

## *First Impressions: Tourism Assessments (FIT)*

### Community Application

Michigan State University Extension appreciates your community's interest in applying for the First Impressions (FIT) program. The following application form will provide insight into the program and outline the basic requirements needed to be successful as a host community.

Please be specific in your responses by using the spaces provided in the application. In order for applications to be fully considered, the MSU Extension requires applicants to follow these basic requirements:

- Lead applicants (and partners) fully understand the FIT process by reading the information provided in this application packet.
- Inquire with MSU Extension tourism educators on any uncertainties related to their application prior to submission, such as their community's commitment, FIT process and costs, and/or other topics of interest.
- The community understands that only one application per community will be accepted, and they will be accepted only via email.
- Applications should be submitted electronically to
  - MSU Extension Educator, Andy Northrop, [northro5@msu.edu](mailto:northro5@msu.edu).

## First Impressions Background

The First Impressions (FI) program was developed in 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Extension to help communities learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The FI program has been used to help communities across the U.S. and Canada inform economic initiatives or further develop community goals. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension has adapted this program, adding a tourism focus to meet the needs of Michigan communities. MSU Extension's First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism (FIT) is a unique version of FI for our state.

MSU Extension's FIT program is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community positioned to lead development based on program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum open to all, and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

The results of FIT can:

- Spawn local leadership
- Strengthen community vitality
- Form the basis for future development

The MSU Extension FIT program not only fosters solutions to strengthening a communities' tourism and recreation industry, but also provides solutions for creating places where people want to live, learn, shop and work as well.

### Community Criteria

- Communities with accessible downtown area or a designated central point are best suited for FIT, but all communities are encouraged to apply.
- Ability to meet the expectations as defined below, including the formation of an active Community Leadership Team (CLT) and secured funding (See program costs).

### Community Preparations and Expectations

- Prior to applying, assemble a CLT representing a cross-section of the community that will be responsible for executing host community responsibilities for the FIT program.
- Fully complete and submit the FIT application electronically to MSU Extension tourism educator and FIT lead in either the Upper Peninsula or Lower Peninsula.
- If your community is selected for participation in the FIT program, then you will be responsible for:
  - a) Informing the entire CLT of application success and begin corresponding with MSU Extension FIT leader.
  - b) Agreeing to and signing a service agreement between applicant lead and MSU Extension that outlines program costs for the host community and the services provided by MSU Extension (See program costs ).
  - c) Attending a preliminary meeting early in the program process between your entire CLT and the FIT lead to discuss program logistics, expectations, and become familiar with FIT.
  - d) Preparing a half-day Community Report Forum (CRF) to share results, including arranging all logistics, inviting residents to participate in community meeting and documenting demographics, and setting everything up with the community participants/CLT. The community is responsible for providing these logistics as in-kind contribution to the program.
  - e) Keep all members of the CLT, partners, and community informed and engaged.

### Time-line and Process

From the time of application acceptance to program implementation, the FIT program is expected to take between four and six months for an individual community. However, this is only an estimate as some aspects of the project may require more time. Please reference the FIT Brochure in this application for more details.

### Program Costs per assessment/per community

- All communities will receive a written report of FIT results, a power-point of summarized results delivered in a public forum, raw data collected from assessments, and a copy *FIT Next Steps Manual* to help guide future action.
- Communities have two assessment options for FIT:
  - \$5000 dollars - All resources and a community assessment by 5 person team.
  - Larger assessment teams are feasible, but will require additional time and costs:
    - As a general figure, communities can calculate \$1000 for each additional assessors. This option requires additional discussion between communities and MSUE. Please contact to discuss further options. Figures are subject to change annually.

### Benefits of Participating in the FIT program

- By participating in this program, communities will learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first-time visitor. Results will help strengthen an existing cohort of community leaders and residents by providing them with an opportunity to organize based on valuable feedback about their community. Therefore, via a list of action items derived from the program, communities can begin to take action on improvements themselves to advance tourism and the communities' quality of life.

Application Begins Here

**COMMUNITY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Point of Contact (please print clearly or type):**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. In order for us to understand your community better, please describe your community.

Please include information on challenges and successes as they relate to tourism and/or quality of life

## Community Leader Team Preparation / Expectations

2. Do you, as lead on this application, have a constituency of local partners to establish a Community Leadership Team (CLT) that is willing to assist with local logistics, conduct outreach to community leaders and/or residents, communicate across diverse partners and audiences, and use the information to the benefit of your community?

