

StoryCorps®

@your library®

A TOOLKIT FOR SUCCESS



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Participants at Greensboro Public Library after their interview session in Greensboro, NC.

I. INTRODUCTION

StoryCorps @ your library (SCL) is a program created by the American Library Association (ALA) in partnership with the national nonprofit StoryCorps, and funded by a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). In its pilot year, SCL trained public librarians across the country to record the stories of their communities and to use those stories to create multi-format public programming on broad themes of oral narrative, as well as local and family history.

The StoryCorps interview model fosters communication by promoting the importance of listening, and we've found that listening to others' stories can be just as powerful as sharing one's own story. The model establishes a sacred space for two people who know each other to speak for 40 uninterrupted minutes about what matters to them most. Because every StoryCorps interview is recorded, it can be preserved and shared for years to come. We hope that our model might prove useful to librarians beginning interview collection programs at their institutions.

Following the program's pilot year, StoryCorps and the American Library Association created this guide to support libraries in the creation of an interview collection program. It is our hope that this guide will provide libraries with inspiration and tools and resources to begin collecting the important stories within their own communities. Librarians are invited to use these resources to plan and present engaging programs, while tapping into the expertise and public appeal of the StoryCorps model, the nationally respected programming models supported by the ALA, and the best practices developed by experienced programming librarians during SCL's pilot phase.

Like many other organizations that have collaborated with StoryCorps over the past 10 years, libraries are well positioned to use the interviews that they collect as communication tools and to raise visibility and awareness of the importance of libraries within their communities. Creating a program inspired by StoryCorps @ your library offers an ideal opportunity to forge new

local partnerships, engage new audiences, and attract additional sources of funding. We encourage you to use our model as a guide to craft a program that will benefit you and your patrons. However, please do note that by using this toolkit, your institution will not be granted access to the StoryCorps database, be given permission to use the StoryCorps brand name, or otherwise be supported by StoryCorps staff in editing and archiving efforts related to the interviews you capture.

We invite you to share your experiences using this guide to present SCL programs by emailing publicprograms@ala.org.



StoryCorps staff and volunteers at Bellmore Memorial Library in Bellmore, New York.

ABOUT STORYCORPS

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide people of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. Since 2003, StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 50,000 interviews with over 90,000 Participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, and millions listen to our weekly broadcasts on NPR's *Morning Edition* and on our [Listen pages](#).

The StoryCorps program reminds us of our shared humanity, strengthens and builds the connections between people, teaches the value of listening, and weaves into the fabric of our culture the understanding that every life matters. At the same time, the interviews we collect serve as an invaluable archive of American voices and wisdom for future generations.

In the coming years we will build StoryCorps into an enduring institution that will touch the lives of every American family.

ABOUT ALA

Established in 1876, the American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world. Its mission is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship, in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. ALA is a nonprofit educational organization of approximately 67,000 members, including librarians, educators, trustees, and other interested citizens.

ABOUT ALA PPO

Through its Public Programs Office, ALA provides leadership, resources, training, and networking opportunities that help librarians in public, academic, school, and special libraries nationwide develop and host cultural experiences for adults, young adults, and families. Projects include live author and artist events, traveling exhibitions, book and media discussion programs, continuing education opportunities, and a variety of professional resources for librarians, including the online programming resource website, www.ProgrammingLibrarian.org.

II. Getting Started

In this section we offer basic building blocks to establishing a StoryCorps-inspired interview model at your institution. We offer tips on how to best prepare your Participants to share their story with a loved one, offer guidance on how to establish a recording location, and provide equipment recommendations.

In the StoryCorps model, individuals choose a friend, colleague, or loved one to interview. Or, interested Participants come to StoryCorps on their own to tell their story. From our perspective, there's no wrong way to set up an interview if the interview Participants are willing to speak to one another. We believe that what is important is simply to provide the space for Participants to listen closely to one another, and to ask the questions they've always wanted to ask.

