

Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice



Leader's Guide

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Introduction

Purpose of the Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice Program

Human beings are social creatures and need each other to learn from, to be nourished, and to grow. A community is a place where people feel welcome and connected to others who share their values and interests. Usually, “community” is defined in terms of the places we live; however, community does not have to be tied to any specific location. Often, people form communities based on their professional, cultural, spiritual, or political affiliations, or based on various activities or interests, like sports or hobbies.

People who have experienced mental health challenges often struggle with isolation, loneliness, and with being marginalized or excluded from society. The Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice (BCGP) Program aspires to enable people who have experienced mental health challenges to feel more connected: with their friends, neighbors, and family, with the places they live, and with the broader society.

The BCGP Program gives people practical tools to increase their awareness of their current roles in community, appreciate the benefits of community, and develop plans to enhance their level of community participation. The BCGP Program seeks to help people take advantage of the opportunities available to them, explore new ways to feel connected, and increase their sense of belonging in their communities of choice.

The Background of Photovoice

The Photovoice concept was developed by Professor Caroline Wang at the University of Michigan School of Public Health and Mary Ann Burris from the Ford Foundation. Photovoice is a process that has been used for research, education, social change, and the development of more healthful public policy. It empowers people who may be marginalized in society and have little access to policy makers by giving them cameras and asking them to capture in pictures and words phenomena that matter to them. People, whose voices frequently go unheard and whose perspectives often are overlooked (i.e., from women living in the villages of rural China to people who reside in the homeless shelters to people struggling with a serious mental health condition), have used Photovoice to articulate and amplify their vision and experiences.

Photovoice values the knowledge put forth by people living in a community or with a particular health condition as a vital source of expertise. Photovoice gives a voice to people at the grassroots level; rather than health specialists, policy makers, or professionals; to represent and define issues of concern, areas of strength, and targets for change. By uniting the immediate impact of a photograph and the story that contextualizes and enhances it, Photovoice enables

us to gain “the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world.”

Negative perceptions of people with mental health conditions often have resulted in their exclusion from mental health research, service planning, and community education efforts. Traditional research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) require people to be able read, write, or speak in settings that may not be comfortable or empowering or that fail to accommodate limitations that can accompany mental health conditions (such as, difficulty communicating or focusing due to cognitive symptoms, social anxiety, paranoia, etc.). Using a camera places the power to represent the world in the hands of people living with a mental health condition, freeing them from some of the constraints of other modes of communication, and allowing them to join in the process creating of knowledge and catalyzing change. Additionally, participating in Photovoice has personal value for the photographers, enabling them to “see” themselves, their lives, and their communities from new perspectives.

Photovoice offers an innovative participatory strategy for including more people with mental health conditions in research, education, and advocacy projects. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Through the power of the visual image, Photovoice offers an innovative way to break the silence that often surrounds the experience of mental health conditions.

The BCGP Program

The Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice manual, consisting of a Workbook and a Leader's Guide, has been developed and refined through several rounds of classes. The Workbook leads students through the BCGP program and individual sessions. This manual supports the delivery of the BCGP program at outpatient mental health and rehabilitation settings as well as peer-run programs and centers. At Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, participants in this program are referred to as students, and the sessions are called classes.

Using the Workbook

Each student needs to have a Workbook that they may take home with them, if desired. You may want to remind students to bring the Workbook to every class. Or you may keep the Workbooks for those students who do not want to take theirs home. It is a good idea to bring a few extra blank workbooks to each class, in case a student forgets his or her copy. You also will need your own copy of the Workbook.

Using the Leader's Guide

The lesson plans in the Leader's Guide match each of the pages within the Workbook. The following sections are included in the Leader's Guide for each class:

- **An Agenda for each Class**

For each class, there is a list of the topics that will be covered for the class. This will give you a general idea of what will be covered. It is suggested that the agenda be written on a flipchart or a chalkboard for the students to see at the beginning of the class. Tentative timelines for different topics are provided; however, they may be modified as needed.

- **A List of Materials Needed for the Class**

The following is a list of the basic technological and material supplies needed for the class. Please note further instructions for use of these materials are to be found at both the beginning of each class (under "Materials Needed" and "Preparation" sections), along with more elaborate technical instructions and examples in Appendix, Section A ("Materials for Class Sessions") and Section B ("Technical Instructions for Implementation of the BCGP Program").

