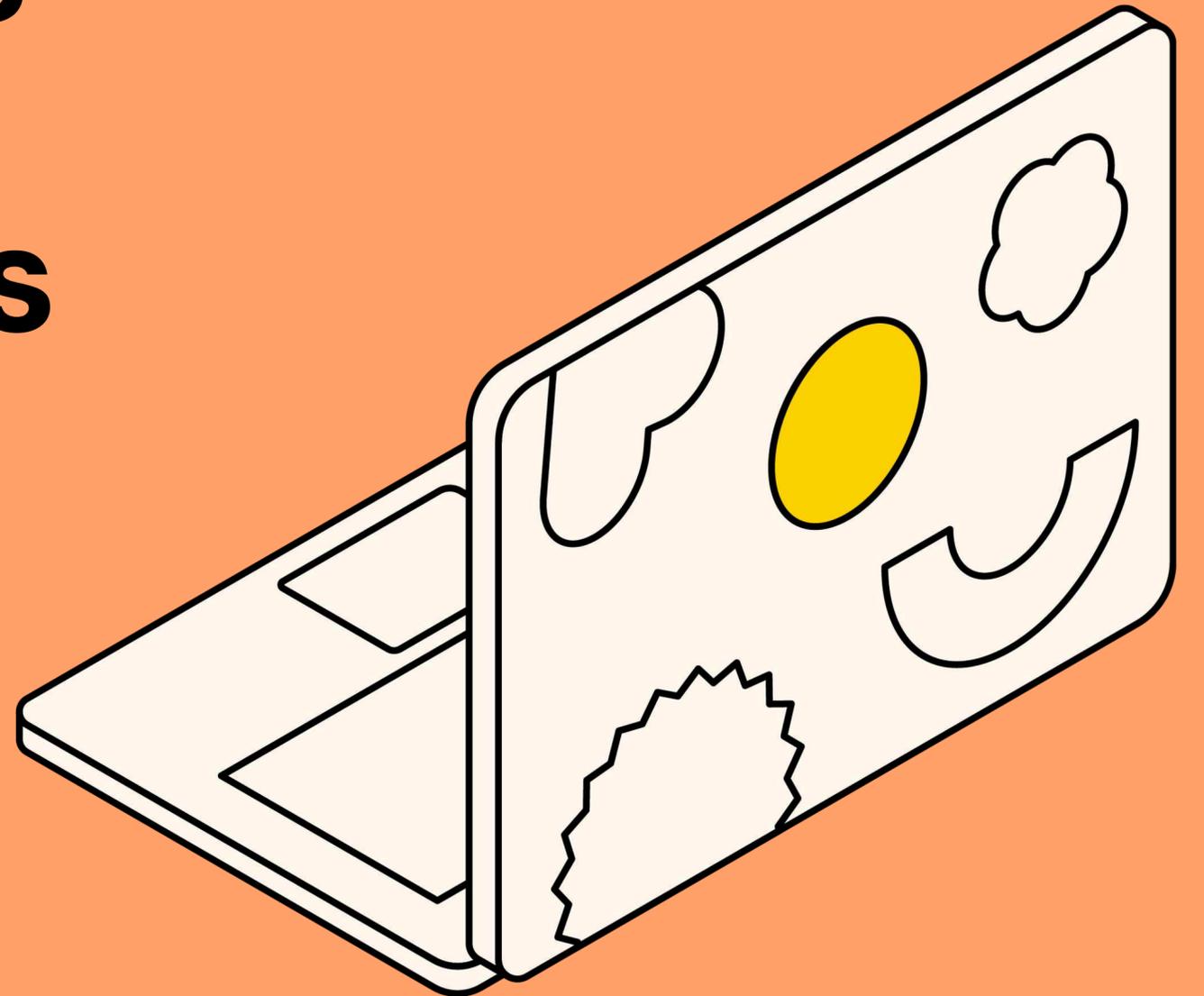


Visual Communications

# How to create professional-looking materials that get your message across



# What's in this toolkit?

Good visuals help your message stick. Whether you're creating posters for your repair café, social media posts about your latest swap, or a simple flyer for the community board, you can use existing tools and resources to create professional-looking materials.

You don't need design experience or expensive software. By knowing where to find the right templates, photos and icons, you can create materials that look great and get your message across clearly.

