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RESEARCH

Using "Photovoice" to Identify Rural Community Food Issues

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Rural communities experience unique barriers to food security. Developing food policy councils (FPCs) is a systematic approach to address food security. FPCs bring together a diverse network of community stakeholders to address local food system strengths and concerns. A six-state team developed new or provided support to existing FPCs in rural communities. Photovoice is a project component used to engage youths, helped identify community food issues, such as food access and affordability in studied communities. Furthermore, it was meant to engage FPCs in meaningful dialogue to identify solutions, such as community gardens and work with local food pantries. Because of the multistate nature of the project, unique measures were employed to provide consistent, successful training and implementation of Photovoice. This article reveals the best practices learned.

Matters of food security in rural populations have become an issue of national concern. Food security is access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle (USDA, 2017). Food insecure populations have lower dietary quality and higher rates of diet-

related chronic disease than food secure populations (Hanson & Connor, 2014; Gundersen, & Ziliak, 2015). Rural communities experience unique barriers to food security, including lack of access to and affordability of fruits and vegetables (Casey et al., 2008; Mulangu & Clark, 2012). Considering the barriers rural communities face, food security is an issue that should be addressed by the affected communities. Developing food policy councils (FPCs) is a systematic approach to addressing food security in rural communities. FPCs cultivate partnerships amongst a diverse network of community stakeholders to address local food system strengths and concerns (Clayton, Frattaroli, Palmer, & Pollack, 2015; Hamm & Bellows, 2003; Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Gimenez, Aldon, & Lambrick, 2009).

Voices for Food, comprised of representatives from six states and functioning under a 5-year integrated Extension and research project, is addressing food security issues by developing new or providing support to existing FPCs in selected diverse, rural communities. The primary aim is to forge partnerships between FPCs and local food pantries to implement socio-ecological changes that will result in increased access to healthful food, improved dietary behaviors, and, ultimately, positive health outcomes.

Photovoice is a process in which an underrepresented group of individuals from a community are tasked with representing issues in their community through photography (Budig, Diez, Conde, Sastre, Hernan & Franco, 2018). The photos are used as a basis for a dialogue about the content of the images that in turn drives community solutions. Photovoice is a flexible process and can be adapted to meet needs related to varied topics, communities, and groups (Heidelberger & Smith, 2015; Kovacic, Stigler, Smith, Kidd, & Vaughn, 2014; Misyak et al., 2015), such as the FPCs in the Voices for Food project.

Objective

Photovoice was an element of the project for following reasons: it helps change agents and policy makers increase their understanding of applicable communities; it can be used to engage youth, an underrepresented group, in meaningful dialogue; and it can serve as a needs assessment for FPCs to use to identify local assets and needs in communities' food systems. The specific objectives for using Photovoice were to (a) engage youths in identifying and representing community food security assets and barriers, (b) provide a youth-led showcase of photographs to participating FPCs, and (c) engage FPC members in meaningful dialogue to identify community-driven solutions related to food security. The objective of this manuscript is to describe the best practices used for implementing Photovoice in rural FPCs through a multistate project.

Method

This six-state project involved an overall Photovoice project coordinator (PPC), state-level project coordinators (PCs), and two adult youth leaders per state in different communities (12 communities in total). Participating communities were those previously recruited to take part in the larger project. Because of the multistate nature of the project, unique measures were employed to provide consistent, successful training and implementation. The Photovoice project occurred in four phases: (a) training material preparation, (b) youth leader recruitment, (c) youth leader training, and (d) implementation.

Procedures

Training Material Preparation

The project team used Box.com (Box), an online file-sharing and cloud-based document storage and content management service, as the main hub for communication among the PPC, PCs, and local adult youth leaders. Training materials were organized in Box by the PPC. Content areas were arranged according to the order in which adult youth leaders should access the folders for easy use and proper implementation (Table 1). All documents provided in Box folders were created specifically for the project and organized prior to adult youth leader recruitment. Each state's youth leaders were assigned separate Box folders so that they would be unaware of other participating communties.

