

# 12. PHOTOGRAPH DIARY

Images (especially photos) can help capture the richness and depth of your participants' experiences. In particular, inviting individuals to select and discuss images that are especially meaningful to them, in their own words, provides great insights that are otherwise very difficult to attain. It is particularly helpful during the implementation of a new programme of activity, to check how things are going and provide formative feedback opportunities.

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## WHAT DO I NEED?

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Ability to capture, collate and view photos from your event. Depending on the resources available (and security situation!) you could for example:

- Invite participants to take their own pictures and upload them to a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram feed using a designated hashtag.
- Distribute digital cameras or tablets to groups (up to 5 or 6 participants per group), with instructions for the group to take photos of anything particularly special or meaningful from their experience of the event. Then collect the cameras/tablets at the end and download their photos to a shared folder.
- Take your own photos regularly throughout the event, trying to capture images of both the event itself as well as the participant 'experiences' of it (audience reactions & viewpoints).

It can be really helpful to be able to handle the actual photos, so if you have the facilities then try to print them out. If not then you'll need a computer with a reasonably large screen so you can view them during your discussions.

People often need encouragement to actively take and/or publicly share their photos, so make sure you include reminders or set times during the event



to allow for this. You'll also need a way to invite people to participate in the photograph diary discussions, e.g. as part of the event itself, or to volunteer at the end of the event, or pre-arrange a small group to stay behind afterwards. You'll also need a quietish place to be able to hold individual or small-group discussions lasting at least 20 minutes.

Finally, think in advance about the questions you will ask. See our section on designing surveys for suggestions for open-ended and prompt questions. You also need to plan how you will record your discussions – it can be helpful to have a separate person available to write down the details while you focus on interacting with the participants (or vice versa).

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## LET'S GET STARTED

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If your photos are in hardcopy then you can probably handle 6-8 people per discussion. If you are taking the computer approach then the group size is likely to need to be 2-3 people maximum (you can also run the interviews with individuals). To start, briefly welcome your participants and thank them for their time and input, and explain how you're going to use the information you collect.

Once your participants are happy to proceed, display the photos randomly on the table / computer screen. Ask participants to individually select one that is particularly important to them based on a question relating to the information you want to collect. Normally you would select 2-3 questions maximum and ask each question in turn but if you're pushed for time you could combine them, e.g. ask participants to select say 3 separate images in one go, representing, e.g. 1) their favourite part, 2) a point where they learned something, and 3) something they felt could be improved.

Emphasise to your participants that they should go with their initial instincts regarding which image(s) they select and also that they should then try to think briefly about the reasons that prompted that choice. Encourage your participants to physically pick up their chosen image, inviting them in turn to share which image they have selected, and why, prompting if necessary to delve a little deeper. When recording the details of these discussions, make sure you capture which image and which part of the event related to each explanation.

Try to summarise any common themes or contrasting experiences, and invite wider discussion. It's important to let the participants tell the story in their own words, and to come up with their own links – this will give you the best insights into any misconceptions or potential outcomes that your event has achieved

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## OK, WHAT DO I DO WITH MY DATA NOW?

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Once you've finished your discussions, try to identify any common patterns, and what they mean for your programme. Are there particular parts of the event that regularly prompted audience reactions (whether positive or negative)? Do the participant reactions match what you hoped to achieve? Did any of the reactions surprise you? What can you change in response to the reactions recorded? For most purposes, a reflective, thoughtful review

of the data is likely to be sufficient, without further detailed analysis. However, if you wish you could also apply the **thematic coding** approach to the qualitative data you collect regarding.

If the participants have taken any particularly useful images, you could also ask permission to use them, for example in reports, or on the programme website.

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## GOT IT! HOW CAN I TAKE THIS FURTHER?

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The technique described above can also be successfully applied using more generic images. This is particularly useful for conducting formative evaluation, to inform further planning or revision of the event or activity itself. Prepare a series of say 20 images representing a range of people / situations / backgrounds etc. You can then run the discussion in the same way as described above, with the advantage that the cards can be pre-prepared and numbered for easy identification during reporting.

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## SIMILAR ALTERNATIVES

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**Scrapbook Selection** - Put students in groups and give each group a big pile of printed (laminated) photos. Ask them to choose one as a group that epitomises their reaction/definition of the topic being discussed, and explain why.

**Digital storytelling** - A computer-based approach where participants put together a narrative based on their chosen images (<https://elearningindustry.com/18-free-digital-storytelling-tools-for-teachers-and-students>).

*With thanks to University of Central Florida for the 'Scrapbook Selection' tool and Learning Space Toolkit for the 'Individual Photo Interviews' technique.*

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