HARNESSING THE
POWER OF VISUALS
TIP SHEET

Visuals go a long way in storytelling: It's one thing to read about a topic such as alcohol and other drug misuse prevention, but more and more, people want to see an interesting illustration or be invited to interact with content. In fact, studies show that **when a relevant image is paired with information, people retain 65% of the information three days later.** (Brain Rules) This shows how important images are when you're trying to communicate your message online.

The best way to use visuals is to incorporate them thoroughly into your content. Make them an integral piece of anything you create.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A "VISUAL"?

We're talking photographs, social media graphics, memes, GIFs, infographics, videos, and much more. Through these tools, many of which can be created by beginners and using simple-to-use software, you can really bring a conversation, an event, data, and more to life!

Want to learn more about video specifically? Check out our **Capturing Video Like A Pro Tip Sheet**.

TAKE EFFECTIVE PHOTOS

Below are a few tips to make sure your image looks great and can be used for a long time:

- Go to your camera settings and be sure you are shooting at **maximum resolution** and that your picture quality is set at the highest setting.
- While in settings, check to see if your camera has an **image stabilization** feature. If so, make sure it is turned on. If possible, **use a phone stand or table** to keep your camera still while taking photos.
- Take your photos in a **well-lit environment** (turn on the flash if necessary), but avoid bright reflections on glasses or objects in the picture.
- **Avoid zooming** in on your subject as it will lower the photo resolution. Use your feet to get closer!
- Find your subject and follow the **Rule of Thirds** (see page 2).
- **Clean your lens** often.
- When sending images via email to colleagues for posting or editing, make sure you **send the image at full size** (or "full resolution").

PUT A FACE ON YOUR PROGRAM

People are more likely to connect with a message when it's accompanied by images that they can relate to—that is, when they "see themselves" in the design. So as you work to illuminate the power of prevention, be sure to **tell the story of the people behind it**...you, your neighbors, colleagues, those in recovery. When engaging youth or young adults, use their images in your story as permission allows and elevate their voices. If you want to reach parents or caregivers, use their images.

When possible, **use photos and videos from previous activities or events,** instead of stock images. This will give more authenticity and relatability to your posts. Just be sure that you have permission to use the photos and videos from the individuals featured in them!

If your supply of photos and videos is limited, low-quality, or a little uninspiring, several stock photography sites can help. Many of these sites also include video.

- **Pexels** (free)
- **Pixabay** (free)
- **iStock by Getty** (subscription)
- **Shutterstock** (subscription)

MAKE AN IMPACT

Facebook posts with images receive **2.3 times more engagement** (Buzzsumo) and Twitter posts with images receive **150% more retweets** (Buffer).

FOLLOW THE RULE OF THIRDS FOR GREAT PICTURES

The Rule of Thirds says that if you **divide a screen into thirds** using lines, the points where the lines cross are focus points that the eye is naturally attracted to.

- Avoid filling all the squares. At most, fill 6 of the 9 squares.
- A person's head should only be in the top two horizontal sections.

USING VISUALS ON TWITTER, INSTAGRAM, AND FACEBOOK

Keep in mind that not all photos are created equal. Here are a few rules to follow:

- Only **post images that you have created** or that you have a right to publish.
- Mix up **different types of images** (e.g., banners, infographics, photos, memes, etc.).
- **Take impromptu photos** on your smartphone and post them in real time; think of these as behind-the-scenes shots for your followers.
- **Have fun!** Post "Caption This" photos or polls to interact with and engage your followers.
- **Avoid "selfies"** unless you're posing with a celebrity or public figure, like the town mayor.

Using the Stories feature on these platforms allows you to share multiple snapshots and videos of your activity in real time. Be sure to add text, GIFs, stickers, hashtags, and even emojis to the images as well to make them even more engaging (and attention-grabbing). However, remember that a Story only lasts for 24 hours, so this shouldn't be the only way you showcase an event or activity.

Also, remember to use **#CommunitiesTalk** and any hashtags relevant to your organization or the specific activity so people can find your posts when searching related topics.

If you need help creating visual elements, several free programs can help:

- **Canva**
- **Pixlr**
- **Crello**

What about **TikTok**? Check out this parent guide, which answers some common questions about the app and how young people use it.

UTILIZING INSTAGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Unlike regular Instagram Stories that vanish after 24 hours, Instagram Highlights can live permanently on your profile. They're like curated collections of Instagram Stories that your followers—both old and new—can tap into and watch any time they like.

The limit for one Instagram Highlight is 100 photos or videos, and you can create as many Highlights as you want. This could be a great place to save frequent questions and answers that you receive and respond to in your Stories or to introduce your followers to your organization's employees.

Don't save all your stories as Highlights but add Highlights to your overall social media strategy to make your profile more exciting and provide your followers with more content they can connect to.

INTEGRATING SNAPCHAT GEOFILTERS AND LENSES

Are you working with young people who actively use Snapchat? Snapchat Geofilters or lenses might be a great way to engage them. These filters behave much the same way that you are accustomed to: take a picture or record a video and then overlay a design on top by swiping across the screen within the app. When you design and upload your filter, you are able to choose where, when, and how long you want your filter to last.

Depending on the type of filter you choose, there may be a small cost associated with using it.

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