementary:

High School:

College/University:

What do residents (young and old) think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

Overall, how would you rate the quality and availability of schools for a community of this size?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities.

Hospitals:

Physician and dentist offices and clinics:

Long-term care and nursing home facilities:

Other health services: (e.g., Chiropractor, physiotherapy, naturopath, massage)

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of health care services for a community of this size?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

Social Services

What social services (e.g., senior's centre, counselling) are available in the community?

What types of not-for-profit organizations and clubs are within the community?

Emergency Services

Do residents feel fire, ambulance and policing services are adequate?

Local Economy**Downtown, Retail and Industry**

What is your impression of the overall health of the local economy?

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Downtown

Explore the downtown and visit as many businesses as possible.

Could you locate the downtown easily? Why or why not?

Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the overall appearance of the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the downtown (housing, professional services, retail, recreation, accommodation & food, industry, parks, etc.).

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of parking in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the customer service you received in the downtown.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting in the downtown.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Attention Satisfactory Excellent

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for the downtown to play a greater role?

Describe the residential housing mix in the downtown (e.g., apartment, single detached, main street).

Would you find the downtown to be a desirable place to live?

General Information about Overall Retail

Describe the mix of retail shopping available (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores) throughout the community.

What retail goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities to buy?

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

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a town of this size?

What store(s) in this community would you travel a distance of more than 40 kilometres to patronize?

Rate the overall condition of the retail sector?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Attention Satisfactory Excellent

Specific Retail Shopping Areas

If applicable, explore other retail shopping areas and visit as many businesses as possible.

Retail Area #1

Type (Shopping mall etc.) _____

Location: _____

Rate and comment on the overall appearance.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Attention Satisfactory Excellent

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Attention Satisfactory Excellent

Rate and comment on the customer service at the businesses you visited.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Retail Area #2

If there is not a second retail shopping area, leave this section blank.

Type: _____
Location: _____

Rate and comment on the overall appearance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the customer service at the businesses you visited.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Local Industries

Consider industries only within or adjacent to the community.

What are the major industrial sectors in the community? (e.g., manufacturing, construction, transportation)

Who do you think are the major employers in the community?

What are the major types of manufacturing in the community?

What are the major types of primary industry in the community (e.g., agriculture, mining, forestry or fishing)?

Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry? If so, please comment.

Is there an industrial park or serviced land where industries could locate or expand? Explain.

Are the industrial facilities well maintained? Explain.

Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development? Why or why not?

Professional, Commercial and Government Services

Professional Services

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located? Do the banks have convenient hours of service? Explain.

How would you rate the adequacy of financial services for a community of this size?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

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

Commercial Services

What types of commercial businesses serve the local community (e.g., high-speed internet provider)?

What commercial services appear to be missing in the community (e.g., print shop, industrial cleaning service)?

Local Government Services

Are municipal offices conveniently located? Please comment.

How would you rate the availability and quality of the following information provided by the municipal government?

Community brochure/guide:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

Business Directory:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

Community Profile: (including business and industrial opportunities)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Needs
Urgent Satisfactory Excellent
Attention

If applicable, were you able to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial business investment decisions? (Answer only if you played the role of a potential business investor.)

Public restrooms:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Public Infrastructure and Planning

Public Infrastructure

Rate each of the following for quality, accessibility, or availability where relevant.

Public Transportation:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Sidewalks:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Streets:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Landscaping, Trees:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Street Signage:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, etc.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Planning

Do you see any conflicting land uses in the community (e.g., a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill)?

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space, etc.)? Specify where land uses are not appropriate.

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

Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities? Please comment.

Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Faith, Entertainment, and Recreation

Does the community have a strong tourism sector?

Does the community have a slogan/brand? If yes, what is it?

Is the community well known for an attraction, event or festival? Are there any events/festivals held annually?

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

Have you seen any **attractions** (natural or man-made) that could be developed to draw tourists?

Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Do you consider any of the existing attractions to be underdeveloped? Please comment.

Services for Tourists

Is there a Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility serving the needs of tourists? Please comment on the staff, facilities, location, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.

Comment on the availability and selection of accommodation in the community.

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

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of public restrooms.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the **quality** of restaurants.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Rate and comment on the **variety/mix** of restaurants.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent					Satisfactory				Excellent
Attention									

Where do local residents recommend as places to stay, eat, and visit?

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

Culture and Heritage

What community events are popular with residents?

Do the residents feel there is a lack of community events?

Does the community have any heritage buildings? Are they well maintained?

Faith/Religion

Comment on the number, appearance, and selection of religious buildings in the community.

Are there any outstanding architectural or design features of religious buildings you visited?

What is your overall impression of religious buildings you visited?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					
Attention								Excellent	

Entertainment

What does the community do for entertainment?

What entertainment opportunities do residents feel they lack?

Does the community have a vibrant night life? Please comment.

