

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WOODFORD COUNTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE OF KENTUCKY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND ENVIRONMENT

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

2018



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The First Impressions Program is a service offered through the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK). First Impressions was developed by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County (WI) Economic Development Director, and conducted in over 1,000 communities across the US and Canada. Dr. Dan Kahl with CEDIK has adapted the First Impressions Program to meet the need of Kentucky communities. The program coordinates anonymous visits to your community by professionals in community and economic development, small business owners, community leaders and more, depending upon your specific community assessment needs. Visitors document their experience and interactions with community members. Their responses are then compiled and presented back to the community by a CEDIK representative. In addition, the program will offer suggestions and resources to address the areas identified for potential improvement.

For further information about this report or additional questions, please contact:

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CONDITIONS OF VISIT

Visits to Woodford County were conducted by 11 team members throughout the months of June to November. One team reported sunny and clear weather conditions, and another experienced warm and mid-70s temperatures. Visits were conducted on both weekdays and weekends to capture a variety of activity within the community. Overall, conditions were favorable for visiting and exploring the roads, small communities, parks, and businesses within Woodford County.

TEAM MEMBERS

Team members began by reviewing the Assessors' Guide with the coordinator and clarifying the purpose of their visit and geographic location from which they would enter Woodford County, in order to ensure that major entrances were explored. Adult ages ranged from 20 to 60 years, with a mix of small business owners, young professionals, traveling retirees and community development professionals. Assessors are from both rural and urban areas. Assessments were completed at an individual pace, allowing personal life experiences to shape participants' impressions. While quotations in this report should not be considered true for all individuals of these demographics, they do provide a valuable snapshot of visitors from a variety of ages, life experiences, and interests.

WEB PRESENCE

Prior to visiting Woodford County, assessors researched the community on the internet: visited official and non-official sites from search engines, restaurant and hotel reviews, and even school and newspaper outlets.

Overall, visitor impressions of the web presence were favorable. Several assessors noted the strengths of the city, county, and official tourism pages. Detailed comments were made about the county tourism site, including admiration for the Uniquely Woodford logo and phrase., with one reviewer stating “the sites are attractive and resourceful.” The Chamber of Commerce, City of Midway, City of Versailles and Woodford County sites were all reviewed and found to be beneficial for both locals looking for information and tourists.

Some assessors experienced difficulty with broken links and clunky layout while navigating web pages on mobile devices, and offered suggestions for improvement. They also noted that while the web pages were attractive, some had out-of-date event tabs so they were unable to easily see updated calendars for community events. Reviewers suggested the addition of maps to some of the county sites to improve integrated navigability from mobile devices, or printable tabs for travelers that like hard copies for navigation.

Assessors also analyzed Trip Advisor, Urbanspoon, and Yelp reviews to identify strengths and weaknesses. All assessors reported planning their trip and selecting locations to visit based on reviews on these sites. While there were ample reviews for restaurants, there were limited options for lodging. One reviewer noted it seemed challenging to make lodging arrangements based on the options on the review sites.

Assessors without young children had a more favorable outlook of a weekend trip than reviewers with young children. One suggested if there are activities for young children to do, they should be more prominently highlighted to assure families can experience Woodford County together.

On social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, reviewers had largely varied responses. Some observed high traffic on Facebook but it did not feel organized or cohesive, and some pages were updated regularly while others had not been updated in over a year. Others felt social media presence could improve considerably, and encouraged the community make note of pages that are outdated and encourage page owners to increase activity to improve presence.

Reviewers also observed that many small businesses were not adequately represented on social media, suggesting opportunity for community social media trainings to support business owners. Overall, reviews for the web presence were positive, with one reviewer noting, “my web impression is Woodford County is aware of their assets and striving to share them online.”

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COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

After completing their pre-visit research, your team began their time in Woodford County by doing a Quick Pass Impression: driving through the community quickly without stopping to create an instinctual impression without focusing too much on detail.

During the Quick Pass, reviewers overwhelmingly had positive impressions of the quality and consistency of the signage throughout the county. Visitors appreciated the way Versailles had a horse mural and Midway had a train mural, showing cohesiveness between the two communities while also maintaining distinct identities. Visitors who entered on scenic or county backroads said the trip was “breathtakingly beautiful”, while those who entered on Highway 60 or from I-64 had a less favorable experience. Visitors encouraged improvement from these roads to better indicate the charm only a few miles off of 60.

After completing the Quick Pass, Assessors returned to locations that caught their attention and began detailed exploration and documentation of the following:

EDUCATIONAL

RESIDENTIAL

HEALTHCARE

ARTS AND CULTURE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

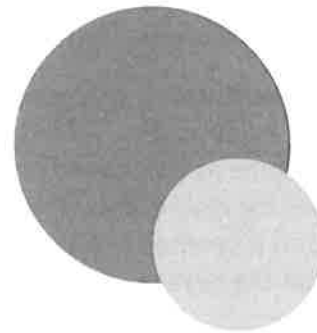
GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES

RECREATIONAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

SMALL BUSINESSES

RESTAURANTS AND LODGING

ADDITIONAL AMENITIES



Highlights from these categories include the range of housing to suit a variety of income levels, the beauty of the built environment and impressive preservation of historical structures, and the observable emphasis placed on arts and culture, local foods, and active, bustling community spaces.

All visitors noted the availability and ease of parking in both Versailles and Midway. They valued the free public parking lots with well-marked, cohesive signs. Visitors observed that even on hectic days, parking was available and easy to access.

Those who were able to stop in the Visitors’ Center had a positive experience during the week, but working professionals who visited on weekends lamented the limited hours, noting “it was disappointing that they weren’t open later on a busy Saturday afternoon.”

Visitors spent most of their time at the local restaurants, shops, distilleries, and wineries. They all observed a strong, well-organized abundance of opportunities within these topics, with lodging opportunities repeatedly listed as the community's greatest weakness. Some also observed a disconnect between tourism and the local residents, and felt there seemed to be a lack of local citizen and community engagement, and possibly even resistance to having so many "outsiders" in the community, due to some instances of poor customer service.

Some assessors suggested there are increased opportunities for the local community to promote small weekend/local events more through print materials. By increasing local citizen engagement opportunities the community could also increase the overall warmth and friendliness of the county. Multiple visitors observed an active community calendar of festivals and events online, but did not see print evidence of these calendars while exploring the community and felt this could be improved to draw visitors and residents alike to local festivals.

After several hours exploring Woodford County, assessors documented their Lasting Impressions on assets, challenges and opportunities they envision for the community, and make recommendations for further appeal to visitors that travel to the area. Notable comments include capitalizing further on outdoor recreation opportunities like trails, and expanding the itinerary opportunities to include agendas for girls weekend getaways, romantic weekend escapes, and family adventure weekends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the feedback compiled from visits to Woodford County, the following suggestions are recommended for future opportunities:

SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESS WEB PRESENCE DEVELOPMENT

Assessors noticed high quality websites and favorable presence for county and city led sites, but noted a disconnect for individual businesses. Consider hosting small business trainings, workshops, or resources to improve the overall web presence of the county through supporting individual business web development.

INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Even day-visitors noted an opportunity to further include local residents in the charming, quaint "brand" of Woodford County. By selling the community to locals as well as tourists, both audiences can benefit. By increasing broad citizen engagement opportunities and individual investment in the community, the overall impression of Woodford will improve even further.

DEVELOP A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EMERGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Generational differences had a distinct impact on visitor observations and experiences. Consider highlighting more family-inclusive opportunities as well as multi-generational experiences to broaden the scope of visitors looking to spend a weekend getaway in Woodford County.

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