Potential team members to consider: please check the organizations participating.

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamber/CVB Director                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Resort/Hotel/Motel/B&B | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resources Specialist          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Director                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Attraction manager     | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum staff                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City planning or economic development staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Retailer               | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Society staff / volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Township supervisor or clerk                | <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurateur           | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts / theater Organization           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth representative   | <input type="checkbox"/> Others as appropriate                 |

Please provide contact information for your Community Leadership Team members (FIT requires a minimum of three people representing public and/or private sectors.)

[illegible]

3. Please describe your interest in the FIT program and how your community envisions using the information gained from the program. Are there specific steps you intend to take in regards to tourism and community development?

4. Is there a **specific season and year** you would prefer the actual visitor assessment be conducted? If so, please explain why this time of year and provide an alternative season. (MSU Extension cannot guarantee visitor assessments can be conducted in a preferred season.)

Thank you for taking the time to complete the FIT application. We look forward to reviewing your application and will make contact with you regarding the status of it within a few weeks. If you have questions regarding this program, you are welcome to contact the MSU Extension Tourism Team specializing in FIT.

Lower Peninsula - Andy Northrop, Extension Educator in Tourism and Community Vitality,  
northro5@msu.edu

Upper Peninsula - Will Cronin, Extension Educator in Tourism and Community Vitality,  
croninwi@msu.edu

This application was constructed from a variety of resources and partners.

- Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Host Application (2015), Community Entrepreneurship Team. Michigan State University Extension.
- Michigan State University Extension Tourism Team Plan of Work (2016).
- Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities: Community Application (April 2013). Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, University of Minnesota Extension and Tourism Center, University of Minnesota.

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## PURPOSE

**FIT** is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community positioned to lead development based on the program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum open to all, and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

### The results of FIT can:

- Spawn **local leadership**.
- Strengthen **community vitality**.
- Form the basis for **future development**.

Apply for FIT today to help your community enhance its appeal to tourists while advancing as a place where people enjoy living, working and playing.



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### For further information, contact:

**Andy Northrop, Extension educator**

MSU Extension

200 Grand River Avenue, Suite 102  
Port Huron, MI 48060

Phone: (810) 989-6935

E-mail: [northro5@anr.msu.edu](mailto:northro5@anr.msu.edu)

Web: [msue.anr.msu.edu](http://msue.anr.msu.edu)

Accommodations for persons with disabilities may be requested by contacting MSU Extension at 810-989- 6935 within two weeks of the CRF to make arrangements. Requests received after this date will be fulfilled when possible.

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

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## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

### Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)



[msue.anr.msu.edu](http://msue.anr.msu.edu)





# First Impressions: Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)

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## Process:

1. Form a community leadership team (CLT) made up of local stakeholders and apply for FIT by visiting [msue.anr.msu.edu](https://msue.anr.msu.edu) and downloading and filling out our application. (Search “First Impressions” first to download application)
2. MSU Extension educators will conduct a FIT orientation and outline next steps with the CLT.
3. A team of FIT visitors will then assess the host community unannounced.
4. The CLT organizes a community report forum (CRF), where MSU Extension educator/FIT assessor will share the assessment results and suggestions with the CLT and the community.



5. MSU Extension educator/FIT leader will provide a written report of results and suggestions to the CLT.
6. The CLT takes the lead in driving action within the host community based on FIT results.
7. MSU Extension conducts follow-up at a later date and offers further assistance.

## FIT communities will:

- Learn about their assets and opportunities from first-time visitors.
- Strengthen an existing cohort of leaders and residents by providing them an opportunity to organize on the basis of valuable feedback about their community.
- Develop a list of action items for community improvement.
- Integrate action items into community plans.
- Take action on community improvements and strengthen their image.
- Improve community well-being and quality of life for residents and visitors.

## INTERESTED IN FIT?

### Things to know:

1. FIT is designed to meet needs and interests of each community that applies.
2. Applications are accepted and reviewed year round.
3. FIT is ideal for communities with 10,000 people or fewer. Special arrangements can be made for larger communities.
4. On average, the FIT process takes between four and six months per community.
5. Applications can be found by going to [msue.anr.msu.edu](https://msue.anr.msu.edu) and searching “First Impressions” to download the FIT application.