Recreation

Facilities

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

Parks:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Public recreation facilities:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Private recreation facilities:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs									
Urgent				Satisfactory					Excellent
Attention									

Based on your impression, what do people in this community appear to do for recreation?

What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

Rate the **overall suitability** of the recreational facilities for each of the following groups.

Suitability (1-10)	Group
	Senior citizens
	Families
	Singles, young adults
	Teens
	Children (13 and under)

Information from Community Residents

Comment on the quality of information and assistance provided by residents and employees of local businesses.

Were residents knowledgeable about their community? Explain.

Did they refer you to someone else who would help? If yes, who?

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

Did residents identify any particular issues to be of major concern (e.g., safety)?

Overall, how would you rate the quality of information from community residents and business employees?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Needs Urgent Attention					Satisfactory			Excellent	

Other Observations

Describe the community using your senses. **Taste** – Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

Smell – Is there a scent that characterizes the community?

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

Sound – What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community.

How would describe the overall environmental health of the community (air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young single adult? Why or why not?

What, if anything, did you experience that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you? Be specific.

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist? Why or why not?

Wrap-Up

The following questions should be discussed and answered as a group.

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/experienced? Why or why not?

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young family? Why or why not?

Would you consider this a suitable location for a retired person? Why or why not?

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here? Why or why not?

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here? Why or why not?

List five positive things you observed about this community.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

- 1
- 2
- 3

What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

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

What have you learned here 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 business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!

Other comments:

Appendix 2: Sample Terms of Reference

Community A Community B

First Impressions Community Exchange Terms of Reference

_____ and _____ have partnered to conduct a First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE).

Purpose

The purpose of the First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) is to help _____ and _____ learn about their strengths and shortcomings through the eyes of first-time visitors. FICE 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 _____ and _____ 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

_____ and _____ will:

- ü identify a coordinator to plan the First Impressions Community Exchange;
- ü 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;
- ü 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;
- ü host a public meeting within the agreed-upon timeframe, when the exchange community will present their report; and
- ü develop an action plan based on the report by the visiting team from the exchange community.

Roles and Responsibilities

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

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

- Ø coordinate the visit to the exchange community (timeframe, budget, etc.);
- Ø recruit volunteers for the visiting team, ensuring an appropriate mix of team members in terms of skills, profession, age, gender, etc.;
- Ø organize the trip to the exchange community;
- Ø collect completed team member Questionnaires;
- Ø facilitate the preparation of a written report for the exchange community;

- Ø prepare a slide presentation featuring the highlights of the report and present the report at a public meeting in the partner community;
- Ø host a report-back meeting to hear the exchange community's report;
- Ø coordinate a media communications plan and identify a media spokesperson, if necessary; and
- Ø liaise with Ontario Government staff that facilitate the First Impressions Community Exchange.

Visiting Team Members will:

- o attend training/orientation meeting(s) in preparation for the visit;
- o review the Questionnaire prior to the visit;
- o complete an assessment Questionnaire during the visit;
- o participate in the preparation of a written report for the exchange community; and
- o 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.

_____ will cover their own costs to visit _____ while
 _____ will cover their own costs to visit _____.

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 _____ and _____ FICE 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 community representatives. Every effort will be made to ensure that the presentation is well-attended, including participation by key community leaders, if possible.

Media

_____ and _____ 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 3: Visiting Team Member Information Sheet

VISITING TEAM MEMBER INFORMATION SHEET

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

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 honest viewpoint on various aspects of the exchange community.

Activities during the Visit

Visiting Team Members travel together to the exchange community. You will tour the community, take photos, interact with people and businesses, complete a Questionnaire and return it to the Coordinator.

A group "windshield survey" usually starts off the tour. Then, different members of the team split up in pairs or individually to role-play during the visit. For example, you could be asked to play someone who is a new resident, a person considering moving to the area, 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.

Your questions might include:

- I've never been here before. What is there to do for recreation?
- Are there any good restaurants in this town? Where would be a good place for lunch?
- I might bring my family here on our way to a wedding next month. Are there any good places to stay?
- I may move to this area. Are the schools good here? Where is the best place to look for housing?
- 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 community you visit. Before you complete your visit, your team should reconvene to see if any photos are needed of key sites and locations.

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 may 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 Community Exchange 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. Based on the experiences of hundreds of communities in Illinois and Wisconsin and over 20 in the Ontario pilot program, visiting teams often return with good ideas for a new project to implement in their hometown, after seeing something in place in the exchange community.

Tips

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

Thanks and Good Luck!

Appendix 4: First Impressions Community Exchange Photo Log

Photographer Name:

Photo #	Description	Location
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		

Appendix 5: Report Template

The report template is available electronically on the First Impressions Community Exchange CD. If you do not have a copy of the CD, please contact staff of the Rural Development Division, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In Northern Ontario, contact the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

Appendix 6: Sample Media Release for Report Back Meeting

__(Name of community)_Participates in “First Impressions Community Exchange”

Residents of (Name of community) will have a chance to see our community through the eyes of first-time visitors as part of the Provincial Government’s “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 7: Action Planning Resources

The following tools can be used to assist with the establishment of priorities and the development of action plans.

