

Tips for trainers

'Other Oxford': participatory community photograph workshops

This photo was taken by E, who told us: 'I didn't realise this bench was designed to stop people sleeping on it until after this photo was taken'

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Introduction

This tips for trainers article provides information on how to run a participatory community photographic project with vulnerable groups. It is based upon our own participatory photographic project called 'Other Oxford' working with homeless individuals from the Steppin' Stones centre near the Cowley Road in East Oxford, in the UK.¹ We hope it will be a useful resource for anyone thinking of setting up a community photographic project. It includes:

- resource requirements and sample budget;
- general workshop outlines/plans;
- sample photographs and meanings (from the Asylum Welcome Project);
- photos from the 'Other Oxford' project; and
- general project guidelines.²

We chose to work with a group of



people affected by homelessness because we felt that they were a part of the population that often went unheard in wider society. We felt that a photographic project would be the best way to get their voice heard in the community. We especially felt that an exhibition could be used as a way of getting messages across to key advocacy targets such as local media and town councillors.

We found the value of this approach is that it should allow any group to use the process to come up with a set of messages in a participatory way and in a form that is easy to communicate.

We would recommend that you

try and get a photographer to help on this project as they are useful when analysing peoples' photos and giving advice on framing and setting. Our approach also used digital and Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras, and we also edited photos using a computer, although if you do not have access to this type of equipment, you can adapt the methods to suit the equipment that is available to you.³ The next section gives you a brief outline of what would be needed to do this project.

³ A Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera allows you to use interchangeable lenses, control over aperture and shutter speeds, and a choice between manual focus and autofocus cameras.

¹ The Steppin' Stone Centre is run by the Porch charity, based in Oxford, UK. The centre provides day-long support for homeless and vulnerably housed people wanting to move forward in their lives, away from street-life and addiction. See www.theporch.org.uk for more details.

² The 'Oxford through my eyes' participatory photography project was run by a local organisation called Asylum Welcome in Oxford, UK, which used photos to portray Oxford through the eyes of young asylum-seekers. See www.asylum-welcome.supanet.com/eyes.html for more information

Resource requirements and sample budget	
Equipment	You will need two disposable cameras per participant at a cost of £3 each. If possible, it might be useful to use one digital/ Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera per participant. Access to a computer would also be required if digital format is chosen.
Transport	You may need to arrange transport for participants if they chose to take photographs further a field.
People	
Photographer	He/she will need to commit roughly 20 hours of his/her time, including attendance at five workshops. If you are having trouble finding a photographer try contacting e.g. your local photographic society, this is where we found ours.
Project worker	You will need at least two project workers in order for this to be successful. They will need to commit approximately 30 hours each.
Dissemination	
Printing Costs	These are variable and will depend on the size of prints and what equipment is available to you. We would suggest finding out these costs before you start the project, as you may need to raise funds. If you have more available in your budget you might want to look at getting better quality prints e.g. for an exhibition.

This photo was taken by K. The caption is: 'I took this photo of a lock because I like to hide the real me from other people'.



General workshop outlines for photographic project

Based on our experience, we recommend that the project takes the form of six workshops, held over five weeks. Each workshop will take roughly between two and three hours. The end point of the project could take the form of an exhibition. When getting the group to choose a location for any exhibition, try to emphasise the importance of choosing a location that is as relevant as possible to the group.

These outlines were adapted from the McAlinden Outline and are a basic guide, which can be adapted and altered to individual needs (Chambers, 2002).

Workshop One

What you will need

- Paper
- Pens

- Sample photographs from other projects
- Disposable cameras
- Bluetac

Aim

This workshop is the basic introduction to the project. The main purpose of this part is to outline the project and to develop a set of participants who wish to join in. You may want to perform an icebreaker near the start. Do not worry about trying to find out exactly what they are interested in taking photos of as many will not know fully. They will develop this as the workshops proceed.

We would suggest the following activities to be used in this workshop:

Sample exercise one: disposable camera pictures

The aim of this exercise is to get

people to participate in the project, think about ideas of what they may wish to take photos of and to break the ice.

