See What You Mean:
visual communication that connects

Think about the issues and major news events from your lifetime. Now close your eyes. What do you see when you picture and think of the Civil Rights Act? Stories about climate change? Major world changes? You're probably not seeing headlines. You're likely seeing images of Martin Luther King Jr. speaking from the Lincoln Memorial. A polar bear floating on a small raft of ice. The Berlin Wall coming down.

When you think about major news events, you're probably not seeing headlines, you're seeing images.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

CLIMATE CHANGE

FALL OF HTE WALL
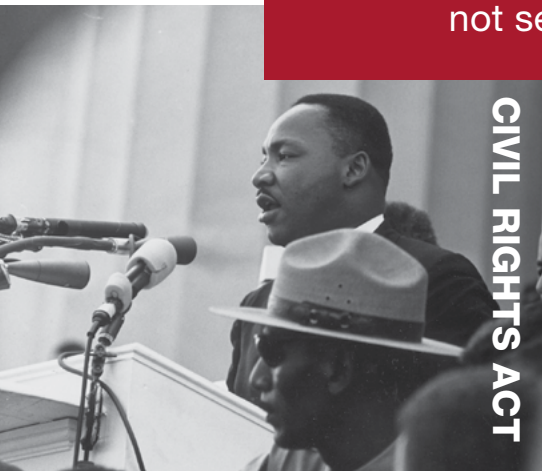
Photo: Rowland Scherman, archive.gov

Photo: Elizabeth Labunski, archive.gov

Photo: SGT F. Lee Corkran, archive.gov

Images have power, and this guide will help you use them to engage your audiences and encourage them to take action on the issues we care about.

Creating access to healthcare. Slowing climate change. Championing equity. These topics and ones like them are the focus of racial and environmental justice organizations. You express their importance using carefully crafted messages, and your audiences connect with these concepts – not only by understanding these words but also by the images they associate with them.

Just as you are intentional about the words in your messages, mission statement or social media content, you must be intentional about the visuals you choose and use. Just as you recognize the messages that get in the way of your work ("Oh! I wish they wouldn't say it *that* way!"), you must recognize the images that help or hurt your efforts – or unintentionally play into harmful stereotypes.

Images have power because we process them in the same part of our brain where we process emotion.[1] That means they stick, and that matters when you're working to reset a perspective, encourage a specific behavior or otherwise create change.

[Spitfire](#) shares strategic communication counsel with organizations working to advance social, racial and economic justice. Working with our partners at [SeeBoundless](#), who share these values, we've developed the *See What You Mean* guide that helps nonprofits, foundations and others working in the public interest to ensure you're being intentional about using visuals in your communication strategy, making the most of their ability to engage your audiences and ensuring they're not working against your aims.

This guide can help you in several practical ways.

☑ Serve as a companion to your strategic communication plan, perhaps your Smart Chart®, by helping you consider not only the words but also the images (graphs, photos, videos and more) that engage your audience and encourage their action – because your images *are* messages

☑ Develop your brand – the promise you're making to your audiences – and convey it in a clear and concise way that elevates your voice

☑ Craft communication materials that enable audiences to quickly understand and engage with your content both intellectually and emotionally – and recognize your values and point of view

☑ Communicate effectively to audiences with various language fluency or literacy

We put these insights to work with our partners around the world, and we've highlighted some great examples we've gathered from them – and other organizations whose work we admire. We hope *See What You Mean* supports your social change goals, and we invite you to share your work with us. Thanks for all you do.

Photo: Li-An Lim, unsplash.com

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See What You Mean Science:
how we know what works

Our brains love visuals. They help us engage with information because they're related to emotion, often allowing for quicker communication and breaking down cross-cultural and language barriers. We hear folks say a well-designed document "looks good" or "is nice to have." To be more effective communicators, we must recognize those statements as shorthand for, "Wow! The visual engaged me, and I'm paying attention!"

We develop messages that clearly outline what we want audiences to think, feel and do. The *think* conveys information. The *feel* ensures the audience connection to the information. And the *do* requests a specific action. Images have the power to support all three and especially to reinforce the feel, which matters when we're communicating with audiences who have multiple priorities. If you want your organization's message to engage your decision-makers, you must identify the emotional connection point that reaches them and increases the likelihood they will act. The same part of our brains that process emotions process images, so using visuals increases the likelihood you'll make this emotional connection – and see results.[2]

We've also learned that our brains are hardwired to be cheapskates.[3] It's understandable that brains have to use resources wisely, because we're asking them to do a lot. When we're developing language to use for messages, we rely on approachable, commonly used terms that are easy for audiences to consume. Audiences may know and understand multisyllabic words, acronyms and complex concepts, but we're more likely to capture their brains' attention if we make it easy. This effort to make it easy is asking someone's brain to use its available resources versus required resources. When we focus on available resources, we're respecting the many things audiences' brains are processing and

serving up an image that focuses them on one key point. When we focus on required resources, we're sharing visuals that ask the audience to work a little harder – seek the object of focus, read a smaller font or make sense of a complex graph. Either can work, but one works better for our cheapskate brains.

One of our favorite examples showing how our brains process imagery is the rise and research behind emojis. First seen in the Windows operating system in the 1990s,[4] emojis were an evolutionary step after emoticons that started with smiley :-) faces and evolved to an internationally recognized emoji set with more than 1,300 characters.[5] These universal expressions enable us to use visuals to convey emotion faster than text. A great example of this is found in smart speed limit signs that show an expressive face instead of your actual speed and quickly inform you if your speed is greater or less than the limit. These images tap into emotions, and they are effective in reaching audiences with varying literacy levels or language skills.

This speed limit sign conveys emotions faster than text and reaches audiences of all literacy levels.

