

COLLECT MEANINGFUL DATA: Capturing Stories with Photovoice

Purpose: Photovoice is a research method used to amplify the voices of communities who have been ignored or silenced. It allows individuals to tell their own stories, in their own way, by capturing photographs and/or video to show their lives through their own lenses. In this emPower Tool we share the basics of conducting a Photovoice project. Learn more at the Community Toolbox (ctb.ku.edu – Ch 3 Section 20).

More emPower Tools
+ learn more about each topic
[thecapacitycollective.org/
resources](http://thecapacitycollective.org/resources)

What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a process of documenting the lives of people through photographs/video to create social and/or policy changes. It is used in communities with limited power due to equity issues like poverty, language barriers, race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability and/or sexuality.

5 key concepts of the method:

- Images teach
- Pictures can influence policy
- Community members ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape public policy
- From the outset planners should bring in policy makers and other influential people as audience
- Photovoice emphasizes individual and community action

Why use Photovoice?

- It is **versatile**—you can use the approach for an assessment tool, to collect data, or to evaluate a program.
- It is **powerful**—photos change perspectives, touch hearts & minds, and do not need translation.
- It is based in **reality**—showing people’s lived realities makes them very hard to ignore, when it comes to making policy.
- It is **accessible**—as of 2020, 73% of people in the U.S. have a smartphone, most with cameras. Disposable cameras are also available.

Conducting a Photovoice Project



Develop Prompts:

Choose 1-3 prompts to inspire your participants and get them thinking about aspects of their lives they want to share with the audience. Remember the goal is to *humanize* your participants—to show members of your community as the whole, complex beings they are—by giving a glimpse into their lives. For example, “What do you wish people knew about you?”



Set up the Framework:

Decide how you will recruit participants, choose your timeline, and set up a place and process to collect and organize the images. Be sure it is accessible to participants, and as easy as possible. Consider a Dropbox folder, a designated email address, or platform like Google Photos. Label images as they come in so you can remember which respondent took the images.



Recruit Participants:

Use flyers and/or social media, and also personal invites. Find ways to invite the quieter clients—some people find it easier to communicate visually than with words, and many people enjoy the power of expressing themselves with photos. If people seem nervous, remind them: no experience or training needed! *Their story matters.* Have participants sign model releases.



Collect and Analyze the Images:

Make sure you have an easily accessible place for participants to submit their photos. When analyzing the photographs, look for themes in the collection from each person and across all of the participants. See the [Amplify Your Story: Analyzing Qualitative Data](#) emPower Tool for tips and tools for analyzing qualitative data, like photos.



Conduct Focus Groups/Interviews:

Based on your project, or how personal the prompts might get, choose whether to talk to respondents as a *group* (see the [Conduct a Focus Group](#) emPower Tool), or as *individuals* (see the [Conduct One-on-One Interviews](#) emPower Tool). Use the prompts to guide the conversation and decide if you want to use the images to probe more deeply into the topics.



Share the Stories:

Stories with images and quotes can be shared in person and/or online. Consider using social media to quickly distribute the images far and wide. If you will share the stories in person, consider holding an event, and build community by inviting important stakeholders. You could make large prints, display them at an exhibit, and use the images for office art after the event.

Photovoice Examples

Born Into Brothels

While photographer Zana Briski was documenting the lives of sex workers and their children in the red-light district of Calcutta, she gave several of the children cameras and asked them to document their world. The images and photos became this 2005 Academy Award-winning documentary.

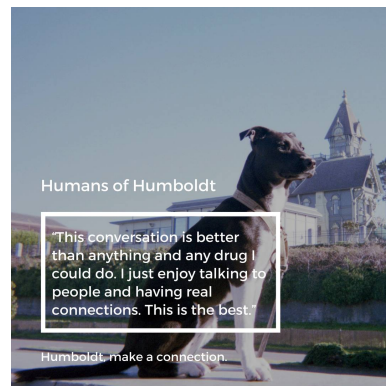
See more: zanabriski.com/born-into-brothels



Houseless of Humboldt

Meredith Williams and Janae Teal conducted photovoice projects in Northern California with a group of students. They gave 10 people who use drugs disposable cameras. When participants brought the cameras back, they interviewed them. Images were paired with quotes, printed on canvas for an art exhibit, and released on social media.

See more: facebook.com/humboldthumans



Photovoice has three main goals *(from The Community Toolbox ctb.ku.edu)*

- **To help those who are often unheard gain a voice** and enable them to record and reflect on their experiences and their communities' conditions, both positive and negative.
- **To encourage critical consciousness.** Through choosing, discussing, and reflecting on the subjects of their photographs, the photographers can come to a clearer understanding of their circumstances and the economic, social, psychological, and political forces that shape them.
- **To bring about change** that will improve conditions and enhance lives by reaching and influencing policy makers.

We encourage you to share these resources with your organization, and other local social service organizations.

PLEASE NOTE this handout is the intellectual property of The Capacity Collective.

Please do not duplicate parts, or adapt, without the express permission of The Capacity Collective. Thank you for supporting our work!

Photography Tips

You may want to share some basic photography tips with your participants so they can feel more confident taking photos/video, and to get usable photos.

- **Rule of Thirds:** Think of your photo frame on a 3 x 3 grid. Move the focal point of the picture out of the center, and into the outlying squares. If photographing a face, eyes are the focal point.



- **Get Closer:** Get that perfect pic ready...then take a step (or 2) closer. It focuses on the best part of the pic, reduces clutter in the photo, and makes your snap look more professional (and WOW).



- **Watch the Light:** Be aware of the light & shadows, especially on faces. Diffused light (vs. direct light) is best. Overcast days are best for outdoor, and light from a big window is best for indoor.

