

Telling your organisation's story through photography: advice from Martin Parr

About Martin Parr

Martin Parr is one of the world's most celebrated photographers. He has been capturing unique and original images for over 45 years and is regarded as the quintessential photographer of everyday British life. His photographs offer the viewer the opportunity to see the world from his unique perspective which is entertaining and relatable.

Martin recently travelled around the UK photographing different community organisations that were awarded funding last year by the Aviva Community Fund. So as part of this year's Aviva Community Fund team, Martin Parr shares his advice on how to take photographs of your community organisation in a unique and compelling way, to help illustrate your story and support your Aviva Community Fund entry.

How to bring the story of your community to life through the lens of a camera or smartphone

A picture is worth a thousand words – and a stand out image that captures the spirit of your organisation can make all the difference to your entry, setting it above the rest.

Each entrant can submit up to five photographs as part of their entry, so here is some advice as to how you can capture great images, using a camera or smartphone, which will help bring the story of your charity or community project to life.

Tell a story through the photos you take

Start with the audience in mind - in this case the public and judges - and assume they know nothing about your project or organisation. Use the images you take on your camera or smartphone to weave together a narrative that shows those who read your entry what it is that your organisation does to benefit the community and it has a valuable impact in the local area.

Before you begin, ask yourself why you are entering the Aviva Community Fund and plot out the unique story of your organisation that you can capture through photography to compliment your entry. Is it the history of your organisation, the work that you do, your place in the wider community, or a representation of how you would use the funding from Aviva? Identify the people or places that are pivotal to building this story and make sure they are available on the day you plan to do the photography to ensure you capture them.

"It was helpful to use photography to visually communicate what we do. Those who voted told us that they liked seeing people they knew in the pictures so we believe that capturing photos of the faces behind our group, such as the organisers and beneficiaries, also made our entry more personal."

Joanna van de Poll, The Wychwoods Day centre

Capture key moments that convey the personality of your project or organisation

Once you have decided on your narrative, consider the key moments within your organisation's activity that can effectively communicate this story as well as conveying personality of your organisation to demonstrate the important role the work you do has in the community.

Perhaps it is photographs of your inspirational members, shots of your project in action, or it could be the moment a smile is put on a child's face thanks to the work your project does.

Make sure each of the five photos you select to illustrate your entry tells a section of the narrative so that when they are viewed together, they tell the story of your community organisation.

If capturing action shots, allow room for spontaneity and instead of standing in one place, make sure you get involved so you have the chance to capture surprising moments on your camera or smartphone.

"We took lots of impromptu shots of some of the activities that we hoped to develop further with the funding. The photography worked really well to bring our idea to life, especially for those who had no idea who we were or what we did in the first place."

Sarah Harris, Tibbs Dementia Services

Take lots of photos

This may seem like obvious advice, but make sure you take lots of photos! It's easier to edit down a large selection of images rather than only have a few to choose from.

People are quite unpredictable in the way they move around a space or react to different situations so you will need to take lots of shots to give you a number of different options.

Finally, accept that you have to take a lot of bad pictures to get a few good ones. If you just wait to photograph the great moments you will lose momentum.

Top photography tips from Martin Parr:

1. **Get in close:** Often people capture shots from too far away. If you're taking a photo from a distance, you may be tempted to just zoom in but it's important to identify the energy source within your frame and get in close to focus on that.
2. **Light:** Make sure your shots are well lit. When it comes to taking good images, lighting plays a key role. Instead of using flash, take advantage of daylight, or use the lighting available if you're indoors.
3. **Capture group and individual shots:** Having a range of different angles and crops of the organisation and its members will make your story more engaging, and also more personal.
4. **Focus:** Try to keep a steady hand and make sure your camera or smartphone is in focus. This will give you vivid, clear images which makes viewing them much more enjoyable! The exception to this is if you're trying to capture an activity, as sometimes the movement within your picture can add to your story.
5. **Experiment:** Try different shots and see what works for you – don't feel like you have to capture posed or staged shots. Identify what works best to tell your story.