Online Resource:
Using Photovoice for Indigenous Initiatives at your Library

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Abstract

This kit is a starting point for librarians to use photovoice in their Indigenous initiatives. This toolkit includes a poster outlining how to use photovoice methodology for library programming or outreach and a list of resources, including recommended readings, guides on using photovoice, and examples of successful photovoice projects for community outreach. Our intention is to provide library professionals with the tools needed to create respectful initiatives that center Indigenous voices and methodologies.

Photovoice is an Indigenous research methodology that lets the participants create their own meaning and depict their own understanding of relations using photography. It can also be adapted as a library program unto itself, empowering Indigenous youths to express their individual and collective experiences that they may otherwise find difficult to vocalize. Through group dialogue and the provision of cameras to participants, photography becomes a method of documenting minority communities’ experiences. Photovoice can also act as a catalyst for creating social change within communities.

Introduction: Why Photovoice?

Photovoice is a participatory research methodology that was developed in order to address the issues of injustice and inequality within minority communities (Castleden et al., 2008). Based in participatory research, photovoice can balance power relations in research practices by valuing Indigenous forms of knowledge and equitably inviting participants into the process (Lewis & Swoboda, 2016; Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, 2016). Unlike previous photography-based methods, photovoice is concerned with the production of knowledge through the identification of community strengths and concerns, with promoting critical dialogue through discussions on photographs, and with affecting changes in the community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Many researchers have shown photovoice to be an especially effective method of working with Indigenous communities in order to identify challenges within their communities, and to empower them to share those challenges with those who can affect policy (Carroll et al., 2018; Castleden et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2018; Hatala et al., 2020; Lewis & Swoboda, 2018; Minthorn & Marsh, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2020; Tremblay et al., 2018).

Photovoice is particularly useful for Indigenous Peoples because it is a form of storytelling. Grounding research in storytelling practices is a way to connect to Indigenous communities, make the research process more accessible, and meaningfully incorporate
Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Photovoice is one way for Indigenous Peoples to convey their ideas and feelings about a topic through visual storytelling (Lewis & Swoboda, 2016).

We believe that libraries can be effective facilitators of photovoice projects in partnership with Indigenous communities. Photography encourages people to create meaning out of what they see in the world around them. It requires basic photography skills that libraries can help teach. Libraries can remove barriers to technology, provide photographic instruction and access to professionals. When Indigenous photovoice participants see their works displayed in libraries, they can see themselves reflected in the library space, creating and strengthening reciprocal relationships. Photovoice also speaks to policy makers because of the way photos tangibly acknowledge the reality of issues (Community Tool Box, n.d.). A collaboration between libraries and Indigenous participants can work towards affecting change in both communities.

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A Photovoice framework

We have created a poster that outlines a framework for using photovoice for Indigenous initiatives for library programming or youth outreach. For best viewing, follow this link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/10efesQEuNyIY8Jyq5tqXLG7wg4alZBvS/view?usp=sharing and zoom in.
Resource List

In alphabetical order, this is a list of resources, reports, guides, and articles about photovoice methodology, with summaries. These reports and articles provide examples of how libraries and other organizations have used photovoice methodology for community outreach with Indigenous peoples. Various resources are included to provide more detailed information to supplement our poster’s framework.

Maskwacis community, this project facilitated youth exploration and representation of their community’s strengths through photography (p. 4). Training for participants consisted of two experienced Indigenous photographers (Ingrid Kelln and Bert Crowfoot) teaching how to capture artistic and meaningful photographs and two community Elders to mentor and guide youth in “appreciating their community’s positive assets” (p. 6). Their photos were compiled into exhibitions (displayed at the Ermineskin Elders’ Centre, the UofA Faculty of Extension gallery, and then the UofA Hospital McMullen gallery) and a photobook for the wider community. The project helped build positive awareness of the Maskwacis community by displaying photos that show culture, pride, talent, creativity, beauty, etc.


This article examines the perspectives of photovoice as a community-based participatory research method for Indigenous Peoples. Castleden et al. (2008) discuss the historical power imbalances of non-Indigenous people researching Indigenous Peoples. Researchers need to make the effort to foster trust and share power with Indigenous Peoples when doing research about and with them. Photovoice can balance power, provide a sense of ownership, foster trust, and build capacity with photography. It is a culturally appropriate method, as one participant states, Indigenous Peoples “are more comfortable with oral and visual [forms of communication], then this way you are drawing out the information, this isn’t intimidating.”


This is a detailed online guide to photovoice from Community Tool Box, a massive online resource on community-building skills. This chapter teaches readers how to use photovoice as a tool to empower people. It breaks down the basics of photovoice and the benefits of using it to understand and document community needs. It explains when photovoice is useful and carefully outlines the steps required to plan and implement a photovoice project.

This report from the Ever Active Schools describes their projects on researching the perceived barriers and facilitators of a healthy school environment from Indigenous youth. Applying photovoice methodology, students were asked to take pictures to reflect wellness in their own school community. The researchers state “We felt it was the most appropriate method to engage students and give them a sense of ownership over the project.” Students then organized their pictures into different themes and discussed them in a focus group setting. The positive themes that emerged were family and friend support, connecting to their culture, and connecting with nature. Discovering these themes with photovoice provides a foundation to develop more school programs that integrate these themes.

