

An Introduction to Photovoice: A Toolkit for Community Groups



*This guide was created by Skylar Scheff and students in Michigan Technological University's Fall 2022
Communities & Research course taught by Dr. Angie Carter*

For questions, please contact Dr. Carter at ancarter@mtu.edu

*The guide is inspired by the United for Prevention in Passaic County's Facilitator's Toolkit for a Photovoice
Project*

What is photovoice?

Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris developed photovoice in the early 1990s as a method of participatory research in which “people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). Rather than a researcher interpreting community members’ experiences, photovoice provides community members the means to document their own experiences through their own eyes (in photos) and in their own words (in accompanying stories). Through a process of iterative discussion in a series of meetings, community members share their photostories with one another, building knowledge, connections, and understandings about their experience that were not there before. In this way, photovoice can be used as a tool for education and social change.

Why does it work?

Photovoice is unique in that it brings community members together to discuss and act on critical issues presented through photographs and narratives. Participants are active contributors throughout all phases of the photovoice project. The facilitator guides, rather than directs, the group’s discussion and process. In this way, the outcomes of the project reflect the participants’ own goals and needs. In some cases, groups may decide to develop exhibits or events that can be used as tools to share education and knowledge beyond their group with the wider public.

When is it appropriate to use?

Photovoice is an appropriate process to use when there is time and intention to engage community members in an open-ended process of sharing, reflection, and knowledge creation. Often, the group will convene around a specific topic of interest or concern in the community, and photovoice can help to visualize the topic or concern in a new way that inspires new connections, ideas, solutions, or next steps.

ELEMENTS OF A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

1. **Photographs** – Participants take pictures of everyday scenes that mean something to them, in response to prompts created by the group.
2. **Narratives** – Participants write up short narratives to go along with their photos.
3. **Meetings/Dialogue** – Through an iterative process, participants share their photographs and narratives through a series of meetings. Together, they engage in dialogue using the SHOWeD method (explained later in this toolkit) to discuss common themes among their photostories.

INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

1. **Project Manager** – This person is responsible for overseeing the project process, including time management, funding, and the specific project topic.
2. **Facilitators** – Facilitators help lead the iterative discussion at the meetings. Unlike focus group facilitators, who have a aim and set of questions, photovoice facilitators follow the lead of the group itself. Additionally, they take care of tasks such as room reservations, refreshments, responsibility for permission/consent forms, reminders of meetings, etc. to enable the success of the group meetings.
3. **Participants** – Participants are community members who want to engage in an interactive, participatory community project. They will develop the photo prompts, take photos, write accompanying narratives, and engage in a process of dialogue and reflection across the meetings.

Recommended Materials

Facilitators will need to consider a quiet, safe, and accessible meeting location, recruitment/advertising materials, project forms, writing utensils, marker board or large post-its for brainstorming and facilitating discussion.

All participants need is something to take pictures with – a cell phone is just fine! No photography experience or other equipment is required.

What is expected of participants?

Because photovoice is as much about process (the dialogue at meetings) as it is product (the photostories themselves), participants are expected to be willing to engage in group discussion with others as they share their photos and accompanying narratives. This process involves attendance at a series of meetings.

What can I take pictures of?

Photovoice participants take pictures in response to a prompt developed by and for the group around a theme, topic, or question that will have been defined in advance by the facilitator. Photos should be from everyday life. The meaning of the photo is more important than the artistic value of the photo. All participants are responsible to engage in review of the *ethical considerations* to be sure that others' consent is obtained prior to photos and that photos do not endanger or jeopardize others' health or well-being.

Is it ethical?

- 1. Obtain Informed Consent** – There are several layers of consent in a photovoice project. First, participants themselves must consent to participate in the photovoice project. Second, photographers must obtain consent from any people or their private property photographed in the photostories. Third, participants must provide their consent before any photostories are shared beyond the project group. (See example in Appendix B, C, and D)

ASK YOURSELF? Is it invading someone's privacy?

Consent Needed

- Taking a picture of someone who is recognizable (faces, tattoos, or markings)
- Taking a picture minors (under 18 years)
- Taking a picture of personal belongings and/or personal property

Consent NOT Needed

- Taking a picture of public figures
- Taking a picture of the environment or public settings
- Taking a picture of people who cannot be specifically identified

- 2. Protect Yourself** – Avoid any space or situation that might pose harm to yourself or others; consider physical harm as well emotional harm, such as harm to individual reputation, or potential financial harm.

ASK YOURSELF? Will it harm me or others? Is it dangerous?

- 3. Protect the Community** – Avoid taking pictures that may harm the reputation, safety, or livelihood of others in the community.

ASK YOURSELF? Will it put a person's employment or status in the community in jeopardy?

