

PLANNING YOUR SHOOT

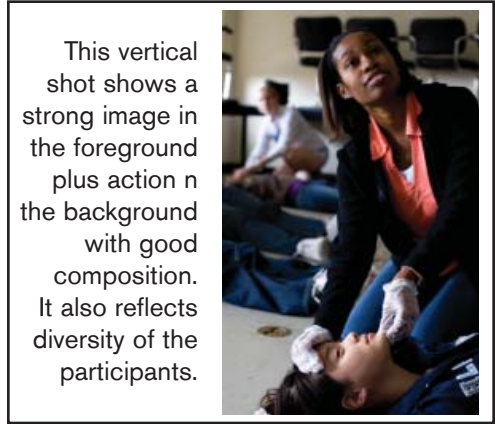
First, use quality equipment and become familiar with these well in advance of your trip. Review your manuals and shoot test shots of similar subjects in the anticipated lighting situations in which you intend to work. You need to know exactly what to expect, like weather conditions, attendees, bringing release forms, etc. In most situations, point-and-shoot cameras will not allow you to take the crisp, high-impact photos needed for publication. The Chapter has an excellent digital camera available to all public affairs volunteers.

THE SHOT LIST

Next, be sure you know what you want your photos to illustrate. Brainstorm any "story" you want to tell. Write it down in outline form. How can it best be told through photography? An ideal set of pictures tells the story visually with little explanation. Make a shot list from your outline, then choose four or five pictures that are absolutely necessary to tell the story. Do whatever it takes to get those shots! If we have no good photo record of an event, we can't adequately show the community and our donors how we responded.

Here's a sample shot list for disaster response to a residential fire:

1. Red Cross volunteers working with clients (requires photo release).
2. Red Cross volunteers working together with other first response groups like fire and police.
3. Red Cross volunteers utilizing resources, like items from the Emergency Response Vehicle or handing out water.
4. Wide angle shots of the entire scene.
5. Tight shots of the disaster/devastation to show detail.
6. Media interviews in front of the scene.
7. Diversity.



This vertical shot shows a strong image in the foreground plus action in the background with good composition. It also reflects diversity of the participants.

TAKING QUALITY PHOTOS

ALWAYS shoot on the highest possible resolution setting. Low resolution images may work well for the web, but will not reproduce adequately in publications.

Composition

Always know why a given picture is being taken, and plan the framing and composition to enhance the intended message. You are probably trying to show our disaster response or tell a story, so be sure each shot achieves its goal in a self-explanatory fashion. The photograph should not have to rely on a caption to explain what is happening.

SETUPS

Candid shots rarely work. It may sound like a lot of effort to set up a specific shot, but in the end it saves time and frustration. Create a "set-up" by simply posing people doing what they normally do.

Some good reasons for posing your subjects:

- to better illustrate a given activity
- to improve lighting
- to improve background separation (contrast)
- to prevent confusing arrangements or people looking away

Posing does not mean that people should look at the camera. It simply means that you should seek the best possible view of your subjects and leave no unnecessary items in the composition. Be sure that all the important parts are visible. Then, have your subjects start moving, talking, etc., just as you shoot, so the picture does not look stiff.



This tight shot of Red Cross volunteers working a disaster scene shows workers in vests, other responders, plus the scale of the disaster.

MORE TIPS

Pay attention to your background. A distracting background can ruin your picture. You can take tighter shots or place the subjects in a brighter or simpler backdrop to get a better shot.

Show people working. Have them look official: wearing a uniform, loading supplies, writing in a notebook, working with a client, etc.

Include as many different types of shots as possible: close-ups of people, as well as medium and distant shots, vertical and horizontal shots, that show the disaster and activities.



In this photo, the photographer attempted to take a candid shot of a volunteer on the scene. Note that the volunteer has an odd expression and all the action is taking place far in the background, making it seem as though the volunteer has nothing to do.



In this photo, the photographer carefully selected the best angle to capture the depth of the apartment fire destruction at all levels, with no distracting elements.