These disposable cameras will provide the material that will be looked at in the second workshop. They are given out so that people can take them away and take photos of any theme that they want. You will need to set a hand in date of when to return the cameras so that they are able to be developed in time for the next workshop. We also advise showing these to the photographer working on the project before the second workshop and asking him to select one or two to say what is good about them.

After you have introduced the project, give out disposable cameras and ask participants to ask the person sitting next to them to take a photo



of them using their camera. It may also get some discussion going about photography. It is also a good source of knowing whose camera is whose.

Then explain that they can take these away, take some photos and they will be developed for free and returned at the next workshop. Don't go into too much detail on what you want them to take photos of here, save that till the later workshops.

Sample exercise two: previous project's photos

The aim of this exercise is to give participants an idea of what has been done before and to get discussion going about various themes.

These are used so that participants can see what has been done before. You will want to try and find the reasons why people think these have been taken and what

Table 1: Outline Of Workshop One	
Plan	
Short term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get people to take part in the project • Form workgroups
Long term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to participate in the complete project • To empower individuals • To find issues that affect them and that they feel passionate about getting across to a wider audience
Organise	
Opening	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is this project? • Why are we doing it? • Why is it important? • What do we hope to achieve?
What's in it for them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the public on issue of their choice • Influence local policy and decision-making • Enjoyable • Training on photography by a professional photographer • Something to keep at the end of the project
Body	
Idea 1	Sample Exercise 1: Photographic Exercise
Idea 2	Sample Exercise 2: Previous Projects Photo's
Idea 3	Gather information on what they might like to educate public about
Close	
Purpose	Plan for next workshop and organise dates
Action steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set deadline for cameras to be handed in • Organise next meeting • Ask participants to think about what and where they would like to photograph • Think about exhibition space

they think they are about. The best way to do this is to give each person a photograph and ask them to comment on what it is about. Then ask others what they think.

Workshop Two

What you will need

- Two or three of your own photographs
- Participants' developed photographs
- Post-it notes
- Pens
- Bluetac

Aim

The purpose of this workshop is to introduce the photographer to the group, to go through photos taken on the disposable cameras, develop some themes to be looked at and to arrange the first trip out.

We would suggest that the photographer spends about 15 minutes talking to people about their photographs and showing some examples of what s/he thought were good photos and why. If there are none available from the participants then ask the photographer to bring in

Table 2: Outline of Workshop Two	
Plan	
Short term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look through photos • Introduce the photographer • Develop themes to look at • Arrange first trip
Long term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to participate in the complete project • To empower individuals • To find issues that affect them and that they feel passionate about getting across to a wider audience
Organise	
Opening	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap on last week • To give photos back and go through them • To introduce photographer to group and for her/him to give a talk on basic photography skills • To arrange first trip out
What's in it for them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returned photos • Training
Body	
Idea 1	Return photos and spend time looking at them
Idea 2	Sample Exercise One
Idea 3	Photographer to discuss photos
Idea 4	Discuss first outdoor session and exhibition ideas
Close	
Purpose	Confirm dates for next workshop
Action steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set dates for next workshop and how this will be run • Ask them to think about what they would like to cover • Think about exhibition space • Think about questions to ask photographer

a few of her/his own.

After the photographer has talked about the participants' photos it is recommended that you ask the photographer to talk about photographic techniques that can be used e.g. framing, flash etc. These should be explained in simple terms and consist of five to six points. More than that could be confusing.

We would suggest the following activity to be used in this workshop:

Sample exercise two: photographic discussion

The aim of this exercise is to generate discussion on participant photos and to try and find out the reasons as to why they chose to take these photos. It is also a useful exercise, as it will allow you see if there are general themes that are being brought up.