- 4. Avoid Misrepresentation** – Take care to reflect situations in the community accurately by avoiding photographs that could be taken out of context.

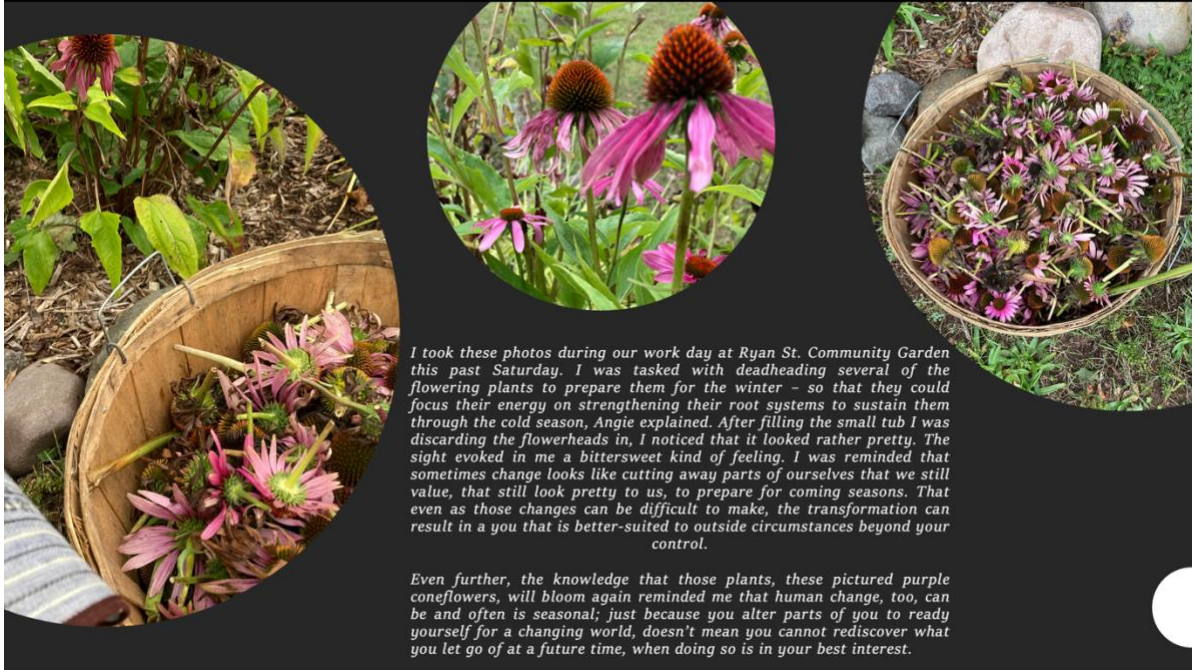
ASK YOURSELF? Is it truthful? Does it accurately represent the situation?

How do I approach subjects?

Consent must be obtained prior to taking photos of any people or their private property included in your photos. See Appendix C for an example of a consent form.

Photostory Examples

Example One by Wandipa Mualefhe



Example Two by Isabelle Cervantes



Rainy Days Bring Fall Season

This is a photo that represents the change in weather between the fall and summer seasons. We've been seeing more rainy days with a drop in temperatures in this transition. The ground in the photo is visibly wet and decorated with fallen leaves that are yellow and brown.

I really enjoy fall up here compared to back home. Back home it stays hot/warm until December/January but up here there is a notable shift. The cooler temps mean cozy sweaters and warm tea.

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.

What do we See here?

What is really Happening here?

How does this relate to Our lives?

Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?

What can we Do about it?

Appendix B: Sample Participant Consent Form

This form is for a research project; you may or may not use your photovoice project for research. If you are not, you might revise the form accordingly to reflect your uses.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Local Food Systems Photovoice Project*

This form describes a research project you are asked to participate in. The study is being conducted by Dr. Angie Carter from the Social Sciences Department at Michigan Technological University in collaboration with students enrolled in MTU's Communities & Research class and the Western UP Food Systems Collaborative. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Before deciding whether or not to participate, please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to identify methods of engagement in our local food system and study how participatory methods can be used to inform local food systems initiatives, such as farm-to-school integration.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in a community-based photography project called "Photovoice" that will highlight local food systems in our communities. You will attend a series of three 60-90 minute group meetings during fall 2022. At the first meeting, Dr. Carter and the research team will explain the project goals, answer questions, and facilitate a discussion among participants about the next steps.

As a participant, you will meet others local food systems enthusiasts and advocates who are interested in strengthening our community food system. You will document your local food systems experiences by taking and/or sharing self-selected photographs. You will also document your experiences through short accompanying captions or narratives that go along with the pictures you take and share. The additional group meeting(s) will consist of sharing your pictures and stories with the researcher and other research participants, with the option to share more broadly within your community.