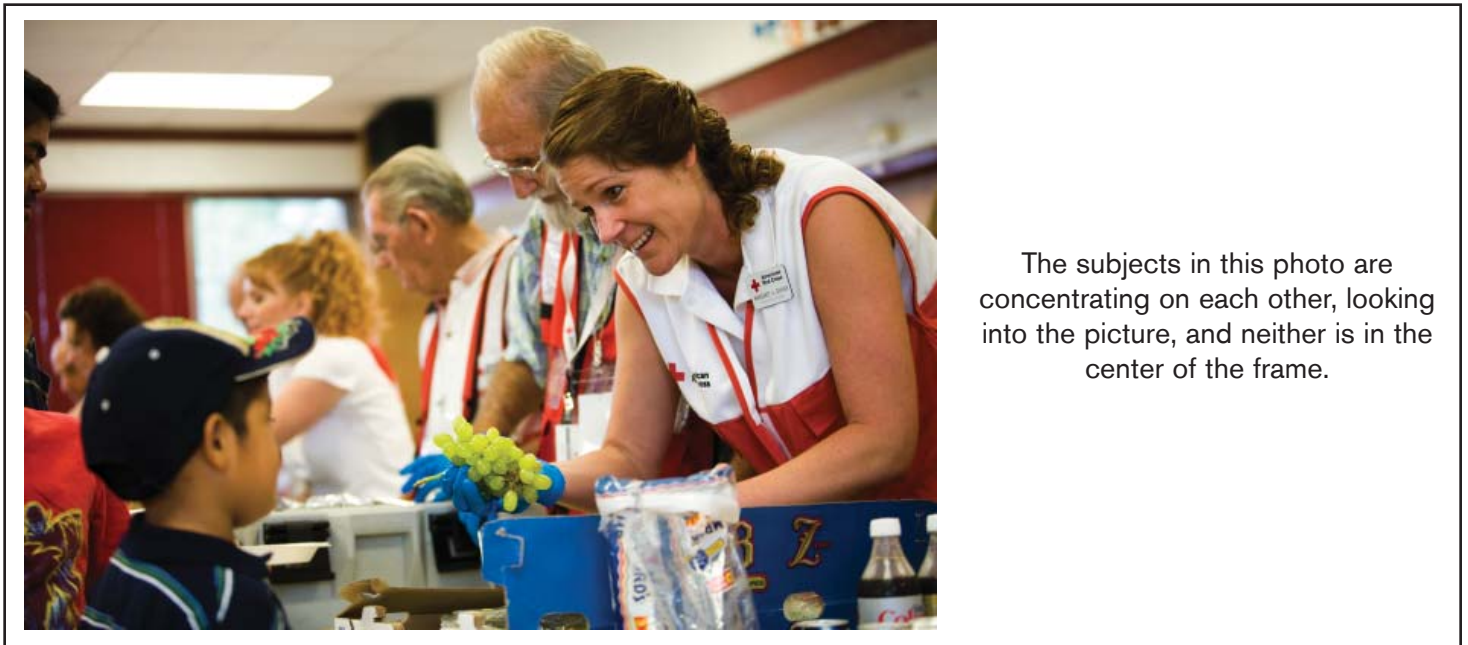


In this shot from a Career On Wheels Days Event, the volunteer is listening closely to a young participant's question. Notice how the volunteer's expression draws your attention into the photo. This shot could have been improved by having the young subjects stop fidgeting and focus their attention onto the volunteer.

FRAMING

Rule of Thirds: Do not center the primary subject. It is best to have the subject facing into the picture about a third of the way in, so two-thirds of the photo is in front of the subject. Subjects can be faced toward the bottom, top or side, but always should direct attention into the remainder of the frame. Also, if the horizon is in the picture, make sure it does not cut the scene in half. Move the camera position so that the horizon line is near the top or bottom third of the photo.

Subjects Looking into Scene: When photographing people, always be sure they are looking into, never out of, the picture. A frame with two or three people all looking at a single subject helps focus viewer attention. If necessary, rivet a group's attention on a leader or speaker by having that person make up a funny story just as you need everyone to look genuinely interested. Even one individual looking in the wrong direction can ruin a great shot. Where groups of people are involved, take several shots to be sure of the right expressions.



The subjects in this photo are concentrating on each other, looking into the picture, and neither is in the center of the frame.

LIGHTING

Lighting is a critical element in all good photography. Do not shoot directly into the sun or position your subjects so that they are squinting. Use flash when necessary, even during the day. This can be especially important to light faces shadowed by ball caps.

SUMMARY

1. Make a list of shots you want. Plan each image to be sure the picture tells the story. Get a variety of shots, including close-ups and wide-angles, verticals and horizontals (with varied backgrounds when possible).
2. Pose people to show them working, wearing professional uniforms and using pertinent tools to the trade. Avoid backsides.
3. Move extraneous objects out of the scene (camera bags, vehicles, drinks, etc.) but remember that vehicles or other things with official seals, logos, or emblems can often help tell the story.
4. Use basic framing rules of composition.
5. Show diversity.