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1.0 Introduction to Manitoba’s First Impressions Community Exchange

Thank you for volunteering to be a member of your community’s First Impressions Community Exchange Team. Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is pleased to introduce this effective idea to you and we are confident that your experience will be enlightening, interesting and rewarding.

First Impressions Community Exchange helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor. Knowing about these strengths and weaknesses helps those who want to be proactive about the growth of their home communities and who want to make them more vibrant places to live and work. It is a program modeled after one originally developed at the University of Wisconsin and since used by hundreds of communities across Canada and the U.S.

You and a group of other community volunteers, will be making an anonymous visit to another community in Manitoba that is similar to your home community yet unfamiliar. Your team has agreed to visit this community to provide feedback. Your “first impressions” will be reported back to the exchange community to help determine their community’s strengths, weaknesses, areas of opportunity and ideas for improvement.

The exchange community will also gather a group of volunteer who will make a return visit to your community to provide the same service – an objective opinion of your community’s strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

2.0 Why First Impressions?

The First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) provides an unbiased assessment of a community from volunteers who then receive the same unbiased assessment from the exchange community’s volunteers.
The information that you provide and receive will:

- help identify both positive attributes and weaknesses in the community (Ex: community services, housing, business, industry, customer service, public infrastructure, health care, social services, education)
- provide a basis for a community vision or plan
- identify issues needed for downtown revitalization
- identify tourism strengths and weaknesses
- provide a sense of how a potential new entrepreneur or business investor might view your community
- provide information about services and infrastructure available to local businesses
- assess customer service in the community

FICE is meant to serve as a catalyst or spark in a longer strategic economic development planning process. Your community should be willing to respond to some of the recommendations and be open to constructive feedback.

### 3.0 Planning for the Visit

When you visit the exchange community, your group will be completing a questionnaire about various aspects of the other community. You will also take photos to help record some of the key areas of interest.

To plan for this visit, your group will meet with the FICE community co-ordinator to review the questionnaire, checklists, maps and trip logistics (approx. two-hour commitment). During these discussions, your group will determine specific responsibilities.

The co-ordinator will make the arrangements for the trip to visit your exchange community and will share the details with you.
4.0 The Exchange Visit

During the visit to your exchange community, you will tour the community, take photos, interact with people in the community, complete a questionnaire and return it to the co-ordinator. Some of the activities during your visit include:

- an initial group drive through of the community
- finding the information you need to answer your pre-assigned questions
  - as you interact with people in the community, you will play roles (E.g., a new resident, shopper, person considering moving to the area, tourist or someone looking to open a business)
  - the role you play will depend on the places you visit and the questions you ask (E.g., if you are pretending to be a new resident, you may ask someone on the street about recreational opportunities)
- be discreet as you record your observations and seek information about the community you visit

Once you have completed your assignments, your group will plan a meeting to ensure all questions have been answered and appropriate photos taken.

5.0 Tips

- You’ll get better information if residents do not know that you are assessing their community.
- Try to discover the great things about the community, as well as its weaknesses.
- Feel free to record additional community strengths and weaknesses not included on the questionnaire.
- Appear to be shopping, conducting business, or making a social visit.
- Strike up casual conversations with residents.
- Be observant.
- Enjoy yourself.
6.0 First Impressions Community Exchange Questionnaire

About the Questionnaire

While you are answering the questions in the guide, remember there may be variations to the questions that are better suited to the community you are visiting. Use your best judgment.

When you are asked to rate something, use the following guide:

1 - needs urgent attention/action
2-4 - needs improvement
5 - satisfactory
6-9 - good/very good
10 - excellent

1. Name of Community Visited

________________________________________________________________________

2. List of Team Members

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________
3. Before the Visit

What materials or information did you review prior to your visit?

☐ Website
☐ Business Brochures
☐ Community Profile
☐ Maps
☐ Tourism Guide
☐ Other

What is your impression of the community (before your visit) based on the information that you received and what you have heard about this community? What are you expecting to see? What do you know about this community? (Each member of the visitation team should complete this prior to the exchange visit.)

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4. **The Five-Minute Impression**

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, what was your first impression?

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5. **Using Your Senses**

As you complete the questionnaire, take note of how you might describe the community using your senses.

**Taste** – Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you remember?

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**Smell** – Is there a scent that characterizes the community?

