



A Guide to PhotoVoice

A tool for
Developing, Sharing and Building Support
for
Community Change



PhotoVoice

for

Older Adults Strengthening Communities Intergenerational Projects

PHOTOVOICE is a creative and collaborative way to tell the story of a challenge and possible solutions that impact your community. It is a creative, empowering and flexible process that combines photography with grassroots action.

*As you begin your PhotoVoice project you need to make a few decisions and have some things in place. You will need to have a **project facilitator** and a **tech coordinator** at the start of your work. If you are working with youth, one of them may be great in the tech roll. The project facilitator could be the same person who is the Key Staff person from the Self Directed Team or someone else who is willing to take on some leadership and a few additional responsibilities.*

How will you decide who will take on this roll? One idea → Whoever calls the first meeting can lead a discussion with the group to determine who has the time, willingness and abilities to do this.

This is what you will need to do your PhotoVoice project:

- **Time Each Week:** We recommend that each PhotoVoice weekly session be at least 2.5 hours.
- **Duration of the Project:** 6 Sessions all together. The first 5 sessions are with your group and in Session 6, all the groups will be together on May 21
- **Facilitator:** Each Gen2Gen group needs a facilitator! This person will do some prep work and facilitate each meeting

- **Tech Coordinator:** Each group needs a person who can deal with the tech needs. They must have access to the computer to which all participants will share their photos
- **Cell phones and/or digital cameras:** Everyone needs a way to take digital photos
- **Central Computer:** Your **PhotoVoice** project needs a computer that can store all the digital photos shared from your participants

WEEK 1 - First Session:

Introduction to Photovoice

GOALS:

- **Introduce the ideas behind PhotoVoice**
- **choose the topic you want to focus your project on**
- **lay out the steps you need to take to complete the project**

What is Photovoice?

*PhotoVoice is a way that a group of people work together, using photography to create a joint story about a community issue or challenge and to propose solutions. **PhotoVoice:***

- Gives people, whose voices are usually not heard, the chance to be heard
- Documents community needs and resources and can act as a Needs Assessment
- Promotes critical conversations through photography
- Creates a platform/process to engage with the community around positive change
- Creates a platform/process to engage with leaders/policy makers around positive change
- PhotoVoice is a **story** communicated through photos and captions. The story must be structured so that there is a problem, a demonstration of the impact of the problem and a solution. That is the structure of your PhotoVoice story will take!

Activities:

A. Icebreaker Activity – Have participants introduce themselves. A great exercise to start building connections amongst your participants is the following:

- The facilitator hands out paper and a pencil to each person
- The facilitator asks everyone in the room to think about someone who they admire: a teacher or mentor, friend or family member, famous individual or historic person.
- Give everyone a few minutes to decide who their person is and to write down a few words that highlight what the qualities are that they admire.
- Pair people up. There should be an older adult and youth in each pair. If you are not doing intergenerational work you can pair people up any way you'd like
- Ask each person in the pair to tell the other person who their “hero” is, what it is that they admire and what are the qualities that they would like to emulate. This should take about 3 minutes each
- Once they finish talking, each person will introduce their partner. They will tell the full group who their partner admires and what it is that they admire about them
- After everyone has shared, the facilitator should have a discussion with the group about what they heard: were there big differences between the generations in who

they picked? Were there similarities amongst the qualities that people highlighted? This exercise is a great way to uncover shared values regardless of the different heroes chosen

B. Introduce the Project – Introduce the topic and timeline for the project.

- The SDVT from your host organization has created an “Issue Brief” This is the topic that you will use for PhotoVoice.
- Have a conversation about the Issue Brief. Make sure that everyone understands the challenge and why it is important. Make sure everyone agrees with the way it is worded. Everyone needs to be on the “same page”
- The timeline for the project is **5 sessions, including this one**. There will be an additional 6th session where all the Older Adults Strengthening Communities groups will be together. All the groups that have done a PhotoVoice project will share them. This 6th meeting will be on May 21st.