The best way to start this is to bring in two or three of your own photographs (pick photos that mean something to you), pin these up on a board of some sort or pass them

This photo was taken by J. The caption they chose was: 'This shop is in keeping with the rest of the Cowley Road.' The Steppin' Stone centre is just around the corner from the Cowley Road.



round. Then ask people to write down what they think the photograph is about. Collect all of the paper and read each one out and ask the group to comment about what they think of that idea. After you have gone through each photograph, tell the group what they are about and what they mean to you and why they were taken.

Then ask the participants to go through their photos and pick the five photos that have the most meaning to them. You could suggest that they are only able to keep five photographs from the ones that were developed and that they have to pick. After they have picked, collect the photos and stick them up. Ask people to write on post-it notes what they think the photographs are about and to come and stick up their answers next to the photograph. Go through these answers and then ask the person whose photo it is to explain why they took it. This should produce some interesting information for the project.



Workshop Three

What you will need

- Transport
- Digital/SLR cameras, or disposable cameras, one for each person

Aims

To get the participants taking photographs and also to use the photographer to help in anyway that s/he can. Themes from previous workshop should start to develop here.

This workshop will take the form of an outdoor shoot. The participants will go out with the photographer and project organisers to various locations and take photographs. It may be easier to base this around where the project is based, but if you have access to transport you can go further afield.

The idea of this workshop is that the participants chose where they would like to go and what they would like to photograph. But if they are not sure, decide some places

Table 3: Outline of Workshop Three

Plan	
Short term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip out to take photographs • Develop themes
Long term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to participate in the complete project • To empower individuals • To find issues that affect them and that they feel passionate about getting across to a wider audience
Organise	
Opening	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the workshop • Discuss sites that people want to visit/themes they may want to take photographs of
What's in it for them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and advice on photography • Fun and something different to do • Taking photos as a group
Body	
Idea 1	Go to sites and take photographs
Idea 2	Whilst there, ask individuals what they are taking photos of and why
Close	
Purpose	Arrange meeting for next workshop
Action steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask them to think about themes of photos and how this may be documented • Ask them to think about exhibition space • Arrange time to deliver the photos to participants

between the organisers before this workshop starts. You may also need to consider alternative indoor places, as the weather may not be suitable to work outside.

It would be useful to have at least one staff member for every two participants as it might be that people want to take photographs of different things and you may need to split up.

Workshops Four and Five

What you need

- SLR/digital cameras or disposable cameras – one per person
- Paper
- Transport

Aim

These workshops take a similar form

and are basically the same. The aims are to look at photographs produced last time and to go out for another shoot. Also to develop themes produced from previous workshop.

In these workshops you should find that certain themes should start to develop regarding themes that people want to take photographs of.

At the end of Workshop Five you will need to give people disposable cameras to take away so that they are able to take extra photos they may want to add to the project. The reason for this is that people may want to take photographs of something that cannot be covered in a group.

It is advisable to split these two workshops into two parts. Part one will look at the photos produced in

Table 4: Outline of Workshops Four and Five

Plan	
Short term objectives	To look at photos from previous week and to go on another shoot
Long term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to participate in the complete project • To empower individuals • To find issues that affect them and that they feel passionate about getting across to a wider audience
Organise	
Opening	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the workshop
What's in it for them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and advice on photography • Fun and something different to do • Taking photos as a group
Body	
Idea 1	Look at photos from last week and discuss themes. Exercise One of Workshop Two can be used again here.
Idea 2	Go out on photo shoot
Close	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise next workshop and ask people to come to decision about exhibition space • Workshop Five: Hand out cameras and arrange for collection date
Action steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan date • Ask for exhibition place to be decided

the previous sessions and part two will involve going out on the shoot. For part two, you could offer the chance for people to go off on their own to take photos if they have certain subjects that they want to cover that no-one else does.

Workshop Six

Aim

To make final decision on photographs to exhibit, to decide exhibition space and to find out why each one was taken.

In this workshop you will be trying to reach a conclusion on what photographs are going to be chosen for the exhibition and where this will take place. You will also want to gain information on why each of these

photographs was chosen so that this can be exhibited with the work.