# What you'll find here

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- 1 How to apply design basics:**  
Simple principles you can use to make things look better
- 2 How to find the right templates:**  
Where to get professional designs you can customise
- 3 How to source great visuals:**  
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- 4 How to take better event photos:**  
Simple techniques for capturing your activities
- 5 How to access quick solutions:**  
Tools and resources that solve common design problems

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# How to apply design basics

If creating your own designs from scratch these tips will help you keep things clear and impactful. If you'd prefer to use existing templates see section 2 of this toolkit.

## Create clear hierarchy in your designs

**Put your most important information first:** People scan materials in seconds, so you need to guide their eye to your key message immediately.

**For social posts:** Lead with the action or outcome, then add context

**For newsletters:** Use headlines that tell the story even if people don't read the text

## Use white space to improve readability

**Don't fill every inch of your design.** Empty space around text and images makes everything easier to read and more professional-looking.



Try this technique: If your design feels cramped, remove 20% of the text and add more space around what's left. You'll be surprised how much better it looks.

**For event posters:** Make your most compelling message biggest, then date/time, then location, then details including a call to action (e.g., what do you want people to do? register for an event, attend a meeting, support your group etc.)

**What's your most compelling message?**

**For well-known events** (car boot sale, Christmas market):  
The event name itself works

**For new or unfamiliar events:** Lead with the benefit or outcome

Instead of;

"Monthly Repair Café" → "Save money and learn new skills"

"Community Clothing Swap" → "Refresh your wardrobe without spending a cent"

"Sustainability Workshop" → "Simple changes that cut your household bills"

# Choose simple fonts that work together

**Stick to maximum two font types**  
– one for headlines, one for body text.

**Use these safe combinations that always work:**

Headlines: Bold sans-serif  
(like Arial Bold or Montserrat Bold)

Body text: Regular sans-serif  
(like Arial or Open Sans)

If you want to explore more font combinations,

Canva have a guide [here](#)

Adobe have a guide [here](#)

Headline

Body text

# Apply the colour rule that works every time

**Pick 2–3 colours maximum** for any design.  
Too many colours can look chaotic.

## Follow the 60–30–10 rule:

60% neutral (white, grey, cream)

