TIPS: Taking, and Using, Photographs to Create High Impact Visual Communications

Guidelines for taking and selecting images for newsletters, outreach, websites, and more.

Photographs are increasingly important in conveying the work of a nonprofit. To have relevant impact, the images generally need to match the season in which the story they are conveying is being told. That means seasonal photos are needed for a variety of subjects and topics. If you can convey this to your volunteer photographers, it will allow you to build a strong library from which to draw.

Start Creating a Library of Images

1. **Animals.** Ideally in relationship to each other or people (adult animals with young, humans with animals, baby and baby, etc.). Emphasize eyes, movement, light, relationships.

2. **Flowers, plants, trees.** Up-close, textures, beauty, different ways of experiencing them.

3. **Landscape views and features.** Angles and perspectives that people may not see often (high, low, different angles), emotive shots (fog, mist, snow, rain, sunlight cascading through the trees, dappled light; magical, evocative).

4. **People.** Relationships, partnerships, joy, hope; angles that cause people to see something differently; lighting that warms the heart and the image. Experiences featuring people from different backgrounds and professions; action photos conveying positive changes and the desire to assist or support them.

5. **Water.** Clean, fresh, beautiful, magical; conveying peace, recreation; in relationship to animals and people; land conservation benefiting water conservation.

Saving Images

Make sure you save and file each photo in a way to make it easy to locate by topic. We suggest including the photographers' first and last names, along with the locations and/or short description within the file names. Including a date in the name can also be helpful for future reference.

Example: *HighFalls_AlbertJones_062319.jpg*

We suggest that you have a written release that your organization has permission to use provided photographs (unless they are taken by staff, as photographs taken during work hours are considered to be the property of the organization).

If you are taking photographs during an event or program, you may consider having a standard photography waiver available for people to fill in their name and sign, as a release of permission to use their image. This is especially important if the photos include underaged persons.
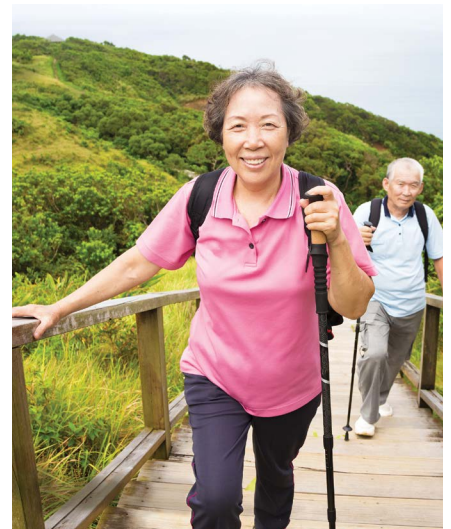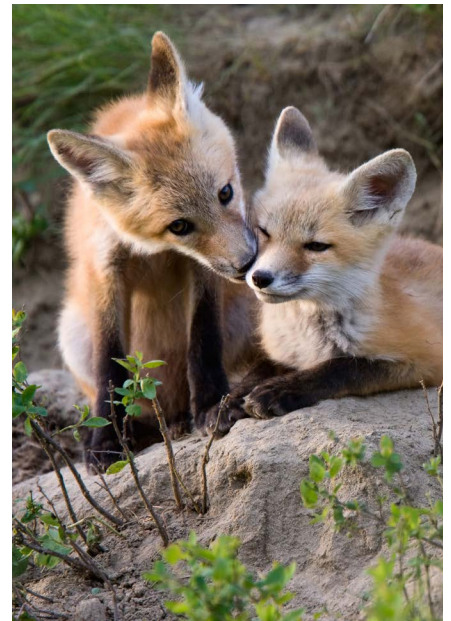
Digital Guidelines

1. **Shoot the same image both vertically and horizontally**, if possible. This allows for more flexibility in cropping or framing the image on a page with digital images and ensures appropriate resolution.

2. Many photos will be more effective if the **subject is off-center**. This allows for the eye to extend into the photograph and/or allow for text/logo to be added next to the subject for use in publications or memes.