Photo: Paul Ridsdale, alamy.com

Photo: galinast, istockphoto.com

Using colors to delineate: black for landfill, blue for recycle and green for compost gives a clear signal enhancing a behavioral change beyond the text.

See What You Mean Results:
integrating visuals into strategy and practice

How do you know your communication is effective? Without a clear objective, you don't. Your communication strives to make meaningful change, and your objective must spell out what that change is. The words you commit to paper can help you to express that, and the visuals you use are important companions to those words. Together, words and images can showcase the problem you're working to address, the future you want to create or the future you want to avoid.

Objectives are specific to each organization and its work at a specific moment in time, and they typically fall into these three categories. Consider these examples of how you can combine words and images to reach your specific objective – and track how you are making progress.

1 **Behavior change**: If you're working to change a behavior, you must show and tell what that behavior is. Clear signals about what an audience should do helps them understand what steps to take. **And a warning**: Be specific about the behavior you want your audience to embrace, and avoid telling it what not to do. By repeating the barrier – what an audience shouldn't do or might think about doing – you reinforce the wrong behaviors in audience members' minds. Your language and your images must showcase the action your audience

See What You Mean: visual communication that connects

needs to take. Consider the examples of recycling and composting bins whose colors signal desired behaviors. Blue bin? Put recyclables here. Green bin? Compost your food and yard waste here. These clear visual signals play a role in specific behavior changes.

2 **Policy change:** If you seek a policy change, you're prepared to make the case for why that change should happen. You'll think about what your audience must think and feel to motivate it to act, and you can identify a visual that delivers these points. What photo demonstrates the need for environmental protection? What graph makes complex public health data understandable? What image makes seemingly dry data emotional and important to your audience? Recognize the power of images to help achieve important policy-change objectives and put those images to work. As you're thinking of what your motivating image might be, remember context to your audience is key. An image of a melting glacier is not going to promote sustainable energy practices in Kansas, but it might in Alaska.

3 **Build reputation:** Many organizations strive to build their credibility so they are included in important discussions and planning for community and policy change. Recognizable visuals make your organization's work memorable and aid in developing your reputation. When Hope and Heal Fund started its work to end gun violence in California, it chose orange as its primary brand color, because orange is the color associated with gun violence prevention efforts across the U.S. This choice connected the fund to efforts shared by many organizations as it worked to build its reputation and create partnerships that ensure homes and communities in California are safe and free from death, injury and trauma due to gun violence.

Photo: Ally Barron

See What You Mean: visual communication that connects

See What You Mean: digging in

📷 SEE WHAT YOU MEAN WITH PHOTOS

You understand that you need engaging messages and images to capture your audience's attention and drive them to action. So, where do you find these great visuals? Consider how you can build an image bank of ready-to-use photos you can easily access to tell the story of your organization, describe the work you do and showcase the change you're working to create. Photos are among the strongest visuals we can use, because they convey moments in lived experiences, which we know are powerful connectors. And now that we all have some of the most powerful cameras ever created in the phones in our pockets, we can easily capture authentic moments of our organizations' work – if we're intentional about taking and organizing the photos. Check out the photography tips later in this guide.

Decide what needs to be photographed: As you've crafted your communication strategy, you've asked your colleagues and partners what change looks like. How can you bring that change to life?

- **Identify what you need to convey.** Focus on photos that include action steps the audience will take or the positive social or environmental change you seek.

- For each photo you plan to take, note **who will take it** (or share it with you).

- **Make a concise list** of what you want to photograph, when you want to photograph it anywhere you will photograph it (add a why element to the need for these pictures).

- **Detail exactly what work you want to show.** Show people in your photos, so your audience members can envision themselves taking action.

- **Identify about five go-to photos** that you will use throughout your communications (presentations, website, social media posts and more). Repeating these images, just as you repeat key messages, is important to engaging your audience and helping it understand your work.

- Check out the **tip sheet** later in this guide to ensure you're getting consent from folks whose photos you use, prioritizing your own photos for authenticity and avoiding stock photos with creepy poses.

The Pisces Foundation is committed to creating a world where people and nature thrive together. And its photos make that clear. Photos of breathtaking oceans, forests and mountains only work if they include people interacting with nature. Just as the foundation's messages make its mission clear, so do the images on its website, in its blog posts and throughout its communications materials. Clear decisions such as this one ensure Pisces staff and partners are using images with the same intention they bring to language – and have the power to deepen connections with their audiences.
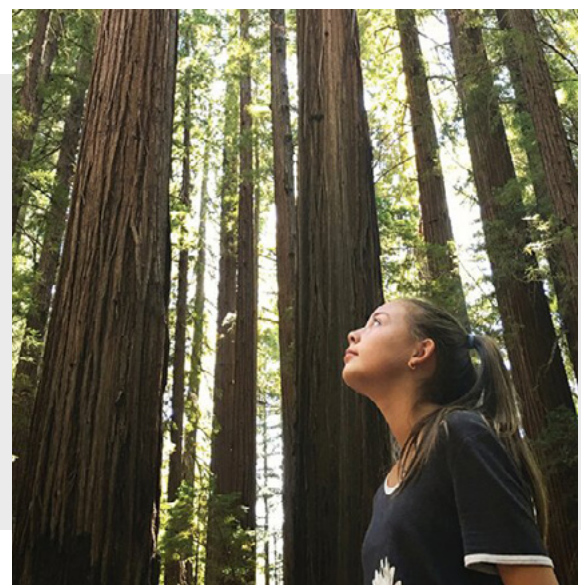

Photo: Pisces Foundation

You've just wrapped up your strategy meeting with your team, and you need to build a bank of photographs for the communications team to post over the next few weeks and months. You've interviewed five top volunteers, as well as three members of your board of directors, to ask them to describe your work. How can you bring these interviews to life with your photos? Show **faces**, **action** and **results**.