1. Material (Office) Supplies

- Whiteboard with erasable markers (*optional, the easel pad could be used instead*)
- 25" x 30" easel pad with blank white pages (*you will need this no matter what*)
- Clear tape, pushpins or masking tape
- Post-Its (*a free-standing cube works better than pop-ups*)
- Markers, extra pens, and blank paper for students' use in class

2. Technological Supplies

- A laptop computer, connected to the internet, with projection capabilities
- A projector and all appropriate cables
- Projection surface (flat screen or wall)
- Cameras with batteries and flash cards installed (*for students not using smartphones*)
- Cables to connect cameras to laptop for uploading photographs
- Printer for finished Photovoice works (*good if color*)
- A reliable local Wi-Fi network which students can access will help a good deal

- **The Class Lesson Plans**

The lesson plans are written in a script format for the class leader to follow. The BCGP Workbook is embedded into the Leader's Guide with corresponding instructions for the class leaders. The directions to the class leaders use "leader prompts," suggesting which type of teaching activities are needed. Listed below are some of the common directions used with an explanation about the type of activity indicated by the prompts.

Leader Prompts:

- **Orient:** Gives general directions for what is to happen at the beginning of a class. In order to participate, people have to know what is expected of them. You will orient students by describing what will be coming up in the class, why it is included, what you want them to do, and what you will do.
- **Review:** You will be going over material that was already covered. Usually, this will happen at the beginning of a class, where you will be reviewing what was covered in the previous class.
- **Tell:** These are important points and information. The "tell" points are bits of knowledge that you are sharing with the students about the content of the lesson.
- **Read:** You will read aloud, as a class, from the class session plan. The content to be read aloud will be contained in the Workbook.
- **Ask Student to Read:** Invite the students to read a section aloud, rather than doing it yourself, whenever possible.
- **Ask:** Indicates a question to be asked of the students. Asking questions is a way of engaging participation, so they are sprinkled throughout each class. Sometimes these questions are looking for short answers; at other times, you will be starting a lengthy discussion.
- **Discuss:** This suggests that the instructor respond to the students' questions, comments, reactions, and/or feelings about the topic.
- **Show:** Indicates the instructor's use of teaching aids, such as videotapes or photographs. The lesson plan provides instructions about using the teaching aid. Sometimes you will need to demonstrate something or show the students an example. Some examples will be in the Workbook, however, if students seem to be confused or unsure, use the board or your own worksheet to give an example, clarify, or demonstrate how to do it.

- **Do:** Gives specific directions to the students about what they are to do in an activity or exercise. People learn best when they do an activity. Often, these exercises will involve preparing written responses to questions in the Workbook.
- **Break:** A reminder that you give the students a 10-15 minute break and to tell the students to come back on time from the break. The scheduled break is optional, but recommended.
- **Summarize:** Indicates that you are finished with one piece of the class and that it is time to wrap up what you covered. This usually occurs at the end of a class.
- **Preview:** Gives general information of what will be covered in the next class, often just a short statement naming the content that will be covered. The Preview of the next class follows the Summary of the current class.
- **Leader's Instructions:** Special instructions for the leader to follow before, during, and after some examples and exercises are written in italics.

Italics indicate "coaching notes for the instructor." The *italics* indicate what the instructor should do or think about, but not say aloud; for example, when the instructor should respond the content and/or feelings expressed by the students.

Roles of the Leaders

The roles and responsibilities of the class leaders will be to:

- Treat students with kindness and respect.
- Assist students in completing any assignment given in the classes.
- Provide students with the support they need to attend and participate in the classes.

Ideally, there should be at least two leaders in the class. One benefit of having co-leaders is that while one person is teaching, the other can observe the students' reactions in the class to the content being taught and to the teaching style. Later, the leaders can give feedback to each other as part of their team teaching experience.

This curriculum was designed to be led by peer leaders, so it works best when at least one of the group leaders is a peer. Promoting peer leadership can be done by encouraging peer-to-peer interactions, teaching the skills of self-disclosing and how to incorporate personal experiences into the content of the class effectively. Collaborating with peers and supporting peer leadership will help solidify a peer partnership.

Co-leading a group can be more challenging than leading on your own group because you need to be a good team player and work together in harmony with each other. The students will easily pick up on any friction between co-leaders and will be taken off course and the learning process will be compromised. Here are some ways to stay on good terms with your co-leader and demonstrate the elements of a healthy relationship:

- Do some joint planning together before the class starts. Make sure you both are intending to have the same outcomes. Find out what each other's strengths are so you can capitalize on them.
- Avoid interrupting each other unless you have agreed that "chiming in" on each other is OK. If you do chime in, do it respectfully so that you don't take the attention away from the main speaker. Raise your hand, or have a way to clue each other that you'd like to add something.
- Avoid correcting each other in front of the class. Do it at the break so the co-Leader can make the correction to the group.
- If things breakdown between you and your co-leader, have an honest and respectful talk to clear the air. Be honest in ways that build on the strengths of the other person instead of causing them to lose confidence or resent you.