Adult Youth Leader Recruitment

As stated previously, youth leaders were recruited for the 12 participating communities, and varying numbers of youths from each community participated in the project. Adult youth leaders included schoolteachers, afterschool program leaders, homeschool teachers, 4-H staff, and church group leaders. State-level PCs were charged with recruiting youth leaders who had access to groups whose members could share their perspectives on the community food environment. There were no stipulations on age or number of youths who could participate, and no incentives were provided. The main focus was on ensuring that youths would be able to comprehend the project and take pictures that provided a comprehensive glimpse into community assets and barriers.

Adult Youth Leader Training

The following content was provided for youth leaders: (a) introductory training on general Photovoice information, (b) instructions for accessing and using Box, and (c) recorded PowerPoint webinars. Youth leader training steps and associated actions are listed in Table 2.

Photovoice Implementation

Throughout implementation, the PPC sent reminder emails to youth leaders regarding training, timelines, and data collection. The PPC and state-level PCs made themselves easily accessible for addressing youth leaders' questions or concerns. Complete implementation steps are presented in Table 3.

Discussion

The process of youths' documenting their environments related to food access and food security was useful in sharing each community's story. It empowered youths to play a significant role in the effort to document food security. Youths reached as a result of the Photovoice project included those in school systems (traditional, alternative, and homeschool), 4-H clubs, and church groups. Photovoice was used in communities not just as an introductory activity with FPCs but also as youths' projects, such as school assignments, volunteer group activities, and social media posts. Some examples of food issues identified using Photo Voices in these communities include: 1) greater availability and affordability of convenience foods, such as chips, baked goods, soda and fast food; 2) school lunches were perceived as unhealthy; 3) fresh produce and meats were noted as too expensive for families in their communities; and 4) the availability of fresh produce and meats was not desirable. Future publications will focus on the specific results of this project.

The implementation of Photovoice in rural FPCs through a multistate project is a useful technique to record each community's strengths and concerns regarding community food systems. This Photovoice project was novel and unique in that it took place as a component of a multistate grant project instead of a stand-alone effort. As a result of the implementation of Photovoice for this project, there are two recommended best practices: 1) involvement of youth in multi-state community work, and 2) use of visuals in research work. There are barriers to implementing Photovoice, including the recruitment of youths to complete this work, and obtaining quality photos and captions that represent the subject well. Using FPC and Extension connections in the community was helpful in recruiting youth. Referring youth leaders and youth to the training power points that provided key information on capturing a subject well was helpful in obtaining detailed pictures and captions. A strength of this project was that the process of discussing the photos taken by area youths provided critical reflection and dialogue within FPCs as members began the visioning process for their councils' missions and goals. Furthermore, after viewing their community's photography showcase, FPC members participated in discussions that launched identifiable community solutions unique to their communities. Last, engaging youth in this project laid the groundwork for future participation and engagement in FPC activities.

Summary

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Table 1. Box Folder Organization and Contents

Step/folder name	Folder Contents
1. Preparatory Materials	• Photovoice Information Sheet that addressed the "Who?", "What?" "When?" "Where?" and "Why?" of this project – State-level project coordinators (PCs) used the content of the *Photovoice Information Sheet* to recruit one adult youth leader in each of two communities, who subsequently used the document to describe the overall process to Photovoice participants (youth). • A step-by-step timeline in infographic format intended to help adult youth leaders visualize the project's steps. • A checklist for youth leaders that coincided with the timeline to help keep them on task and completing the tasks in order.
2. Information and Materials	• PowerPoint webinars that trained adult youth leaders and Photovoice participants (youth) on the food system, (FPCs), and adapted Photovoice methodology. • Example photos that adult youth leaders could use to help communicate the type of photos and captions that should be included in the project. • Two infographic handouts from http://www.nourishlife.org/teach/food-system-tools/ that explained the food system.