Faces

Faces are key for audiences to connect with your visuals. These faces could be those of your volunteers engaging with others or with the people you serve.

Photo: Global Heritage Fund

A worker places a stone with mortar along an exterior wall of a granary in Morocco's Souss-Massa region. These granaries are being restored by the Global Heritage Fund using ancient building techniques by locals to preserve the structure and history of the region.

Action

For action, it is best to get close to what is going on – in this case, work as it's being done. This creates a strong focal point, and also shows movement which is key for compelling photographs.

Results

Results. Results. Results. It's so important that your visuals show the work that has been done. Look for markers of change that tell the story of work to continue and lives that are changing. *Note: Just as you don't repeat the barrier in your messages (repeat misinformation or reasons change hasn't happened), be sure you follow that practice as you identify what photos you use.*

Skip the staged photos. Posed photos of everyone present are part of your history, but they typically won't engage audiences. Seek ways to focus on interaction so your audiences deepen their understanding of what it's like to partner with you.

Photo: istockphoto.com

SEE WHAT YOU MEAN WITH COLORS

Color is a powerful signal you send from your logos, website design, social media profiles, business cards and more. It can identify your industry sector, tap into feelings of trust or encourage creativity. As you determine what colors to use in your communication, you'll want to keep these factors in mind to ensure color is conveying all it can for you – and you'll need to consider what colors mean within different cultures.

We can observe how colors are used to send signals in the United States. Green often expresses work tied to the environment. Health care organizations often use blue in their communications. Orange conveys youth and vitality, while brown links to notions of home and stability. As you determine the colors you will use, understand what they are saying to audiences. This strategic decision will make your communications more effective – and it will help you prevent disconnects. For example, red signals prosperity and happiness in China, but it represents mourning in South Africa.

Deploying the power of color will help your visual communications strategy go a long way, especially in combination with the other strategies in this guide.

✓ Who is the audience for your work? This strategic decision will inform how you choose colors and engage the audience to work for you. Then be prepared to consider the following.

✓ Do you need to connect with an industry sector or existing movement? What color accomplishes that?

✓ What emotional reactions are you seeking from your audience? What colors evoke trust, energy, warmth or others?

✓ What colors does your organization currently use, and do they help you achieve this purpose? If so, build from that point. If not, consider a design refresh that enables you to use color strategically.

Colors are used to send signals.

The environment
(also: safety, harmony, stability, reliability, balance)

Healthcare
(also: tranquility, love, loyalty, security, trust, intelligence)

Youth & vitality
(also: courage, confidence, success, friendliness)

Home & stability
(also: friendly, earth, outdoors, longevity)

Second Sense inspires individuals to move beyond vision loss and believe in their abilities. Through client-centered support and training, they learn new skills, build confidence and realize their value in our community. Together they are changing society's perception of human potential.

Cheryl Megurdichian, director of development and communications, said, "When we were changing our name, we wanted to go for a whole new look from when we were founded in 1947. We were looking for something visually appealing, but most importantly something that could be seen by those with low vision. Age related macular degeneration is the most common form of vision loss for seniors, a core audience, and the yellow/black combination is most often easier for them to read."

The yellow/black combination creates a bold contrast, which makes the information easier to read and understand. This combination of colors creates one of the easiest to read from far distances – think of school buses, taxi cabs and road signs. And yellow's association with happiness and hope echoes the mission of Second Sense.

Photo: GaudiLab, istockphoto.com

Photo: Jet City Image, istockphoto.com

🅵 SEE WHAT YOU MEAN WITH FONTS

Fonts, or typography, also signal and reinforce emotion and tone of your communications. Again keeping your audience in mind, you'll make choices about the basic font types that will be effective for you.

Perhaps you've seen the memes that poke fun at Comic Sans for making serious situations seem silly by expressing them with a font that's jumped from the pages of a comic book. And anyone who's created a document or presentation has seen a sampling of the many fonts available to us. Here, we'll focus on three elements of fonts: types, size and thickness.

There are three main categories of font types: serif, sans-serif and decorative.

Serif Fonts

● **Serif fonts** feature the small "feet" at the edges of letters, and they convey a more formal or traditional style. Generally, serif fonts are easier than sans-serif fonts in printed materials, because the "feet" make it easier for our brains to recognize the shapes of each letter.

Times New Roman
Baskerville
Georgia

the most commonly used serif fonts

Sans-serif Fonts

● **Sans-serif fonts** (*sans* is Latin for *without*) create a more digital or modern look. Helvetica, Futura and Ariel are the most commonly used sans-serif fonts. You'll typically see this font used for headlines, tables and captions.

Helvetica
Futura
Arial

the most commonly used san-serif fonts

EXAMPLE

Bold, simple fonts allow for clear messaging that aligns with 350.org's core messaging – bold decisive action.
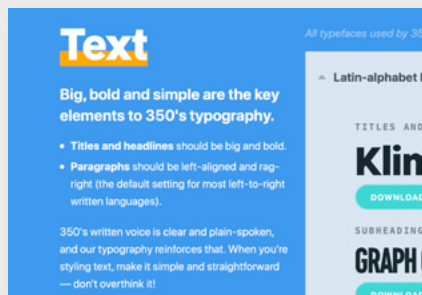
Screenshot: 350.org

Helpful tip: Identify two or three fonts as the primary fonts for your organization. No communication materials need to look like a ransom letter. Our brains like patterns, and consistent choices about colors and fonts will create the consistency that helps audiences recognize your organization or campaign and be prepared to engage.