In this toolkit, we offer guidance on how to create a program that will allow you to recreate the StoryCorps experience and interview model within your own institution. We believe that providing space for patrons to record conversations about what matters most to them supports the creation of local oral history collections, engages your staff and volunteers in the issues facing your communities, and allows you to enhance your existing public programming with new content and ideas.

As you begin thinking about establishing an oral history or interview collection project at your institution, make sure that you consider the time and commitment it takes to carry out such an effort. This includes everything from conducting trainings on the recording equipment to promotion and marketing. Here's our suggested breakdown for how to get started:

1. Assemble Your Team

Gaining institutional support for your project ensures the longevity and sustainability of interview collection and preservation. As such, teamwork is essential to make your project and related programming a long-term success. For the best framework for success, be sure to involve the following groups from the start:

STAFF

Start by assembling your core project team. Identify a project lead, and specify individual roles. A project of this kind can allow staff the opportunity for professional development by giving them the chance to play integral roles in the programming, promotion, and interview collection process. However, it's important to set expectations early, and to acknowledge time commitments and responsibilities. Examples of potential tasks and duties include: securing private recording rooms, making sure Participants know where to go, training staff members to operate the recording equipment during the recording session, and library staff time to catalog and preserve the interviews. In addition to logistical duties, some staff might serve as excellent Interviewers or Facilitators for the interviews.

VOLUNTEERS

Depending on your staff resources, recruiting volunteers for support can be essential to the success of your project. In addition, involving volunteers engages your community, increases your capacity for interview collection, and can allow for increased program visibility. The roles volunteers can play range from doing outreach to community groups to serving as Interviewers or Facilitators. If your institution does not have its own volunteer program, consider approaching the following community-based organizations:

- public and community radio stations;
- high school and college programs, clubs, and service organizations;
- civic and religious organizations; and
- local oral history projects.

2. Make It Easy: Start Small

Pick a theme and name your program.

When you begin your interview collection program, think about what community issues or goals you might like to see addressed in interviews and related programming. To focus your program, we suggest you pick a theme that is broad enough to appeal to diverse groups throughout your community, but specific enough that you can use it to focus your marketing and promotional efforts. If you are not planning to integrate interview collection into an existing program, we also suggest that you create a name for your program that will be easily identifiable and legible to both your patrons and your institutional peers.

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare.

Become familiar with the entire process from start to finish so you can refine it based on institutional needs. Learn how to operate recording equipment, test different recording spaces, and train support staff to aid in the process. Allow at least two weeks to prepare for your first interview(s) and finalize logistics. This will also give your Participants time to prepare as well.

Choose eager Participants.

Sometimes getting people excited about the project and confirming their participation can be challenging. Choose Participants who are engaged and motivated. Those who might need more convincing can benefit from seeing the success of your first interviews. For more tips on outreach to Participants, please see our **Resources & Tools** section.

Make adjustments and set achievable goals.

Once you've established your process for recording interviews, try setting a goal of collecting a few interviews each month. Once you've created a system that works, you can determine the schedule that works best for you.

LOOKING CLOSER:

Greensboro Public Library's "Leaving Home"

In conjunction with their "One City, One Book" program, Greensboro Public Library used their book selection, *"Into The Beautiful North"* by Luis Alberto Urrea, to reach multiple audiences. Using the theme of "Leaving Home," the Greensboro Public Library gathered the voices of first-generation college-bound students, elders entering assisted living facilities, recent immigrants, and African Americans who participated in the Great Migration.



A family shares their story of "Leaving Home" at Greensboro Public Library after their interview session in Greensboro, North Carolina.

3. Establish an Interview Model

There is no right or wrong way to conduct an interview. Nevertheless, we believe in the importance of establishing interview roles so that your patrons and community members have a general idea of what to expect in an interview and so that your volunteers and staff are aware of their own responsibilities. At StoryCorps, we use the following terms to describe these individual interview roles:

Participants: The people participating in the interview.

