



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

INNOVATE

A Program for Innovation Place Assessment & Improvement

Your name:

Your gender:

Your age:

Your contact information:

Community you are from:

District you will visit:

Date of your visit:

Time spent in the district (hours):

Weather conditions on the date of your visit:

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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 6 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

In this guide, innovation districts refer to areas in the community or communities specified as impact areas. Please refer to the maps of innovation impact areas to be sure all of these locations are included in your assessment.

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 excellent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Prior to your visit, search websites you think may be related to the innovation ecosystem (business resources, innovation projects and programs, accelerators, incubators, etc.) and request and print-based collateral materials provided to prospects that highlight targeted industries, entrepreneurship and other innovation programs.

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

Write the website you encountered here:

Comment on the websites you encountered related to the innovation district for their appearance, usefulness, and credibility of information that might be of interest to businesses.

Comment on the websites you encountered related to the innovation district for their appearance, usefulness, and credibility of information that might be of interest to potential residents.

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

Was there information you looked for but could not find online?

Visit and review municipal and economic development websites. Based on what you encountered online comment on the quality of the marketing and branding for the city and district.


Comment on the quality of the marketing and branding for the city and district.

If you were able to review collateral materials, are they effective – why or why not?

Based on what you encountered online, comment on the presence or accessibility of any business attraction strategy for the city and district.

*Does there appear to be a coordinated effort for marketing economic development, innovation efforts and workforce development?

Identify the sense of the community you have from the online research ONLY. What is your gut reaction? Does this innovation district 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 innovation district 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 innovation district.

Community entrances

Circle a grade for community entrances:

poor										excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Approach the innovation district 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 innovation districts there may be entrances for other modes of transportation.

Entrance #1: Road name and direction:

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 merchants during evening and weekend hours.

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

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

Comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting.

Comment on the quality of the natural environment in the innovation district (trees, shade trees, flower plantings, pocket parks, green spaces, etc.).

Does the innovation district 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.

Housing

Circle a grade for housing:

poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent

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

Rate and comment on the following:

Existing/older homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Vacant lots for new homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
New homes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Apartments/rental housing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Affordability of housing units	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Alternative or group housing (for seniors, people with disabilities, transitional)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA

*Is the housing in the innovation district integrated with the surrounding community? Why or why not?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Circle a grade for business & economy:

poorexcellent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What appears to be the major employer(s) in the community or district?

Does there appear to be a primary innovation related business or industry cluster?
If so, describe.

*Is there a clear geographic cluster of universities, medical centers, or large anchor companies? Describe:

*Is there a clear geographic cluster of innovation intermediaries (e.g. incubators, accelerators, coworking spaces, makerspaces, social enterprises). Describe:

Would this district be an attractive location for business development?
Why or why not?

Comment on the availability of professional and financial services in and around the district (engineering, insurance, legal, accounting firms, banks, ATMs, etc).

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

Comment on the availability and accessibility of overnight accommodations in the district.

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Innovation capacity

Circle a grade for innovation capacity:

poorexcellent

12345678910

Consider asking community & business owners their opinions on the following questions. Use internet research and observations during your visit to supplement your answers.

*Comment on the district’s innovation anchors and research strengths (may include universities, medical centers, or large anchor companies) and their presence in the district. Ask community & business leaders their opinions. Involvement might include student involvement, joint degree programs, proximity of research centers etc.

*Comment on and provide any evidence that research ideas are being commercialized.

Education, health and social services

poor

excellent

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 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 district 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 district's access to a talented labor pool. Are there any identified shortcomings?

Comment on workforce training programs available in or around the district. Are there opportunities for apprenticeships?

*Comment on the availability of STEAM (science, engineering, arts, technology, math) education programs in the region.

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Quality of place and connectivity

Circle a grade for quality of place and connectivity:

poor											excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

Are municipal offices conveniently located with regard to the district?

Does the district have an identifiable slogan or brand?

Comment on the helpfulness of government employees.

Comment on the walkability of street networks within the district.

Grade the accessibility of the following modes of transportation:

Local bus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Intercity or regional bus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Van	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Train	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Taxi	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Ride sharing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Shared bicycles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
International air service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Domestic air service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA

Comment on how easy it is to connect from one form of 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?

Comment on any physical barriers that limit access to parts of the district or its immediate surroundings:

Describe any historic places or distinct cultural amenities in the district. Are they well maintained and accessible?