3. **Resolution for print:** Check that each photo is 300dpi at 100% of the size to be reproduced. Use this chart as a guide for sizing:
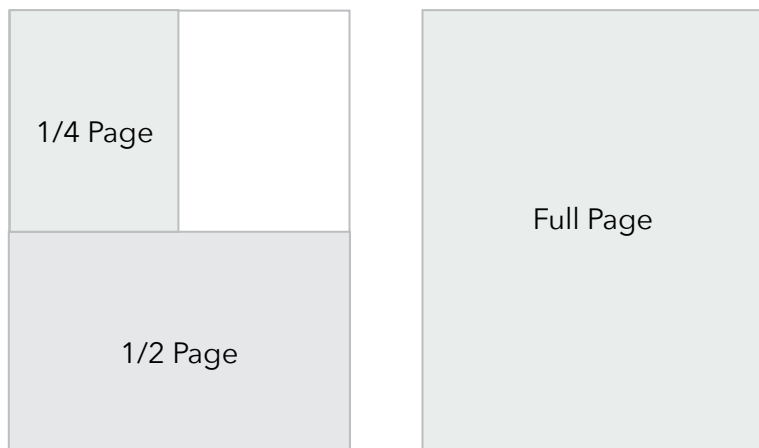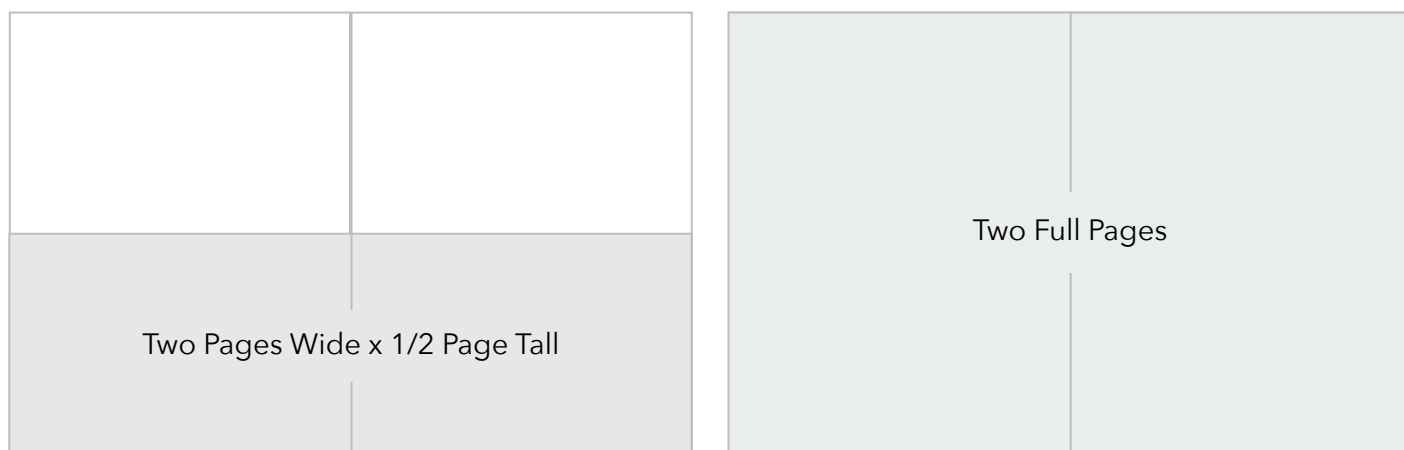

Horizontal format

Same photo as above in a vertical format

1/4 Page

1/2 Page

Full Page

PRINT: **Single Page**—minimum sizes

1/4 page = 1275 x 1650 pixels (4.25"x 5.5" at 300dpi)

1/2 page (full width x 1/2 page tall) = 2700 x 1800 pixels (9"x 6" at 300dpi)

Full page (image covers entire page) = 2700 x 3600 (9"x12" at 300dpi)—Vertical formats work best.

