

Capturing Our Stories in Pictures



How to Plan & Use Photography in NPO Communications

Non-profit organizations (NPOs) have great stories to tell. Just a few good photos can bring these stories to life and help make connections and build relationships. But it can be difficult to get the quality images you need for compelling communications materials. If you're not sure where to start, here are 10 tips to help you plan and manage your imagery.

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Words for action and results.

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Non-profit organizations (NPOs) have great stories to tell about the work they do, the people they do it with and the lives, families, and communities that are changed for the better in the process. Telling these stories well can make such a difference in the organization's ability to inform and help people and to build and maintain relationships with volunteers, donors and funders, and partner organizations.

Just a few high quality photos can bring these stories to life in a way that triggers connections and improves lives.

If you find yourself struggling to produce these high quality photos and tell your stories, there are some simple steps you can take to put together a photography plan for your organization.

1. **Describe the type of photographs you need for your materials and how you will use them.** If you have a document that describes the organization's brand voice, draw from it. Here are a few other considerations for your plan.
 - Many non-profit organizations and charities seek photographs that represent the people they work with and help. For example, if your organization offers sports programs for youth, you may be looking for healthy, happy, athletic young people.
 - You will also need to plan for the photographs you will take to recognize and thank donors, volunteers, staff, and other supporters.
 - Be sure to outline the places you will use your photographs, such as newsletters, brochures, annual reports, websites, and social media accounts.
2. Plan and take photos that visually highlight the main message you want to get across. Since photo captions are one of the most-read parts of any publication, **include captions that reinforce the message verbally** for maximum impact. Collect all the information you will need for the captions when you take the photos. Be sure to get the names of people you photograph.



A photography plan can help non-profit organizations create compelling and engaging communications materials.

3. **Make a specific “shot list” for each of the major events you have planned.** Write down which people you want to take photos of and if there is anything specific you would like to have them do in the photo. For example, if you would like to get photos of a panel of speakers you’ll want to arrange in advance for them to come early or stay after for the group shot. Natural shots are often best, but if you need props you’ll want to make sure you have them ready.
4. **Be sure to get permission before photographing people.** Record the permission with your organization’s photo release form or use my sample permission forms for photography and testimonials. Get them here: <http://bit.ly/eiRVc4>
5. **As you are photographing people, be ready to collect their feedback, stories, and testimonials if you get the opportunity.** Ask them about their experiences. What have they liked about their involvement with the organization? How has their life changed because of it? Record their responses and be sure to get their permission to use their story.
6. **Deputize your colleagues and volunteers and empower them to help you take and collect the photographs you need.** Pass along some resources to make it easier for them. For example, you can share our *Photography Tips for NPO Staff and Volunteers* article with suggestions on the type of photos to take and how to set up the shots.
7. **Bring in the professionals if you can.** If you can possibly invest in a professional photographer to capture your images I recommend that you do. If you have corporate partners sponsoring a program or event, they may be able to provide a photographer they work with regularly.

Charity Village lists photographers that serve NPOs in Canada:

<http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/marketplace/event/photo.html>.

Consider hiring a photojournalist through news services such as the Canadian Press:

<http://www.thecanadianpress.com/photography.aspx?id=160>

8. **Supplement your original photographs with stock photography, when needed.** Find low-cost royalty free stock photography in easily searchable sites such as <http://www.istockphoto.com/>



9. **Once you have your digital photographs, use professional photo editing software** to adjust the light and colour levels and make your final images look great. You can make the image lighter or darker, warmer or cooler. In some cases you may want to apply filters and special effects. Look into the Adobe software donation program to see if you can get a free copy of Photoshop for your organization: <http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/philanthropy/software.html>.
10. **Set up an easily searchable place to keep your photographs, testimonials and permission forms.** You can use digital photo sharing sites to store and share your photos. Flickr is one of the most popular sites: <http://www.flickr.com/tour/>

Or if you don't expect to accumulate high volumes of photos you can put together your own simple system for sorting, naming and filing your digital photographs and tracking them in a spreadsheet. Ask me how if you need help.



Armed with these ideas and resources, I hope you will find it easier to bring your stories to life through photography. If you would like to **keep learning about photography**, I suggest you follow blogs and articles by photographers and visual communicators.

I've read a number of resources about photography over the years. The one I've enjoyed the most is Suzanne Salvo's article "Visually Speaking" in *CWBulletin*. It is published online by the International Association of Business Communicators for their members. Suzanne also has a blog, titled *Salvo at large*. You can find her blog at <http://www.salvoatlarge.blogspot.com>

If you have your own photography tips or resources you would like to share, please contact me at karen@luttrellcommunications.com. Or post your comments on the *PR for NPOs* blog: <http://bit.ly/hbWlly>



About the Author

Karen Luttrell offers marketing and communications strategy and copywriting services to help small businesses and non-profits grow and succeed. Before launching her own business, Karen worked in communications, marketing and sales for 14 years with 10 years management experience. She holds an Honours BA in linguistics and is a member of the International Association of Business Communicators. For

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