Any information you share during your participation in this project will include only what you choose to self-disclose. You may choose to leave the project at any time and your identity will remain confidential. If at any point you want your name associated with your pictures you will be asked to sign a separate photo permission form.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING

Participating in this study will offer you an opportunity to share your knowledge and contribute to a research project funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund (<https://mihealthfund.org/>) informing a pilot farm-to-school initiative in our area. There will also be opportunities to share your stories and pictures with others in the community who share your interest in local food systems. A copy of any and all resulting reports and academic papers will be sent to you upon completion.

POTENTIAL RISKS

We do not anticipate any physical or emotional discomfort to result from participating in this project. Your identity and participation in this project will remain confidential, known only to the research team, until the point at which you will have the opportunity to decide whether or not you wish to share your photostories beyond the photovoice project group. However, it could happen that other photovoice project group participants may disclose your participation in this project to others.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participants' identities will be kept confidential by Michigan Technological University researchers; all photos and related captions will be stored in password protected, secured MTU electronic folders available only to the research team. We will not share or publish the names or specific job titles of any

participants without permission. However, there is a risk that other participants may choose to disclose group ideas or group member identity to non-participants. Michigan Health Endowment Fund and the research team are interested in publicizing the outcomes of this project, including pictures and their captions, but we would first ask you as a participant for your permission to do so and this is entirely voluntary. Your information, pictures, and spoken or written words will not be used in connection with your identity without your permission. You may participate in the project even if you do not wish any of your photos or participation information to be made public or to be shared with project partners or funder. At the second or third meeting, you will have the opportunity to decide if you would like to associate your name with the pictures. At this point, you will then sign another separate photo permission form and another separate photo permission form. This is voluntary. Any notes or data related to this project will be kept in a secured file for five years after the completion of the project, available only to the primary researcher, Dr. Carter.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Dr. Angie Carter, faculty, Michigan Technological University, 906-487-1431,

ancarter@mtu.edu **RIGHTS**

The Michigan Tech Institutional Review Board has reviewed our request to conduct this project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact the Compliance Office at 906-487-2902 or email IRB@mtu.edu.

- I understand the procedures described above and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate in this study.
- I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

PHOTOGRAPHY RELEASE FORM

Project Title: *Local Food Systems Photovoice Project*

Project Researchers: Dr. Angie Carter (Assistant Professor), Michigan Technological University and students in MTU's SS 4700 Communities & Research class

You are being asked to sign this release form because you appear in a photograph that was taken for or used in a research project conducted by Michigan Technological University (MTU) researchers titled, "*Local Food Systems Photovoice Project.*"

I, _____ (**name of person in photograph**) grant the researchers listed above and _____ (**name of research participant and photographer**) the right to use photographs/images of me in connection with their research project.

I authorize Dr. Angie Carter, the Western UP Food Systems Collaborative, and/or Michigan Health Endowment Fund to use and publish the photographs/images in print and/or electronically in research publications and/or at a public community event that may be held in 2022-2023 at a location to be determined.

This may or may not (**circle one**) include the association of my name with the images/photograph, and I may withdraw permission at any time prior to public release.

I have read and understood the above.

Signature of person in the photograph: _____

Name and contact information of the person in the photograph:

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS Project

Title: *Local Food Systems Photovoice Project*

Project Researchers: Dr. Angie Carter, Michigan Technological University

The project researchers affiliated with Michigan Technological University and listed above seek permission to use any or all copyrighted photographs/images and written narratives you shared or created as a research participant in their project, “*Local Food Systems Photovoice Project.*” Additional details are further outlined below.

I, _____, photographer and author of the attached images and written material, hereby grant permission and the non-exclusive worldwide right to Michigan Technological University (MTU), the Western UP Food Systems Collaborative, and/or Michigan Health Endowment Fund to copy, display, distribute and use these materials for educational and research purposes, in whole or in part, in digital, print or other formats now known or developed in the future, and to otherwise incorporate this material in the normal course of business of MTU including the right to copy, display, or distribute. I understand that:

- The primary use of the described material will be as a print copy for a community photo gallery event, at a site determined by myself and other research project participants.
- Secondary uses of the described material may include use of digital copies in professional publications by the project researchers and/or written content on the websites of the organizations or institutions listed above.
- I retain the full right, title and interest in the images and written material, including any Copyright, and may publish, display or use the material elsewhere for my own purposes.
- I am to receive no compensation for allowing MTU, WUPFSC, or MHEF to copy, display, and use the described material.

Dated this _____ day of _____, 202____.

Signature of Copyright Owner/Research Participant

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

References

Apaza, V. and DeSantis, P. (N.d.). Facilitator's Toolkit for a Photovoice Project. United for Prevention in Passaic County and the William Paterson University Department of Health.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. doi: 10.1177/109019819702400309