



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

University of Nebraska – Extension
Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Community Development Specialist &
Phyllis Schoenholz, Community Development Educator

With permission from:
Dr. Andy Lewis
Community Development Specialist
Center for Community Economic Development
University of Wisconsin Extension

Revised for Nebraska use - 2007

Contents:

Introduction	3
How to Arrange a First Impressions Exchange	4
The Report and Final Action Steps	6
Users guide worksheet	9
Prior to your visit	10
Past Perceptions	11
The “Five Minute Impression”	11
Community Entrances	12
Downtown Business Area	13
Other Retail Shopping Areas	16
Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas	18
Health Care Services	19
Housing	20
Schools	21
Faith/Religion	23
Civic	24
Residents	25
Public Infrastructure	26
Recreation/Tourism	28
Wrap Up/Using Your Senses	30
Template to Be Used for Final Report	34

Introduction

The Extension program, First Impressions, was created to help residents see their community as an newcomer or traveler might see it – to get an accurate “first impression” from an outsider’s perspective. Originally developed by Dr. Andy Lewis from the University of Wisconsin Extension, it has been used for over ten years with hundreds of communities participating in the program. During that time, the program success has been recognized by others and its use has been expanded into several states and countries.

The reason behind the program is universal – when you live in a community, things become familiar and comfortable. Something that might have irritated you initially as a newcomer to the community now blends into the background. Over time it becomes very difficult to be objective. It also becomes more challenging to be completely honest with our neighbors when dealing with difficult issues (i.e. the appearance of buildings, customer service, and maintenance of public facilities). In other words, local community residents often no longer see things that could be changed and sometimes also don’t have the willpower to bring up the issue of change in a public setting. It is just easier to maintain the status quo. But it becomes much harder to ignore the issue when someone from another community brings it up and it is discussed at a community meeting.

This is where the program First Impressions comes in. 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 could about their sister city. They follow procedures and reporting guidelines that were provided in a fully developed guide that participants also use as a checklist. The intent was to develop a guide that would ensure that the evaluations and reports were thorough and somewhat uniform, and that the guide would minimize the training of volunteers. The authors designed the guide so that anyone could become a shopper if they knew what they were shopping for.

After the exchange and the report is written, the process does not stop. Town hall meetings, or forums, are encouraged. This is where good, honest discussion happens and hopefully some action items are identified. Improved community appearance and service to travelers and newcomers is the goal.

Special Thanks

University of Nebraska Extension extends our thanks to our colleagues in Wisconsin, Dr. Andy Lewis – Director, UWEX Center for Community Economic Development and Extension Specialist, Dan Hill - Lafayette County UWEX Community Development Educator, and Dave Muench - Outagamie County UWEX Community Development Educator, for their work in developing and revising the guide and graciously letting our state modify the program guide for Nebraska use. For those interested in seeing completed reports from the Wisconsin program, they can be accessed electronically at <http://www.uwex.edu/li/andy/finalreports.html> .

*The first version of this instrument was developed by Andrew Lewis, University of Wisconsin-Extension and James L. Schneider, Blue Chip Training in March, 1991

How to Arrange a First Impressions Exchange

The users guide and report template are available free of charge on the University of Nebraska- Lincoln Center for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI) website at www.cari.unl.edu. The only requirement for using the material is that you must provide the University with an electronic copy of the final report (please email the report to: cburkhartkriesell@unl.edu). Once the report is received it will be posted on the CARI website so that communities contemplating participation in the program can see a completed program report. It also gives the University the opportunity for follow-up evaluation with participants to help improve the program in the future.

If you have specific questions about the program please contact: either Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel (UNL Extension Community Development Specialist, ph: 308-632-1234, email: cburkhartkriesell@unl.edu or Phyllis Schoenholz (UNL Extension Community Development Educator, ph: 402-768-7212, email: pschoenholz1@unl.edu)

If you need help in identifying a community with comparable characteristics, you might consider contacting your University of Nebraska County Extension office, local economic development corporation or Chamber of Commerce to request assistance. Ideally, you should select a community that is far enough away so your team won't be totally familiar with it, but close enough to make this a one day trip (overnight trips can be great too, but not everyone can spare the time). Remember, there are no perfect matches....just similar. Think about some of the characteristics that impact your community when making a selection:

- ___ County seat or location of state government
- ___ Miles from a major interstate
- ___ Miles from a major urban area
- ___ Unique geological/natural feature (i.e. lakes, recreational areas)
- ___ Population
- ___ Major industries/employers
- ___ Are there any specific community issues that are currently impacting your community that another community may also be facing (i.e. a road by-pass)?

NOTE: A listing of Nebraska communities by population has been acquired to aid in this matchmaking process. It is posted on the CARI website (<http://cari.unl.edu>) with the other First Impressions materials.