- **Storyteller:** The person answering questions and telling stories during the interview.
- **Interviewer:** The person who asks most of the questions during the interview.

Facilitator: The person present during the interview who promotes a comfortable, meaningful experience for the Participants and handles all technical aspects of the recording. We encourage Facilitators to work in teams of two in order to share responsibilities.

4. Create a List of Questions

Preparing ahead of time will greatly improve the quality of the interviews. A good idea is to generate a Great Questions List that you can provide to your patrons. Here are some questions that have led to great conversations:

- What are some of the most important lessons you have learned in life?
- What are you most proud of?
- What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your life?
- What lessons did he or she teach you?
- How would you like to be remembered?

For more suggested questions, visit storycorps.org to use our online [Question Generator](#), or see the Great Questions List in our **Resources & Tools** section. Alternately, you can create customized questions based on your own interests or program theme.



Participants talk before their interview at Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System in Tampa, Florida.

5. Choose an Interview Location

We know there may not be flexibility in the type of space where your recordings take place, but we find that suitable recording locations can often be found in most libraries. Generally, we suggest that you locate a small room with a door and a space for a small table that can comfortably seat two to four people.

In choosing your recording location, be sure to pick the quietest place possible. A carpeted room is best. Avoid walkways or places where people gather. Be sure to turn the volume off on any TV, radio, phone, personal electronics, or stereo. Close the door and listen for anything else making noise, including buzzing fluorescent lights, ticking clocks, and air conditioners. If possible, turn off any noisy electronics or move them out of the room. Quiet study rooms or meeting rooms away from the main floor could be ideal. Listen for noise during the interview as well, such as jangling jewelry or loud voices, and feel free to stop the recording to make changes to your setup. Make the space peaceful and calm by turning the lights low. Sometimes even the most minor adjustments can enhance Participants' comfort and the sound quality of their recording immensely.

III. Recording the Conversation

1. Purchase Recording Equipment

The basic components needed to record interviews are a digital recorder, a microphone, and headphones. You can find both basic and more sophisticated recording equipment at your local electronics store or for purchase online. Whatever recording equipment you choose, we strongly suggest making sure that the library's staff and volunteers feel confident and ready to use it. See our **Equipment Recommendations** in the **Resources & Tools** section for more details.

2. Set Up and Test the Equipment

Be sure to set up your equipment and check the sound before the interview. As a way to test your equipment, record your Storyteller answering a few prompts, such as, "Tell me what you had for breakfast." Stop recording and then listen to the test recording to determine if everything is working and that the sound is clear and legible. Press RECORD again when you begin the actual interview.

A few tips for better audio quality:

- Wear headphones when recording. Your headphones are your "ears" for the interview; they tell you exactly what you'll hear on the finished recording.
- When using an external microphone, hold the microphone in your hand, moving it between you and your Storyteller.
- Hold the microphone about one hand span (about 5 inches) from your Storyteller's mouth. If you're using an internal microphone on a camera, set up the camera just far enough away to keep the picture in focus.
- Be careful of "mic-handling" noise. That's the low, rumbling sound you hear when you move the microphone in your hands. Use a light touch when handling the microphone, and minimize movement.
- If your Storyteller fidgets, respectfully remind him or her that the microphone picks up the sound.



Volunteer Facilitator performs a soundcheck during the StoryCorps @ your library training at the Nashville Public Library in Nashville, Tennessee.



Facilitator sets up equipment during the StoryCorps @ your library training at Smithville Public Library in Smithville, Texas.

3. Create a Fun, Welcoming Atmosphere

- Ask the Facilitator or other staff to personally welcome Participants, and casually find out what the Participants want to talk about during their interviews.
- If interviewing elderly Participants, engage them in conversation after their interview. Ask them to retell a story to keep their memory fresh and reinforce their feeling of accomplishment.
- Invite local press to visit your institution to learn more about the program. Emphasize that your interview Participants are contributing to your local history.
- Consider making interview segments available for others to enjoy. Create an exhibit using photographs and quotes from interviews.
- Encourage older children and teenagers to interact with their loved ones through your program.
- Make interview Participants feel as if they're part of something important, unique, and specific to your own institution and community.

