



PHOTO GUIDE

for USAID PARTNERS

UPDATED ON 09/2020

USAID SHOOTING GUIDE FOR PARTNERS

GENERAL TIPS FOR CAPTURING VISUAL CONTENT

PLAN AHEAD.

Partners are encouraged to hire a professional photographer. Make sure to consult with USAID Development Outreach and Communications Specialists (DOCs) early about what they would like photographed or filmed. Think about what visuals will help meet USAID's communications objectives. Plan on visiting the site in the morning and in the afternoon to see how the sunlight enhances the photo. Arrive at a site a few minutes early to walk through where you might stand to take your photos and find unique vantage points (can you take a photo from a window on the second floor?).

BRING CONSENT FORMS.

Consent forms are usually provided by the mission or embassy and should be in the local language. This [consent form](#) can be used as a starting point but it needs to be translated and approved by the relevant mission/embassy.

CRAFT STATEMENT OF WORK.

It is important to capture photo credit details in the Statement of Work (SOW) with the hired photographer. The SOW should note if any photos are owned by USG (and therefore open for public use if on USG publications) and if not, the photographer would need to give permission for photos used outside of the project.

GET CLOSER.

Don't be afraid to move nearer to your subjects when appropriate.

GENERAL TIPS FOR CAPTURING VISUAL CONTENT

BE PATIENT.

If you really like the way you've framed a photo, wait for the action to come to you (subject to walk into the frame, etc.).

TAKE MORE PHOTOS.

The more photos you take, the more comfortable you'll be behind the camera. Professionals don't just take lots of photos to take photos, they do this because they know that it takes a lot of good photos to get a great moment.

KEEP YOUR CAMERA OUT AND KEEP THINKING ABOUT PHOTOS AT UNEXPECTED MOMENTS.

Sometimes the best frames are captured when you least expect them to happen.

CAPTURE ACTION SHOTS.

Get photos of people doing something, rather than just standing around. Instead of getting a group shot, capture people greeting each other. Find a moment when people are interacting with each other and their environment.

FUNDAMENTALS OF SHOOTING

There are many elements to ensure that you get a good photo. When going out to a shoot, you must remember the fundamentals to every photo: **E**xposure **F**ocus **C**omposition.

CAMERA EXPOSURE BASICS

APERTURE

- This is generally the first adjustment you can make to help achieve correct exposure.
- This is the eye of your camera. Aperture determines how much light is allowed to pass through your lens.
- A smaller f-stop number (f/1.4) will let more light in than a larger f-stop number (f/8).
- A small f-stop (1.4) = more shallow depth of field vs larger f-stop = wider depth of field.
- Depth of field (DOF) is the amount of focus room you have in front and behind your subject in a scene. So a smaller DOF would mean you have less room for your subject to move and still be in focus.