Prior to Your Visit:

Question: If you were thinking about moving to a new community, visiting that community, or doing business in that community, what would you likely do before visiting? Answer: Request information from the appropriate organizations prior to your visit through a direct mail request, phone call and web search. You should also request information about your new community for First Impressions as well. You might want to consider calling the village/city hall, the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, as well as some of the state agencies that should be able to provide contact information. In Nebraska, consider contacting: The Nebraska Department of Economic Development – Division of Tourism (www.visitnebraska.org ph: 1-800-228-4307).

Before You Begin:

Before you begin your First Impressions visit, there are some things you should know about the program...

Purpose:

The purpose of the program is to help a community learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of the first time visitor. The program also provides a structured opportunity to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of other similar communities. The results from a First Impressions visit can serve as the basis for community action. The final report and photos can also be used as a means of documenting change within the community over time.

Your Group:

Ideally 3-6 people should comprise a team for the visit. Plan to make the visit together as a group (car pool). It makes for a more enjoyable experience and helps to ensure a better end result as well.

Try for as much diversity as possible. Remember that the rest of the world may not look like you! Work for a mix in terms of the typical diversity issues: age, occupation, sex, income, and the number of years as a community resident.

Remember, while “expert” opinions may be beneficial, each person’s opinion is valid and important. You may want to get together a day in advance to review the guide, ask questions, review materials received from the community, etc.

The Visit:

Plan to arrive in the exchange community in the morning. Review this users guide on the way and decide who will be “team mates” for the visit. Think about dividing into a driving team and walking team with that role being reversed in the middle of the visit. Decide who will target the various stops in town (more than one team can visit, but be sure to cover all of the “community indicators” in this guide). Develop a story to explain your visit. You get to be an actor for the day! This is like the “secret shopper” concept...you don’t want to be treated any differently than the real visitor. You might consider being a person who is trying to locate property in the area, interviewing for a job in a neighboring community, or just traveling through and decided to explore (i.e. “looking for a reason to vacation here next summer”).

Tips:

1. Take a pocket notepad for each person (writing in the guide is too conspicuous).
2. Check the areas that you would like to photograph, but save the photo opportunities for the end of your visit (Who else would be taking pictures of the rusty water tower?). If you want more than one photographer, consider the use of disposable cameras. If you want to have slides for a community presentation, you should have at least one person with a 35-millimeter camera or digital camera. Check with the other community on the format that would be most useful for them, as they will be the ones integrating the photos into group presentation opportunities (Obviously if you have a preference for format, this would be the time to express that as well!). The First Impressions guide includes a column where you can indicate photo opportunities that you would like to come back to at the end of the day. Use the first column in the photo log column to indicate the pictures you want to take. Use the second box in this same column to indicate the photo number (Or write down the name of the photo if you are using a digital camera).
3. Take notes! Yes you can have fun too, but if you don't take notes your thoughts will be lost in short order. The driver should stop frequently for note taking.
4. Ask for directions, places to eat, information on town, etc. Don't forget to request information from all of the obvious sources prior to the visit (Please see, "Prior to Your Visit, page 7).
5. Look for positives as well as problems. If you see a problem, try to offer some constructive criticism that might remedy the problem. This isn't a movie critique, so we hope you don't get satisfaction out of simply belittling another community. Look for things that you would like to copy in your own community.
6. There is no wrong way to do this, remember, two people may see the same thing and react differently – that's OK!
7. Have Fun!

The Report & Final Action Steps

Once you have completed the visit, you will need to complete a single composite report that summarizes the comments from your entire team. Each member of the visitation team should complete their report with 3-4 days and return their responses to the team leader. This final report should include:

- A cover letter that provides a profile of your visitation team, the weather on the day of your visit, the date the visit took place, the amount of time spent in the community, a general summary of the visit, a thank-you for participating in the exchange, and contact information for the contact person in your group.
- Each member of the team should use the following report to summarize his or her comments. This template should also be used for completing your summary report. Try to use descriptive sentences and give examples and suggestions. For example, "We could not find the Chamber of

Commerce office” is not as good as, “We could find no Chamber office but some people said that there was a community “civic” club. Nobody could tell us where they had an office or who the president was. Clearly, the “civic” club could improve their visibility by sharing this information widely with community officials.”

- As soon as you receive the final report from the other community (but not before you have sent your final report to the exchange community), you should make copies and distribute them in the following order after you have set a date for a Town Meeting (See below):
 - Sponsoring committee leaders and people who went on the visit
 - City/Village officials
 - Media
 - General public

Remember ... not everyone enjoys surprises.