4. Begin the Conversation

Start the interview by having each Participant state his or her name, age, the date, and the location of the interview. For example, “My name is Marissa Martinez. I’m 40 years old. The date is November 27, 2013, and I’m sitting with my grandfather, Frank Jackson, in the Brooklyn Public Library.” While the Great Questions

List will help prepare Participants for the interview, encourage them to trust their instincts and ask questions in whatever order feels right. Instruct Participants to avoid saying “uh huh” or interrupting. Instead, recommend they use visual cues like nodding their head to encourage the Storyteller to keep going. See our **Interview Tips** on page 10 for more information on how to keep the conversation going.

5. Wrap It Up

We’ve found that 40 minutes is a good length of time for a StoryCorps interview, but Participants can speak for as long or as short a time as they like (or as long as you can accommodate). Before you turn off the recorder, be sure to ask the Storyteller if there is anything else he or she wants to talk about. If the Participants have finished their conversation, you might also want to thank them; opening up and/or speaking into a microphone can be difficult. Express your gratitude, and let them know that it was a privilege to listen to the story. Finally, hit STOP on your recorder.

Once the recording is finished, provide Participants with a copy of the interview and their photos. You can also give the Participants a certificate commemorating their participation. Sample certificates are in the **Resources & Tools** section.



Participants after their interview session at San Francisco Public Library in San Francisco, California.



Make sure to let those around you know that an interview is taking place!

Interview Tips

Taking the time to do an interview with a loved one, family member, or friend is a unique opportunity to remember someone or something important in someone else's life. As a general guideline, we believe that allocating 40 minutes for each interview represents a good amount of time to capture a person's story. It may seem like a long time, but it can go faster than you think! Here are some tips for Storytellers, Interviewers, and Facilitators to keep in mind when preparing for an interview.

Before the interview, **ask your participants** if there's anything they do or don't want to talk about. This is a great opportunity to remind Participants that they are in control of their own stories and that you're there to listen.

Choose about 10 main questions for your interview. This will give you a broad outline of what you hope to cover in your interview and the directions in which you might want your interview to go.

From this list, **choose the first question** to get you started. You may want to begin at the beginning, with "Where were you born?" or jump to a specific time or topic in that person's life that most interests you, such as military service or parenthood.

Start with open-ended questions without yes or no answers, letting the Storyteller steer you toward what is most important to him or her. These questions should start with phrases like, "Tell me about..." or "What was it like..." or "How did you feel when..."

Be aware of your **body language** throughout the interview. Showing Participants that you're genuinely interested helps them open up and makes them feel confident enough to indulge in the details.

Keep in mind that future listeners may not be familiar with specific people and places you mention. **Set up context** and background for the interview where needed with questions such as "How did you get there?" "Who was Uncle Bill?" and/or "Why was he such an influence on you?"

Questions that **encourage vivid details** can be surprising and make the interview special. Good examples include questions like, "Can you paint a picture in words of your childhood neighborhood?" "What did Uncle Bill look like?" or "What are some images that stand out when you think about your grandfather?"

Be prepared to ask **follow-up questions** or veer from your planned question list if you're curious about something. A memory about work could be followed up with a question such as, "What are you most proud of in your career?" You may hear stories you've never heard before.

Think of your interview as a conversation. While rehearsing or writing out your answers may help in preparing for your interview, we also recommend thinking of this as a time to have a meaningful conversation. Relax and let your words come naturally.

Don't hesitate to **contribute a favorite story** about the Storyteller or memories you share together as you go along. This interview can be a time to tell your interview partner how much he or she means to you, or share something you've always wanted to tell your partner.