3. Upload Photos Here
- A SHOWeD Method worksheet (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004) intended to help participants write a comprehensive caption to accompany each photo.
- A photo release form from the lead institution, which was required by each individual who took pictures for the project.
  - Signed release forms were sent to state-level PCs.

4. Showcase (community photo presentation to FPCs)
- An implied consent form
- An invitation letter to be distributed to participating youths' parents, inviting them to attend the showcase.
- Photovoice Showcase Questions document, which listed eight open-ended questions (see below) to prompt conversation following the photo presentation at the FPC showcase meeting.
  - "What do you see as strengths of your community's food access?"
  - "What do you see as weaknesses of your community's food access?"
  - "How did participation in the Photovoice showcase and/or project change your awareness of your community's food access?"
  - "How did participation in the Photovoice showcase and/or project make you feel about your community's food

access?"

- "How did participation in the Photovoice showcase and/or project change your motivation to be involved in your community's food access initiatives?"

- "If you could make one change that would improve your community's food security, what would you do?"

- "How did participation in the Photovoice showcase and/or project impact you?"

- "What did you learn by participating in the Photovoice showcase and/or project?"

Table 2. Adult Youth Leader Training Steps and Actions

Step	Actions
1. State-level project coordinators (PCs) submitted youth leader contact information to the Photovoice project coordinator (PPC).	• The PPC contacted youth leaders to set up an introductory training date and time. • Depending on youth leader preference, trainings took place through online videoconference or telephone.
2. The PPC conducted introductory training and next-steps discussion, which took 90 to 120 min to complete.	• The PPC described the Voices for Food project and Photovoice and explained how Photovoice fits into the larger project. • The adult youth leader was given access to his or her Box folder and introduced to all materials posted there. • The PPC and adult youth leader discussed strategies for tailoring Photovoice to fit the program, FPC, and community. The meeting ended with the opportunity for questions and answers.
3. Adult youth leaders familiarized themselves with Box materials in more detail and viewed recorded webinars.	• Prerecorded webinars used to train adult youth leaders and participating youths were as follows: Food System Introduction, Photovoice Introduction, Photovoice Photography, and Photovoice Showcase. • Youth leaders were encouraged to view all webinars prior to informing youths on the project methods as each webinar included valuable information for properly implementing the project.

Table 3. Photovoice Implementation Steps, Actions, and Details

Step	Actions/details
1. Adult youth leaders trained youth participants.	• Adult youth leaders described Photovoice methods and presented the recorded webinars to the target group of youths. Photo takers were reminded not to capture pictures having other people's faces in them to ensure privacy of community members.
2. Youths used cameras to take photos.	• No stipulations were made on camera type used. Tablets, smartphones, digital cameras, and disposable cameras were all allowed, depending on the youth leader's decision and available resources. • Youths took 10-15 photos of community environmental features that positively or negatively affected food access and food security.
3. Participants or youth leaders uploaded photos and added descriptive captions.	• The participating youths or the adult youth leader uploaded photos to the appropriate Box folder. • In photos with people's faces shown, faces were blacked out or made unrecognizable for the showcase PowerPoint presentation. • Photo captions were typed into the comments section on Box.

4. Project leadership prepared the Showcase presentation.
   - The Photovoice project coordinator (PPC) organized photos and captions into slides in a PowerPoint presentation titled "Community [insert community name] Showcase Presentation."
   - Each picture/caption was on an individual slide in the presentation.
   - Questions from the Photovoice Showcase Questions document were specifically chosen to prompt a discussion among the showcase participants.
   - The PPC shared the showcase presentation draft with the state-level project coordinators (PC) to review.

5. State-level PCs presented the Showcase.
   - The PC printed copies of the finalized PowerPoint slides to share with FPC members so that each showcase attendee could have a copy.
   - A showcase of the pictures was presented to the local FPC.
   - After the pictures were presented, the selected items from the Photovoice Showcase Questions document were addressed.
   - A dialogue among FPC members occurred, and the results of the dialogue helped shape next steps of the FPC initiatives.

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