- As a condition for using these materials, we ask that you please email a copy of your final report to: University of Nebraska Center for Applied Rural Innovation, in care of Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, 4502 Avenue I, Scottsbluff, NE 69361-4939 or email to cburkhartkriesel@unl.edu Your final report should use the standard report cover, which credits the authors of this program. Through your participation in this program, you agree to let us post the final report on the CARI web site (<http://cari.unl.edu>), and to have participants in the program respond to a brief evaluation of the program. By receiving a copy of the report, the University of Nebraska will also share the data with the University of Wisconsin, the originator of the program, in an effort to track program impact.

Community Action ... Now What?

While we hope you had fun on your visit and learned something about how you might improve your community, this exercise only becomes meaningful if you begin to act upon what you have learned. We would urge you to consider hosting a “Town Meeting”, or public forum, for sharing what was learned. This public forum is an opportunity to reflect on the final report that you received from the exchange community, lessons you may have learned from your visit, and begin to focus on whether or not there are any actions that could be taken to address potential problems in the community.

This forum would be most useful if you combine slides (images from the community) with comments from the final report. One way to do this would be to simply select someone from your group to present a summary of the final report. It might be possible to do joint presentations with representatives from the exchange community. In other states where this has been done, regional forums in which communities shared their experiences and findings were developed.

In preparation for this public meeting, you should plan on having copies of the final report available along with news releases and photos for the media (don’t forget to extend an invitation to the media!). Your committee should review the final report prior to the meeting and prepare a list of points that could be addressed by some form of community action.

Possible agenda:

1. Welcome and introduction to the First Impressions Program (who, what, when, where, and how).
2. Distribution of final report from the exchange community (have press releases available for the media).
3. Review of major points found in the final report. These points could be covered along with images from the community (This list should be formulated with input from the group of volunteers who participated in the exchange. You might want to have this list as a handout.).
4. Review of things learned from the exchange community visit (What did you see and learn from your visit to the other community?).
5. Action Planning session. You might want to consider breaking up into small groups to begin addressing some of the issues found in the final report. During the discussion, action items are commonly identified. Once the ideas are brought back to the larger group for further discussion, identify one or two people that are willing to take leadership for the effort. During the public forum, several key areas should be identified. For instance, if a local park needs some repair and upgrading, it would be ideal if one or two individuals volunteer contact the appropriate officials and set up an initial meeting. The meeting should end with everyone knowing what kind of action, if any, is going to happen as a result of this effort.

After the forum... making a difference!

If action items are identified (and often they are), this is where ideas are translated into action. After the public meeting, small group follow-up sessions are needed. Here is where the details of the action plan are determined: What is the task? How long should it take? Who will do it? Exactly what needs to be done – what are the logical steps? How will we know when it is done?

As groups work, they need to remember to celebrate during the process, and at completion. Improvements need to be acknowledged by both those who worked on the project, as well as by the community. For instance, think about hosting an event in the new park and make sure the media is present. Let the public know that a program, First Impressions, got the idea started. Sometimes, all it takes is a little spark, like the impressions of a mystery shopper in your community, to help get people motivated!

**First Impressions Revisited:
A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement Users Guide**

Community You Visited (City and State): _____

Your Personal Profile

Name: _____

Age: _____ **Gender:** _____ **Occupation:** _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ **E-Mail:** _____@_____


Date of visit and amount of time spent: _____


Weather on date of visit: _____

***Photo Opportunity Reminder:**


A picture tells a thousand words. While you don't want to blow your "cover" taking pictures of water towers and entrance signs in a town with a population of 4,000, we do urge you to go back and take pictures of some of the features that you viewed in town after you have completed the majority of your visit.


As a reminder, check (✗) the boxes of those images that you would like to go back and capture on film. Once you have taken the picture, use the second box in the photo log column to record the number of the photo (Remember the mush principle...this photo may not look familiar a few weeks from now!). Use your imagination...a picture of a bell tower might capture what the community "sounds" like, while a picture of a brochure next to a picture of the way something actually looked, might convey that there is some "false advertising" going on!


<p>1. Prior to Your Visit</p> <p><i>Assign this information-gathering task to one person in the group (If you have an address other than one in your home community, you might consider using that to keep your identity hidden).</i></p> <p>How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?</p> <p>Did the information you receive accurately reflect the community?</p> <p>Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?</p> <p>Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?</p> <p>What was the quality of information obtained from regional/state agencies and organizations (i.e. Department of Tourism, or Department of Commerce)?</p>	<p>Many communities assume that others know how to get in touch with them, but it is usually more difficulty than you might expect. Communities need to inform others about who the appropriate contacts in the community are (i.e. State agencies, regional tourism organizations, local units of government). Communities also need to take a look at how they are portrayed on the web. Yahoo Internet Life actually started ranking cities on how “wired” they are...as this is an important factor for many businesses and individuals.</p> <p>Make sure material placed in print and on the web is reviewed and modified on a regular basis.</p> <p>Check the following websites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.visitnebraska.org/about/cvbchamber.asp The website to find specific Chamber of Commerce or Visitor’s Bureau in Nebraska communities • http://www.nebraska.gov The website connects to the official local government websites and provides local information on the community. • http://crd.neded.org Call Twyla Witt (402) 471-3791, Administrative Assistant of Division of Travel & Tourism. Twyla works with the representatives from communities, attractions and events to coordinate literature and information for fulfillment request. Nebraska Department of Economic Development • http://visitnebraska.org/ Nebraska Division of Travel & Tourism 	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	--	--