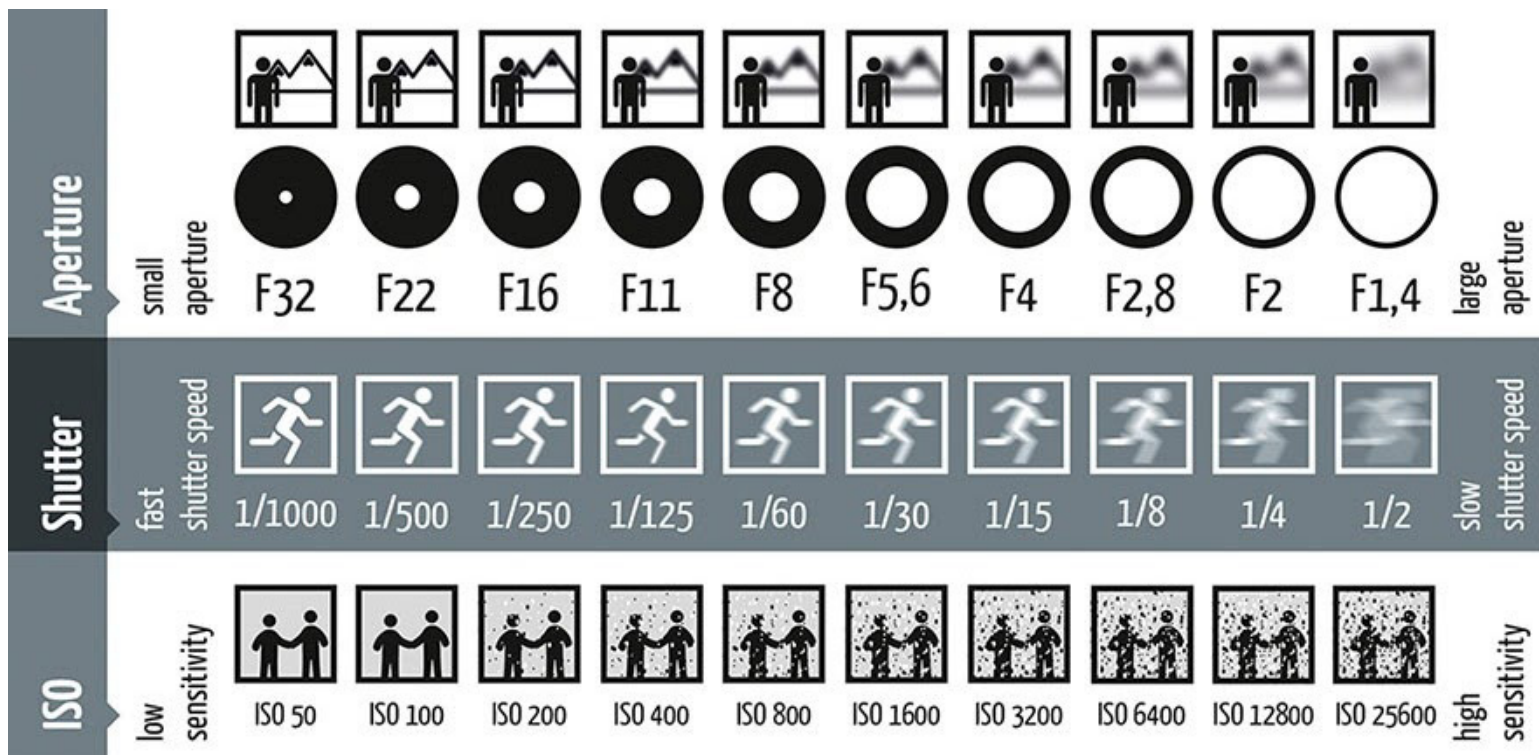
SHUTTER SPEED

- How quickly your camera captures a scene.
- Your shutter speed will be determined by the speed of the action happening and how much light your camera needs.
- The longer your shutter stays open, the more light your camera lets in.
- 1/60 — Minimum shutter speed for handheld images
- As the numbers increase, (1/500) less light enters the camera and therefore you have a darker shot.
- Low shutter speeds (1/20 or 1/5 or over 1 second) can create motion blur of subjects moving through frame. Used to create artistic look or put focus on subject.
- A slow shutter speed would not be best for sports or fast moving action. A fast shutter speed, (1/2500) would not be best for helicopters in flight (catches the rotors still and seems awkward).

CAMERA EXPOSURE BASICS

ISO

- A measurement of how sensitive your camera sensor is to light.
 - ISO 100-400 daytime photographs
 - ISO 800-1600 evening or indoor photographs
 - Higher apertures create more noise of grain in your image
- Usually a last option to change. Set it on an average setting around 600-800, adjust aperture and shutter speed. If those do not get the desired exposure, then change your ISO.



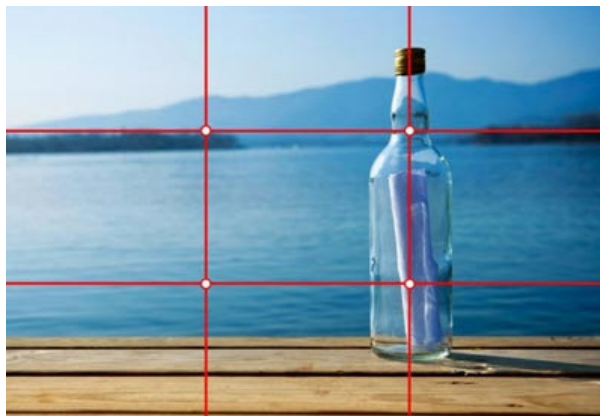
FOCUS AND COMPOSITION

FOCUS

- Manual Focus
 - Preferred method to ensure you get the best focus.
 - Tip: zoom in until you have a close up of someone's eyes. Our brains subconsciously focus on people's eyes, so they need to be sharp. Adjust until their eyes appear clear and sharp. Once their eyes are in focus, zoom back out to get your shot.
- Auto Focus
 - Use when you think you cannot follow action fast enough and focus at the same time.
 - The drawback of auto focus is that you are relying on the camera to make sure the focus is correct.

COMPOSITION

- Know the rule of thirds. Science says that people like compositions that follow a grid that places a subject(s) at the intersection of these lines. Pay attention to your background. Move around (back or forward, lower or higher) to eliminate distracting elements like a pole in the middle of someone's head or a glaring light, etc.
- Position the camera lens at the same level of the eye of the photo subject, or a bit lower. This means you often need to sit or kneel to get a good angle.



- **Depth:** Add interest to your image by layering elements in ways that move a viewer through the frame. Foreground and background elements can be placed in ways to add context and help someone understand what is going on.

VISUAL STORYTELLING

Telling a good visual story involves taking photos of people from a variety of angles and in different locations, as well as capturing special moments that evoke emotion.

