



First Impressions

A program for community assessment & improvement

K-State Research and Extension's Community Vitality program helps communities assess and develop opportunities and strategies for community improvement. Through the **First Impressions** program communities can learn about existing strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of the first-time visitor. The results from a **First Impressions** visit can serve as the basis for community action. The final report and photographs can also be used as a way to document changes in the community over time.

This tool is particularly useful because as a matter of human nature, all communities have difficulties viewing their surroundings as others – customers, visitors, potential residents, and potential businesses – see them. Our views are skewed by over-familiarization, a lack of differing perspectives, expectations, and a reluctance to be completely honest with our neighbors when dealing with difficult issues, such as the appearance of buildings, customer service, and the maintenance of public facilities.

How does it work?

Volunteers from two similar-sized communities agree to do unannounced visits and then report on their findings. Participants become “secret shoppers” for the day to discover what they can about their partner community. Participants are trained, then follow procedures to document their visit using a Team Report Form to record comments. The Report Form, which ensures that evaluations and reports are thorough and uniform, is divided into the following sections:

- Prior to your visit (web search before your visit)
- The Five Minute Impression
- Community Entrances
- Housing and Residential Areas
- Education, Health, Social and Emergency Services
- Local Economy
- Government/Public Services
- Recreation, Faith, Culture and Heritage
- General Observations
- Information from Community Residents
- Wrap-up

Following the visit, the **First Impressions** reports are compiled by the K-State Research and Extension representative and exchanged with the partner community. Each community arranges a “town meeting” where results are shared with the broader community. This is typically done by zoom with a presentation which includes photos illustrating the visitor observations. Ideally the community gathers in person, but other formats are allowed. The zoom meeting is recorded for use by the community and posted on the K-State First Impressions [archive](#).

Following presentation of the report, action planning is the next step, identify specific issues to address and establish working committees. Be sure to include local officials and other community leaders throughout the entire **First Impressions** exercise. Their involvement will assist in achieving success in resolving the identified issues. Involvement of the local media is also an excellent way to motivate good actions as a result of the report.

How do we participate?

A community group, such as city council, chamber of commerce, PRIDE organization, or another community development organization makes a request to participate in the program. The K-State Research and Extension (KSRE) representative visits with the organization to explain the procedure and explore “partner city” possibilities. A formal application is signed by each City Council.

A team of 3 or more community volunteers is recruited to conduct the community visit. After training, which may be in person or by zoom, visitors complete the Team Report Form, with comments from each visitor.

The KSRE representative takes community photos, compiles visitor comments, and makes a photo presentation to a town meeting.

Who do we contact?

For more information or to make a request to participate contact the K-State Research and Extension Office of Community Vitality:

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