As you near the end of your interview, **think of some reflective questions as time wraps up.** Examples might include, "Is there anything you want to talk about that I didn't ask you?" "Looking back, what were your happiest times?" "What advice would you give to me about being a parent?" or "What are your hopes for the future?"

Remember that **the Storyteller and Interviewer model is a fluid model**, and both Participants can take turns asking each other questions.

Most of all, **relax and have fun.** Enjoy the opportunity to share the stories, thoughts, and the closeness that can come with this experience.

IV. Preserving Your Conversation

1. Archiving Interviews

Some Participants record interviews with StoryCorps primarily to have the experience: they want to have an uninterrupted, intimate conversation, a chance to speak and be heard or to listen fully. Because we always provide each participant pair with a copy of their interview, these individuals may not wish to have their stories preserved or made accessible to anyone outside of their immediate family or friend circle.

However, others participate so their stories can become part of the historical record. The StoryCorps interview model offers a unique divergence from typical oral history interviews in that, while it does not necessarily offer a complete, factual who-what-when-where account of the events of an individual's life, the conversation tends to capture a more emotional, affective account of lived experience. These conversations prove valuable accompaniments to other forms of archival records—documents, news accounts, etc.—often answering the question “What did it feel like to be there at this time?”

In order to archive interviews, it's important to have Participants sign a release form, and to offer them the option not to release their interview to your institution. StoryCorps Facilitators give Participants our release form to sign after the interview, so Participants can decide if they wish their interviews to become part of the public record based on what they actually discussed. We recommend that you explain the release form clearly to Participants, and notify Participants if the interviews will be posted online and discoverable by using a search engine.

You should also establish a means to collect important Participant information. For example, every StoryCorps Participant fills out a voluntary data sheet that contains contact information, demographic information, and a question that asks for a Participant's identity in his or her own words.

StoryCorps, the Library of Congress, and many other institutions that archive oral histories or personal narratives also offer individuals the opportunity to remove their materials from the archive retrospectively. We do not present this option up front (otherwise we'd be overwhelmed with people changing their minds), but because of the often emotional content of the stories and the fact that Participants discuss the stories of other friends, family members, and colleagues we employ a liberal takedown policy and comply with all requests to withdraw an interview from the collection.



Library staff member interviews patron at Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System in Tampa, Florida.



Volunteer Facilitator interviews community member at Octavia Fellin Public Library in Gallup, New Mexico.

2. Preserving Digital Files

Your library or repository probably has its own guidelines for preserving digital materials. We recommend that you begin backing up interview files *from the moment you record them*. That's as easy as:

- Transferring a file from the recorder's SD card to a computer or server that's connected to a backup server;
- transferring the file from the recorder's SD card to a computer or server and to an external hard drive; or
- transferring a file from the recorder's SD card to a computer or server and burning a CD or DVD copy.

Many folklorists and oral historians who work with digital media recommend creating a checksum as soon as you create a digital file that's destined for an archive.

For more information about checksums, please visit the online resource Oral History in the Digital Age: <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/resource-tutorial-on-checksum-for-digital-preservation-of-oral-history>



Father and daughter interview each other at Chicago Public Library in Chicago, Illinois.

3. Cataloging Interviews

Library partners have chosen a variety of formats for cataloging StoryCorps interviews.

Institutions with preexisting digital asset management systems like ContentDM often create collections for their oral history materials. Some of these institutions make only a portion of the interview or an edited clip available for public access offsite, with the whole interview available onsite at the library.

StoryCorps interviews have been cataloged in MARC (see the collection at the La Crosse Public Library), presented in ContentDM (Maryland Digital Libraries, Nashville Public Library, Denver Public Library), and incorporated in EAD Finding Aids (University of Texas – Austin).



StoryCorps @ your library training at Nashville Public library in Nashville, Tennessee.