C. Expectations: Discuss what is expected from the participants, including safety and ethical considerations, and how to obtain informed consent. Here are suggestions:

Responsibilities/Agreements

- Please try to arrive promptly to the weekly group sessions, so that we can start and finish on time.
- Most people will probably use their phone but if you are loaned a camera, keep and handle it with care, as if it is your own.
- Please contact the group facilitator if you cannot make it to a session. Please share your contact info
- Please leave your cell phone off during meetings
- Be positive with your peers and others within the group; avoid put downs, be constructive
- Give everyone, including yourself, an opportunity to speak uninterrupted.
- Ask people for their permission before taking their picture.
- If you take a photo of someone who is under 18 you must get parental permission.

See Appendix A

What are some other norms your group would like to add? Your group may have some group norms particular to your work together. Such as:

- Do not interrupt
- Use “I” statements during discussions
- Confidentiality...
- Others?

D. Choose Your PhotoVoice Working Style:

Each PhotoVoice group is unique. Some groups are comprised of only older adults, while others are intergenerational. The makeup of each group will help determine what your working style will be. The basic options are:

Option 1: Participants take photos by themselves and share them back to the group for discussion. This is best for a homogeneous group of participants

Option 2: Participants pair up and go out to take photos together. Each participant takes their own photos but the pair agrees between themselves which photos to submit to the full group for discussion. **All Gen2Gen groups should work in pairs, made up of an older adult and youth, or they can also consider option 3**

Option 3: All participants work together as a **full group**, going out to take photos together and discussing as a group in order to decide which photos to use in the final project. **All Gen2Gen groups working with children under 12 should consider this option.**

Each person will select between 3-6 photos each to submit to the Tech Coordinator. They will submit them at the end of Week 2. If you have worked as a full group throughout the photo taking process you may all decide together which photos to submit rather than each individual doing this. If you are working as a whole choose about 30-40 photos from all the photos taken.

Please note: If pairs are going out together, you need to establish them at the end of this session/Week 1. You might use the pairs that came together for the opening Ice Breaker exercise or pair folks up in another way. Make sure people in the pairs know how to get in touch with each other!

E. Photography 101

- Provide a short tutorial on how to use the camera/HD card and flash drive, if needed
- Have everyone take a few photos in the room. Send them to the central computer
- Explain how to save and download photos. Make sure everyone knows how to do This! Give it a try!

WEEK 2 - Second Session: Taking and Discussing Photos

GOALS

★ taking photos

★ Selecting 3-6 photos

Overview:

When your group meets for its Week 2 session, send people out to take photos (individually, in pairs or as a full group). Allow half the time you have allotted for your meeting to photography and half for discussion. So for example, if you meet for 2.5 hours, you will take photos for a bit over an hour leaving another hour to discuss them. Make sure people have the ability to get to locations for photography that is relevant to your topic! If children are involved it is important they have parental permission.

- Participants should meet first as a full group, listen to the instructions and then go out to take photographs. Make sure everyone knows when to come back to the meeting space and what you will do in the second part of the session
- Participants can take as many photos as they want. Once back in your meeting space, each person must choose 3-6 photos that will be shared with the whole group. Or if the group is working together as a whole, they can choose between 30-40 photos to save
- In order to select these 3-6 photos people should review all the photos they have taken and/or review them with their partner. By sharing and talking about them they can choose the best 3-6 to save and share.

Each person will select between 3-6 photos each to submit to the Tech Coordinator. They will submit them at the end of Week 2. The Tech Coordinator will save them on the central computer. These photos need to be available for viewing by the whole group in Week 3. They can be shared in Week 3 on a computer screen or you can print them out. **Printing them will make it easier to do the next step of the project.**

WEEK 3 - Third Session:

Goals:

- ★ *Discuss 3-6 photos using SHOWeD process*
- ★ *Select photos for your story*
- ★ *Choose an order for your photos*

Overview: This week you will be building the structure for your final PhotoVoice presentation. This is done by selecting the most powerful photos, adding meaningful captions and putting the photos in an order that helps to share the story you want to tell

1. Discuss the significance of the photos/first hour

- Using the photos shared and saved, the full group of participants will discuss the significance of their photos by using the **SHOWeD** framework [Appendix B].
- Identify someone to take notes to capture the SHOWeD responses. You can use Appendix C for this. This may take a while. Make sure you only use 1/2 of your time together for this.