<p>2. Past Perceptions</p> <p><i>What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?</i></p>	<p>Past experiences and media reports often influence a person’s perception of a community. It may have even impacted your decision to participate in this exchange! What do you think of when you think of Waco, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; or Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin? Do they raise good, bad, or indifferent responses?</p> <p>Jot down a few things that come to mind when you think about this community. You will have an opportunity later on to reflect on these perceptions</p>	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	---	--


<p>3. The “Five Minute” Impression:</p> <p><i>Take one drive through the community without stopping. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence; don’t talk with the others in your group for this part!</i></p> <p><i>Please comment on your observations:</i></p>	<p>+</p> <p>How fair is this? Could you possibly discover what’s important about this community in five minutes? Well, who ever said the world was fair? Everyone has passed through communities without having the time to stop. And yet, most people form an opinion about a community based on their experiences... even if they are limited.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	--	--


<p>4. Community Entrances</p>		<p> Photo #</p>
<p><i>Enter and exit the community through all of the major entrances.</i></p>	<p>While there may be an “obvious” road route through town, there are typically multiple ways to enter the community. In some communities, there are also multiple transportation modes. Does the community have an airport? Does the community have a bus station or train station? What about a bike trail or major river? If these options exist, you will want to check out these possible entrance points as well.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><i>Please comment on your observations for each entrance:</i></p>		
<p>Approach #1: _____ (Name of road or transportation mode and direction you approached)</p>	<p>Points to consider:</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Approach #2: _____ (Name of road or transportation mode and direction you approached)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directional Signage to amenities like parks, schools, downtown, medical facilities, attractions, public service (i.e. police), etc. • Welcome signs that indicate what is unique about the community. • Community slogan • Aesthetics • Safety/traffic issues • Street signs • Traffic patterns/street conditions. 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Approach #3: _____ (Name of road or transportation mode and direction you approached)</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Approach #4: _____ (Name of road or transportation mode and direction you approached)</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p>5. Downtown Business Area</p> <p><i>Some of your exploration of the Central Business District/Downtown Business Area can be done by car, but you will need to take time to walk and visit with some of the business people in town.</i></p> <p><i>Please comment on your observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:</i></p> <p>General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage:</p> <p>The variety of shopping. Do you see a good mix of commercial/retail services that match what you would expect for a community of this size...i.e. grocery, hardware, apparel, furniture, professional services (lawyers, accountants, medical services, banking), specialty stores, restaurants, etc.? Were there any surprises?</p> <p>How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?</p>	<p>Central business districts were typically the only location for retail businesses in many of our small towns. With the expansion of big box retailers and shopping malls, the health of our traditional downtowns has deteriorated in a number of communities. Other communities have utilized Business Improvement Districts, the Main Street Program or other efforts to maintain the viability of the downtown.</p> <p>Nebraska Lied Main Street Program (check if the visited community participates in Main Street Program.) (http://www.nebraskamainstreet.org/)</p> <p>Many people have assumed that the decline of our central business districts in small communities is inevitable. However, communities involved with the National Main Street program have reported a different trend: In an annual survey of 200 Main Street towns, retail sales were up in 56 percent of historic Main Street communities. Sixty-one percent reported an increase in the number of retail businesses. Ground-floor occupancy rates rose for 59 percent of respondents. Crowds at downtown events grew 78 percent of the time (Source: 2001 Main Street Trends Survey, see: http://www.mainst.org).</p> <p>In Nebraska, more than \$27 million of public and private reinvestment has occurred thanks to Main Street. There have been 230 new businesses, 656 new jobs and 899 building rehabilitations. On average, %15.13 has been generated in each community for every dollar used to operate the local Main Street program. (http://www.nebraskamainstreet.org/memberinfo.shtml)</p> <p>In a study evaluating the health of downtowns in small communities, the characteristics considered most closely correlated to the health of the downtown were "business mix". In other words, the factor having the closest association with perceived downtown health was shown to be the types of businesses located there (Source: Evaluating the Health of Downtowns, Let's Talk Business Newsletter, Issue 23, July 1998, Center For Community Economic Development, U.W. Extension, See: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/lets/lets798.html).</p>	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
---	---	--

