

Photovoice

This tool can be a powerful way for youth to represent their communities or express their points of view by taking photographs that respond to themes related to your program objectives or evaluation.

Photovoice is an arts-based method in which participants take photos to capture their own experiences, accompanied by written captions or stories and followed by discussions. The photographs can be discussed and/or interpreted as a group to outline how the photos highlight particular themes. Using digital photos allows the results to be instant, and, as such, the discussions can occur immediately after the photos have been taken.

The resulting narratives are used to better understand the program and the experiences of those who participated, which can be used to adapt and improve the program. Moreover, the photos can be used as a way to highlight or exhibit captured program experiences; for example, the photos can be displayed online, in the program location, or in an organization's newsletter.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Provide your participants with a training session to ensure they understand the evaluation goals and how to use the camera equipment. Engage in discussions to develop photo prompts, ensure safety, discuss ethics, and create guidelines and direction for the data collection and analysis.
2. Provide participants with a timeline to take their photos – this may be as short as 30 minutes or for the duration of your program. The timeline will depend on the nature and flexibility of the project/evaluation.
3. Participants should add written captions or short stories to describe their photos. They might describe why they took the photo, what is happening in the photo, the feeling they had while taking the photo, and their overall experience in that moment.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Individual or small groups of youth, program staff or research assistant.

WHAT DO I NEED?

- Digital cameras or cellphones with cameras
- Audio recorders
- Chart paper and markers

WHEN SHOULD THIS BE DONE?

At any time during the duration of the program depending on the purpose of the activity.

EXAMPLE 1: To understand participants' experiences of the program, the activity can be done towards the end.

EXAMPLE 2: To understand participant perceptions of barriers within a community that are related to a particular issue, the activity could be done at any time during the program.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

30-60 minutes.

4. Gather participants to review and discuss the photos taken. This discussion can take place in 1-on-1 interviews or focus groups, depending on the number of participants involved.
5. The discussion questions will depend on your evaluation goals, logic model, training and program activities, etc. These discussions can be audio recorded. Both the audio recordings and photos can be used as data within your program evaluation. Some questions you may want to consider include:
 - What do you think is happening in the photo?
 - How does this relate to your experience?
 - Where do the problems and strengths exist?
 - What can we do about this? What can be done to solve the problems?
6. Based on the information shared during your discussions, you may feel that program participants should take more photos or use a different prompt to answer your evaluation questions. With your team and/or participants, you may want to decide to either continue taking photos or move onto analysis and dissemination.
7. After the data collection and analysis process, decide how it would be best to disseminate your findings. You may want to consider social media campaigns, an art exhibition, or a photo display.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Sometimes photovoice and photo elicitation techniques are mistaken as the same process, but they are not necessarily the same. *Photo elicitation* is when participants are asked to reflect on images selected by the evaluators or researchers, whereas *photovoice* allows participants to capture the photos and gather data used for analysis.
- Whether you engage in discussions with participants through interviews or focus groups, ensure that those involved discuss all or most of the photos captured, as other participants may have differing interpretations of a particular photograph or experience. This can help generate multiple meanings for different phenomena.
- Photovoice is a powerful tool that can be used to understand the experiences of individuals whose voices are often ignored (e.g., people experiencing homelessness; members of racial, ethnic, or religious minorities; people living with disabilities).

LEARN MORE

Thomas, H. C., & Irwin J. D. (2013). Using photovoice with at-risk youth in a community-based cooking program. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 74(1), 14-20.