

# *FAIR IMPRESSIONS\**

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*A program for  
Improving County Fairs*

*\*An adaptation of First Impressions  
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## ***Things you should know.....***

### ***\*History:***

Fair Impressions was modeled after the First Impressions program developed in 1991 by Andy Lewis and James Schneider (Executive Director of The Grant County Economic Development Corporation) to provide communities in Grant County Wisconsin with an unbiased evaluation of themselves as they might be viewed by a first time visitor. The First Impressions evaluation instrument has now been utilized by over 70 communities in the midwest. By participating in the program, communities have been able to identify and respond to concerns identified by visitors to the community. In addition, First Impressions participants have learned from the successes and failures of other similar communities.

As a result of the First Impressions program, communities have sponsored hospitality seminars, improved community signing, sponsored "clean-up" efforts, developed informational brochures, developed building improvement loan programs, improved public infrastructures, and other community improvement programs.

### ***Purpose:***

To help a fair board/association learn about existing strengths and weaknesses of the fair as seen through the eyes of the first time visitor (To that particular fair).

### ***Your Group:***

Ideally 3-6 people should comprise a team for the visit. Plan to make the visit together as a group (car pool). It makes for a more enjoyable experience and helps to ensure a better end result as well.

Try for diversity if possible. Work for a mix of men/women, business people/residents, farmers, young/old, educators, political leaders, etc. (Consider including some participants who have never been to a fair, although that may be difficult!) If your County Board of Supervisors has a role in the fair, consider including board members who do not serve on the Fair board.

Remember...there are no "experts". Each person's opinion is valid and important. You may want to get together a day in advance to review the manual, ask questions, etc.

### ***The Visit:***

Plan to arrive in the target community by 10 a.m. Obviously, you will want to pick a date during the fair to observe the activities first hand. Review the manual on the way and decide who will be team mates. Develop a story to explain your visit. You get to be an actor for the day. ("I was driving through the area and heard about the fair", "I'm new to the area and was thinking about enrolling my kids in 4-H", "I own a small retail business in Racine and was thinking about renting commercial space at next years fair, etc.)

Upon entering the "fair community" try to note publicity that would indicate that the fair is taking place. Drive by the fairgrounds and then pull over at an appropriate location to write down your "five minute impression". Remember, many visitors may not have planned a trip to the fair but would stop if they knew it was going on and it looked inviting!

Go back and enter the grounds to begin your evaluation. Note: Have lunch at different booths if possible. Plan to leave by 2 - 3 p.m.

### ***Tips:***

1. Take a pocket notepad for each person (writing in the manual is too conspicuous).

2. Take notes...take notes...take notes or it will all turn into mush!
3. Ask for directions, places to eat, information on the fair, etc. Send letter to Chamber of Commerce or Fair office and request information ahead of time and see how they respond (i.e. a copy of the fair book).
4. Someone may want to take a camera along to document particular points. Send the photos back with the final report (and keep copies that show ideas you want your own fair board to know about).
5. Look for problems and strengths...we need to know what we're doing RIGHT, too.
6. There is no wrong way to do this, remember, two people may see the same thing and react differently - that's OK.
7. Have Fun!

### ***Setting Up the Exchange:***

Your Fair secretary/administrator or Bob Williams (Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, 608-266-7184), or Jane Grabarski (Sec./Treasurer, Wisconsin Association Of Fairs (608-584-5327), can help you make a contact. They might be willing to act as a local contact person and may assist with completing the final report. They may also be able to go with you as part of your team. Consider using the annual or district Fair Association meetings as a time to contact another fair. To keep down costs of the visit, fairs should exchange an equal number of entrance passes.

The other fair should be similar to yours in size and some characteristics (i.e. county size, number of miles to interstate or urban area, rural vs. urban, type of dominant agriculture etc.) The fair should be far enough away so your team won't be totally familiar with it, but close enough to make this a one day trip (overnights can be great too, but not everyone can spare the time). Remember, there are no perfect matches...just similarities.

### ***The Report***

Use the manual to write the report (need not be typed but write legibly). Use descriptive sentences and give examples and suggestions. **"Yes" or "No" answers don't do a lot of good** (i.e. buildings were not signed vs. The exhibit buildings and show areas were not signed, but we noticed that food booths were. We found these to be very visible and helpful. You might want to consider using this sign format on your exhibit buildings and show areas.)

***Do this within 3 - 4 days*** and return to your contact person.

### ***Contact Person:***

When you have all the reports, type up the information in a single composite report. Add a short cover letter that describes:

- a. profile of team
- b. weather during visit
- c. date of visit and time spent
- d. Events and activities the day of the visit
- e. general summary comment on visit and impression of the fair and the community (optional).
- f. thank them for doing an exchange and include your name and phone number.

Add standard report cover (see sample reports) and mail to the other communities contact person. (You may want to hold the report until they have visited your fair...whatever you feel comfortable with.)

### ***Their Report on You:***

As soon as you receive it (but not before you have sent the report on their fair) you should make copies and distribute them in the following order:

1. Sponsoring committee members and people who went on the visit.

2. County/fair officials.
3. Fair Superintendents/other volunteers
4. General Public.

Also, please send a copy to Bob Williams, Marketing Division, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture P.O. Box 8911, Madison WI 53708. Copies of any media coverage would also be appreciated.