For onsite use, libraries have provided CDs to patrons, loaded files onto MP3 players for researchers to listen to in the library, and made the files available through listening stations or file servers accessible via computer terminals.

StoryCorps has developed its own set of key words, which partner libraries use to catalog their interviews through StoryCorps @ your library. We based our set of key words on the American Folklore Society's Ethnographic Thesaurus, available online at www.openfolklore.org/et/. You may also find an abbreviated version of our **Key Words List** in our **Resources & Tools** section.

V. How to Maintain a Successful Program

This section offers advice and tips on how to make the interviews you record part of your public programming offerings. We offer individual case studies and suggestions that illustrate how to create compelling and innovative programs, and suggest ways you can enhance your existing programs by engaging your community through oral narratives.

1. Ideas to Make It Last

The best way to make your oral history program a lasting success is to demonstrate its impact, which extends far beyond the interview experience.

For examples from our partners, please see **Programming Examples** in the **Resources & Tools** section.

PUBLICITY

Publicizing your interview collection program as part of your organization's programming is an opportunity to showcase your commitment to collecting and preserving your community's many stories. Being featured in local press or a newsletter is a great way to make Participants feel special and can heighten excitement about your program. Some other ways include:

- **Using our press release template** in our **Resources & Tools** section to invite local press to visit during a recording day and speak with Participants.
- **Submitting articles or op-ed pieces to a local newspaper** in your community. Explain how and why your institution decided to collect stories, and if possible provide quotes and anecdotes from Participants.
- Using **photos from your recording days** to enhance your marketing and communications efforts, such as brochures and flyers. Write about the program in your organization's newsletter.
- Posting **photos, interview clips, and articles** about the program on your institution's website, social media accounts and/or blog.

PARTNERSHIPS

Establishing strong local partnerships allows you to take your project to the next level and introduce your program and your institution to entirely new audiences. To further your program goals, take advantage of existing partnerships or use this opportunity to forge new ones.

High school programs regularly encourage students to volunteer with local organizations and other institutions as community service or in exchange for extra-credit work. You may also want to partner with a local college where professors may have students directly support your program as part of the curriculum. Consider working with a teacher in your community to create a regular activity between students and your institution.

LOOKING CLOSER:

How to work with schools and teachers

Chicago Public Library partnered with DePaul University to create an innovative program centered on its "One Book, One Chicago" program. StoryCorps staff trained DePaul students enrolled in an English independent study course to facilitate interviews collected in this program. For help in planning your "One City, One Book" program, see: www.programminglibrarian.org/library/programs/discussion-programs/book-discussion-programs/one-book.html.

Local history centers, museums, and neighborhood associations often design programs or exhibits that showcase local history and the lives of community members. Your interviews would provide a rich source of material, compelling content, and inspiration for artistic expression. Invite your local community to connect closely with an exhibit by engaging them in listening.

Establishing a partnership with a local **radio station** is also a great way to inform your local community about your project. If you do not have a preexisting relationship with one, this would be a great opportunity to start one.

2. Using StoryCorps Content

We welcome libraries to use our animations and broadcast clips in their promotional efforts and/or at listening events. Please visit storycorps.org to access our material.

LOOKING CLOSER: Animation, “Eyes on the Stars”

On January 28, 1986, NASA *Challenger* mission STS-51-L ended in tragedy when the shuttle exploded 73 seconds after takeoff. On board was physicist Ronald E. McNair, who was the second African American to enter space. But first, he was a kid with big dreams in Lake City, South Carolina.



This is one of StoryCorps’ most popular clips. We find that this story resonates with librarians and libraries deeply. For more information, visit storycorps.org/animation.

HOST A LISTENING EVENT

A listening event is a great way to bring friends, family, and colleagues together to listen to inspiring stories and talk about what matters to you. You can play a portion of your Participants’ interviews on a CD player or computer connected to speakers. Make sure the speaker volume is loud enough to fill the room. Projecting photos of the interview Participants onto a screen is a nice addition.