Thinking Big and Bold: Size and thickness, as well as italics, make it possible to vary your use of your go-to fonts while maintaining a consistent look and feel.

A great example of varied size appears in the British WWII posters to "Keep Calm and Carry On" (or "Keep Calm and Spitfire On," as we like to say). The size of the sans-serif font varies to make it clear that the audience has a to-do list with two actions. The smaller "AND" separates the two instructions while balancing the poster. As you're thinking about font choices and combinations, check out free resources such as this font combination generator from Canva.

Photo: wikipedia.org

⚙ SEE WHAT YOU MEAN WITH LOGOS

Color and font choices informed the development of your logo, which serves as a shorthand for how you communicate about your organization's promise to the people it serves. A logo is just one component of a brand, but it's a powerful one that creates an entry point for audiences to get to know who you are and what you do. As you create or refine your logo, think about these elements – in addition to color and font, which we've already covered.

Word mark: If your logo is your organization's name with no additional graphics, you may hear designers refer to it as a word mark. And if this is the approach you've taken with your logo, you'll need to pay special attention to color and font, because they're working hard to nod to your sector (health, environment, technology, etc.) and engage your audience in the right way (to promote trust, encourage innovation, etc.).

Graphics: Many logos feature small graphics – shapes that further signal what you do. These may be obvious, such as a small house to express your related work, or they may be abstract images designed to convey progress or change.

Tagline: Does your name convey what you do? A tagline is a super-short line of copy designed to better describe your work or nod to a call to action. Why are we talking about copy in a visual strategy guide? Because it's part of that visual package – your logo – that often introduces your organization. Its font and color matter, of course, and its length and your decisions about how to combine it with the organization's name and any graphic will determine if they clearly communicate what you do.

If you're refining your logo or creating a new one, start by thinking about simple concepts and symbols – like those on park or airport signs – and ask yourself these questions.

✓ **Simplicity:** What images simply convey who you are and complement your name and messages?

✓ **Context:** Are the images you are considering clearly relevant to your work? Will they cause audiences to confuse you with other organizations?

✓ **Balance:** Does the symbol work well with the fonts and text of your organization? Is the logo's size proportional?

✓ **Function:** Does your logo work with and without text? Will your logo work on a social media avatar (small square) as well as a large website or printed materials? Can it be understood on a pen as well as a sign on the side of your building?

More than a half million pounds of crayons are discarded every year. The Crayon Initiative collects donated crayons from restaurants, schools and homes across the country; melts them down; remanufactures them; and reduces waste. It distributes recycled crayons to art programs at children's hospitals across the U.S. and brightens the lives of young patients during their stay.

Photo: The Crayon Initiative

"Simplicity is the key thing about our logo. When we did the logo initially, the rainbow gave the arch and the colors to the hand drawn circles. The point is for it to not be perfect and get the crayon feeling."

—BRYAN WARE, FOUNDER OF THE CRAYON INITIATIVE

🎥 SEE WHAT YOU MEAN WITH VIDEO

Video accounts for the majority of content consumed online and can serve as a powerful tool used in combination with other elements of visual communication. Because we frequently consume video, many organizations assume they must use it.

Should we produce a video?

Begin by asking yourself a few questions about why you may choose to use video.

Whose story will the video feature? Will you be able to prioritize first-person storytelling that enables the people you serve to share their own stories?

Will it help your organization to engage its audience in ways that other forms of communication cannot? If so, how?

Do you know your audiences consume video? If so, how?

Do you know your audiences trust video? What evidence do you have?

The first question we always ask our partners is ***why do you need video?*** It's almost a gut reaction for an organization to say "we really need a video about this." And "this" could be an annual report, an event, a new campaign or just an aspect of your work.
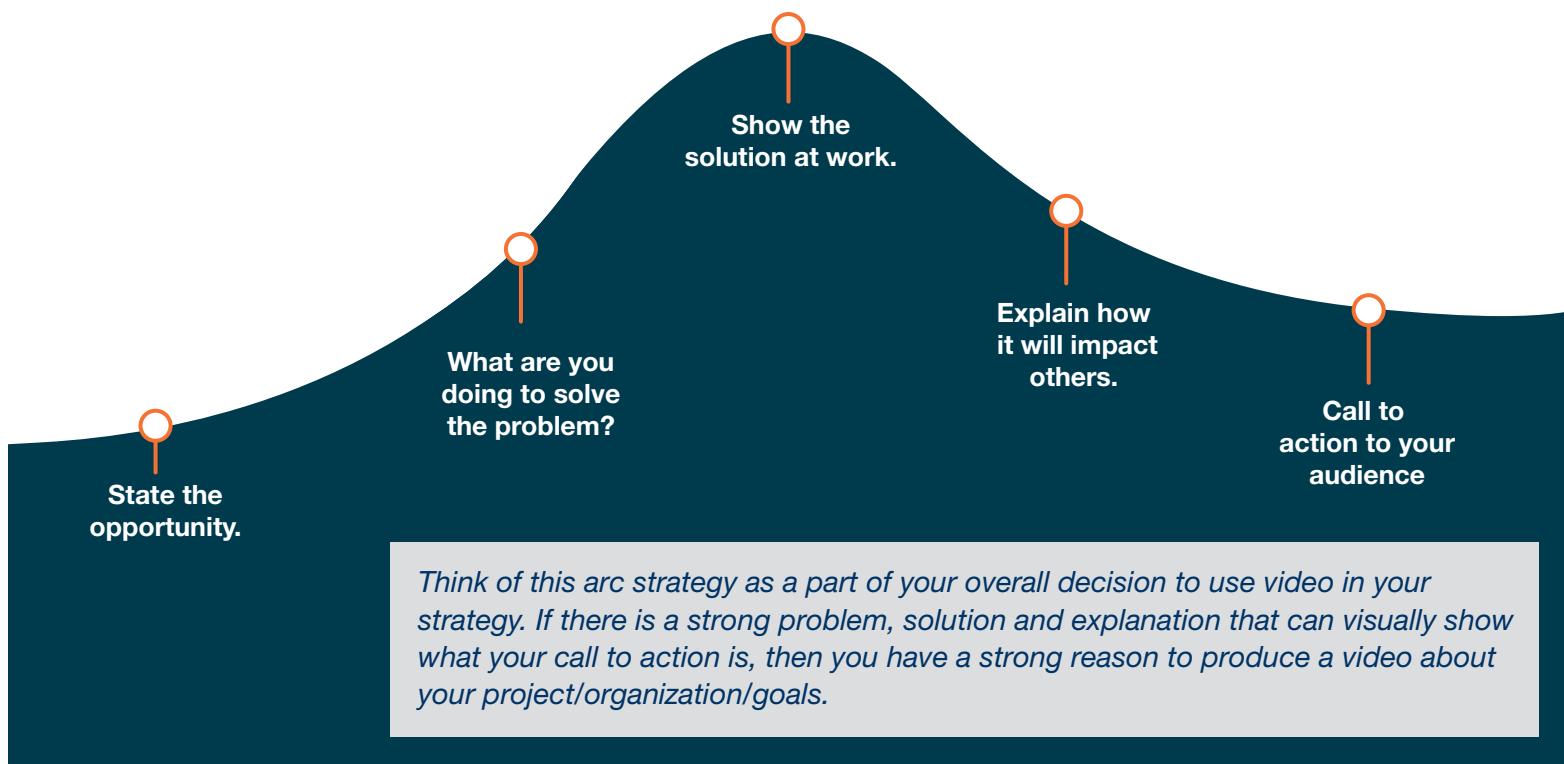
👍 **Yes,** video is an incredible tool to communicate and to show the work you're doing in a meaningful and compact format while giving a lot of context.