<p>The reported craft supply does not always meet the perceived demand of tourists. Tourists wanted more of these craft items than they found available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leather items • Glass items • Handcrafted toys • Jewelry • Clothing • Functional craft for use (not only display) in the home (“Marketing Crafts & Other Products to Tourists,” 1992) <p>What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses? Were you greeted/acknowledged? Did anyone ask you how he or she could help you? Were they cordial, knowledgeable and helpful? Were they knowledgeable about their products as well as the community? Were they open during the hours in which you would typically be shopping?</p>	<p>Business is booming in downtown Scottsbluff, NE as several property owners continue their historic renovations of key pieces of real estate. The community is fortunate to have a varied business mix in the downtown and merchants who are willing to experiment with store hours and promotions to meet the needs of the customer base. (http://www.nebraskamainstreet.org/pdf/AnnualReport20042005.pdf)</p> <p>For most small town retailers, local residents generate the lion’s share of sales. However, the marginal amount generated from tourists can be critical in maintaining profitability and keeping a store’s door open. In recent years more rural communities are taking another look at tourism as a viable economic development strategy. It makes sense to diversify and to take full advantage of what is already happening in their community. Tourism dollars are also seen as new dollars, which increases the base level of activity in the community. (Cornhusker Economics, December 14, 2005; http://agecon.unl.edu/pub/cornhusker.htm)</p> <p>For examples of retailers’ strategies for marketing products to tourists, see the publication “Marketing Crafts & Other Products to Tourists,” 1992. (To request the publication, contact University of Nebraska, IANR Communications & Computing Services, Lincoln, NE - (402) 472-3023).</p> <p>Remember, it is the positive, friendly environment, information, products and services that meet or exceed the expectations that make a visitor feel at home. And customer service does translate into profits. For example: In one study, a waiter at a casual dining restaurant increased his average tip from 11.5% to 14.8% by simply touching customers on the shoulder when delivering the check to the table (Source: Lynn, M., Le, J. & Sherwyn, D. (1998). Reach out and touch your customers. Cornell H.R.A. Quarterly, 60-65). While some businesses are actually working hard at trying to convey a caring customer service focus, others fail to provide even the most basic customer service training for their staff.</p> <p>Good service can be anything from giving directions and restaurant recommendations to entertainment suggestions or handing out maps. For more information about how front-line employees can promote their community in a positive way, contact Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel (308) 632-1234 (Red Carpet Service program) http://ruralinitiative.nebraska.edu/development/tourism/red_carpet.html</p>	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
---	--	--

<p>6. Other Retail Shopping Areas</p>		<p> Photo #</p>
<p><i>Big Box retailers (Walmart, K-Mart, Borders Book Store, Walgreens Pharmacy etc.), as well as strip malls/shopping malls located outside of the central business district.</i></p>	<p>Only a few of our communities rely strictly on the traditional “Main Street” businesses. Don’t forget to check out the other retail areas within the community and take the time to compare how they are dealing with some of the same issues as the traditional Main Street businesses (i.e. customer service, hours of operation, parking etc.)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>What types of businesses did you notice that would fit the general category of “Big Box Retailer”:</p>	<p>For more information on the changes in retailing activity in rural Nebraska and recent consumer trends:</p>	
<p>General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage (Please be specific if there were multiple stores in this category):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Importance of Shopping Locally</i> by Diane Vigna, Alan Corr, and Nancy Miller (University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Publications) http://extension.unl.edu/cpllessons/hef547.pdf 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>The variety of shopping. Do you see a good mix of commercial/retail services that match what you would expect for a community of this size.... i.e. grocery, hardware, apparel, furniture, professional services (lawyers, accountants, medical services, banking), specialty stores, restaurants, etc.? Were there any surprises?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers are spending less time at traditional shopping malls. Precision shopping is more common. Consumers do less generalized shopping and make fewer trips to malls. They tend to know what they want and where to find it (<i>The Importance of Shopping Locally</i> by Diane Vigna, Alan Corr, and Nancy Miller (University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Publications)) • Towns with healthy retail sectors tend to attract other services sectors. Other services can add to the economy of a community as well. A study by the American Dental Association shows that just one dentist can mean up to !1.6 million in economic growth for a community (<i>The Importance of Shopping Locally</i> by Diane Vigna, Alan Corr, and Nancy Miller (University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Publications)) 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
		<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p align="center">7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas</p>		<p align="center"> Photo #</p>
<p>Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand?</p>	<p>To find out what manufacturers say is important to their operations, see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Competitiveness: Results of the 1996 Rural Manufacturing Survey: http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer776/ 	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>What did you find attractive about the potential locations for manufacturing/commercial businesses? How would you evaluate the general health of manufacturing businesses that are currently located in the community?</p>	<p>Check the Nebraska.gov – Official website of Nebraska (Moving category and check for affordable housing, community resources, cost of living, employment, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://crd.neded.org/housing/ah_overview.htm <p>Check Location One Information System (an on-line searchable economic development database that provides detailed information on buildings, sites, and locations for businesses looking to expand.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.locationone.com/states/index.php 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Could you find print information and informed persons that could provide you with data that would help you make an informed business location decision?</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p>8. Health Care Services</p>		
<p>Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services:</p>	<p>According to Alan Fox, publisher of <i>Where to Retire</i> magazine, "Every year, nearly 400,000 people move to a new town in a new state after retiring, bringing skills, time, energy and disposable income. They are searching for a better quality of life and a chance to belong to a community." In a 1997 study conducted for that magazine, retirees identified the following factors, in order of preference, on their list of reasons to choose a retirement destination: low crime rate, good hospitals nearby, mild climate, low cost of living, low overall tax rate, low housing costs, friendly neighbors, major city nearby, no state income tax and good recreational facilities.</p>	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physician, dental, optometrist, and other medical care:</p>	<p>The oldest segment of our population is also one of the fastest growing segments of the populations.... The older population increased by 17 percent between 1980 and 1990 and by 7 percent between 1990 and 1998. (Source: Growth of the Oldest Population and Future Implications For Rural Areas, Community Economics Newsletter, No. 289, November, 2000. See: http://www.aae.wisc.edu/www/pub/cenews)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>What long-term care, assisted living, or nursing home facilities exist in the community?</p>	<p>Obviously, good health care facilities impact the location decisions of everyone, but they play an even greater role for our retirement community. In addition, hospitals are often one of the biggest employers in many of our small communities.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>