EPL. (n.d.). Digital storytelling initiatives. Retrieved from
https://www.epl.ca/digital-storytelling/

The Edmonton Public Library uses digital storytelling in one of their Indigenous Initiatives. These digital story videos let Indigenous Peoples “share what's important or meaningful to them.. add a different dimension to the traditional narrative. It provides the chance to learn about one another, building stronger relationships and understanding within and across our communities.” Their project, *Voices of Amiskwaciy*, shows how multimedia is a powerful tool to share personal and community stories. Some stories are created with the help of EPL, while others are created using EPL resources, such as a digital storytelling kit that can be borrowed or access to their makerspace technology (e.g. green screens, recording space, video editing software). The website “is a space owned by the Indigenous community,” reminding us that the media created from these initiatives belongs to the contributing communities.


This research project aimed to uncover the perceptions of urban Indigenous youth. Through photovoice, participants were able to show their perspectives on mobility that would be
difficult to express otherwise. Photovoice was an effective way for Indigenous youth to contextualize their experiences. Goodman et al. point to how relationship and trust-building were key throughout the process.


This article describes how traditional photovoice methodology needs to be adapted for Indigenous contexts in order to not risk reproducing the power imbalance that is frequent in research on Indigenous Peoples. By incorporating Indigenous standpoint theories, photovoice can help investigate “the questions that can be asked” from personal experiences and employ critical reflexivity. Furthermore, Indigenous praxis contributes to the idea of building healthy relationships within communities and beyond. Higgins calls for photovoice to include more than just human voices and consider voice as relational (e.g. telling stories *with* rather than *about* place) to utilize Indigenous Ways of Knowing.


This is a master-list of organizations that are dedicated to helping their communities tell visual or digital stories. Many of these organizations are specifically based in photovoice methodologies, while others are similar in spirit. These websites are filled with resources and examples of how photography can empower communities.


This report details the experience of using photovoice to promote mental health initiatives for urban Indigenous youth in Kelowna, Port Alberni, and Quesnel. Led by the [Canadian Mental Health Association](http://www.cmha.ca), the project aimed to promote positive health outcomes with a visual storytelling approach. The project used photovoice as a tool for engaging youth in co-research about their communities and to build connection to protective factors.
Through photography, Indigenous youth displayed their understandings of mental health in their lives. Youth conveyed this through photos of their pets, exercise, learning about culture, confronting stereotypes, nature, family, self-portraits, and more. Adapting the Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence manual (see Palibroda et al., 2009) to a mental health context, participants created photographs “that reflected their sense of belonging and identity in the community” (p. 9). The project started with workshops on camera use, ethics, power, and concepts of community-based research and ended with a Photovoice Exhibit Gala to share the photographs with the wider community.

**Norquest College.** (n.d.). *Welcome in Our College: A Student PhotoVoice Project.* 
Retrieved from https://www.norquest.ca/NorquestCollege/media/pdf/centres/intercultural/ISE/photovoice_HiRes.pdf

This guide details Norquest College’s student engagement photovoice project. While their project focuses on welcoming diverse students to a college campus, this guide was designed to be used as a resource that can be adapted to any organization wanting to use photovoice. It provides detailed information on how to engage participants and outlines eight weeks of sessions, including objectives, underlying theories, timeframe, activities/tasks, materials, new vocabulary, reflection questions, and tips for each session.


This facilitator guide contains useful resources such as examples of consent forms, participant calendars, and scheduling timelines. It discusses practical topics, e.g. how to prepare a budget and create the right environment for participants to learn and share. It lays out the project in a series of sessions with details on what to discuss and do in each.

This is a guide for completing Photovoice research. It provides an outline of a photovoice project that can be adapted for other contexts, along with timelines and forms. This document covers the key steps of a photovoice project, what is required of facilitators, and ethical considerations (privacy and informed consent). It provides detailed instructions and checklists for planning a project, such as what equipment you need, how to teach photography basics, and how to recruit participants. It also provides good advice on how to interact with participants and how to create a safe space for them to express their ideas.


This manual was created by the Prairie Women’s Health Center of Excellence as a guide for incorporating photovoice research methodology. Photovoice empowers members of marginalized communities through the sharing of their photographs and their voices as a means to implement positive change within their communities. Photovoice participants act as co-researchers in a project.


In 2013, the Chicago Public Library partnered with a local organization in order to collect stories from refugees and asylum-seekers. Through photovoice, participants became connected to their new home by capturing their daily lives through pictures, to the Chicago Public Library where they met in small groups, and to other refugees with similar lived experiences. This webinar by the Public Library Association of America provides the methodology used and will aid viewers in planning their own photovoice projects.

This is a foundational article on the basics of photovoice. Wang is often credited as the developer of photovoice methodology. This article outlines a clear framework on what photovoice is and how it can be used as a participatory research method. Photovoice is a departure from previous photo-based methodologies with three main goals; to reflect community strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue through discussions of photographs, and to reach policymakers.

**Conclusion**

Photovoice can empower Indigenous communities to “identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang & Burris 1997). It is important to invite policy and decision-makers who might be influenced by the marginalized voices of the community to the issues reflected in their photographs and their stories. Create travelling posters that can be exhibited at Pow Wows and other community cultural events, or even in restaurants or cafes. More exposure in the community offers more learning opportunities and potential for change!
References


http://www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/webinars/ondemand/photovoice