Things To Do Before, During, and After the Class

The ideal number of students in a Photovoice class is 8 to 12 students. This group size is manageable for group discussions as well as for giving personalized attention and feedback on the students' Photovoice projects.

Before the class, leaders will need to prepare ahead of time by reading through the Leader's Guide in order to use it effectively to facilitate the classes. Materials will need to be collected before the class, and the classroom may need to be arranged to fit the needs of the Photovoice group. Planning for the class ahead of time is extremely important and can be one of the best things a leader can do to be well organized and ready for the group. It will allow the class leaders to pay full attention to the students during the group activity.

It is very important to create an atmosphere that supports learning. We probably all have had disappointing experiences of attending a class where the Leader is unprepared. As we know, this lack of attention to preparation sends a message to the students that they are much less important than the Leader and/or the other things in the Leader's life. It sets the stage for the student's to be skeptical of the Leader, the class content, and the outcome of the class. Attend to the physical space by straightening up, arranging the seating so all can see each other,

organizing the training materials and readying audiovisual components. Here are some things the Leader can do to get the class off to a good start:

- Prepare all the materials you will be using a few days before the class. This will give you a chance to do some dry runs of the material and to make sure all your equipment is working. If things need to be repaired or adjusted, you'll still have time to make corrections.
- Plan the materials and make sure they will be easy to use. Name tents that students can pick up on the way in will help you remember names. Distribute the name tents once students are seated.
- Arranging the chairs will be determined by the size and shape of the room. If possible, it's a good idea to visit the room ahead of time and find the best way to arrange the chairs. Try to set up the chairs in ways that will allow for maximum eye contact. Sitting around a table may be a good option.

During the class, leaders will deliver the content of the BCGP curriculum and will encourage participation of the students. Leaders will respond to students when they ask questions or give comments and reactions to information being presented. There are places within the curriculum to prompt leaders to respond to the students. Responding to the student's thoughts and feelings takes time and practice. Practicing with a co-leader and/or supervisor can be very helpful to improve your skills.

Getting off to a positive start is a great way for the Leader to connect with the class and to connect the students with each other. This will not necessarily happen automatically. However, the Leader can do a lot to encourage positive connections within the class. Fostering positive relationships can create a safe place for people to open up and be themselves.

Before the class begins, look at each person in the room and make a connection with them in your mind. This will help you connect with them easily in the class since you already will have established a feeling for them. Establishing a positive connection right from the beginning of the class is very important. Now the challenge is to enhance the connection as the class continues. A strong positive connection between members of the class, including the Leader, will create a wonderful learning environment and make learning fun, especially in a class, like the BCGP program, where there is so much opportunity for creativity and for learning from each other. Here are some ideas that will enhance ongoing connectivity:

- Keep track of which students you are connecting with regularly. Make sure you aren't playing favorites. Try to make conscious contact with students who are less engaged so you can keep bringing them into the process.
- Pay attention to the messages your whole being is sending – body language, voice, facial expressions. You may want to ask a friend or mentor to sit in on your class and give you

some feedback on the messages your body is sending. These are easy to correct and can make a big difference in how the students experience you.

- Think about how comfortable you are with the appropriate use of humor. If you are “a natural” at using humor, then feel free to use it as often as you can. It is a wonderful way to lighten up the class. If you aren't used to using humor, this is something you could develop and enhance your skills as a Leader. Practice with your friends or even with the class in a playful way.

After the class, leaders will need to put any materials away and to rearrange the classroom back to its original set up, if needed. Co-leaders should meet together to discuss how that day's class went, give feedback to each other, and discuss any changes that may need to be made for the next week's class session. They also will need to discuss the content and any preparations needed to the next week's class session.

Tips for Leading the Group

A good leader is honest, forward looking, inspiring, competent, and credible. Credibility comes from your knowledge, your projected confidence, and from treating students with respect. If there is something you don't know, then say so. Promise to look it up and report back—and then follow through. Honoring your promises, such as starting and ending on time, also helps make you trustworthy and credible.

A good group leader will be organized and will deliver a smooth presentation, which comes from preparing carefully. Prepare ahead by reading through the class session plan, including the background material.

As the group leader, you need to focus your attention on the students, not on your notes. When you present, maintain a good pace—not too fast or too slow. In the group, demonstrate good “people skills” by involving students—don't just rattle on and on. Make eye contact with the students (this means don't just read the group leader script). Even if you feel a little anxious, try to concentrate on relaxing your body. If you look relaxed, the students will feel more comfortable.

Orient students at the beginning of each class and after each break. Orienting means explaining what you will be doing during that class or during a particular activity, why you will be doing it (the purpose or value of the content), and who will do what. Explain your role as the group leader and clearly indicate any expectations that you will have for the students. Each class session plan gives you a script to use when you orient. It is important for the students to feel included and appreciated.