



First Impressions Community Exchange
A Stepping Stone on the Path to Community Sustainability

The First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) program helps communities learn about existing strengths and shortcomings as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor.

FICE was first developed in Wisconsin as a relatively simple, and inexpensive community development tool. It involves two municipalities of similar size and situation sending small teams of volunteers to each other's communities. The teams assess aspects such as friendliness, aesthetic appeal, housing, infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and other elements of the community. This assessment is used to determine how different organizations and individuals such as tourists, youth, business people and retirees might view a community and decide whether or not to visit, live or locate a business there. Once volunteer teams have conducted their visits and assessments, the communities meet to provide reports and exchange feedback that highlight the strengths of the communities and suggest how weaknesses could be addressed.

The benefit of FICE is that it provides communities with a fresh perspective that is delivered by a fellow community which likely has a good understanding of the barriers to community development and may have some firsthand, practical ideas of how to overcome them. Another aspect of the FICE exchange is the opportunity for municipalities to partner with local businesses and other organizations to develop and champion action plans that address areas of need and opportunity.

FICE also provides the basis for ongoing collaboration between municipalities, business leaders and community organizations to share ideas and solutions. It has been utilized with great success by smaller communities in both Ontario and Saskatchewan as well as throughout the United States, not to mention the 18 Alberta municipalities who have participated over the past couple of years.

Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Government of Alberta's Agriculture and Rural Development (AARD) have formed a partnership to adapt and deliver the FICE program for Alberta municipalities. Many smaller Alberta municipalities are ready for change and are interested in positive steps such as municipal sustainability planning, beautification, community spirit and revitalization initiatives. The FICE program can serve as a practical tool in helping to identify and develop areas of opportunity within a community.

For more information:

Visit: www.auma.ca and select First Impressions Community Exchange from the Toolkits and Initiatives menu on the left hand side of the screen.

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