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**Sight** – Was there any colourful or striking feature that made an impression on you?

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**Sound** – What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community.

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________________________________________________________________________
6. Community Entrances – Road/Highway

Approach the community from the major entrances. Rate and comment on each entrance.

ENTRANCE #1

__________

(road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

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**ENTRANCE #2**

(road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

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### ENTRANCE #3

(road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

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ENTRANCE #4

(road name and direction)

How favourable an impression of the community does this entrance provide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

needs urgent attention satisfactory excellent

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7. Housing and Residential Areas

Drive through as many neighbourhoods as possible, including the downtown.

How would you rate the overall quality, affordability and availability of housing in the community?

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<th>RATING (1-10)</th>
<th>TYPE OF HOUSING</th>
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<td>existing/older homes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>senior citizen housing</td>
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<td>new construction</td>
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<td>apartments/rental housing</td>
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Is there an *adequate mix* of housing to suit a variety of income levels?

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What are the *most appealing features* of the housing in this community? Why?

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________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
What are the **least appealing features** of housing in the community? Why?


Please comment on the **quality and availability** of residential infrastructure (ex: roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation and green space).


How would you rate the **overall appeal** of housing to the following groups?

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<tr>
<th>RATING (1-10)</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
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<td>low income</td>
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<td>middle income</td>
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<td>high income</td>
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<td>____________</td>
<td>single young adults</td>
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<td>____________</td>
<td>young families</td>
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<td>____________</td>
<td>senior citizen</td>
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</table>
8. Education/Health/Social/Emergency Services

8.1 Education

Comment on the availability and appearance of schools.

pre-school/daycare

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primary/elementary

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high school

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What do residents (young and old) think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

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Overall, how would you rate the quality and availability of schools for a community of this size?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
needs urgent attention satisfactory excellent

__________________________________________________________________________

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8.2 Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities.

hospitals:

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physician and dentist offices and clinics:

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long-term care and nursing homes:

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other health services (e.g., chiropractor, physiotherapy, naturopath, massage)

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Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of health care services of a community of this size?

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8.3 Social Services

What social services (E.g., day care, seniors centres, counseling) are available in the community?

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What types of not-for-profit organizations and clubs are within the community? What role does each organization or club play in the community?

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8.4 Emergency Services

Do residents feel fire, ambulance and policing services are adequate?
9. **Local Economy**

What is your impression of the overall health of the local economy?

____________________________________

____________________________________

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9.1 **Retail and Business Services**

Visit as many businesses as possible.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance of the main business area.

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Rate and comment on the variety of shopping opportunities in the main business area.

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Rate and comment on the customer service you received.

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</table>
Rate and comment on the signs in the main business area.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
needs urgent attention satisfactory excellent

Rate and comment on the window displays in the main business area.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
needs urgent attention satisfactory excellent
Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise in the main business area.

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Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the community area (E.g., housing, professional services, skilled services, trades, retail, recreation, accommodation and food, industry, parks)

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Rate and comment on the quality and availability of parking in the main business area.

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Rate and comment on the safety (E.g., lighting, sidewalks, accessibility) of the community.

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9.2 General Information About Retail and Business Services

Describe the mix of retail and business services throughout the community.

What retail goods do not appear available to local residents?

What stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a town of this size?
Are there stores in this community that would attract shoppers from a distance of more than 40 kilometres?

Rate the overall condition of the main business area.

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9.3 Local Industries

What are the major industries in the community or area?
Who do you think are the major employers in the community?

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________________________________________________________________________
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What are the major types of primary industry in the community (E.g., agriculture, mining, forestry or fishing)?

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Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry? If so, please comment.

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________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Is there an industrial park or serviced land where industries could locate or expand? Explain.


Are the industrial facilities well maintained? Explain.


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


10. Professional/Commercial and Government Services

10.1 Professional Services

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located? Do the banks have convenient hours of service (including business and retail services)?

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How would you rate the adequacy of financial services for a community of this size?

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What other professional services are available (E.g., accounting, legal)? Are there any professional services missing? Be specific.

10.2 Commercial Services

What types of commercial businesses service the local community (E.g., high-speed Internet provider)?

What commercial services are missing in the community (E.g., print shop, industrial cleaning service)?
10.3 Local Government Information

Are municipal offices conveniently located? Please comment.

