

First Impressions

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/communities/firstimpressions/index.cfm>

All communities have difficulties viewing themselves as others (including visitors) see them. Our views are skewed by over familiarization, lack of differing perspectives and expectations, and a reluctance to be completely honest with our neighbors when dealing with difficult issues (i.e. the appearance of buildings, customer service and public facilities). During tough economic times, it is important that we objectively assess community development opportunities and develop strategies for community improvement. This roundtable will discuss a program that engages volunteers in exchange visits with peer communities as a basis for creating an objective community assessment.

About this Resource:

This community improvement program has been used by hundreds of communities, throughout the state, and the Country. It is based on the premise that, as members of a community, we often overlook some of our most noticeable negatives, as well as some of our less celebrated community assets. The First Impressions tool is a program that provides communities with a fresh understanding of what is most noticed by visitors as they tour our community.

Volunteers from two somewhat similar communities (size, location, county seat, etc.) agree to do unannounced exchange visits and then report on their findings. Participants become “secret shoppers” for the day to discover what they can about their partnering community. They follow procedures and reporting guidelines in a fully developed manual, which is copied for each participant. The manual helps insure that the evaluations and reports are thorough and somewhat uniform, and minimize the training of volunteers.

Following the visit and report, the community will receive the First Impressions study report. From this point it is up to the individual community to review and consider the suggestions of the visiting team.

Putting it to Work in Your Community:

This tool is intended to be used as a self-help tool with assistance from your County Community Development Educator. The First Impressions visiting team will likely involved various community stakeholders such as your local Chamber of Commerce, Visitor Bureau members, bankers, consultants, and others who work directly with tourism business operators.

For More Information:

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