PLAY AUDIO AT EVENTS

StoryCorps interviews are a personal and effective way to share your community’s voices at board meetings, fundraising events, or conventions. It is a great way to raise awareness using different media resources.



Library staff and volunteer Facilitator at Somerville Public Library in Somerville, Massachusetts.

LOOKING CLOSER: Smithville Public Library

The community of Smithville, Texas, previously partnered with StoryCorps to record and preserve the stories of post-9/11 veterans, active-duty service members, and their families, as part of the Military Voices Initiative. When the Smithville Public Library was selected as an SCL pilot library, it allowed the library to continue to record the stories of veterans, expanding upon the previous work done by StoryCorps and strengthening the library's ties to its community. In the midst of their program, Smithville Public Library hosted a listening event on Veterans Day that featured StoryCorps broadcasts and animations alongside the stories of veterans collected through their SCL project. After hearing some of the recordings and seeing some of the StoryCorps animations, program attendees were encouraged to schedule their own interviews with the library.



Students from DePaul University serve as volunteer Facilitators for Chicago Public Library's StoryCorps @ your library program.

EDITING FULL-LENGTH INTERVIEWS

StoryCorps' own broadcast clips allow a Participant's story to be told in a concise and meaningful way. At your institution, you may be interested in editing interviews in a similar fashion, or you may want to edit interviews in order to highlight specific issues or concerns that support your organization's mission or goals.

Once interviews are edited, you can post the edited segments and/or the transcripts of the segments online, use them in a listening event, or feature them in an exhibition. **Before making any portion of an interview publicly available, we recommend that you call both interview Participants as a courtesy.**

We strongly recommend that all interview segments be:

- faithful to the overall tone of the conversation and representative of the substance and feel of the interview;
- made available in a non-downloadable format;
- not more than eight minutes in length (most StoryCorps segments are less than three minutes);
- cohesive, telling a particular story or sticking to a defined theme;
- presented in a manner that shows care and an intent to honor the source material; and
- truthful (we suggest that you verify the hard facts in the segment).

For further recommendations about using edited segments of interviews, please see the **Resources & Tools** section.

NATIONAL DAY OF LISTENING

The National Day of Listening is a new national holiday started by StoryCorps in 2008. On the day after Thanksgiving, StoryCorps asks everyone to take a few minutes to record an interview with a loved one.

By participating as an institution, you can help publicize your oral history program and post interviews to StoryCorps' Wall of Listening to be shared nationwide.

Visit nationaldayoflistening.org for more details.

VI. Resources & Tools

This section contains helpful resources to assist you in planning and implementing your interview collection program.

Resources

1. Online Resources
2. Equipment Recommendations
3. Editing Full-Length Interviews
4. Technical Guidelines for Editing Interviews
5. Programming Examples: Using StoryCorps Interviews
6. Great Questions List
7. Key Words List

Tools

1. Participant Schedule
2. Interview Introduction Card
3. Sample Interview Certificates
4. Recording in Progress Sign
5. Sample Press Release



Participants after their interview session at the Sommerville Public Library in Somerville, Massachusetts.



Participants after their interview session at Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon.

Online Resources

StoryCorps @ your library is an online resource for information about the SCL program at <http://www.programminglibrarian.org/storycorps>.

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, StoryCorps' national archive partner, provides basic notes on folklife fieldwork at www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/index.html.

Oral History in the Digital Age is an online resource for planning, implementing, and supporting oral history programs at your institution at <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu>.

Oral History Association's Principles & Best Practices for Oral History provides a set of guidelines for those interested in conducting oral histories at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices>.

Activists' Guide to Archiving Video, created by Witness, focuses on video but has thorough and straightforward tips on capturing, preserving, and organizing digital field-based recordings at <http://archiveguide.witness.org>.

Transom, an online public radio community, has extensive product equipment reviews and instructional recording guides at www.transom.org/tools.