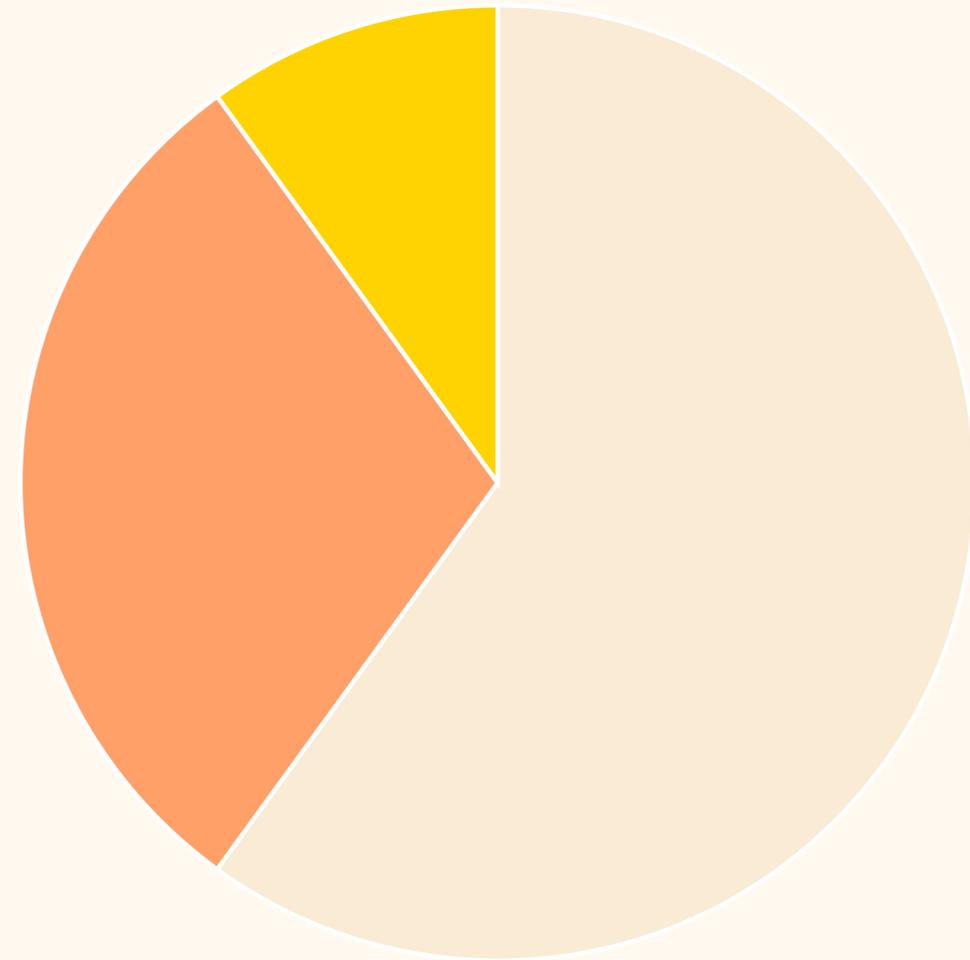
30% your main colour

10% accent colour for highlights

If you'd prefer to browse and choose colour palettes from existing libraries,

Canva is worth exploring [here](#)

Adobe has a large gallery [here](#)



## 2

# How to find the right design templates

## Set yourself up with Canva

If you don't have access to a graphic designer, it's a good idea to set yourself up with a Canva account. Canva is a free-to-use online graphic design tool that can create social media posts, presentations, posters, videos, logos and more.

**Choose free or Pro:** Most community groups can achieve great results with Canva's free version. Pro adds more templates and removes backgrounds from photos, but start with free.

