



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

CONNECTICUT

A program for community assessment & involvement

Your name:

Your gender:

Your age:

Your contact information:

Community you are from:

Community you will visit:

Date of your visit:

Time spent in the community (hours):

Weather conditions on the date of your visit:

Contents

Introduction 1
 Preparing for your visit 1
 Suggestions for using this guide 2

Your visit 3
 Prior to arrival 4
 10-minute impression 4
 Community entrances 5
 Downtown or central business district 6
 Retail outside downtown 8
 Tourism 9
 Housing 10
 Business & economy 11
 Education, health, social, & emergency services 12
 Government, infrastructure, & land use 14
 Recreation, faith, & culture 17
 Firsthand comments from residents 20
 Using your senses 21
 Reflections 22

Wrap up 23



Inspiring great Connecticut downtowns,
Main Street by Main Street



EXTENSION

Introduction

You have volunteered to be a member of your community's visiting team in a First Impressions community exchange. Thank you for your commitment to your community. 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 candid viewpoint on various aspects of the community you visit.

Preparing for your visit

You will need to make some preparations before the visit and complete some reporting tasks afterward. We encourage you to take time to familiarize yourself with the questions in this booklet, which will make it easier to navigate the contents on the day of your visit. You may also have an online version of this survey tool available to you to upload photos and text from a smart phone or tablet on the day of your visit.

The pre-visit preparations or orientation may take a few hours of your time. You'll need to review the questionnaire, maps, and checklists and then participate in an orientation meeting to arrange trip logistics. This meeting may involve a review of materials, training about how to record your observations, and logistics—including weather and safety information for the day of your visit. The visit coordinator will give you detailed information on meeting spots, things you need to bring along, and

any arrangements for costs such as fuel and meals. Your visit coordinator may also provide pens, a clipboard, a note pad, a map, or a camera for use during your visit. In addition to the orientation, you may also be asked to spend some time online reviewing visitor information for your partner community. Consider taking a look at the community website, Facebook, Twitter, or other sources.

Typically, the visit will take 4 to 8 hours, plus drive time. Volunteers are encouraged to take the safety precautions provided by your site coordinator (e.g., remaining within the boundaries of the site visit), to carry a cell phone and sharing that number with members of the visit team, and to avoid situations that may be suspect. If ever you feel your safety is compromised, you are encouraged to enter the nearest establishment and call the site coordinator's cell phone and/or the local police, if necessary. Safety concerns will be addressed during the pre-visit orientation in more detail.

After your visit:

- Expect to attend a final team meeting to share and discuss your first impressions with each other. This meeting, perhaps in a focus group format, will help with the writing of the follow-up report.
- We strongly encourage the teams from both communities to meet informally after their visits to discuss their experiences and share lessons learned.

- At least one member of the team will contribute to a follow-up report.
- One or two members of the team with skills and experience in public presentations will assist in a community presentation about the results of the team’s work to the exchange community.

Providing constructive criticism always requires some diplomacy. Be sure to give careful attention to the words and phrases you use in the report.

Suggestions for using this guide

Be discreet as you record observations and seek out information about the community you visit. The intent is to get an honest feel for how visitors are treated in the community. Take lots of pictures if you can do so without being noticed. Otherwise, keep notes on the images you would like to capture and then take those photos at the end of your visit. Using a smart phone is recommended so pictures can be easily integrated into a community presentation. Your visit coordinator may provide you with a link to an online survey tool that can be accessed using a smartphone or tablet to upload image files while you are on your visit. Be sure to add notes about your images so they can be integrated into the final report.

Remember:

- This visit will result in better information if residents do not know you are there to assess the community. Try to find ways your partner community shines—but don’t ignore the “warts.” Feel free to record strengths and weaknesses not included in this guide.
- You can appear to be shopping, conducting business, or making a social visit. Strike up casual conversations with residents and be interactive.
- Be observant and take your role seriously—your sincere feedback is very valuable. Be sure to include details and comments, as they will be the most useful feedback for your partner community.
- Be sure to have fun.

Many questions in this guide ask you to provide feedback using a grade scale. Remember, people bring their own set of “lenses” to the visit. Use the following guidelines as you grade various aspects of the community based on what you experience:

- 9-10 = What I experienced far exceeded my expectations.
- 7-8 = What I experienced was better than my expectations.
- 5-6 = What I experienced met (but did not exceed) my expectations.
- 3-4 = What I experienced did not meet my expectations.
- 1-2 = What I experienced was far worse than my expectations.

Your visit

Prior to arrival

Circle a grade for your impressions prior to arrival:

POOR

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXCELLENT

What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit? What are you expecting to see? Share some of what you know.

Search destination and tourism information via websites and social media. If the community has a website write it here:

Comment on the community website for its appearance, usefulness, and credibility of information.

Comment on the usefulness and credibility of information you obtained about the community through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

Identify and comment on any other websites or online sources you used. Was there information you looked for but could not find online?

If you contacted the community tourism information office or visitor's bureau via email or phone, grade and comment on the friendliness and helpfulness of staff.

