

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ASSESSMENT

SUPPORTING DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Inspired by the First Impressions Community Exchange developed in the US, [4TVI](#) created the First Impressions Assessment as a destination development tool to help remote and rural communities on Vancouver Island evaluate their strengths and challenges to improve tourism offerings.

PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

Rural communities face several unique challenges, including demographic changes as young professionals move to busier urban centres. These areas might not have the leadership and funding necessary to support economic growth. Similarly, aging infrastructure and competing priorities can contribute to low business attraction.

Additionally, since rural locals maintain intimate understanding of their communities, they might find it difficult to objectively assess their community's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.



MAPLE BAY | Photo: Tourism Vancouver Island/The Great Trail



ALERT BAY | Photo: Nathan Martin



PORT HARDY | Photo: Nathan Martin

PROJECT APPROACH

When designing the First Impressions Assessment, 4TVI focused on ways remote communities could attract new businesses and drive longer stays while preserving culture and heritage and protecting the natural environment.

The assessment involves members of 4TVI's Sustainable Development team travelling to rural communities to connect with residents and businesses while observing aspects of each area through the lens of a first-time visitor.

The team evaluates communities according to 20 assessment areas, with themes spanning residential areas, services and facilities, commercial spaces, public spaces, accessibility, and tourism assets. Along with the location visit, the team conducts interviews with key community members.

Once the evaluations are complete, the team generates a report summarizing the assessment findings and sharing recommendations for tourism development and sustainability initiatives. The community is encouraged to use this information as a foundation for destination development projects that build on its strengths while improving problem areas.

Ultimately, the First Impressions Assessment offers a fresh perspective alongside tourism expertise that may not exist within a community. It encourages the development of tourism products in underserved areas and drives collaboration between businesses, destination management organizations, partners, and 4TVI.



PROJECT RESULTS



11

communities across Vancouver Island implemented



Increased awareness of challenges faced by remote communities



Expanded to a regional scale

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The First Impressions Assessment emphasizes the need for collaboration among local partners and other community groups to achieve tangible results for destination development. It's also a reminder that it might be difficult for people who are familiar with an area to objectively assess its limitations, strengths, and opportunities.

Bringing in outside counsel with a fresh perspective, and creating an actionable report, can simplify the review and implementation process for rural communities and businesses, particularly for those that have limited staff.

Most importantly, taking a collaborative approach to engage rural and remote communities can facilitate tourism and economic development in all parts of a region.



ALERT BAY | Photo: Jordan Dyck/U'mista Cultural Centre