After conducting 2 - 3 exchanges with different fairs you may want to discuss the reports and how you can best use the information.

*As you approach the fair community.....*

*I. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?:*

*II. The "five minute" impression:*

Drive by the fairground without entering. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the fair with only this quick look. Do this in silence, don't talk with the others in your group for this part.

*Take a "drive" around town:*

Is there any promotion or indication of a fair taking place in the community (i.e. posters, banners, signs)? Consider stopping at the local Chamber of Commerce or Tourism Information booth to request information on the fair...Are they knowledgeable about the fair? Could you have found the grounds without the ferris wheel (Other times of the year)?

***III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance:***

Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road which provides access to the fairgrounds. List each road (61 North, etc.) and list positive and negatives for each entrance.

a. Billboards/advertising

b. Directional Signing to Fairgrounds

c. Is the fairgrounds site signed (i.e. "Grant County Fairgrounds"). Is the sign lit for night time viewing?

d. How well is the traffic flow controlled? Could you easily identify the appropriate entrances? Are there any safety concerns?

***IV. Parking:***

a. Is there an adequate amount of space provided for parking?

b. Is there adequate support staff to assist with parking and maintain traffic flow?

c. Is the parking in close proximity to the fair activities or is alternative transportation provided between the parking area and the fairgrounds.

d. Are parking provisions being made for the elderly and disabled?

e. Is there a parking fee and did you find it to be reasonable?

**V. Information/Assistance:**

a. Is the Information area/fair office visible and easy to find?

b. Is the staff at the information area/fair office as well as the agents and superintendents helpful, and friendly?

c. Other points related to fair office (hours, appearance, locations, was it easy to find?, etc.)

**V. Information/Assistance (continued):**

d. Is there a public address system that is used to publicize activities and announcements (and can you understand it/hear it)?

e. Are fair superintendents, board members, judges and other volunteers identified in a visible manner (i.e. shirts, hat, or button identifying them)?

f. Are there any directional maps ("you are here") or informational booths which provide a map and directions for the various buildings and activities?

g. Is a program published and distributed at the fair listing events, judging times, locations and a map of the fairgrounds?

h. Is the fair office well staffed (Or is there a long wait for help)?

i. Is there directional signing on the grounds (i.e. which way for the nearest rest room)?

*VI. Buildings - Are the exhibit halls and show areas functional (i.e. do they serve the purpose for which they were intended? Comment on the quality of the acoustics/sound system, and seating):*

Commercial area:

Educational Exhibits area:

Livestock Barns:

Youth/Adult Projects area:

Tents:

b. Appearance of the buildings on the grounds...are they well maintained?

c. Are the buildings signed to identify there purpose (i.e. sheep barn)?

**VII. Fair Entries:**

a. Number of entries and the number and variety of departments

b. Quality of the displays. Were special award winning projects prominently displayed? Are the exhibit areas full?

c. Judging

1. The type of judging used (conference vs. standard)

2. Speed in which the judging took place.

3. Is anyone explaining what is being done between classes?

**VIII. Entertainment:**

a. Quality of the entertainment (Does it match what the local market could support?) Was there a reasonable admission charge?

b. Diversity (Does the entertainment appeal to various age groups and interests?)

**VIII. Entertainment (continued):**

c. Facilities for entertainment (seating, stage, sound system, rain, accommodations, track conditions, signs promoting event sponsorship, etc.)

d. The midway (Condition and variety of rides, comment on employees)

**IX. Food Service:**

a. Cleanliness of food booths/areas

b. Seating areas

c. Variety of food available

d. Quality of the food (any unique foods or foods produced locally?)

**X. Fair Book:**

a. Was it well organized and easy to read?

**X. Fair Book (continued):**

- b. Does advertising make the book difficult to read (And is the advertising appropriate for the audience...i.e. a large quantity of beer advertising at a Youth Fair)

**XI. Other stuff.....:**

- a. Public restrooms (ease in finding, condition, handicapped accessible, maintained, diaper changing areas, etc.)
  
- b. Payphones (working, phone book intact, etc.)
  
- c. Water fountains, benches (rest areas), etc. Are any of these amenities sponsored by businesses or civic groups?
  
- d. Lighting of grounds for safety and visibility
  
- e. Safety Concerns. Are the first aid stations and law enforcement easy to find?
  
- f. Availability of showers for carnival personnel and exhibitors.
  
- g. Costs (Entrance fees, rides, food, etc.) Did the prices reflect the value of the product that you received?

***XI. Other stuff (continued).....:***

- h. Were there any unique educational or commercial exhibits?
  
- i. Was there any recognition of donations or sponsorship?
  
- j. Was there any merchandise or prizes offered at the fair that would be considered offensive to the average fair participant?

***WRAP UP:***

- A. Using your "senses"...
  - 1. What does the fair TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/local product, etc.)
  
  - 2. What does the fair SMELL like:
  
  - 3. What SOUNDS did you hear?
  
  - 4. What did the fair feel like (emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/ deserted, inviting, etc., or physical response, poorly maintained, muddy, too small)

B. List the 5 most positive things you observed about the fair:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

C. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own fair and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours:

D. What will you remember most about this fair six months from now:

E. Other comments (that just didn't seem to fit anywhere else!)