Identify the sense of the community you have from the online research ONLY. What is your gut reaction? Would you want to visit there with family or friends? Does this community seem to welcome you or others to visit or live there? Why or why not? Consider your income, age, interests, hobbies, family, health/disabilities, race, and ethnicity in your response.

 Remember to take photos of this and other topics during your visit. Try to tag them to remind you why you took them. This will make it easier to use them later.

10-minute impression

Circle a grade for your 10-minute impression:

POOR EXCELLENT
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Enter the community through the designated route and take a 10-minute drive without stopping. What was your first impression? Find a place to safely pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the community.

Community entrances

Circle a grade for community entrances:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Approach the community from the other major entrances. Grade and comment on each entrance. While there may be an obvious main entrance, there are typically multiple ways to enter a community. In some communities there may be entrances for other modes of transportation. Identify the community entrances you will review with your team before you begin.

Entrance #1: Road name and direction:

Entrance #2: Road name and direction:

Entrance #3: Road name and direction:

Entrance #4: Road name and direction:

Other entrances (airports, bike trails, boat landings, or train stations):

Downtown or central business district

Circle a grade for downtown or central business district:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Specify area: _____

Comment on the overall appearance of the buildings, displays, signage, and streetscape.

Comment on the variety of restaurant options.

Comment on the variety of shopping options.

Comment on the customer service you received during your visit.

Comment on the signage.

Comment on the window displays.

Comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

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

Comment on the accessibility of downtown merchants during evening and weekend hours.

Comment on the quality, availability, or necessity for parking in the downtown.

Comment on the walkability (presence or absence of footpaths, sidewalks, pedestrian rights-of-way, crossings, building access) of the downtown.

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for it to play a greater role? What evidence leads you to this opinion?

 *Consider taking a photo about this topic.*

Retail outside downtown

Circle a grade for your retail outside downtown:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comment on the mix of retail shopping available in the community outside of the downtown (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores, etc.).

What goods or services were missing or do residents need to travel outside the community to find?

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

Are there stores or other outlets where residents and visitors can go to reuse, resell, and/or recycle goods (clothing, electronics, household items)?

What stores in this community would you travel more than 30 miles to patronize?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Tourism

Circle a grade for tourism:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What unique features or populations exist in this community?

Does the community have an identifiable slogan or brand?

Does the community appear to have a strong tourism sector? Why or why not?

If they have a visitor's center, grade and comment on the customer service you received when you visited.

What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man-made)?

What natural, ecological, or environmentally related tourist attractions or accommodations exist in the community?

Comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations (hotels, motels, B&Bs).

Comment on the customer service of front desk and concierge staff.

Housing

Circle a grade for housing:

POOR											EXCELLENT
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Describe the residential housing mix in the community (apartment, townhouses, single-family, multi-family, etc.).

Comment on the condition of the following:

Existing/older homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Vacant lots for new homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
New homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Apartments/rental housing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Transitional housing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Senior assisted living	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Assisted living/group homes for those with disabilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Business & economy

Circle a grade for business & economy:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What appear to be the major employer(s) in the community?

Does there appear to be a primary industry in the community?

Is there a well-maintained industrial park? Why or why not?

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

Comment on the availability of professional and financial services for a community of this size (engineering, insurance, legal, and accounting firms, banks, ATMs).

Comment on the availability of high-speed internet services in this community.

Education, health, social, & emergency services

Circle a grade for education, social, & emergency services:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comment on the availability of schools (pre-school/kindergarten/Headstart, primary/elementary/middle schools, high schools, colleges/universities). How do local residents feel about schools?

Comment on the availability of healthcare facilities (hospitals, physicians, dentists, optometrists, or other medical offices and clinics, long-term care or assisted living, and other health services such as chiropractic, mental health, yoga, massage). How do local residents feel about these services?

Comment on the variety and quality of retail food outlets. Comment on location, cost, and types of foods available. Are healthy food options available?

Comment on ways that residents grow their own food or access food through local farms (community gardens, backyard gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture farms or drop sites).

Comment on the availability of emergency food services (food pantries, soup kitchens, community meals) for a community of this size. How do local residents feel about these services?

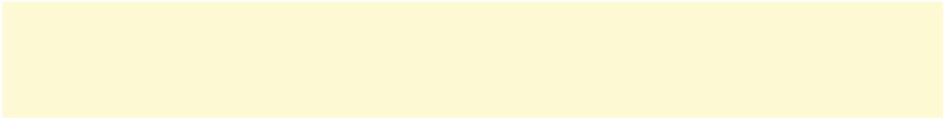
Comment on the availability of social services (day care, senior center, counseling) for a community of this size? How do local residents feel about these services?



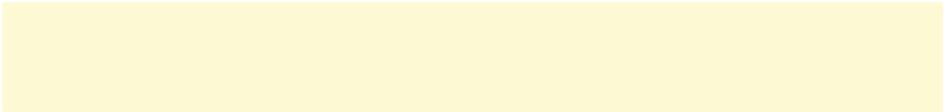
Comment on the availability of civic organizations and clubs for a community of this size. How do local residents feel about civic involvement?