If possible, avoid photographing events, conferences, and workshops, which are less visually interesting. Here's our cheat sheet of the different shots you should capture on a shoot:

I) WIDE ENVIRONMENTAL VIEW

- Wide view showing the entire scene to give context
- Could be shot with a drone, or from the top of a hill/mountain
- Helps answer the question 'Where are we?'



VISUAL STORYTELLING

2) MEDIUM PORTRAITS OF HERO

- Frame to focus on the expression of the hero (typically, the hero is a USAID beneficiary).
- Isolate a scene to help a viewer focus on a moment.
- Try different angles to capture different expressions of the hero.



VISUAL STORYTELLING

3) FULL PORTRAITS OF SUBJECTS

- Both Portrait / Landscape orientation.
- Try moving slightly to the left or the right of the subject.
- Play with the light to see which is the best angle to shoot the photo.
- Consider including posed portrait of the whole family.



VISUAL STORYTELLING

4) ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS of OTHER CHARACTERS

- Capture what other people around the main subject are doing



VISUAL STORYTELLING

5) CANDID MOMENTS

- Look for moments that show personality and emotion. If something makes you laugh, cry or respond, it will probably resonate with someone else. Document it!



VISUAL STORYTELLING

6) DETAIL SHOTS

- Capture what a person is doing with their hands (i.e., inspecting vanilla beans), often with shallow depth of field.



VISUAL STORYTELLING

7) ARTISTIC MOMENTS

- Look for shadows or reflections - in puddles of water, or mirrors - to form unique compositions.



VISUAL STORYTELLING

8) ACTION PORTRAITS

- Photograph the person getting ready, eating with family, traveling to work, etc.
- Capture movement (e.g., subject sifting rice, cutting vanilla beans)
- Need higher shutter speed to 'freeze' motion without blurring



VISUAL STORYTELLING

9) USAID BRANDING

- Look for scenes with USAID branding (preferably unstaged)



VISUAL STORYTELLING

10) LIGHT

- Photograph from the angles that illuminate your subjects. Also try to schedule field visits during early morning to capture sunrise and late afternoon to capture sunset.
 - Use sidelight if you can, for example, from an open door.
 - Watch out for strong backlight. Move around to avoid it, and if necessary, force the flash.
 - Use flash outdoors under trees/in shadows to give greater clarity to faces.
 - Do not fire the flash against mirrors or windows. Change your angle in order to bounce the flash.



AFTER THE SHOOT

It's important to get your photos from the field to Washington, D.C. as quickly as possible. This allows us to get images edited and incorporated into our online social media and communications channels. Even if you have a well-written narrative, a photo can pull a viewer into your story faster and make them curious to learn more.

TIPS:

- **Transfer photos from your camera or phone every night.** This provides peace of mind should something happen later in the trip (camera stolen, card is ruined, etc.).
 - **Create a folder on Google Drive** where you can easily upload and share photos.
 - **Include captions and photo credits,** for every image, no matter how repetitive.
 - With captions, our team can figure out who is in the scene, where you were, what was happening and how the images fit into your story.
- **EMBED CAPTIONS AND PHOTO CREDITS IN METADATA:**
 - Right-click the photo, select View details, scroll to Add a description and then click on the pencil to Edit description, add the caption, press Enter Key to save.
 - **PHOTO CREDIT EXAMPLE**
 - Photo by Morgana Wingard for USAID [If USAID hired photographer]
 - Photo by Bob Smith, USAID [If USAID employee]
 - Photo by Jane Doe, CARE [If USAID partner]
 - **PHOTO CAPTION EXAMPLE**
 - GURADHERA, ETHIOPIA - FEBRUARY 8, 2014: Ethiopian pastoralist Dhaki Wako's 7-year-old son Liban drinks his daily breakfast milk straight from the cow as part of the family's morning routine. The USAID-supported resilience program connected Dhaki with a more reliable market to sell her milk in. This has increased her revenue and given the family financial security in case of drought or market shock. Across the country's disaster-prone drylands, USAID is helping pastoralists mitigate and recover from environmental stresses.

FINAL SUGGESTIONS

- We are always looking to identify and share evocative and personal stories including examples of individuals whose lives have been saved, greatly impacted, or individuals who are helping save lives with USAID and/or with partner assistance. **When sharing stories, it is always helpful to include the following:**
 - Provide stories that answer the five W's: Who, What, When, Where and Why
 - Succinctly describe the story with a headline
 - Include a short paragraph that outlines the problem, USAID's and partner response, and one to two follow-up sentences that depict the real impact on people
 - If available, include details that personalize the story, such as names, ages, quotes, locations, and photos
 - Share links to supporting photos, write-ups or social media posts (when applicable)
 - Provide an estimated start date of activity/action
 - Include contact information for follow up questions