How to Create Compelling Visuals

WHO WE SPOKE TO:

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Community Design Director at Hester Street Collaborative, and works to engage people in shaping their neighborhood spaces. He likes building things, visualizing information, and exploring cities on his bicycle.

"Visuals" means communicating ideas in a way that people can understand quickly and easily, even if they have no knowledge about a topic or the vocabulary to talk about it.

Visuals can also inspire people, as well as inform them. They can spark a call to action. Photos, charts, graphs, diagrams, videos, illustrations… All of these can be used in outreach materials like flyers, posters, and websites to get people's attention, convey why your issue is important, and compel them to participate.

If visuals are well-designed and attractive, they can draw people in in an immediate way that non-visuals can't.

They can also help you to communicate universally, and to reinforce your idea's "brand." If you're producing flyers, postcards, a website, and a banner, use the same "visual system" every time. That means the same colors, same logo (if you have one), same font, same layout, etc—to the extent

possible. That familiarity of a repeated look makes people feel they're a part of something stable and reliable.

In addition to the usual flyers, posters, and photographs you might prepare before holding an event or launching a campaign, think about what visuals you can incorporate into your project in real time.

If you're holding a fundraiser to start a community garden, you could provide attendees—kids and adults—with markers and a simple outline of the space on paper. Then ask them to draw how they envision the garden being laid out, the amenities it should have, or what you should grow there. You might get some great new ideas, but even if the responses are outlandish, you've just given your constituents a feeling of ownership in your project and tapped into their imaginations. Those are both key elements of successful community campaigns.

You still need people-power behind everything you do.

Pretty pictures are great and can help sell your cause, but more than anything, you need the right hands, hearts, and minds to make progress. Think about the difference in engagement between a smiling, friendly person handing out a flyer, versus taping it to a lamppost and just hoping someone will read it!
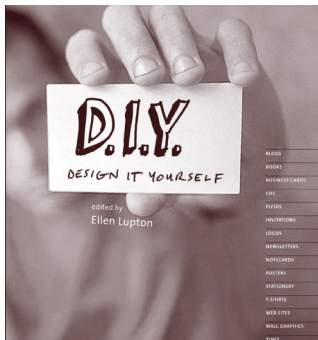
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Ellen Lupton's books about graphic design, particularly DIY: Design It Yourself, range from novice to expert level and are all terrific
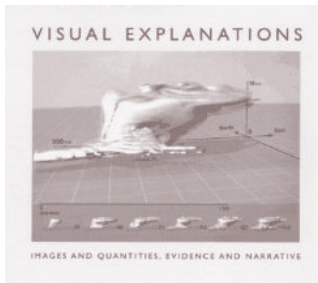
Edward Tufte's book VisualExplanations explains graphic design as a communication tool

Always look to other folks you've seen do visuals well—organizations as well as individuals. Study your favorites and get inspired by the work they do. One I love is the Center for Urban Pedagogy.

Dylan's Rules for Creating Persuasive Visuals:

1 **Everything needs to tell a story.**

This applies to your verbal messaging as well as images. Don't just show data or tell a nice story for the sake of it; make sure everything you say has a purpose: to support your overarching goals.

2 **Show support for your project visually.**

If you're writing a report, put your neighbors' positive comments in a bigger font and highlight them in a different color. If you've talked with all the residents on your block about your idea and 80% of them support it, show that in a bright pie chart. Citing support for your project will be vital to its success, and showing it visually helps make sure it's eye-catching and easily understood.

3 **Don't muddy the waters.**

Flyers that are crammed top-to-bottom with graphics or text, colors or fonts that are constantly changing, or low-resolution imagesthat look blurry or pixelated will all make it harder for people to understand your message. Keep it simple, clean, and consistent. Remember that visuals won't help if people can't understand them—or can't stand to look at them!