Comment on the availability of private or public fitness centers or facilities for physical recreation. How do local residents feel about them?



Comment on the availability of emergency services. How do local residents feel about these services?



Comment on the availability of emergency shelters to accommodate residents in the event of a heat wave, flood, or other disaster. Do they appear accessible to people without vehicles? Is there signage in the community indicating where these shelters are located?



 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Government, infrastructure, & land use

Circle a grade for government, infrastructure, & land use:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Are municipal offices conveniently located?

Comment on the availability and quality of community brochures, business directories, or community profiles if they are available (either online or paper).

Comment on the helpfulness of government employees.

Grade the availability of the following modes of public transportation:

Local bus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Intercity or regional bus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Van	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Train	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Taxi	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Ride sharing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Shared bicycles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

Comment on how easy it is to connect from of public transport to another?

Comment on the availability and usefulness of public transit maps/schedules/websites, if applicable. If public transit exists, are people using it?

Grade and comment on the availability of each of the following:

Streets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Bike lanes on street	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Street signage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Street lighting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Street crossings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Traffic controls	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Sidewalks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Bus stops with shelters/ shade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

What is the condition of bike paths/trails?

Comment on your sense of security/safety as a pedestrian or bicyclist in the community.

Is there signage for pedestrians and bicyclists?

Comment on the availability and accessibility of bicycle parking near schools, retail areas, community services, and recreational facilities.

Are community facilities and infrastructure accessible for people with disabilities, the elderly, and people pushing strollers, etc.?

Grade and comment on the availability and quality of the following amenities:

Benches	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Shade areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Drinking fountains	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Public art	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Landscaping/ streetscaping	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Public restrooms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Public trash containers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Public recycling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Household recycling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

Do you see compatible land uses, such as a park near a museum, or conflicting ones? Are land uses (commercial, residential, green space) appropriately located?

Comment on the apparent effectiveness of water management in the community (storm water drains, rain barrels, rain gardens, permeable pavement areas). If there is a river or stream, are there developed areas that appear to be close enough to be damaged by flooding?

Did you experience traffic congestion anywhere? If yes, where?

Do areas of the community appear to be developing or declining? Comment on how effectively the community appears to be managing this.

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Recreation, faith, & culture

Circle a grade for recreation, faith, & culture:

POOR EXCELLENT
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Grade and comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following:

Parks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Public recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Private recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Non-motorized bike or walking paths	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

Comment on what the following groups appear to do for recreation/fun: families, young people, senior citizens.

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

Grade and comment on the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following:

Senior citizens	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Families	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Young adults	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Single adults	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Teens	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Children (6–12 years)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable
Children (0–5 years)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not applicable

Does the community have historic buildings or places? Are they well maintained?

Does the community hold annual events or cultural festivals? How did you hear about them? What did you learn about the traditions behind the festivals?

Does the community appear welcoming to a diverse range of residents? Why or why not?

If you are visiting this community during night hours, please complete the following questions.

What night-time locations/venues appear to be popular? How did you hear about these?

Comment on the appeal of the community's nightlife and entertainment options.

Comment on the suitability of street and alley lighting.

Comment on your perception of safety at night.

 *Consider taking a photo about this topic.*

Firsthand comments from residents

Circle a grade for firsthand comments from residents:

POOR

EXCELLENT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Grade and comment on the friendliness of residents of the community.

What do local residents recommend regarding lodging?

What do local residents recommend regarding events?

If residents did not have answers to your questions, were they able to refer you to someone else who could provide assistance?

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

Did residents identify a particular issue to be of major concern?

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

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Using your senses

Circle a grade for using your senses:

POOR

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EXCELLENT

What did the community taste like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or other food store that you will remember?

What did the community smell like? Were there any offensive smells? What about pleasant odors (flowers, food, etc.)?

What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community (traffic, industrial noises, birds singing, water fountains, music on the streets, trains, clock chimes).

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

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (children playing, hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, safety issues, smiling faces)?

Do you think your impression would be different if your visit occurred during a different time of day or at a different time of year?

Reflections

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

Would you consider locating a retail, professional, or nonprofit business here? Why or why not?

Would you consider living here? Why or why not?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Wrap up

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 and experienced?

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

List three positive things you observed about this community.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three potential opportunities available to this community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the three biggest obstacles or challenges facing this community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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

What have you learned 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 community and describe how you will implement it.

Other comments:

 Remember to consider entering your responses and uploading your photos to our online tool.

Thank you

for participating in Community First Impressions!



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut First Impressions program was adapted from the UW-Extension First Impressions Program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider in 1991 and revised by Andrew Lewis in 2002 and 2007. This edition was revised in 2014 and again in 2016.

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UConn
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE,
HEALTH AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

EXTENSION



Inspiring great Connecticut downtowns,
Main Street by Main Street

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Community First Impressions