Two Pages Wide x 1/2 Page Tall

Two Full Pages

PRINT: **Two-Page Spread**—minimum sizes

Spans two pages across x 1/2 page tall = 5400 x 1800 pixels (18"x 6" at 300dpi)

Two full pages (image covers entire spread) = 5400 x 3600 pixels (18"x12" at 300dpi)

Photo Examples

Showcase people interacting with land and water, and their community. Notice the depth of field, and how you can see the person's face in the context of the story.

"Frame" the subjects within the landscape by offsetting them to the right or left sides of the photo. Avoid placing the subject in the middle; it makes the photo more static.


Animals are winners. Frame animals in a photo just as you would people. Notice how your eye follows the direction of the subject. You want your eye to move towards the inside of the page. Relationships to animals, or between animals, are as important as relationships between people.

Photos taken of the backsides of people generally aren't flattering or engaging, unless they evoke movement, meaning, or context. If you decide to take a photo from the back, try positioning the photo so that your eye continues past the subject into the landscape, as shown here.
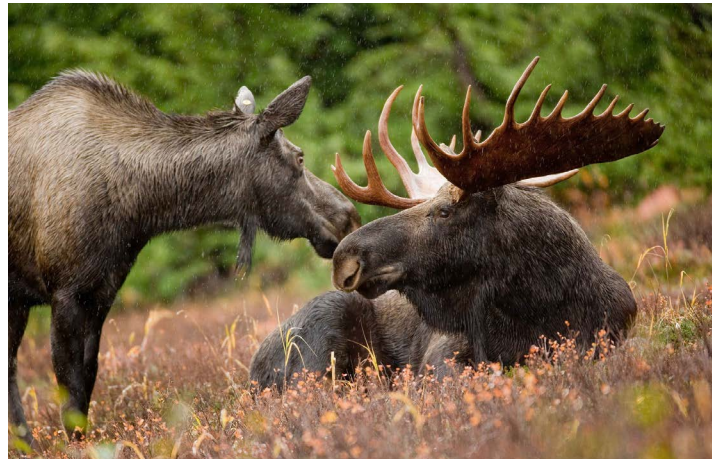
Always try to capture the emotional connection between the subjects. You want your photos to tell a story, or evoke a connection with the reader, who then creates a story in his or her head as a result of the image. The image needs to support the narrative if there is written content, too.
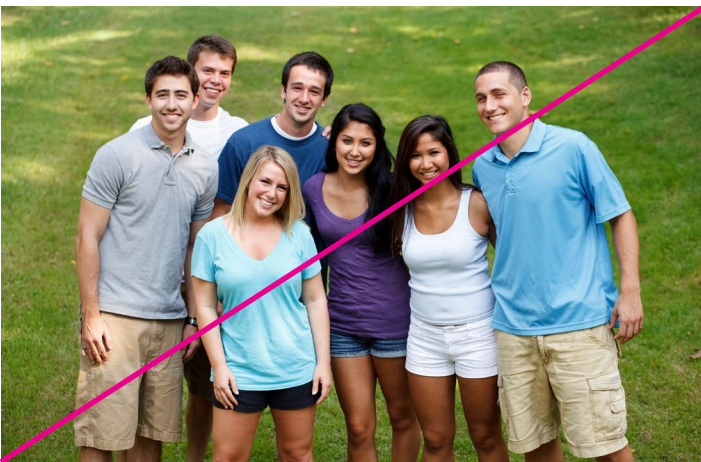
Group photos don't usually evoke emotional connection. Try different angles and ways of clustering the individuals; to create a relationship with the reader. Generally, it is better to crop a portion of a group unless there is some fun, quirky element involved.

Create a mix of impact, focus, and/or depths of field when considering cover images, features, or memes. Find images with high focus on the subject. Consider whether you will have text overlaying the photograph, and if so, pay attention to how you frame the subject.

For visual interest, and allowing your reader to see something more deeply, consider using silhouettes. Select photos where the background can be downplayed or easily removed.

Photography Tips

There are numerous websites and resources that will help you with your photography skills and selection. Here are a few to start with:

Composition: https://digital-photography-school.com/composition/

Landscapes: https://digital-photography-school.com/landscapes-photography/

Portraits: https://digital-photography-school.com/portraits-photography/