

Report to Municipal Services Committee  
Meeting Date: September 2, 2025  
**Report Title: First Impression Community  
Exchange (FICE) Program**

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Report No. ECD-2025-07



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### RECOMMENDATION:

Be it resolved that the Economic Development Committee recommends to Council that staff be authorized to submit an application to the First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) program at an expense of approximately \$1,000 subject to the 2026 Budget process, as presented in the Report ECD-2025-07.

### STRATEGIC PLAN COMMENTS:

Recommendations directly relate to several areas in the Strategic Plan 2030:

Sector #1 – Economic Prosperity. Strategic Initiative #1

Sector #3 – Infrastructure. Strategic Initiative #1 and #2

Sector #10 – Heritage and Culture. Strategic Initiative #2 and #4

The Economic Development Action Plan 2023-2026 identifies Village Renewal Projects within Priority #2 - Physical Infrastructure (Active Transportation) and Priority #3 - Community Revitalization.

### BACKGROUND:

The First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) program partners communities to visit each other for the first time to offer fresh perspectives and unique insights about your services, transportation, accommodations and tourist attractions. It is a learning exercise that can help municipalities and community organizations find ways to better attract tourists, residents and investors.

### **The Process:**

1. Application submission

2. Build a team

To organize the visit to your partner community, you'll need a team with money and resources.

- an organization that leads the project (e.g., economic development organization, business improvement area, chamber of commerce)
- a project coordinator

- a budget of at least \$500 to run the project
- plan the visit and develop key documents, such as the itinerary, surveys and maps.

### 3. Pair with a partner community

Once approved, a community that's within 100 to 200 kilometres will be matched with us, and has similar characteristics such as:

- size
- distance to a major population centre
- population and demographics (e.g., number of school-aged children, seniors)
- tourist attractions

### 4. Plan your exchange

After you're paired with a community, you'll decide:

- what to evaluate during the visit (e.g., health and community services)
- the structure of the visit (e.g., one-day visit or two half-days)
- when to visit each other and report back (you can't tell each other the date of the visit but you can agree on the time of year (e.g., summer, winter))

### 5. Recruit volunteers

You'll need to recruit four to eight volunteers, depending on the size of the community you'll visit. We help out by training the volunteers.

Your volunteers will:

- travel to your partner community to anonymously make observations
- follow the instructions in your itinerary
- record their feedback in a survey during the visit

Remember that you'll need to cover your volunteers' costs for travel, accommodations and meals.

### 6. Complete the exchange

The exchange visits are where volunteer teams visit their exchange community and note observations in order to prepare a report back.

### 7. Share reports and take action

After the visit, you and your exchange partner will present your observations to each other. You can then create an action plan based on what you learned in your partner's report.

## Evaluation Options:

You can evaluate your community in three ways. Each option takes at least one day to complete, at a cost of about \$500 for travel, meals and accommodation.

### 1. Evaluate the **full community** and get insights about:

- services that make your community visitor-friendly (access to transportation, information centres, signage, location of attractions)
- physical spaces (historic sites, buildings and entrances)

- community services (housing, education, jobs, health)
  - businesses, retail stores and restaurants
  - natural areas (parks, cycling and walking paths)
2. Evaluate how **visitors** are served and get insights about:
- what makes your community visitor-friendly (access to transportation, information centres, signage, location of attractions)
  - tourist attractions (landmarks, events)
  - natural areas (parks, cycling and walking paths)
3. Evaluate **downtown area** and get insights about:
- the look and feel of downtown areas
  - businesses, retail stores and restaurants
  - entertainment (events, festivals, arts and culture activities)

### DISCUSSION:

The Economic Development Committee may recommend to Council that an application be submitted for the First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) program. The project, its budget and timeline are for discussion.

Example resources and project support:

- Rideau Lakes Economic Development Committee
- Rideau Lakes Business Network (RLBN)
- Newboro & Area Business Network (NABN)

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Guidelines estimate the cost to be approximately \$1,000 (\$500 per day) for consideration as part of the 2026 budget process.

The proposal from Rideau Lakes would recommend up to 6 villages be evaluated over a 2-day period. At \$500 per day, the cost is estimated at approximately \$1,000 for expenses related to travel, meals and accommodation for Rideau Lakes volunteers or committee members to evaluate the partner communities.

### ATTACHMENTS:

- FICE Manual
- FICE Worksheet

e-signed

August 25, 2025

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Marie White

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

Economic Development & Cultural Heritage Coordinator

e-approved

August 26, 2025

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Shellee Fournier, CAO

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DATE