**Watch a tutorial:** YouTube offers many good tutorials and introductions into Canva. We'd recommend [Canva Tutorial for Beginners 2025](#) as a good step by step guide, but there are others too.

**Get familiar with the basics:** Spend a little time exploring templates, changing text and swapping colours before you create anything important. Canva also offer an introduction guide you can access [here](#)

# Start with Canva's built-in templates

Canva offers over a million design templates covering everything from event posters and presentations to social media posts and logo creation. Some templates need to be purchased but most are free.

## Search by what you need:

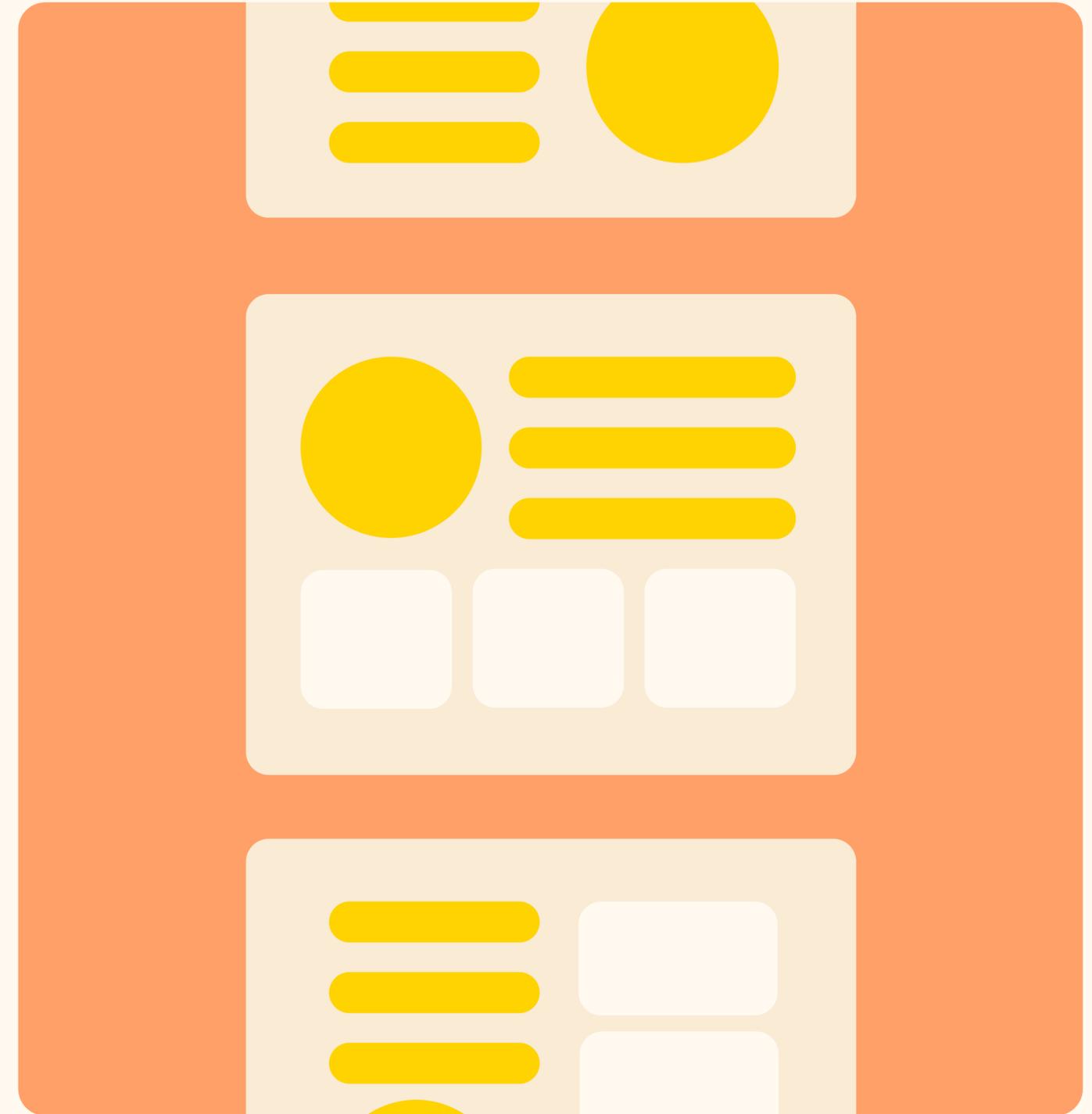
Instead of starting from scratch, type what you're looking for into Canva's search bar:

- "Community event poster"
- "Volunteer recruitment"
- "Thank you post"

## Filter by your needs:

Use Canva's filters to narrow down options:

- Free templates only
- Specific dimensions (A4, Instagram square, etc.)
- Style preferences (modern, friendly, professional)



# Use these template categories that work for community groups

## For event promotion:

**Look for:** Clear date/time/location spaces, friendly fonts, approachable colours

**Search:** community event

workshop

local event

## For social media:

**Look for:** Space for your photos, readable text, consistent branding

**Search:** volunteer community

impact

thank you

## For print materials:

**Look for:** Simple layouts, large text, clear sections

**Search:** flyer community

newsletter

information sheet

## For impact and updates:

**Look for:** Space for numbers, before/after layouts, progress displays

**Search:** achievement

statistics

community impact

# Customise templates to fit your group

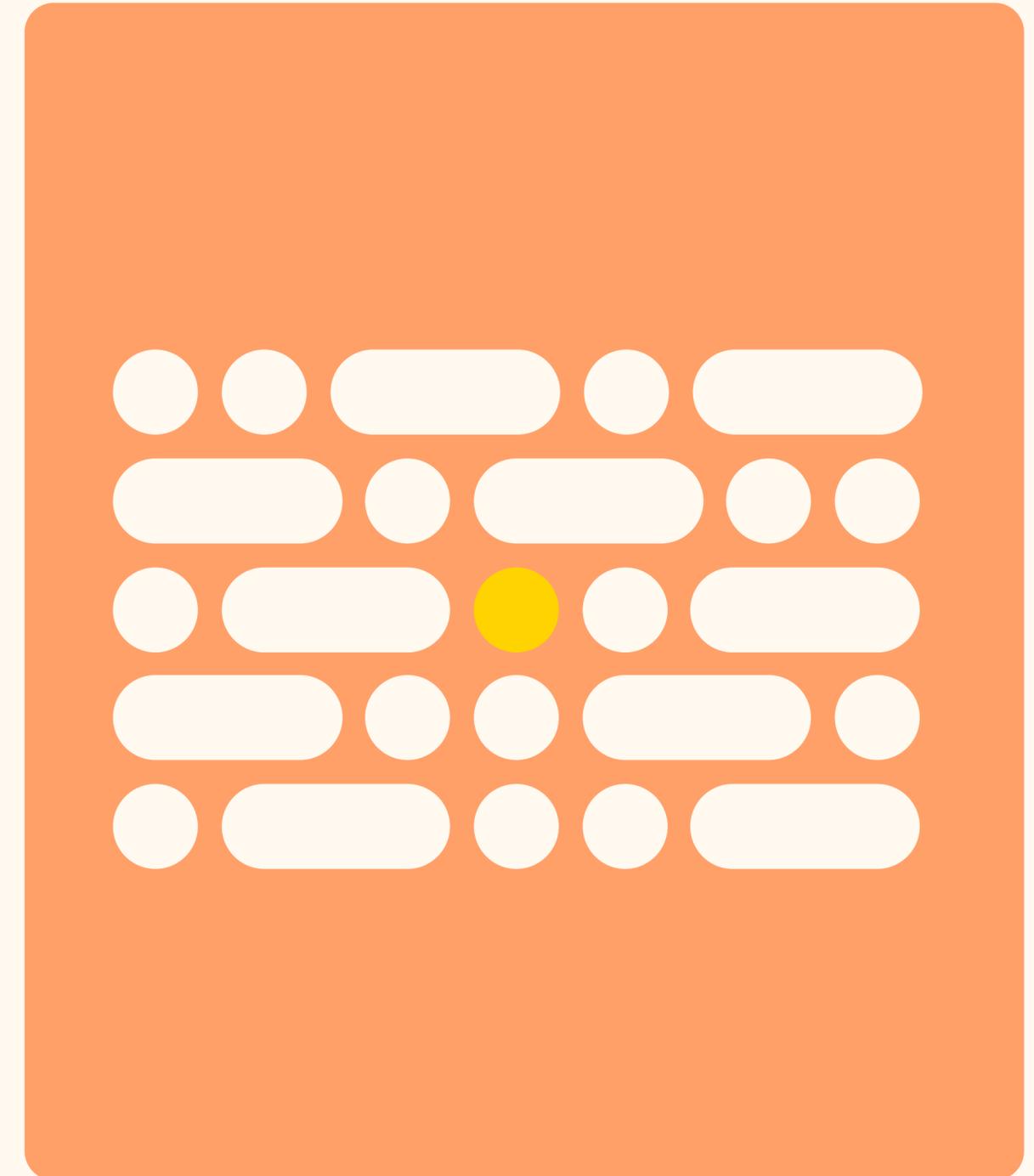
Replace placeholder text with your specific information – event details, group name, contact information.

**Swap in your colours:** Most templates let you change colours easily. Pick 2–3 colours that feel right for your group and use them consistently.

**Add your images:** Replace template images with real photos from your events and activities. If you don't have anything suitable or high enough quality check out the next section on where to find free, high quality images.

**Keep the layout:** The template designer has already solved the layout problems – focus on changing content, not structure.

**Less is more:** If you think the design feels busy or hard to read, see what you can remove. Your priority should always be clarity, keeping the most important information as easy to read as possible. Remember with social media posts especially you can also use the caption to share important information so the image needs to do less.



## 3 How to source great (free!) visuals

### Find free, high-quality photos

Whether looking for an image for a poster, social media post or presentation, there are a number of free, high quality image libraries available online.

**Unsplash**  
unsplash.com

**Best for:** Professional-looking photos of activities similar to yours

**License:** Free to use, no attribution required (but always appreciated)

**Search:** repair community hands tools sharing workshop

**Pexels**  
pexels.com

**Best for:** People-focused photos, diverse representation

**License:** Free to use commercially

**Search:** volunteer helping hands community garden workshop

**Pixabay**  
pixabay.com

**Best for:** Icons, illustrations, and photos in one place

**License:** Free, but check individual image requirements

**Search:** repair recycle tools community



**Pro tip:** Try to choose images that feel representative of your life. For example if an image is set in a city with tall sky scrapers or in a town square with palm trees it will not feel as authentic and relatable to you and your audience.

# Get free icons, illustrations and simple graphics

Sometimes, rather than photography, you might need an icon, illustration or graphic to communicate a specific point or represent an idea. Below is a list of free online galleries you can explore.