👎 **No,** video is not the solution to all communications problems. Video is not a tool to drive followers/subscribers and not a sole tool that will increase donations to an organization.

How can we play for a video?

Effective videos must convey stories – whether short update-style stories or longer narratives that engage audiences in the work of your mission. A good video has the power to engage multiple senses with images, music and language. And video follows this story arc – a slight modification to a written story arc.

Show the solution at work.

What are you doing to solve the problem?

Explain how it will impact others.

Call to action to your audience

State the opportunity.

Think of this arc strategy as a part of your overall decision to use video in your strategy. If there is a strong problem, solution and explanation that can visually show what your call to action is, then you have a strong reason to produce a video about your project/organization/goals.

See What You Mean: visual communication that connects

What kind of video do we need?

Call to action or update: This short-form video should be 60 seconds or less to quickly capture your audience's attention and make a single, clear point. You may need to share an update on a specific element of your work, such as a recent program achievement or fundraising need, and short-form video can be an effective tool. Such call-to-action or update videos must focus on a single thing you need the audience to know, ensure you identify the emotion you want the audience to experience and issue a clear action step. Those elements may be obvious for the call to action, but they're also vital for the update video. Any update you share is a marker of progress, and you communicate these markers to celebrate progress and engage your audience in next steps toward reaching your strategic objective. Logistically, these videos can be simply produced via a smartphone or simple video camera, and this approach adds an element of authenticity to the work. Such short videos work well as Instagram, Twitter or website posts, which give them a sense of newsworthiness.

Explanatory narrative: Longer-form videos are useful ways to convey stories, or collections of stories, and further describe the work you do. You may use such videos online or at events, and professional partners can help you to plan, record and edit these pieces. This type of video typically lasts two to five minutes.

EXAMPLE

This video from the Chicago Literacy Alliance is an example of an explanatory narrative. It was created by production partner Kindred Content and demonstrates the organization's efforts to collaborate during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the literacy needs of Chicagoans.

Usman Khan, marketing manager of The Chicago Literacy Alliance, said "We created the video close to the start of the COVID crisis, it serves as a message that in a time when it's more crucial than ever to be able to access services, pursue education, navigate healthcare, stay connected, and more, the cause of furthering literacy remains top of mind for the Chicago Literacy Alliance and our members."

