

FIRST IMPRESSIONS [PRESENTATION CHECKLIST]

One of the primary goals of the First Impressions program is to move a community from talk to action that centers around specific recommendations for community improvement. The community presentation can be an effective way to accomplish this goal if a town hall meeting is designed correctly. These key points should be considered when scheduling the presentation.

INVITEES

For grassroots community change to be successful, making a real effort to hear from all sectors within the community is critical. When residents are empowered to “own” an idea or project, they are more likely to “underwrite” it as well. In many cases, potential volunteers simply do not know how to engage in community decision making and are not even asked to participate. Simply stated, all voices need to be given an opportunity to be heard. Taking the time to target specific groups using several different strategies can pay dividends in the long run.

While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, representatives from the following sectors should provide an excellent opportunity for healthy discussion and diverse viewpoints to emerge:

- ▶ Faith-based community leadership
- ▶ Minority associations or organizations
- ▶ Elected and appointed municipal and county officials
- ▶ County Extension Service personnel
- ▶ State and federal legislative/congressional representatives or staff
- ▶ Minority or women-owned business owners/leadership
- ▶ Traditional business owners/leadership
- ▶ Chamber of Commerce, economic development, and/or tourism organizations
- ▶ Civic groups
- ▶ Municipal- or county-appointed boards or committees
- ▶ Education representatives (pre-K through college)
- ▶ Informal associations (garden club, neighborhood watch group, parade committee, etc.)
- ▶ Students and young adults
- ▶ Media representatives

LOCATION

It is important to select a location that is easily accessible for all residents, paying attention to individuals with disabilities and special needs. It is also critical to have the meeting in a location that is nonthreatening or not intimidating to some residents. Sometimes the city/town hall, the courthouse, or the Chamber boardroom quickly comes to mind as an ideal location, but are these venues really inviting to everyone? Churches, schools, and community centers may prove better locations for getting the best turnout.

TIMING

The meeting should be scheduled when it is convenient for the majority of residents to attend. Generally, evening meetings work best; however, some communities have better attendance at a breakfast or lunch seminar. If an evening meeting is the most desirable, it is important to determine the exact starting time. In communities where many residents work out-of-town, a 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. starting time may work best; otherwise, a 5:30 p.m. starting time will probably work well. Again, it really depends on the commuting patterns of the residents. While there is really no “best” day of the week, Wednesdays and Fridays should probably be avoided for evening presentations.

Thank you for your interest in the First Impressions program. Visit www.sig.msstate.edu and click on “Programs” for more information and an electronic application.