

A Participatory Visual Methods Primer

What are participatory visual methods (PVM) and why use them? This infographic invites facilitators, researchers, and program leads working in community organizations to reflect on how they might use PVMs in their work. It is produced in partnership between the Centre for Community Based Research and Trillium Health Partners - Institute for Better Health and made possible through support from the Evaluation Capacity Network.



Definition:

Participatory Visual Methods (PVM) invite participants (or co-researchers) to take photos or make videos to collaboratively identify, discuss, and analyze issues of importance. They are carefully facilitated via workshops, and often done in group settings, but not always. PVMs are used for research, evaluation, and advocacy.

Photovoice



Participants take photos and create captions/narratives to collectively identify, reflect on, analyze and discuss key community issues.

Cell-philming



Participants use their phone to make and share short 60 second videos (in many genres) in response to a prompt.

Digital Storytelling



Participants create 3-5 min personal stories using a combination of text, graphics, video, voice and music.

Other



Body mapping, collage, or drawing may also be used as a PVM. Many creative methods may be combined.

Remember: Before taking any photos or videos, participants should be briefed on ethical photo and video taking. Always ask permission and avoid capturing images of people who do not want to be included.

Why use Participatory Visual Methods?

Honours lived experiences & community strengths

PVMs encourage individuals to share their stories, values, and perspectives, as well as multiple ways of knowing.



Sparks rich insights & powerful stories

PVMs invite new and different perspectives on important topics. They can spark reflection, and encourage looking at ideas and issues in new ways. The process changes the outcome.

Fosters community ownership

Participants choose what videos or photos they make, based on what they feel is important, and how and where to share them.



Invites flexibility & adaptability

PVMs can be adjusted to better incorporate community goals, access needs, and preferences.

How can these methods be used in community settings?

Asset Mapping & Needs Assessment



Photovoice can be used to learn more about community needs and strengths, in order to build community-responsive and relevant programs.

- How can the community build on its strengths?
- What supports already exist, and what further supports are needed?
- What goals does the community have?

Process Evaluation



Combined with other methods, photovoice can help explore what makes a program effective. For example, instruct participants to take photos on what is working well, or not working well. Then, facilitate a group discussion to create a culture of shared learning.

Impact Evaluation



Digital stories or cellfilms can be used to invite participants to share their journey accessing programs, participating in an initiative, or providing services or care. Explore key questions like: "What difference did this program or initiative make?" Create moving and impactful videos in response.

Advocacy



All PVMs can support organizing and advocacy goals by:

- Increasing awareness of issues
- Celebrating community strengths, and building leadership capacity
- Advocating for social and structural change

Want to learn more? : References and Real World Examples

Hunter, O., Leeburg, E., & Harnar, M. (2020). Using Photovoice as an Evaluation Method. *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*, 16(34), 14-20. <https://doi.org/10.56645/jmde.v16i34.603>

Joly B. M. (2024). Using Digital Storytelling as an Evaluation Tool. *Health Promotion Practice*, 0(0). doi:10.1177/15248399241275634

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education and Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309>



[Listen to our podcast](#), available now on Spotify, Amazon, and YouTube.

To cite this infographic: Switzer, S., Thompson, C., Martin, J. Fuentes-Aiello, K., Lloyd, S, Mansfield, E. (2025). *A Participatory Methods Primer*. [Infographic]. <https://aim4communityhealth.ca/exploring-participatory-visual-methods-online/>.