General project guidelines: the Ten Commandments of a photographic project

This section covers our ten generic 'commandments' that we think are essential when it comes to participatory project work.

'Copy, steal and adapt'

When starting on any project work it is useful to look for other projects that have been produced on similar themes. This will allow you to gain scope on whether the project was successful, what went wrong/right and also provide a point of reference in case you need any advice. It may also provide you with exer-

cises and materials that can be adapted to suit your purpose.

'Get involved'

From our experience, don't go into too much detail with the planning process as things will definitely change as you form relationships with the groups involved. Instead get involved as soon as possible. This will give you a good idea about if your project is feasible and if people are actually interested in what you are doing. It will also provide you with a great insight into the issues that you want to deal with and help shape the overall outputs.

'A bit of preparation goes a long way'

When it comes to workshops preparation is everything. You need to look at developing a set structure which can be adapted if something is not working. It is important that you engage the whole audience and get their inputs into this, as this is where you will find a lot of the information needed.

'We are boring...doing stuff is fun'

We are boring, we all know that. Imagine listening to yourself speak for half an hour if you weren't really that interested in what you were being told? Wouldn't that make you turn off and not pay attention? So how do you prevent that from happening and keep people engaged for the whole duration of the project/workshop? We recommend 'doing stuff' and it really works. Having practical exercises that you can use to split up the talking parts of any workshop will allow you to build relationships with the participants and also get them to engage on the issues that you are looking at.

'Simplify, simplify, simplify'

Keep things as simple as possible, you do not know who you are dealing with and what they will understand. The simpler

The photographer from the Asylum Welcome Project said 'This was interesting. There were all sorts of things in the cart – a gold tin, a chair, even some jewels. The man was quite old and the cart very heavy. I guess he was taking it to the university.'



it is the easier it will be to explain what you are trying to achieve.

'Don't change what's not yours!!'

It is easy to put your own interpretation onto other peoples' work. This is usually unbeneficial and should be avoided. In a participatory project you have to give the participants the final say and allow them to contribute and control the way in which the project will proceed. If this is not done it may make the participants feel that they don't have anything to offer and therefore undermine the entire project.

'Invest small to accumulate big'

Start small and scale up. Don't jump into something that you can't handle. The smaller the project the easier it will be to get feasible outputs. Remember that the biggest tree came from a small acorn. Also if you start small you can develop a pilot project, which can be used as part of a project proposal for funding when/if you decide to scale up.

'Keep techies on a leash'

In some projects technical people (techies) are needed in order to make the project work. This can sometimes be unproductive to the overall project as they might have a different agenda to you and may try and change the emphasis for a participatory project to a technical one.

We found that in our Oxford

Table 5: Outline of Workshop Six

Plan	
Short term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To decided photos to exhibit • To put text to these photos • To confirm exhibition space
Long term objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to participate in the complete project • To empower individuals • To find issues that affect them and that they feel passionate about getting across to a wider audience
Organise	
Opening	
Purpose	• Introduction to the workshop
What's in it for them?	Completion point
Body	
Idea 1	Give back disposable camera pictures
Idea 2	Go through photos from all weeks
Idea 3	Pick photos for exhibition
Idea 4	Apply text to photos
Idea 5	Decide exhibition space
Close	
Purpose	Close of project
Action steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank everyone for taking part • Debriefing/feedback from participants

project, as the photographer involved tried to change the photos to make them look better. We had to explain to him that this was not the purpose of the project.

Remember that they are working for you, not the other way around.

'Things might not be as you think they are'

We all go into any project with some fixed ideas of how it is going to proceed and an area that we would like to look at. But you always need to consider that these might not be the issues that the participants want to look at. It should always be about what the participants want to say, not what we think they want to say.

'It's who you know, not what you know'

You can have all the knowledge in the

world but its no good if you've got no where to use it. To conduct any participatory project with vulnerable people you need to be able to get access to that group. This can be very frustrating and difficult. The best way to do this is to develop a network of people who may be able to help you. Using your existing networks is an efficient and effective way of doing this.

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