Photo: Chicago Literacy Alliance

See What You Mean
Tip Sheets
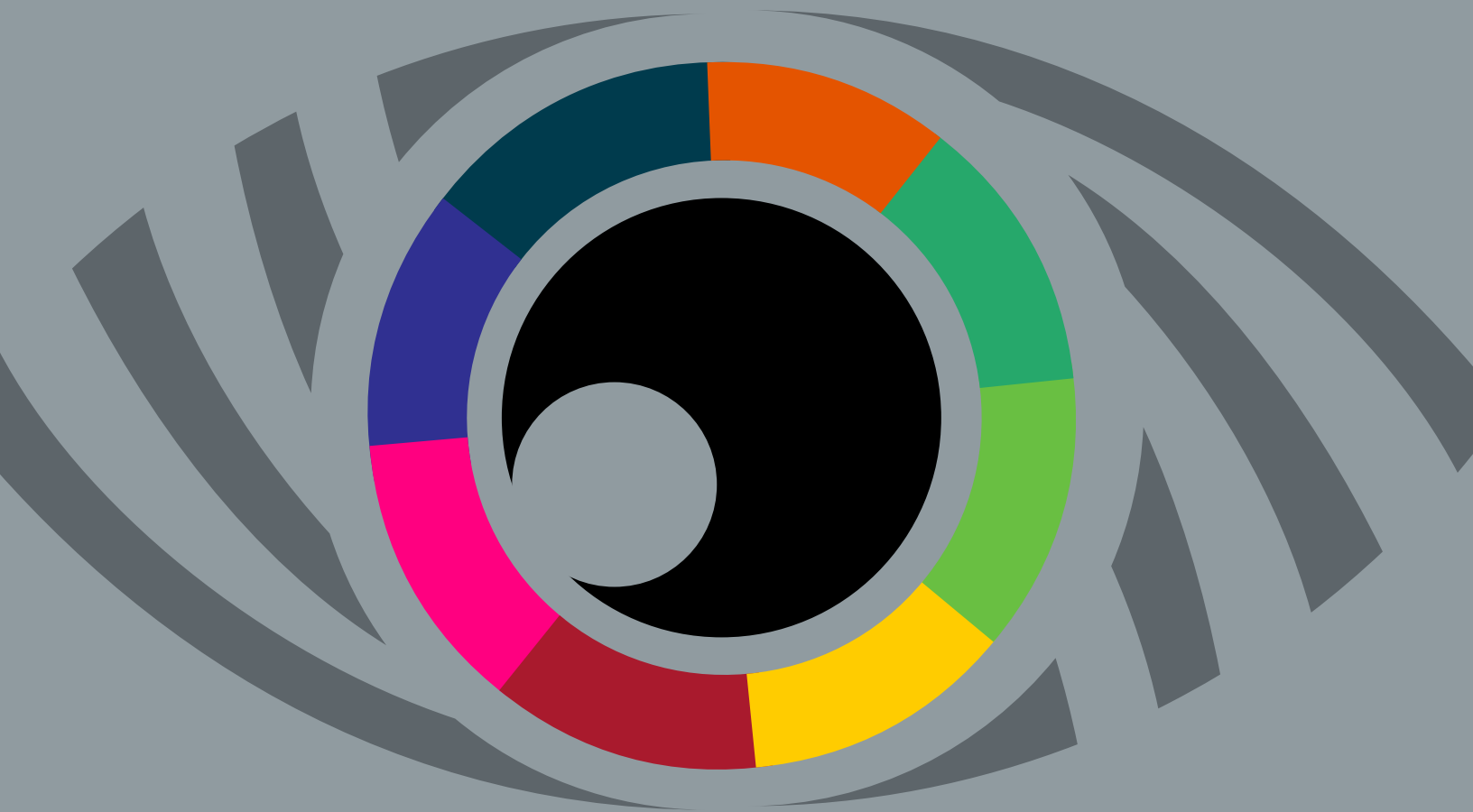
See What You Mean Tip Sheets: implementing visual communication

We've walked through the *See What You Mean* strategy, science and starting components. As you think about how to integrate this guidance into your existing communication strategy or emerging, day-to-day needs. The following tip sheets can guide your decision-making, planning conversations with colleagues and interactions with various communication professionals who will support your work.

This tip sheet outlines a step-by-step process for capturing effective photos that you'll use across all of your communication efforts. Your photos will typically fall into two categories:

1. **Candid:** These authentic moments demonstrate the work being done across your staff, with partners and with people and places you serve. Candid photos show lived experience, which audiences trust, and are powerful tools within your communication strategy. Candid photos should account for at least 80 percent of the images your organization uses.

2. **Staged:** Posed images can work to convey process or disseminate information. But use these sparingly – in no more than 20% of your visual communications.

> ***BEWARE of the staring group photo.*** *Posed photos of everyone present are part of your history, but they typically won't engage audiences. Seek ways to focus on interaction so your audiences deepen their understanding of what it's like to partner with you.*

How do we get great photos?

- Ask your colleagues and partners to **describe what change looks like**.
- Be sure the photos **reflect your values**. Are your photos amplifying various perspectives? Are you thoughtful about images showing various people in leadership roles or holding power?
- **Follow up** by probing for more details. Who will benefit from this change? Where can we see that? What will happen next?
- Organize their responses as descriptions of scenes. This list can function as a **shot list: a list of the images** you will take or secure from partners.
- **Create that wish list** of photos you will capture, secure from partners or take when possible during the course of your work.

To go "pro" or smartphone?

Once you've identified what you need to capture, you'll decide who will take these photos. Hint: It might be you.

Cameras in today's smartphones have the power to take high-quality photos. And the software available in our phones makes it increasingly easy to share photos to shared platforms such as Google Drive or Dropbox folders. When you choose – or need – to take photos on your own or ask colleagues and partners to do so, consider these photo-taking tips:

- Remember to focus on candid shots and identify specific actions you or a partner needs to capture (people planting a tree, drawing on a white board, walking into a classroom, etc.).
- When possible, share examples of the types of pictures you would like to capture.
- Get close to your subject to take the photo, and fill the frame with your subject.
- If you will be outside, keep the sun to your back to light your subject.

- Avoid distracting backgrounds so the viewer will be able to clearly focus on the subject of your photo.
- Ignore the fancy filter options, because we want to see what happened as if we were there.
- Take lots of photos to give yourself options. You will choose your best work and use those photos.
- Provide feedback to your photographers (professionals and amateurs) so they can get better and better.

If you have the resources to hire a photographer for a substantial activity (such as a new website or signature event), prepare that photographer to do the best possible job. Review that wish list of photos you need to communicate your strategy, refine it and share it with the photographer. Be specific about individuals (your board chair, an award winner, a program participant) whose actions you need to capture. Note specific actions (a speech, play time, cooking together, etc.) the photographer needs to capture.

What do we do with these pictures?

Determine photos you will share quickly, and identify photos to keep as part of your image library. Have a big event? Be sure to post photos directly after – or perhaps during the event – via your social media accounts. Need to freshen up your website? Adjust the hero image on your site to feature new images from recent work.