2. Select the Photos for your story

- The second half of your session will be taken up with step 2 and 3.
- After the group discusses the photos, they will choose **not more than 20 photos total** that will make up the PhotoVoice presentation.
- Sometimes choosing the photos is very easy but sometimes it is not. One way to decide which ones to use is to select **one photo from each submission** (the 3-6 photos that everyone submitted)
- Everyone should have at least one photo in the final presentation.

3. Start your story creation/Put the photos in order

- Put your photos in a sequence that will tell the story you are trying to share. This is your “draft” story so don’t worry, you can rearrange the photos in week 4.
- A PhotoVoice story is communicated through photos and captions. (You will put in the captions next week) There must be a problem, a demonstration of the impact of the problem and a solution. So for example, if you are telling a story about litter in the park you might start with photos of people throwing their garbage on the ground, the some photos of flower beds with litter in them or kids running around empty cans and bottles. Then you might show overflowing garbage cans or no

garbage cans at all. Then there would be a photo or two of a “solution”: garbage and recycling cans! Putting the photos in a meaningful order that starts to tell the story you want to share.

- If there is room for, or the story needs more images, you can vote in additional images. It may be obvious which ones are needed in order to tell the story you need to tell.
- If possible, print the remaining photos and hang them on the wall.
- Ask everyone to vote for the number of photos you still need. For example, if you need 4 more everyone can vote for 4. You can do this by giving everyone stickies. Participants go up to the photos and place their stickies on those they feel do the best job filling the gaps in the story. Count which photos received the most votes. **Remember, make sure that everyone has at least one photo in the final presentation**

Week 4- Fourth Session

Goals:

- ★ Adding Captions
- ★ Putting your story in final order
- ★ Deciding what type of PhotoVoice Presentation to host
- ★ Invite community members and leaders

Overview: PhotoVoice Story Development Tips: Now that you have your “short list” of photos from Week 3 and a draft of their order, it is time to refine and finalize your story. Your story must have a beginning, middle and end; all done with photos and captions.

- *The beginning should demonstrate the problem*
- *The middle should expand on the problem or demonstrate some of the consequences of the problem.*
- *The end needs to share your vision of a solution to the challenge*

1. Adding Captions

- Discuss the photos, and review the SHAReD notes.
- Discuss their order and the ideas that each photo represents
- As you go through each photo, have people suggest captions. You will only have a few minutes to discuss each photo so keep the conversation going! Remember, if you have 20 photos and you spend 2 minutes on each one that will take 40 minutes!
- Write the caption ideas on a board or butcher paper so that everyone can see them
- Once people have suggested captions, have the group vote on which one works best for each photo

2. Final Ordering of Photos

You now have all the elements you need: photos, captions and a suggested order

- Review and discuss the photos, captions and the order
- Rearrange the order and re-do captions as needed until your story says what you want it to say
- Put your photos with captions into either a PowerPoint presentation or Google Slides format

3. Decide your presentation format

Your presentation can be a powerpoint presentation projected from your computer or Photo Exhibit where you enlarge the photos with captions and hang them on the wall.

- **Powerpoint:** Your photos are uploaded into a powerpoint presentation and projected on a screen during your presentation. If you choose this format, your invited guests will be able to watch the presentation together
- **Enlarged Photos:** You can enlarge the photos and hang them on the wall. The people who took the photos stand by their photos while guests walk around the room to see the photos, read the captions and discuss them

4. Invite Community to your Presentation

- **Inviting community members to your presentation:** Think about who needs to be there to hear about your work, your ideas, and the change that you are proposing.

5. Add an introduction

If you have time, the team should consider writing a short introduction describing the challenge / issue they are trying to address through the PhotoVoice project, what the Photovoice process was and what they would like to see changed. This can be used as an “introduction” to the presentation and/or be part of your outreach.

