First Impressions Tour (FIT):

An unbiased perspective of a community's strengths and opportunities

Introductions

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First Impressions Tour

- A First Impressions Tour (FIT) is an assessment tool that can provide a community with an unbiased perspective of its strengths and weaknesses
- The assessment is truly a "first impression" of a community
- A group of community leaders will swap places with one another to complete an assessment (via a day-trip) of one another's communities using the First Impressions Tour assessment tool provided by the University of Central Arkansas (UCA)
- They will then take their findings and share them via a report and virtual debrief meeting
- The information gathered can be used to provide general direction for future community development efforts by identifying broad categories of community assets and/or areas for growth

How do we gather data?

- A FIT assessment includes information gathered through various avenues:
  - First Impressions Tour assessment packet
  - demographic and market data
  - discussion with community leaders and citizens
  - online assessment
  - driving tour of the community

What do we assess?

The FIT Assessment looks at the following aspects of a community:

- **Physical Infrastructure**: Accessibility, signage, highways, streets, and sidewalks
- **Social Infrastructure**: Healthcare facilities, parks and recreation, schools, housing, etc.
- **Economic Infrastructure**: Local small businesses, industry, downtown development, etc.
- **Online Activity**: Social media accounts, top search results, Tripadvisor, etc.

The end of the assessment allows those scoring the community to offer a reflection and highlights of their visit.

All the information is compiled into a simple report that analyzes a community's online, physical, social, and economic infrastructure and provides a list of possible "Next Steps."

FIT Assessment Example

UNIVERSITY OF
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Economic Infrastructure

Local Small Businesses

Rate and comment on the mix of the following small businesses:

|	Very good	Average	Needs Improvement	N/A
Specialty Shops/Boutiques				
Strip Malls				
Big Box Stores				
Pharmacies				
Thrift Shops				
Convenience Stores/Gas Stations				
Grocery Stores				
Fast Food				
Restaurants				

Newport Findings

- The best form of flattery in our business is duplicating successful projects – we loved Stuttgart's water park, grass ordinances, downtown façade project and are looking at similar projects for Newport.

- Stuttgart has grass ordinances with more teeth than Newport, City Beautiful Commission is reviewing our current ordinances for recommended changes.

Newport Takeaways

- Newport's boundaries are spread out and confusing for travelers. Looking at ways to direct to areas of interest (ASU-Newport, Downtown, Public Areas)
- Fit Tour recommendations can be a great opportunity for leadership class projects or to partner with existing organizations.

Where are we?
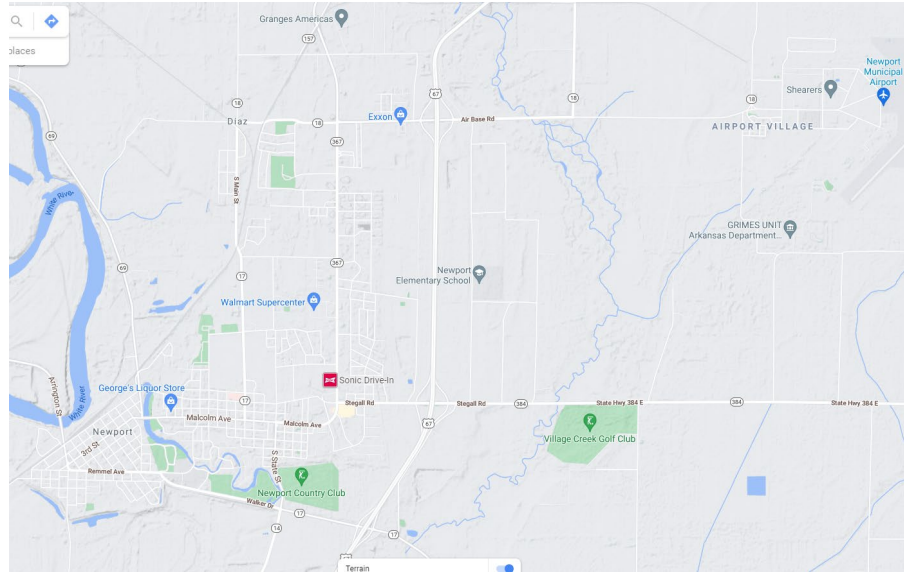
Newport Updates

- Implemented public art projects, now completing third downtown mural.

Stuttgart Findings

- We loved the wayfinding signage in Newport.
- We recommended bridging the gap between "old Newport" and "new Newport."

Stuttgart Takeaways

- We were able to take the information from the FIT back to our community to discuss improvements to our organization.
- We also learned that we are our own worst critics.
- It was refreshing to get positive comments on some of the things in our community we may not notice.

Stuttgart Updates

- We are currently working on a new website and will be incorporating some of the feedback from FIT.
- We are currently working on a branding effort and incorporating comments from FIT in the discussion.
- We are working on wayfinding signage for our community and downtown area.
- We are currently working on a Master Pedestrian and Bicycle plan to make our community more friendly to these visitors and residents.
- We are currently working on painting new crosswalks.

Paris Findings

- Preparation: Build a diverse team that will help share FIT findings.
- The Paris team used the benefit of wayfinding signs, useful trails and beautiful parks located in Gravette as a conversation starter.
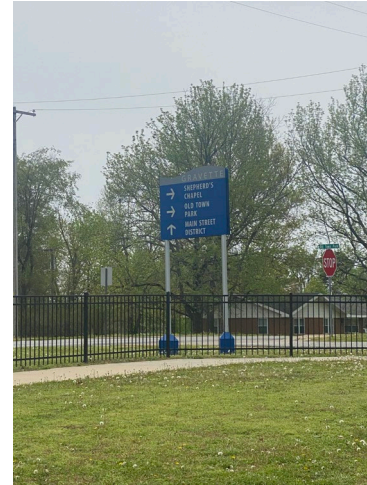
Paris Takeaways

- Using FIT as a tool to share with community leaders, including elected officials and business owners, as well as other organizations that work to improve our community.

Paris Updates

- City and County police officers have started posting positive messages.
- Mayor Rogers is giving a monthly video update across various media platforms.
- The Chamber of Commerce is giving their website a fresh, updated look.

FIT Assessment Exercise

Think about your community…

- What local restaurant, specialty shop, or attraction would bring someone to your community?
- What is your community known for? Do you have a brand?
- Do you think others would consider locating a retail, professional, or nonprofit business in your community? Why or why not?
- List three positive things about your community (besides the people).
- What are three potential opportunities available to your community?
- What are the three biggest obstacles or challenges facing your community?

Break into groups and share your answers.

Interested in a FIT Assessment?

Reach out to **Shelley Short** (shelley@aedce.org) or **Shelby Fiegel** (sfiegel@uca.edu) for more information.

Questions?