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first impressions



Established in 1998, First Impressions is a collaboration between the General Services Administration and the design community. The goal of the program is to extend the vision of the Design Excellence Program into existing federally occupied buildings, starting with the lobby areas—which are often a visitor’s “first impression” of the federal government. The First Impressions program strengthens our assets and is, therefore, good business. The program works on two fronts: (1) it improves the work environment of federal employees; and (2) increases the efficiency and appearance of the buildings that serve the American people.

First Impressions provides both “quick fix” and “high impact” solutions to reach the goal of serving the public in a welcoming and professional environment. A key element of the program is improving the way in which security is integrated in our lobbies. Federal buildings belong to the American people, and, as such, should not be foreboding places to enter. The welfare of federal employees and visitors should be safeguarded in a way that is seamless, welcoming, and transparent. Chaotic or seemingly hasty assemblages of screening equipment convey a lack of professionalism undeserved by the well-prepared men and women who watch over these government institutions.

The First Impressions program is organized around the following actions that incorporate everything from low or no-cost improvements to full-scale renovation work.

Learn more about GSA’s First Impressions program at our web

Five Simple Actions.

Reducing Clutter

Lobbies should be free of clutter. Following the adage “a place for everything and everything in its place,” building managers are creating friendly, uncluttered lobbies by displaying appropriate messages in a consistent, uniform manner and integrating furnishings in an inviting and functional arrangement.

Consolidating Functions

Today, lobbies serve many functions other than simply entry into the building. A clean, open lobby is more efficient, functional, and professional. Building managers are grouping amenities by function and creating centrally located business centers in their lobbies.

Unifying Signage

A unified signage system is critical to making buildings readily accessible. Users need to easily understand where they are and how to get where they want to go. GSA has developed a comprehensive signage prototype that is helping building managers create a clear, consistent signage system throughout their buildings.

Streamlining Security

Increasing and changing security demands continue to play a pivotal role in federal public spaces. Security is a fact of life, but it does not have to be intrusive and intimidating. Using advanced technology and equipment; building managers are creating unobtrusive pockets of space in their lobbies to provide for security needs. The result is more open spaces with better circulation.

Transforming Our Image

Once clutter, consolidation, signage, and security have been addressed, building managers can complete the transformation through renovation. Old lighting is being replaced to brighten dull dark lobbies and new materials are being introduced to complement existing conditions and refresh tired and worn interiors. Integrating the architecture, interior, and graphic elements creates a welcoming professional environment.