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

Streets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Bike lanes on street	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Street signage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Street lighting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Street crossings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Traffic controls	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Sidewalks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Bicycle parking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Bike/Ped signage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Bus stops with shelters/ shade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA

What is the condition of bike paths/trails.

Comment on your sense of security/safety in the district.

Comment on the presence of publicly accessible places where people can meet in the district (shops, cafes, makerspaces, markets, lively parks and squares etc.)

Comment on whether the district has sufficient employment and residential densities to create the potential for interactions between users.

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

Benches	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Shade areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Drinking fountains	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Public art	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Landscaping/ streetscaping	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Wireless internet access points	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Public restrooms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Public trash containers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Public recycling containers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Household recycling containers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA

Are there clearly compatible or conflicting land uses in the district? Are uses appropriately located or are there uses that appear to be prohibited?

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.

Comment on the mix of residential and commercial buildings, ground-floor activity, public markets, cultural amenities, neighborhood amenities, public spaces, and other uses that connect people to each other.

Comment on the presence of any underutilized or abandoned buildings, highways, rail lines, or similar infrastructure in the district that may be a hindrance or an opportunity.

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

Parks (mowed and unmowed)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Public recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Private recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Non-motorized bike or walking paths	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA
Motorized trails (ATV, snowmobile)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	NA

What do people of various ages in this community appear to do for recreation/fun?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Circle a grade for diversity and inclusion:

poorexcellent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Comment on the apparent diversity (age, race, gender, income) of workers, researchers or students you encounter in the district.


*Comment on the apparent diversity (age, race, gender, income, etc) of residents of the surrounding community.

*Do surrounding neighborhoods appear to be physically connected to district anchor institutions, firms, and amenities?

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 location, design and programming of public destinations in the district appear welcoming to a diverse range of people including residents, workers, and others? Why or why not?

*Do residents of the surrounding community appear to be connected to the district?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Firsthand comments

Circle a grade for firsthand comments:

poorexcellent

12345678910


Comment on the friendliness of people you encountered in the district.

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 people you encountered in the community have a positive or negative attitude? Did you sense community pride?

Did people you encountered in the district identify a particular issue to be of major concern?

*Did people you encountered in the district seem to be engaged in innovation efforts?

 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?

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Reflections

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

What business, feature, attraction, or event would bring you back to this district in the future?

Would you consider living here? Why or why not?

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

 Consider taking a photo about this topic.

Wrap up

*Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? In what ways was the district 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.

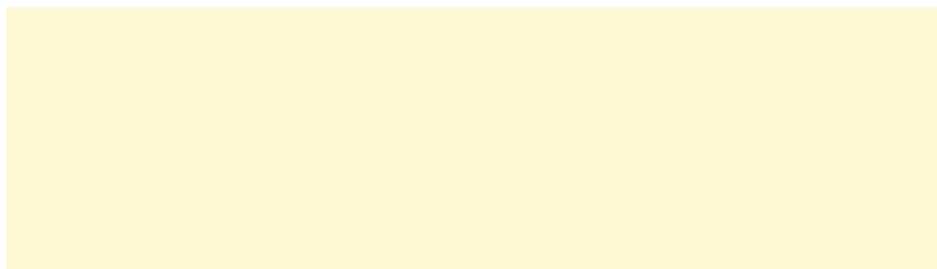
*What are the three biggest obstacles or challenges facing this community?

1.

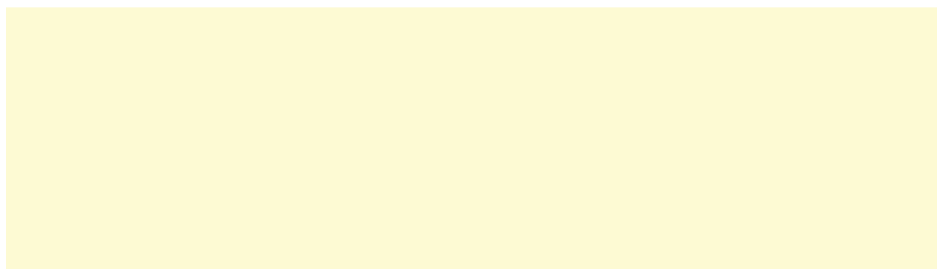
2.

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 First Impressions: Innovate!



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

INNOVATE

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, in 2016 for the state of Connecticut, and in 2018 for use by CT Innovations. In addition, Lisa McKinnon, Jay Moynihan, Victoria Solomon, Beverly Stencel, Diana Tscheschlok, Ingrid West, and Kristine Zaballos provided valuable input.

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