

Key Components of Photovoice Projects

Recruit Participants.

The first step is recruiting young people! If you don't have access to an established youth coalition, reach out to community partners and youth-serving organizations in your area to recruit youth participants and get them excited about the photovoice project.

Get Permission.

All youth participants will need to complete a permission slip to be involved in the activity and share the images they capture. Be transparent and let young people know this when recruiting for the project.

Describe Photovoice.

Don't assume young people are familiar with photovoice. Get youth partners excited by providing an overview of what photovoice is and discuss the purpose of the project. Setting clear expectations is always helpful. Be sure to highlight the process and length of the project, and work with youth partners to set a project timeline.

Build a Cohesive Group.

Fostering group camaraderie and building trust with youth partners is a foundational step in the photovoice project. Before starting any project work or training, do a few ice-breaker activities. It is also helpful to formulate group agreements at this stage, and to teach skills in observation, listening, and giving constructive feedback. Engaging youth partners in these activities and group-building exercises establishes a safe, supportive space for sharing.

Technical Training

Be sure everyone feels comfortable using the photography equipment and technology. Provide youth partners with basic training on camera operation and photography principles to help support their photovoice work.

Ethics and Safety

Discuss the ethics and safety of taking photos with youth partners. Specifically, when it is ethical to take photos, how to ask for permission, and when to get release forms from subjects.

Take Photos

Start by identifying and discussing the issue with youth partners. This will guide all future steps of the project, and define the parameters of what youth should record and submit with each photo. Next, distribute the camera device(s) and photography equipment to youth partners and have them start taking photos! Be sure to set a deadline for submission to maintain the project's timeline.

Discuss | Reflect | Choose

Have youth partners select up to six of their most powerful photos. When sharing photos with the group, each participant should answer the following key questions: (1) why they took the photo; (2) how it makes them feel; and (3) how they think others will interpret it. Be sure to gather constructive feedback from the group on the photo, specifically image quality, representation of the issue, and emotional impact. Next, have the group reflect on the collection of photos and if they address the project's issue, aesthetic, and intellectual choices they've made so far. The final step is to discuss as a group which photos to use in the exhibit, allowing a set number from each participant. Choose photos that clearly communicate the issue to you intended audience (community members, policymakers, etc.) and have the strongest impact. Including a caption with each photo is also a helpful way to communicate the photo's intention with the audience. This can include: why the photographer chose the subject, the context in which it was taken, how it makes the photographer feel, any personal connection to the issue, and what it communicates to the viewer.

Host exhibit

Plan an event to share the project with your intended audience. If the audience is mixed (friends and family and/or and decision makers), it can be helpful to host more than one event. Map out who will be invited, where it will be held, what will be communicated, how word will be spread, and the project display format. Be sure to provide youth partners a brief public speaking training or refresher to ensure they feel confident for the event. Youth partners will want to prepare a facilitated discussion of the project and issue, and identify the call to action – this is the action they want the audience to take after viewing their project. Finally, send out the invitations and media releases, and advertise your event in the community!

Implement Action Plan

Keep the momentum going after your exhibit! Place your issue front and center by implementing your action plan. Activities can include meetings with decision makers, media or letter-writing campaign, and other direct actions like speaking at public hearings, mobilizing organizations, sparking protests, and making the issue visible throughout your community.

Continued Engagement

Be sure to keep youth partners engaged and maintain a meaningful relationship with them after the project. You can do this by offering further training and skill-building opportunities, recruiting participants to join the coalition, and inviting them to join in on future project activities.

Debriefing

Reflect and discuss the entire Photovoice project with participants, facilitator, and evaluator. Be sure to Look at individual-level outcomes, organizational-level outcomes, and policy outcomes.