Sharing your PhotoVoice Story - questions to consider:

There is some extra work this week for the group. They will need to make sure the invitations go out. The Tech Coordinator should make sure that the presentation (whatever way you choose to share the work) is finished and looks good. Is there any budget to enlarge the photos (if that is how you want to do your presentation)? Will there be food at the presentation? Who will set up the room before people arrive? Are there any handouts? These are all issues that the facilitator needs to think about.

WEEK 5 - Fifth Session: **Community Exhibit / Presentation**

Goals:

- Share your story
- Identify what you want to do next re: your issue / challenge

Overview: Set up, display, and discuss the project with community members. Remember, the goal is to bring awareness about the critical issue to the community, so be sure to invite the appropriate people, such as policymakers and other stakeholders who can bring about environmental and policy change. Some members of the group will need to help set up the room before your guests arrive

Things to think about:

- Have the entire team at the event to help with the presentation, answer questions and interact with guests.
- Make your presentation as engaging and dynamic as possible.
- Take photos of the presentation. Make sure you have documentation of what is happening.
- Sustain your momentum by following up with people that come to the presentation; especially those with the power to make the changes you want. You can do this by arranging one on one meetings, taking a walk with community leaders to show them photo locations, taking your presentation on the road and sharing it widely
- After the presentation - the team should meet and 'de-brief' - and think about how they want to continue to move this issue / challenge forward.

**Congratulations! You have created your PhotoVoice project
and community event!**

**Appendix A
(Put on your organization's Stationary)**

Minor Participation Consent Form

I, _____, give permission for my student, _____, to participate in the [insert project name] photovoice project. I understand that this project may discuss topics of a sensitive nature. I understand that my student will be taking photographs that will be used by [insert organization] for public display and discussion. I allow my student to participate, and be photographed or recorded in group discussions. I am aware that these photographs and/or recordings may be used for promotional and furtherance of the [insert project name] photovoice project.

Signature of parent or guardian:

Printed name of parent or guardian: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B / SHOWeD

After you have selected two photographs, use the questions below to identify and explore the community concerns related to the project topic that is illustrated in the photos.

1. What do we **See** here?
2. What is really **Happening** here?
3. How does this relate to **Our** lives?
4. **Why** does this situation, concern, or strength exist?
5. How could this photo **Educate** people?
6. What can we **Do** about it?

Appendix C / Captions

After you have selected two photographs, come up with some proposed captions to describe why you took this photo/what its significance is to the goal of the project

A.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

B.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

ABOUT

As a membership organization of 40 settlement houses and community centers in New York City and two upstate affiliates, United Neighborhood Houses of New York [UNH] promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need. Our network of non-profit organizations serves over 765,000 people each year, and we support this work through advocacy for budget and policy change, customized professional development and peer learning, and promotion of innovative practices, particularly those that deepen civic and community engagement.

For the past eleven years, UNH has been promoting a strength-based and purpose-driven approach to aging throughout its network of member organizations. UNH believes that the skills, talents, and knowledge of older people are a tremendous community resource for the greater good. Acting on this belief, UNH trains settlement house staff how to mobilize and empower older people to work in teams that identify important community needs, and develop and implement strategies for addressing these needs in ways that strengthen communities for all ages, and improves the health and wellbeing of those involved. This PhotoVoice guide is an important tool that helps teams to develop, share and build support for the importance of their community change work.

TERRY KAELBER is Director of [UNH's](#) Institute for Empowered Aging. The Institute houses innovative practices, advocacy campaigns and tools and research that supports and empowers older people, positioning them as community catalysts, community connectors and change agents for the greater good. Since 2008, Terry has been developing these practices and leading this work for UNH, demonstrating the impact that older people can and do have when engaged, supported and positioned as drivers of community change.

ALISA DEL TUFO has been the lead consultant on the Older Adults Strengthening Communities initiative. She is the founder of [Threshold Collaborative](#), which uses narrative and participatory practices to strengthen individual and community wellbeing. She is the author of this Guide.

Developed by UNH to support and empower teams of older people working to strengthen their communities