A: Nominal Group Technique for Establishing Priorities

What is it?

- a rank ordering of ideas/actions;
- a statistically derived decision based upon individual ratings.

The technique is accomplished by using:

- a numerical rating system, e.g., assigning items a priority where the most important item receives a value of 5 (if there are five items) and the least important receives a value of 1; or
- a visual rating system, e.g., assigning items a priority through the use of sticky dots e.g., participants are provided with a specified number of dots and are asked to place them on the items that are of the greatest priority; one or more dots can be assigned to an individual item.

When do you use it?

- when there are many options to choose from;
- when the group wants to determine the importance of all items; and
- to help large groups make a decision.

How do you use it?

- list all the items on a flipchart;
- participants individually assign a priority ranking to the identified items;
- the individual rankings are recorded on the flipchart;
- the rankings are totalled for each of the items/actions;
- the item that receives the greatest number of "votes" is the top priority; the item that receives the least number of votes is the lowest priority;
- action items are re-ordered according to the priority level that it received.

B: "Must Do, Should Do, Could Do" Priority Setting Worksheet

A METHOD FOR SETTING PRIORITIES		
(A) "MUST DO"	(B) "SHOULD DO"	(C) "COULD DO"
Record action items that the working group feels must be implemented.	Record action items that the working group feels should be implemented.	Record action items that the working group feels could be implemented.

C: Pair Share for Establishing Priorities

What is it?

- a technique that allows individuals to think about their own ideas/opinions before sharing them with the larger working group;
- a technique that helps individuals to focus and express their concerns;
- allows for more in-depth discussions than would happen in a large group.

How do you use it?

- write the question on the flipchart;
- provide participants with time to formulate their ideas/response;
- have participants divide into partners and share their responses;
- the partners may use their individual responses to create a new one;
- each pairing shares their report with the larger group;
- a discussion follows to reach consensus on actions and the priority assignment.

D. Consensus

What is it?

- a method for making decisions that all group members can live with and support;
- it is usually more successful in a small group (8 or less);
- a decision-making technique that allows for persuasion rather than coercion.

How do you use it?

- state the reason/focus for the discussion, e.g., how would you rank these five items in terms of priority?
- ask for a recommendation and the associated rationale, i.e., have someone provide a priority ranking for the actions and explain why they have ranked the items in that order;
- have the group discuss the recommendation; everyone's opinion, knowledge and skills should be heard;
- ask for consensus, e.g., should we accept this recommendation?
- if everyone is not convinced, then ask for another recommendation and repeat the process until a decision is reached.

Action Planning Worksheet

An Action Planning Worksheet needs to be completed for each Priority Action that is identified.

Identification of the individual steps that are required to complete the priority action can be identified through a brainstorming exercise.

Brainstorming

What is it?

- a method of quickly generating a lot of ideas, free of criticism and judgment.

How do you use it?

- record the question on a flipchart; ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of what is being asked;
- challenge participants to be creative and think in new ways while breaking away from "what we've always done";
- use your imagination and build on ideas provided by others;

- allow a few minutes of “thinking” time;
- record ideas as given on a flipchart so that they can be easily seen by all; there are no bad ideas;
- discussion and evaluation does not occur during the initial brainstorming exercise;
- provide clarification of idea as required;
- when ideas have stopped, provide some additional thinking time; the brainstorming exercise will take between 5 to 20 minutes depending on the complexity of the topic;
- discuss, provide clarification and build on each idea following the second brainstorm;
- combine ideas that are similar; and
- finally, evaluate the ideas and reach agreement on the best ideas/actions.

Action	By Whom	Deadline	Resources & Support		Potential Barrier(s)	Communi-cations Plan	Evaluation
What needs to be done?	Who will take the lead?	By what date will the action be done?	Available	Needed	What individuals or organizations might resist? How?	What individuals and organizations should be informed re: this action?	What will successful implementation look like?

Appendix 8: Evaluation Forms

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/MainStreet or 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?

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 on 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?

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?

Appendix 9: Government Staff Contacts

OMAFRA Coordinators:

Clare Wasteneys:	Program Lead	(519) 826-3157
Nancy Ross:	Economic Development Consultant	(519) 537-2656

E-mail addresses for all the above follow this format: [*John.Smith@omafra.gov.on.ca*](mailto:John.Smith@omafra.gov.on.ca)

Northern Ontario: for a listing of regional staff for the Ministry of Northern Development & Mines, please contact: (705) 564-7615, or visit http://www.mndm.gov.on.ca/mndm/nordev/redb/contacts