9. Housing

How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock? Did it provide an adequate mix of existing older homes, new construction, available vacant lots for new development, assisted living, and rental units?

Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed...i.e. were there an abundance of "For Sale" signs and a lack of upkeep and maintenance? Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing (i.e. no real estate signs, and no visible place for new construction)?

If you can get easy access to some housing information from a local realtor or from publications in the community or from listings in the paper, please comment on the range of housing costs. Does the local housing market have housing that would appeal to all income ranges? Are there sufficient rental properties for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

Check census data (State/Place and chose tables related to housing –H1, H2, H6, H7, H8, H15)

- <http://factfinder.census.gov/>



Photo #

10. Schools

Please try to view all of the schools that exist in the community (public & private). If the community is part of a shared school district and some of the facilities do not exist in the community, please comment as to whether or not the commuting distance to these facilities would be acceptable. Comment on these facilities based on the physical appearance of the buildings (Do they appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of "temporary class rooms"? Are they well maintained?).

Pre-School/Kindergarten/Head Start/Day Care facilities:

Elementary School:

Middle School/Junior High:

High School:

The number of graduates of U.S. **private** high schools is projected to increase from an estimated 273,000 in 1998-99 to 298,000 by 2010-11, an increase of 9%.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Information on Nebraska communities and schools can be found at:

- <http://assist.neded.org/neweb.html>



Photo #

11. Faith/Religion

Religious preferences can be a significant location factor for many people. For some, a place of worship in close proximity to the community is significant, while an overly intrusive religious community might offend others. Whether someone is an atheist, a born again Christian or a Muslim, most people would agree that places of worship are often the most impressive architectural structures in town. Please try to keep in mind a diverse set of needs while evaluating the religious infrastructure of the community.

Please comment on the number of denominations represented in the community:

Please provide some commentary on the physical appearance of the churches in the community:



Photo #

<p>Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services (i.e. educational facilities, meeting facilities, food pantries, day-care, and recreational facilities)?</p> <p>Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith?</p>		<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	--	---

<p>12. Civic</p> <p>Does it appear as though there are a variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community? <i>Look for offices, signs, and print materials.</i></p>	<p>According to National Center for Charitable Statistics, in Nebraska there are 12, 879 nonprofit organizations, including 435 social and recreational clubs. Nonprofit organizations include civic clubs (Rotary, Elks, Lions, etc), youth groups (4-H, boy scouts, YMCA, YWCA, girl scouts, FFA), garden clubs, Red Cross, food pantries, sports clubs, and many other diverse kinds of groups. These organizations are the means by which most citizens participate in their community.</p> <p>http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/PubApps/profileStateList.htm</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
---	--	--

13. Residents

Please comment on the friendliness and hospitality of community residents.

In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful (i.e. community information, suggestions for dining, directions)?


How did people talk about their community? What were their attitudes about their schools, public leaders, and community services?

Were they knowledgeable about their community or able to refer you to people who were?


Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country (age, income, ethnicity, political etc.)? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?




Photo #

<p align="center">14. Public Infrastructure</p>		<p align="center"> Photo #</p>
<p>Streets, street signing and lighting:</p>	<p>While not everyone is an advocate of planning and “smart growth”, more people are recognizing the need for a community to grow in an orderly fashion. Were incompatible uses separated from each other? Has the community preserved the assets, which define its own unique “sense of place”? Do investments in public infrastructure appear to match recent growth or decline in the residential and business areas of the community? For more information on “Smart Growth”, see:</p>	<p align="center"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Land Use Planning:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.smartgrowth.org (Smart Growth Network) • http://www.smartgrowthamerica.com/ (Smart Growth America) 	<p align="center"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Sidewalks (In addition to the condition of the sidewalks, did the community appear to be “pedestrian friendly”?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.urbanfutures.org/state.cfm?state=Nebraska (Nebraska State Planning & Growth Management Data Base) 	<p align="center"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Bike and walking paths (also usable by children and elderly?)</p>	<p>There is a growing movement known as the “New Urbanism” that is trying to recapture what many small communities used to provide in traditional neighborhoods. To learn more about these pedestrian and neighbor friendly communities see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.newurbannews.com/AboutNewUrbanism.html (New Urban News) • http://www.newurbanism.org/ (New Urbanism) 	<p align="center"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Public Restrooms:</p>		<p align="center"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>

Community/Village/Town Hall:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photo # <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities		
Public Parking:	Public Parking concerns are often overblown, but are still important. Take into consideration that in some of our larger cities, monthly parking fees average hundreds of dollars (\$510 a month in New York, \$245 in Minneapolis, \$375 in Chicago). Source: Colliers International (www.colliers.com)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Library:		
Landscaping/street trees:	Environmental respectful community (tree retention, natural landscape features, water features etc. taken advantage of. Are these features included into a retention policy and/or conversation efforts?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, other misc.:		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

<p style="text-align: center;">15. Recreation/Tourism</p> <p>Is the community well known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?</p> <p>Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations (Hotels, Motels, Bed & Breakfast, Resorts, Campgrounds)</p> <p>Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents, i.e. festivals, athletic events, tours, etc.</p> <p>Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community (i.e. Lakes, Rivers, Scenic views, public parks)</p>	<p>When someone mentions The Big Apple, The Windy City, Gateway to the West, or The Mile High City, people generally know what community they are talking about. This is called marketing. Granted, these are large communities and have large promotion budgets, but the idea is still the same. If a slogan gets used enough and is properly marketed, it gets known outside the community. That identity can not only benefit community recognition, but may attract people to the community.” Source: Muench, David, <i>Wisconsin Community Slogans: Their Use and Local Impacts, 2nd Edition</i>, University of Wisconsin Extension, 1993</p> <p>Impact of community slogans on Iowa communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/news/ComCon09.html 	<p style="text-align: center;"> Photo #</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	---	--

<p>Are there any significant man-made attractions...i.e. museums, athletic facilities, water parks, bike paths, walking trails?</p>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photo # <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Is there an obvious visitors center, chamber of commerce office, Main Street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? <i>Please comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.</i></p>		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

<p>16. Wrap-Up....Using your Senses</p> <p>What did the community TASTE like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or candy store that you will remember?</p> <p>What did the community SMELL like: Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural, or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors.... were there any smells from local restaurants or flower gardens that attracted your attention?</p> <p>What SOUNDS did you hear? Traffic, industrial, natural (birds singing, water fountains, winds gusting), train or boat whistles, noon whistle, music on the streets or in the mall....</p>	<p>We can all think of communities where an emotional response or sensory experience strongly influenced our perception of a community...an outstanding food at a local restaurant, the offensive smell of a local industry (paper or oil refinery), a pleasant smell from a local bakery or flower garden, or the harsh sounds from highway traffic. Use your senses in responding to the following questions....you will be surprised by the significance of these sensory experiences!</p> <p>There are a number of businesses that have developed strategies for Appealing to the senses of sight, smell and sound. The Alpine Chocolat Haus in Gaylord, MI makes candy on the premises and attracts many customers by allowing them to watch the candy production. The aroma of the cooking chocolate helps sales. Similarly, Das Wurst Haus in Lanesboro, MN sells great German food and draws customers with the sound of an accordion (Source: <i>Retail Strategies to Capture Tourism Dollars, Part 2. Shopping Experience, Lets Talk Business Newsletter</i>. See: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/lets/0799ltb.pdf)</p>	<p> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
---	---	---

<p>What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p> <p>4.</p> <p>5.</p> <p>What will you remember most about this community six months from now (positive or negative)?</p> <p>Describe ONE idea that you will borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!:</p>		<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photo #</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--	--	--