Having an image library will ensure you can find the photos you need when you need them for presentations, website updates and other communications activities. This image library may be part of your organization's story bank, if you choose to have at least one image per story you capture and share. It may be a standalone image bank where you organize photos according to specific topics, geographic areas or programs. The key is to be sure you're organizing the photos so they're there when you need them. And a note from your lawyer (or your ethicist, if you have one of those). Be sure to credit photos. Just because you found the perfect image via an online search, that doesn't mean you can use it. Buy it, ask to use it and credit the photographer.

Royalty free images

Check out these links to quality images – many of which are free – and remember to use ones that work best for you, so you're making the most of stock photography while showcasing many and diverse people.

The Gender Spectrum Collection (genderphotos.vice.com) is a stock photo library featuring images of trans and non-binary models that go beyond the clichés. This collection aims to help media better represent members of these communities as people not necessarily defined by their gender identities—people with careers, relationships, talents, passions, and home lives.

Nappy (nappy.co) describes itself as "Beautiful, high-res photos of black and brown people. For free." and this is a rare thing: stock photography is often VERY white.

New York Met (metmuseum.org) blogs/digital-underground/2017/open-access-at-the-met) shares 375,000 images of artworks from its collection to use, share and remix without restriction.

RawPixel (rawpixel.com) shares a variety of images and groups them in interesting ways.

Stocksnap (stocksnap.io) provides free-to-use stock photography and allows you to sort by "recently added," which can help you identify stock photos that aren't overused.

Unsplash (unsplash.com) shares beautiful, free images and photos that you can download and use for any project.

See What You Mean: visual communication that connects

Unless you are creating a new brand identity for your organization, you know what your primary color is, and you likely have a basic color palette of three colors used in your logo, on your business cards and on your website.

Where do we start?

As you create and update social media profiles, build presentations and create other communications tools, you'll make judgment calls about how and if to include complementary colors that bring your work to life and engage the audience. If you are working with a graphic designer, they will ask you about your brand guidelines that outline specific colors, fonts and images to use – and ones to avoid.

And if you're diving into a presentation builder to do this on your own, you can make strategic decisions, too. Explore free tools such as the Adobe Color Wheel, an interactive resource that will guide you as you create materials and help you use color strategically. The color wheel allows you to enter your primary color and explore combinations of colors based on color theory (such as monochromatic, triad, complementary and more).

Choose. Use. Repeat.

You'll see this theme throughout our guide. It is important to stick to a consistent color palette once you've thoroughly researched, tested and chosen your primary and secondary colors. There is room for experimentation, but always remember to test and get feedback to continually improve your color rules for your organization.

RESOURCE

Adobe Color allows you to create color palettes with the color wheel or an image and browse thousands of color combinations from the Adobe Color community.
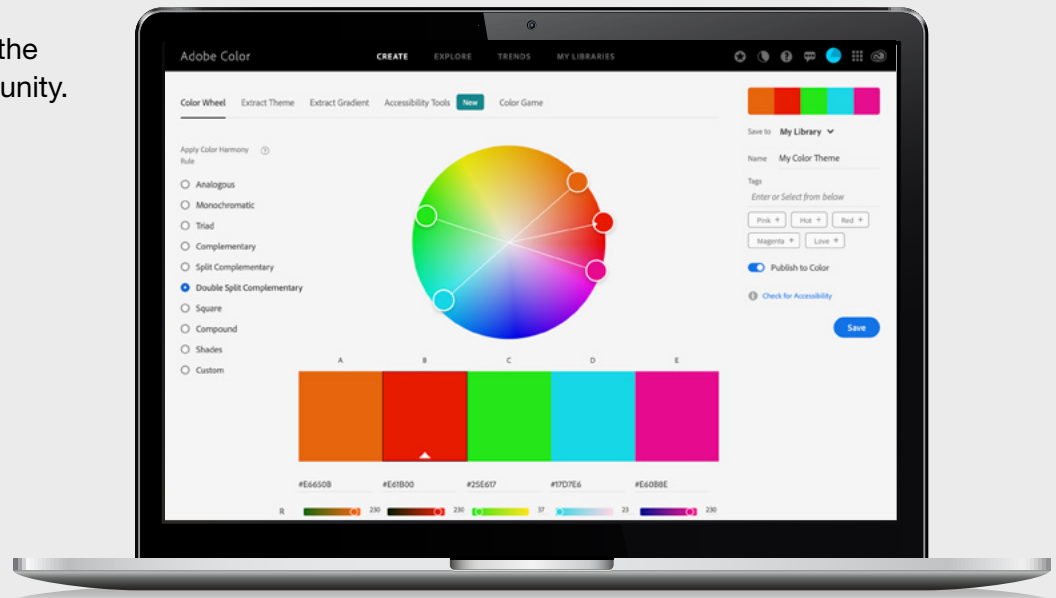
Screenshot: Adobe Color

See What You Mean: visual communication that connects

So you've decided to use video as part of your visual communication strategy. Refer back to the strategy section of this guide to consider what type of video you're producing – a short call-to-action/update video (60 seconds) or a longer explanatory narrative (two to five minutes). Build out your strategy by answering the following questions.

What's our approach?

- What do you want to accomplish with this video? Name a clear result.
- What is the single thing you want the audience to know after seeing this video? Identify just one thing the audience must think or learn.
- What must the audience feel as it learns this information? Describe the emotion that's likely to engage the audience. This could be hope or pride. Guilt seldom works as an emotional motivator you can sustain over time.
- What is the action you're asking the audience to take? Make this as specific as possible.

How will we plan content?

- What videos have you seen that engaged you in similar ways? Choose examples to view with your colleagues.
- What elements of those videos appeal to you? It may be the speaking style, music or other elements.
- What is the narrative you will develop? Identify how you will craft a simple narrative (as described in the strategy section).
- Who is your messenger? Determine whose voice and face will star in your video, and be sure this messenger is one your audience trusts.