## The Noun Project thenounproject.com

**Best for:** Simple, clear icons that work in any design. Also good for more expressive, stylish icons

**Free account:** Basic icons with attribution

**Paid account:** More options, no attribution needed

### Search:

repair recycle share  
community

## Free Pik freepik.com/illustrations

**Best for:** illustrations of people doing things, or scenes and locations

Many free options available

### Search:

repair recycle share event  
community sustainability

## Canva's built-in elements

**Access through:** Elements tab in Canva editor

**Best for:** Icons and graphics that match your template style  
Many free options available

### Search:

sustainability community  
repair



**Pro tip:** Consistency is key. If you find an icon or illustration style you like, see if it belongs to a set, or if the artist has more work available that you can use. This will help your communications feel more consistent, cohesive and clear for audiences.

# Use your own photos effectively

## Take photos at your events

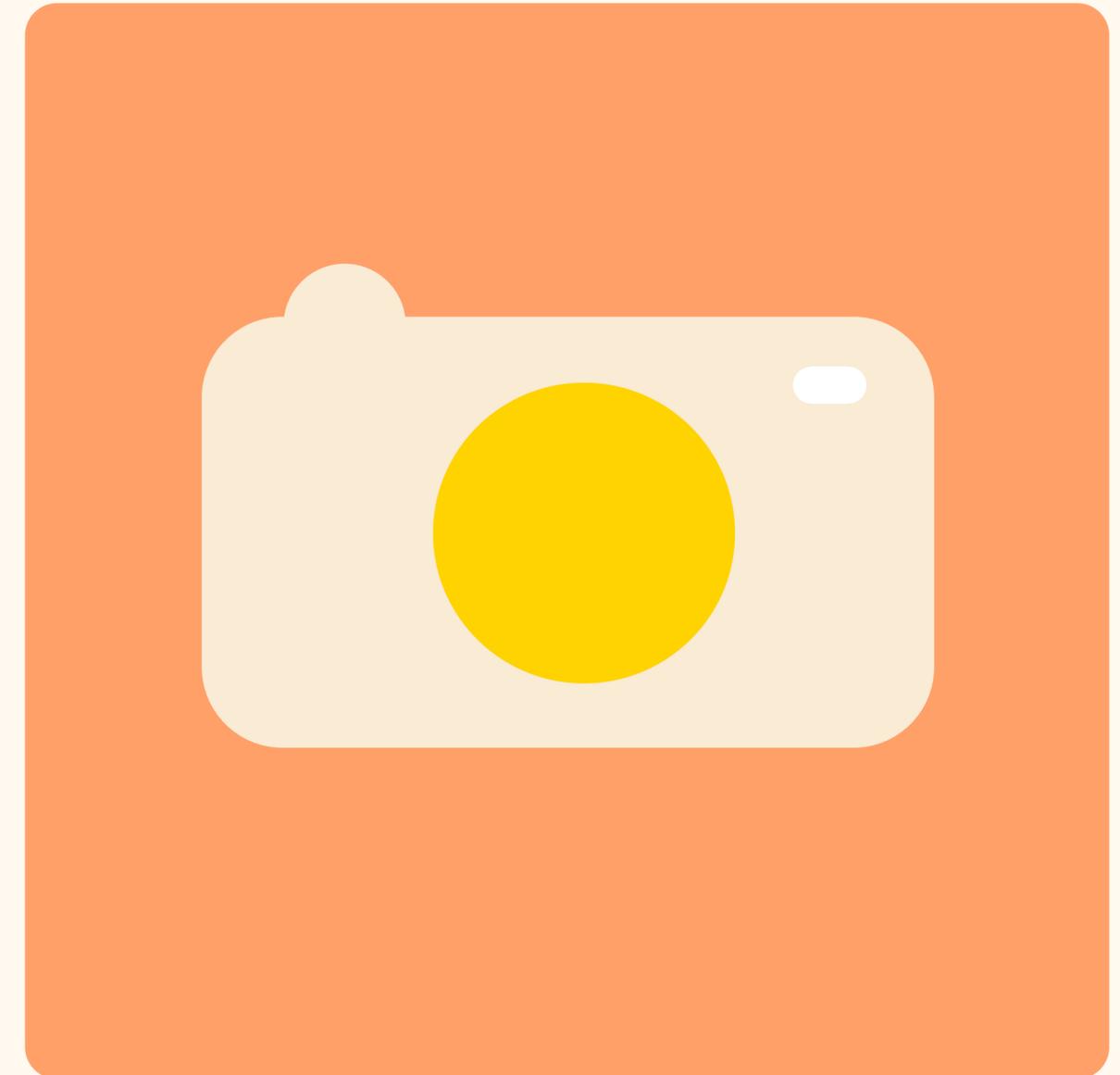
If taken well authentic images of your actual activities can work better than stock photos.