For More Information:

Cheryl Burkhardt-Kriesel, Ph.D
UNL Extension Community Development Specialist
UNL Panhandle Research & Extension Center
4502 Ave I, Scottsbluff, NE 69361
Tel: 308-632-1234
E-Mail: cburkhardt-kriesel1@unl.edu

Or

Phyllis Schoenholz
UNL Extension Community Development Educator
Southern Plains Extension
225 North 4th
Hebron, NE 68370
Tel: 402-768-7212
E-Mail: pschoenholz1@unl.edu

The following is a template to be used for the Final Report. For those interested in obtaining the documents in a WORD format, please directly contact either C. Burkhardt-Kriesel or P. Schoenholz.



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited:

Date of Visit:

Visit Completed by (community):

Original Program Developed by: Andrew B. Lewis
Community Development Specialist, Center for Community Economic Development
University of Wisconsin Extension and adapted by
Cheryl Burkhardt-Kriesel, UNL Extension Community Development Specialist &
Phyllis Schoenholz, UNL Extension Community Development Educator
3/1/07

Contents:

Prior to your visit XX
Past Perceptions XX
The “Five Minute Impression” XX
Community Entrances XX
Downtown Business Area XX
Other Retail Shopping Areas XX
Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas XX
Health Care Services XX
Housing XX
Schools XX
Faith/Religion XX
Civic XX
Residents XX
Public Infrastructure XX
Recreation/Tourism XX
Using Your Senses XX
Photo Opportunities XX

First Impressions Revisited: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement Final Report

Community You Visited (City and State): _____

Visitation Team Profile:

Name1: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____@_____

Name2: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____@_____

Name3: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____@_____

Name4: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____@_____

Name5: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____@_____

Date of visit and time spent: _____

Weather on date of visit: _____

NOTE:

You might want to consider tracking purchases (perhaps even finding a sponsor to provide \$50 to each participant). It would be useful to report where any money was spent within the community.

Insert pictures where appropriate in the sections above or paste your photos into the final report at the end using the following format:

Picture # _____

This Picture was taken because:



1. Prior to Your Visit

How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?

Did it accurately reflect what you saw?

Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

What was the quality of information obtained from regional/state agencies and organizations?

2. Past Perceptions

What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?

Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

3. The “Five Minute” Impression

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, the following reactions were noted:

4. Community Entrances

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances:

Approached from _____:

Approached from _____:

Approached from _____:

Approached from _____:

5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage:

The variety of shopping:

How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses?

Were there any governmental or nonprofit organizational activities that might serve as a magnet for the shopping district?

Were there the following public amenities?

Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):

Drinking fountains:

Benches:

Public restrooms:

Appealing landscaping:

Did you have any difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

6. Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box Retailers/Shopping Malls)

What types of businesses did you notice that would fit the general category of “Big Box Retailer”?:

General Appearance of buildings, displays signage:

The variety of shopping:

How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses?

Did you have any difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand?

What did you find attractive about the potential locations for manufacturing/commercial businesses?

How would you evaluate the general health of manufacturing businesses that are currently located in the community?

Could you find print information and information and informed persons that could provide you with data that would help you make an informed business location decision?

8. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services:

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physician, dental, optometrist, and other medical care:

What long-term care, assisted living, or nursing home facilities exist in the community?

9. Housing

How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock?

Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed?

Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing?

Does the local housing market have housing that would appeal to all income ranges? Are there sufficient rental properties for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

10. Schools

Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of “temporary class rooms”? Are they well maintained? Please comment on the following:

Pre-School/Kindergarten/Head Start/Day Care facilities:

Elementary School:

Middle School/Junior High:

Higher Education (Community College, Technical College, University):

Were you able to find print information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?

11. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations represented in the community:

Comment on the physical appearance of the churches in the community:

Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services?

Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith?

12. Civic

Does it appear as though there are a variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community?

13. Residents

In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful?

How did people talk about their community? What were their attitudes about their schools, public leaders, and community services?

Were community members knowledgeable about their community or able to refer you to people who were?

Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?

14. Public Infrastructure

Streets, street signing and lighting:

Land Use Planning:

Sidewalks:

Public Restrooms:

City/Village/Town Hall:

Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:

Public Parking:

Library:

Landscaping/street trees:

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, other misc.:

15. Recreation/Tourism

Is the community well known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations:

Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?

Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community?

Are there any significant man-made attractions?

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, Main Street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Please comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?

16. Wrap-Up....Using your Senses

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

What did the community smell like?

What sounds did you hear?

Did you have any experiences that impacted the way the community feels?

What are the 5 most positive things that you observed about the community?

What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

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

Describe ONE idea that you will borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!