Tips for Taking Photographs

By Kimberly Wade, Mark Robison and Bonney Brown

This document is intended to help volunteers and staff members take effective photos of animals and events to help promote your organization's good works.

You'll notice that different types of photos will be more effective (or even in some cases required) for various publications and online usage.

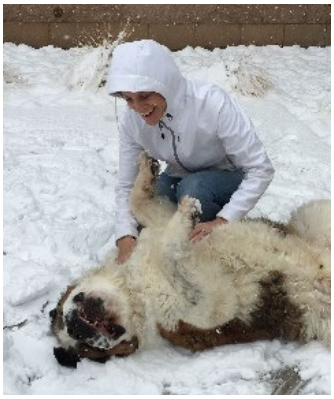
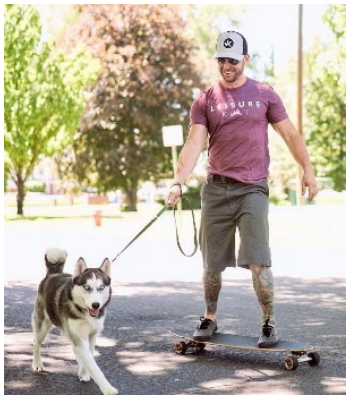
Keep in mind that:

- Crisp, clear focus is important in photos.
- Higher resolution photos are needed for printing rather than for use online—but it's easy to crop down or resize if a smaller size is needed.

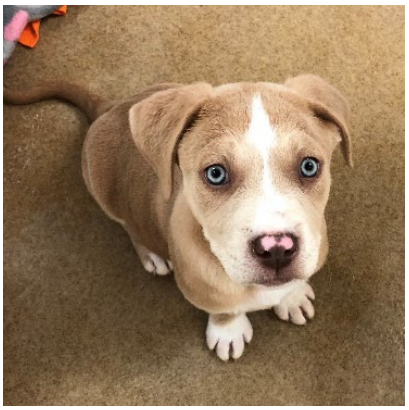
Types of Photos

Posed (People): People posing with each other, staff, volunteers or animals. Photos should usually display happy smiles, with eyes focused on the camera. As the focus is on the people/animals, the background should not be a distraction, so aim for tight shots of people, either the faces, half or full body. (You can also crop photos later to get tighter images.) Here are a few samples of posed photos:

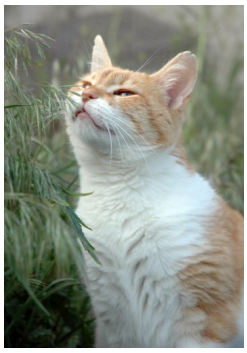
Candid (People): A candid photograph is one that is made either without the subject's knowledge or without their explicit permission, hence they are captured without the subject posing. A good candid photo tells a story and makes you feel as if you are there when you later look at the picture. Pick a subject to focus on and remember to keep the background simple when possible. Good candid photos, even ones with a very busy picture, need to have a clear focus of attention. (Unless in a public place, you should get the person's permission, and even in public, it's a good idea.)

Posed (Animals): The animal should usually be looking at the camera, not visibly stressed, and relaxed enough so that the photo comes across as a happy animal. Face shots and full body shots are both good. Generally, it is best to keep your angle straight on and at the same level rather than looking up or down at the animals – though there are times when photos from above or below can work well. Generally, you want the animal's eyes open, visible, and pupils not dilated. Make sure the ears are up and open or at least positive (as in a floppy ear is not bad). Ears that are flattened or pinned back mean the animal is not happy and you want to avoid unhappy animals in photos. Also, generally, animals "behind bars" do not show well (there are some exceptions) – if possible, have a staff member take the animal out of their kennel. Always be aware of the background – no visible poop and when possible, a color that contrasts with the animal can be helpful.



Candid (Animals): The animal does not necessarily need to be looking at the camera for these, but they still need to look relaxed and happy. Stressed animals have dilated pupils, flat or pinned ears, and this will come across as stressed in a photo. Comical photos, such as an animal chasing his tail, or cute photos, such as kittens sleeping, can be good. Usually you will want to avoid taking photos of animals in their kennels, as animals "behind bars" do not show well —ask for help and have a staff member take the animal out of their kennel. Note that there are circumstances where an animal in a cage can be a compelling, heart-tugging photo.

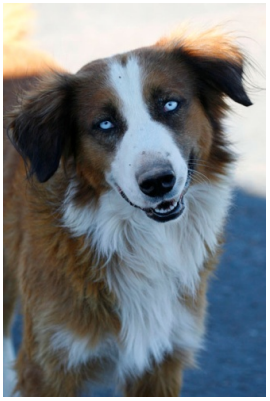


Events/Actions: The key here is taking a variety of types of shots that together tell the story of the events, groups of people as well was wide shots of the event are helpful. Including banners and signs can be useful because they will distinguish your event from others in the same location. Angles, lighting, and background play a big part in these photos. You want to capture as many aspects of the event as possible – showing both the scope of it as well as some more detailed and closeup images of participants. Even in images capturing an event's scale, it can be useful to focus on a few people, with the implication of more activity glimpsed in the background.

Adoptions: We frequently take pictures of pets as they are being adopted, and these photos generally, but not always, need to be posed. The best shots should include the adopter and the newly adopted pet together, preferably a side by side head shot. However, in some circumstances, a wider shot works well.

Backgrounds (for all photos)

Try to keep backgrounds clean – avoid having a messy office, table, or other distraction behind the center of focus. When possible, a background that provides a contrast can help to show an animal off. Color can also make a photo more interesting. We always want to avoid poop in photos. Simple backgrounds are good, such as those seen below. A solution to a busy background can be cropping the photo to focus on the subject.



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