What tools will we need?

If you decide to produce a video in house with smartphone equipment, it is vital that you invest in basic equipment that will increase the quality of your production. Start by making sure you have a clear background for any video you're capturing, and then purchase this basic equipment. We've listed the following in priority order, and you can easily find all of these items via online and in-store retailers.

- Audio: Invest in a wired lapel microphone that plugs into your smartphone or computer USB for better interviews and clear call-to-action statements.
- Stability: A tripod is a must for getting a steady static shot in your video. Desktop and larger versions are available to hold a smartphone and other cameras.
- Lighting: You may consider a bi-color LED light, which will better light a speaker's face and help the individual to stand out from the background.

Keep it fresh!

Pay attention to trends you see and enjoy in other videos, and update your plans accordingly. Social media networks, styles, vertical video, various filters and recorded video conferences are just a few of the emerging trends you likely see – and probably use in your personal life. Get creative about using these fresh options when they make sense for your strategy.

Photos of people participating in your work convey authentic moments, and that's what will make them more effective with your audiences. You must secure their permission to use these photos in your materials, so they fully understand how and where you may use the images. The following is a starter template for your photo release. Be sure to customize it to your organization and usage and have it reflect any organizational or legal policies you follow.

Photograph Consent and Release

I, _____, (hereinafter," I" or "me"), hereby consent to the use by (your organization's name), its successors, agents, assigns and licensees (collectively, "your organization's name") of the photographic/video image attached hereto as Exhibit A (the "photo" or the "video"), in all forms or in any manner, in whole, in part or as modified by (your organization's name), throughout the universe in perpetuity, including without limitation on the web site www.strategies.com (or related or successor sites) and in printed materials, including but not limited to training, assessment, research, promotional and advertising materials.

On behalf of myself, my executor, administrator and assigns, I hereby release and forever waive any and all claims, actions, causes of action, demands, rights, damages, costs, attorneys' fees, losses and expenses which I had, have or may have against (your organization's name), its affiliates, subsidiaries, divisions and each of their respective officers, directors, employees, representatives and agents to any of the above for any cause of action or loss of any kind or nature suffered by me, arising out of or related to the Photograph or this Photograph Consent and Release.

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which are acknowledged, and intending to be legally bound, I hereby agree that I have read the above terms and, on behalf of myself and my heirs, successors in interest, legal representatives, beneficiaries, agents and assigns agree to be bound by them.

_____   _____   _____
Printed name   *Signature*   *Date*

Presentations are communication tools that nearly all of us use in the course of our work, and they require close attention to how visuals play a role in successful communications. Organizational templates, as well as those provided by PowerPoint and Keynote, are helpful, and we can make good choices about how we use these templates effectively.

These platforms function best as visual aids – materials you use alongside what you are saying. Your voice, intonation, expressions and other body language are key to successful presentations that engage audiences. Thinking of your presentation as a visual aid will help you plan for the content on your slides and ensure you're delivering an effective presentation. Consider these tips as you're crafting the visuals for your next presentation.

Templates: Organizational templates are helpful tools to ensure you're using colors, fonts and other visual elements of your brand identity. Use templates to ensure continuity and follow best practices, such as clear headlines, which viewers' eyes are trained to seek. If you break away from trusted templates, do so with powerful visuals, such as full-slide photos or links to video.

Colors and font: If you are not using a template, be sure you are using colors and fonts that are part of your organization's brand identity. If your organization has just one or two brand colors, use the color-wheel tool to see complementary colors that will bring your slides to life. Be sure to limit the number of fonts you use. Direct the viewer's eye to key information by varying the boldness and size of your fonts.

Repetition: Identify go-to slides that you will use not only in your presentation but in every presentation someone from your organization gives. Repeating these visuals will create continuity in your communication and help your audiences better recognize what you do, how you do it and the role they may play.

Structure: Convey one point per slide. Use a short amount of written copy paired with an image when possible, so you can make the emotional connection that will help your audience engage with the information.

People: Images of people are some of the most powerful ones, since they help the audience to relate to content and envision themselves as part of the work. Use the photos you take of colleagues, partners and program participants in your slides – even if the same images appear on your website and other communication materials. It helps audiences to see images more than once, just as they need to hear messages multiple times.

Stock photos: Authentic photos are best, but follow good practices for choosing stock photos when you must. Select photos that show people like those in the communities where you work. Be thoughtful about showcasing diversity. Consider whom you're showing in power. And be sure to credit photos as required and/or pay for photos that you are adding to your image library. Check out these links to quality, free images.

And if you need assistance developing the content of your presentation or coaching support on delivery, let us know. Spitfire staff has trained speakers for TED talks, fundraising pitches, congressional testimony, community events, online sessions and more.

Endnotes

[1] Dajose, L. (2017, April 24). Facial Expressions: How Brains Process Emotion. Retrieved May 21, 2020, from https://www.caltech.edu/about/news/facial-expressions-how-brains-process-emotion-54800

[2] Kragel, P., Reddan, M., LaBar, K., & Wager, T. (2019, July 01). Emotion Schemas Are Embedded in the Human Visual System. Retrieved May 21, 2020, from https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/7/eaaw4358

[3] Barron, D. (2016, May 10). How the Brain Processes Images. Retrieved May 21, 2020, from https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/how-the-brain-processes-images/

[4] Wingdings. (2020, May 12). Retrieved May 22, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wingdings

[5] Full Emoji List, v13.0. (n.d.). Retrieved May 22, 2020, from https://unicode.org/emoji/charts/full-emoji-list.html

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