## Keep a photo library

Collect good shots over time rather than scrambling before each event. If you have others taking photos in your group, consider setting up a shared library people can dip into as and when they need.

## Ask permission

Get consent before using photos of people, especially for public materials.



# 4

## How to take better event photos

### Plan your shots before the event

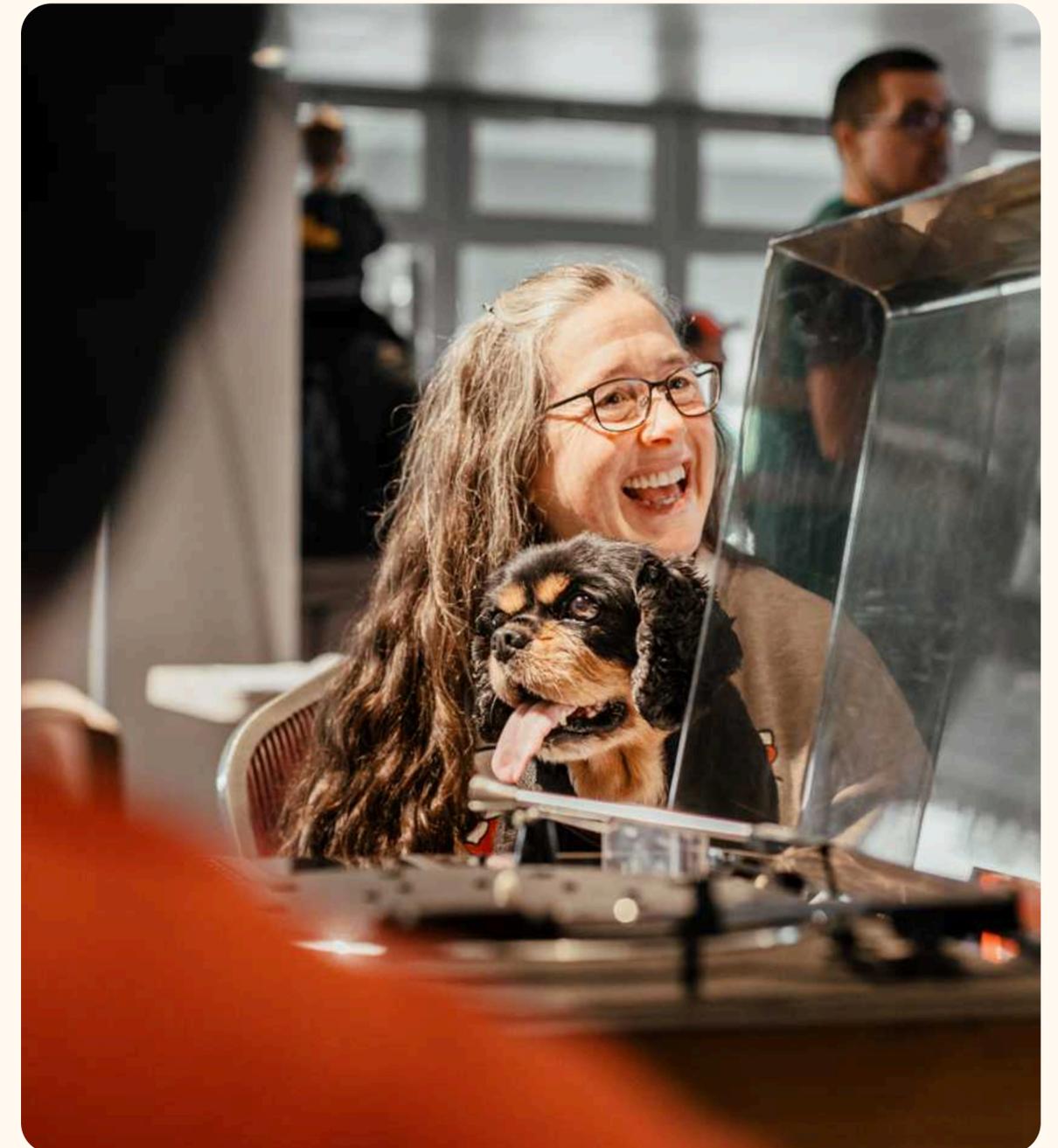
Running an event takes a lot of work, meaning photography can sometimes be an after thought. By doing a little pre-planning beforehand you can

