



# STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING A STORY COLLECTION PROJECT

## METHODS FOR THE ORIGINAL PROJECT

NWA's WIC Voices Project used elements of PhotoVoice methodology to promote story collection in the WIC community. PhotoVoice uses a grassroots approach for storytelling among specific groups. A principle behind the technique is that it is a community based participatory research method to document and reflect reality. Put more simply, the principle recognizes that community members are the experts on their own lives, and this approach engages them to tell their stories. This approach has the added benefit of empowering people more directly through the sharing of their own experiences and controlling (to some degree) how they are used.

If you're looking for inspiration or are in the early stages of planning a story collection effort in your community, a good place to start is reviewing the following resources for background information and ideas for curating content:

- » [Overview of PhotoVoice methodology](#)
- » [CDHD PhotoVoice: Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\)](#)
- » [PhotoVoice: From Snapshots to Civic Action](#)

In the same way that the National WIC Association used PhotoVoice methodology as a model and adapted it to the greater WIC community for its WIC Voices story collection project, you can likewise use the WIC Voices Project as a model and adapt it to your

situation. This section provides a step-by-step guide that you may adapt to your individual needs.

## START BY DEVELOPING A WORK PLAN

There are multiple parts of a PhotoVoice project to plan and manage in order to implement a successful project. Start by developing a work plan to keep your story collection efforts on target. The work plan should include a project timeline, proposed budget, time commitments of staff, communications and public engagement activities, goals for the project, and an evaluation plan, if applicable.

## ASSEMBLE A PROJECT TEAM

A key component of the original WIC Voices story collection effort was assembling a team of volunteers from the WIC community to lead the project at the community level. The team was given two options for collecting the actual stories:

- » **OPTION 1:** Function as amateur journalists and independently interview WIC participants and photograph or record them on video.
  - » **Pros:** Targeted themes, more uniform content, easy to manage, and safety and liability concerns are minimized (See: [Street photography and the law: 7](#)

[things you need to know](#) on the Clickin' Moms Blog).

- » **Cons:** The content may not be as personal, and the project will require more of your personal time.
- » **OPTION 2:** Seek volunteers, ideally current or former WIC participants, who will provide their own stories. Provide instructions for collection of stories (i.e., themes, photo release forms, project timeline, schedule of meeting dates, etc.).
  - » **Pros:** Diverse perspectives, more varied content, team camaraderie, and the project will require less of your time to gather content.
  - » **Cons:** More project management responsibilities and planning to minimize safety and liability concerns.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE THE EXPERTS ON THEIR OWN LIVES, AND A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH ENGAGES THEM TO TELL THEIR STORIES.

In the original WIC Voices Project, several WIC agencies used a hybrid approach for their local projects and assembled teams of frontline WIC staff to collect stories. These staff members usually have the most interaction with WIC participants, and it made the most sense for them to incorporate story collection into their regular WIC appointments. Based on anecdotal feedback the staff story collectors shared with NWA, this approach seemed to be beneficial for improving the provider-client relationship. Local WIC staff deepened their connections with participants and gained new insights on community needs and assets and WIC's role in lifting up local families experiencing temporary and long-term hardships.

## TRAINING

Once you've assembled a team to implement the project, you'll want to schedule a training session. Use this time to:

- » Provide background on the goals and intended outcomes of your story collection project
- » Identify targeted themes for the content such as "Mom Strong," "I was a WIC Baby" success stories, "Who is a WIC family?" or a customized theme related to your project goals.
- » Review responsibilities of team members
- » Share photography and any other content-gathering tips
- » Agree on times for periodic project check-in meetings that will be important to keep the project on track
- » Discuss the format for the final project showcase (for example: photo exhibit, video, marketing campaign, briefing, etc.).

During the meeting, you should also determine if the story collectors will need any special tools or equipment for the project, such as a digital camera, sound recorder, or computer storage devices.



**Above: Story gathered by Visiting Nurse Association Health Group WIC Program, New Jersey, under the theme of “Mom Strong.”**

## PROJECT THEMES

To ensure your project is cohesive and adequately communicates your desired message, you should develop a list of themes for the content, such as “WIC Supports Military Families” and “WIC Builds Equitable Communities.” If you are taking a collaborative approach to your story collection effort, the themes should be developed with direct input from other team members and any key stakeholders engaged in the project.

Once you've developed a list of themes for the project, integrate them into your training, and instruct your team to capture content highlighting the specific themes.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & MEDIA TIPS

If you are planning to print the photos from your story collection project, it's a good idea to do research ahead of time to determine the ideal camera to use for your desired print size (for example, posters, banners, booklets, etc.). Hard-copy products, those that are printed out, require the highest-resolution settings on cameras; whereas digital products, such as photos used on websites, require lower-resolution settings on cameras. Taking high-resolution photos and saving the original photo files will give you the most flexibility for using your photos in different media. Just remember this rule: You can always take a high-resolution photo—originally meant for print purposes—and step it down for digital uses, but you can't always take a low-resolution photo—originally meant for digital purposes—and use it for print purposes. Pixelated and blurry printed photos are the result of using low-resolution photos.

A great resource for determining your print needs is [How Big Can You Print with Your Camera's Megapixels?](#). It might also be helpful to talk with local print shops for additional input. Once you've determined the minimum megapixel camera needed for the project, be sure to share the information with your team during the training.

Again, refer to [Telling Your Story: Why and How](#), part of [NWA's Advocacy Toolkit](#), for guidance and tips on using photos and videos with stories.

## TIMELINE AND CHECK-IN MEETINGS

To ensure the project content stays cohesive and to begin curating your final product, develop a timeline for your project that includes the initial training, check-in meetings, and the final project show case. For example, the WIC Voices Project held check-in meetings with story collectors following each period set aside for gathering the photos and videos of WIC participants. Story collectors would submit their content to NWA, and then there was a check-in call to provide feedback and discuss challenges, successes, and lessons learned during this phase of the project.

## NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

PhotoVoice projects use the **SHOWeD mnemonic** to develop narratives and contextualize pictures:

1. What do you **S**ee here?
2. What is really **H**appening here?
3. How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
4. **W**hy does this condition **E**xist
5. What can we **D**o about it??

Narratives and testimonials help to personalize photos and give them deeper meaning. If you are working directly with WIC participants

and asking them to take photos highlighting their life experiences, the **SHOWeD** method is ideal for developing narratives during your group check-in meetings. However, if a WIC staff member or another individual is taking photos of WIC participants during their WIC appointments, it will probably make more sense to ask participants for a verbal or written testimony. You should keep in mind the overarching theme for your project and specific messages you want to convey to your target audience about the WIC program.

## FINAL PROJECT SHOWCASE

One of the most important parts of a story collection project is the dissemination/presentation strategy. This part of the project allows you to elevate your work and effectively tell your story. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways: videos, a photo exhibit, billboards, newspaper articles, social media posts, Twitterchat, PSAs, media placements, flash mob, or a parade. You should consider developing a dissemination plan to organize the final showcase and any other communications you'd like to incorporate.

A good project management strategy to adopt for your story collection project is to start with an end goal in mind for your final showcase and work backward from there. For example, do you want to have a reception/exhibit highlighting the stories in your WIC clinic or another community space? If so, you might start by identifying and reserving a space for the event. Then you'll need to start envisioning your final visual showcase. This could include determining the ideal photo sizes, number of images to display, whether to use floor-stand easels or wall-mounted photos, audio/video equipment needs, space constraints, and messages you'd like to communicate to event attendees. You can then use this information to guide your story collection efforts.

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