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How would you rate the availability and quality of the following information provided by the municipal government?

community brochure/guide:

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### Business Directory:

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### Community Profile (Including Business and Industrial Opportunities):

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If applicable, were you able to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial business investment decisions? (Answer only if you played the role of a potential business investor.)

11. Public Infrastructure and Planning

11.1 Public Infrastructure

Rate each of the following for quality, accessibility, or availability where relevant.

sidewalks:

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### Streets:

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### Landscaping, Trees:

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### Public Restrooms

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- **1**: Needs urgent attention
- **2**: Satisfactory
- **3**: Excellent

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### Street Signs

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- **1**: Needs urgent attention
- **2**: Satisfactory
- **3**: Excellent
public rest areas, benches:

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11.2 Planning

Do you see any conflicting land uses in the community (E.g., residential subdivision next to a heavy industry?)

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space, etc.)? Specify where land uses are not appropriate.
Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities? Please comment.

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12. Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Faith, Entertainment and Recreation

Does the community have a strong year-round tourism sector? Please comment.

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Does the community have a slogan/brand? If so, what is it?

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Is the community well known for an attraction, event or festival? Are there any events/festivals, held annually?

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Have you seen any attractions (natural or man-made) that could be developed to draw tourists?

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Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

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Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of seasonal signage and decorations.

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Do you consider any of the existing attractions to be underdeveloped? Please comment.

Do you have any suggestions for new attractions, events or festivals?
12.1 Services for Tourists

Is there a visitor’s center, chamber of commerce office, or other facility to serve tourists? Is this service available in all seasons? Please comment on the staff, facilities, location, signs, marketing material, maps, etc.

Comment on the availability and selection of accommodation and campgrounds in the community.

Are there facilities to accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors?
Rate and comment on the quality and availability of public restrooms.

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Rate and comment on the quality of restaurants.

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Rate and comment of the variety/mix of restaurants.

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needs urgent attention  satisfactory  excellent

Where do local residents recommend as places to stay, eat and visit?

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future? Why?
12.2 Culture and Heritage

What community events are popular with residents?

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What other opportunities might exist for community activities or events?

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Does the community have any heritage buildings? Are they well maintained?

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12.3 Faith/Religion

Comment on the number, appearance and selection of religious buildings in the community.

Are there any outstanding architectural or design features of religious buildings you visited?

What is your overall impression of the religious buildings you visited?
12.4 Entertainment
What does the community do for entertainment?

What entertainment opportunities do residents feel they lack?

12.5 Recreation Facilities
Rate and comment on the availability, and appearance, of each of the following types of recreational facilities.

parks:

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needs urgent attention  satisfactory  excellent
Based on your impression, what do people in this community appear to do for recreation?
What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?


What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?


Rate the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following groups.

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<td>families</td>
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<td>singles, young adults</td>
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<td>teens</td>
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<td>children (6 - 13)</td>
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<td>preschool</td>
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13. Information from Community Residents

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

[Blank space for comments]

Did they refer you to someone else who would help? If yes, who?

[Blank space for comments]

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

[Blank space for comments]
Did residents identify any particular issues to be of major concern (e.g., safety)?

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Overall, how would you rate the knowledge-ability of community residents and business employees about the community and their willingness to share information?

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13.1 Other Observations

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

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What, if anything, did you experience that had a particularly negative or positive effect on your impression of the community? Be specific.

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14. Wrap-Up Group Questionnaire

The following questions should be discussed and answered as a group.

Was your perception before the visit accurate? In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

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Did the information you collected before the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experience? Why or why not?

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What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

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How would you describe the demographic make-up of the community (e.g., primarily a retirement community, large youth population, etc.)?

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Would you consider this a suitable location for a young family? Why or why not?

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Would you consider this a suitable location for a retired person? Why or why not?

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Would you consider this a suitable location for a young single adult? Why or why not?

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist? Why or why not?

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here? Why or why not?
Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here? Why or why not?

List five positive things you observed about this community.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

1. 
2. 
3. 
What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

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


What have you learned here 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?

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Describe one idea that you will borrow to use in your own business/community? Describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours.

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Other comments:
15. First Impressions Community Exchange

Photo Log

Photographer’s Name:

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For more information on First Impressions Community Exchange, contact the Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Killarney GO Office at 204-523-2194 or 204-523-5260 or email Paige.McDougall@gov.mb.ca.