**Think about your story:** What do you want people to see? The activity, the people, the results?

**Identify key moments:** Arrivals, busy activity, successful repairs/ swaps, happy faces, before/after shots.

**Know your lighting:** Natural light from windows beats overhead lights every time. Plan where to position activities if possible.

**Shoot at the right level:** Crouch down for children, stand on a chair for overview shots. Get close for action shots i.e. hands fixing or making things.



# Capture the right moments



## Action shots

- Close-ups of hands working
- People collaborating on problems
- Before/after of repaired items
- Moment of success when something works



## People Connecting

- Genuine conversations (as opposed to staged)
- Volunteers helping participants
- Shared laughter or satisfaction
- Intergenerational skill sharing



## Overview Shots

- Busy rooms showing participation
- Tables full of shared items
- Queues of people engaged
- Your space set up and ready

## Simple techniques for better phone photos

**Get closer:** Most photos improve when you take two steps closer to your subject. You can also crop into your images afterwards on your phone or computer.

**Take lots of shots:** People move, blink, look away. Take 5–6 photos of each moment.

**Hold your phone steady:** Use both hands, breathe out as you press the shutter.

**Clean your lens:** Might sound obvious but it makes a big difference. Wipe it with your shirt – you'll be amazed at the difference.

## Handle permissions and privacy properly

**Always ask before photographing people,** especially children. Most people are happy to help, but they appreciate being asked.

**Focus on activities over faces** if you're unsure about permissions or want to use photos widely.

**Create a simple consent process** – a clipboard with a sign-up sheet works perfectly for events.

**Remember privacy concerns:** Not everyone wants to be on social media, even for good causes. Respect this.

# 5

## How to solve common design problems

### When you need consistent colours across materials:

Use Canva's brand kit (even on free version)

Save your group's colours once, reuse everywhere

Stick to 2-3 colours maximum

### When text is hard to read:

Add a semi-transparent dark overlay behind text over images

Use Canva's text background options

Choose high contrast (dark text on light backgrounds, or vice versa)

### When everything looks cramped:

Remove 20% of the text and double the spacing around remaining elements

Focus on one main message per design

### When your design looks amateur:

Use Canva's alignment guides to line everything up

Left-align body text, centre-align headlines only

Stick to Canva's font suggestions – maximum 2 different fonts per design

### Quick checklist before you publish

- Can I read the most important information in 5 seconds?
- Is the text large enough to read on a phone?
- Am I using 3 colours maximum?
- Does this look like something my group would create?

# Take action: Create your first materials

## Start with what you need most urgently:

1. Identify your most pressing visual need (event poster, social media post, flyer)
2. Search Canva templates using specific terms related to your activity
3. Choose a template that has the right sections for your information
4. Customise with your text, photos, and contact details
5. Save it as a template for future use

## Build a simple system:

- Create a Canva account and explore for 30 minutes
- Bookmark Unsplash, Pexels, and The Noun Project
- Take photos at your next event specifically for future materials
- Save successful designs to reuse and adapt

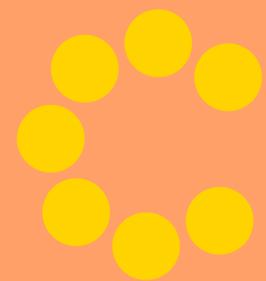
## Remember:

Professional-looking materials come from using good templates and authentic photos rather than complex design skills. Your community wants to understand what you do and how to get involved – clear communication beats fancy design every time.

Updated November 2025

Got a suggestion on how to improve this toolkit? Or have something you'd love us to cover?

**[Get in touch with Eibhlin today](#)**



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