Audacity features instructions and tips for downloading, installing, and using their free audio editing software at www.audacity.sourceforge.net.



Participants after their interview session at Nashville Public Library in Nashville, Tennessee.



A nephew interviews his uncle about his military career at Smithville Public Library in Smithville, Texas.

Equipment Recommendations

PORTABLE DIGITAL RECORDERS

Digital recorders store audio on digital media like memory cards, allowing files to be transferred to a computer for processing. Digital recording is the modern standard, and allows for the highest quality and integrity of audio files.

We recommend recorders that feature:

- XLR inputs, which accommodate a wider variety of microphones;
- capacity to record WAV (also called PCM) audio files; and
- removable media, like Compact Flash or SD cards

Average cost: \$170—\$600

Recommended Models: Marantz PMD661, Tascam DR-40 Microphone

Plugging an external microphone into the recorder will allow you to better control sound quality. Use one or two microphones depending on the number of participants you'd like to accommodate. We recommend a handheld condenser microphone with a directional pickup pattern. Microphone accessories, such as stands, mounts or cables may be useful as well.

Average Cost: \$100—\$200

Recommended Model: Audio-Technica ATM710



HEADPHONES

Use headphones to monitor sound from the recorder. We recommend over-the-ear, closed-back-style headphones to block out background noise.

Average Cost: \$50—\$100

Recommended Models: Sony MDR-7506, Sony MDR-7502



EXISTING EQUIPMENT

In many cases, equipment you already own—such as computers, smartphones, and tablets—may be used for audio recording.

For **computer recording**, we recommend:

- USB microphones, which plug directly into a computer's USB port; and
- low-cost or free recording programs like Reaper, Audacity, and GarageBand

For **smartphones and tablets**, we recommend:

- attachable microphones like those made by Blue and Tascam; and
- recording apps like Tascam PCM Recorder and Voice Memo.

Web-based audio sharing services like Soundcloud and Audioboo also have free recording functions built into their websites and apps.



Editing Full-Length Interviews

StoryCorps' own edited segments highlight people's personal experiences and their emotional reactions to them. You may be interested in editing interviews in a similar way, or you may want to highlight specific issues talked about in the interview that specifically support your organization's mission or goals. We recommend that you include both interview participants' voices in all segments. This emphasizes the conversational style of an interview, as well as the authenticity of the ideas being shared.

Before making the edited segment publicly available, we recommend that you call both interview participants as a courtesy.

All edited segments should be:

- Faithful to the overall tone of the conversation and representative of the substance and feel of the interview.
- If posted online, in a format that users cannot download but that permits Internet streaming of the clip.
- Not more than eight minutes in length; StoryCorps recommends segments of less than or about three minutes.
- Cohesive, telling a particular story or sticking to a defined theme.
- Presented in a manner that shows care and an intent to honor the source material.
- Truthful; we suggest that you verify the hard facts in the segment (see page 12).

Before distributing a story, you will want to make sure that everyone who listens will understand the segment and ensure that the information presented in the segment is truthful. To do that, you must gather background information about the story and write a brief (two- to three-sentence) introduction.

Here's how we do it:

- After editing the segment, we call the interview participants and play it for both people to confirm that we've gotten their story 100% correct.
- We double-check names, spellings, and ages with the interview participants.
- We confirm all dates, historical events, and other information in the interview that could be verified by a third-party source.

For example:

- If an interview participant remembers hearing Martin Luther King Jr. speak in your city in 1963, double-check that Dr. King spoke in your city at that time. Memories fade—the speech might have been given a few towns over or in a different year.
- Once you've confirmed the facts, take five minutes to write an introduction to your story so that everyone who listens to the piece can fully appreciate it. Although the people editing the story will have heard the entire 40-minute interview, the people listening to what you present will hear only a few minutes of the recording. Make sure your listeners have all of the information they need to understand both interview participants.
- These steps will leave you with a better, clearer, more powerful story in the long run.

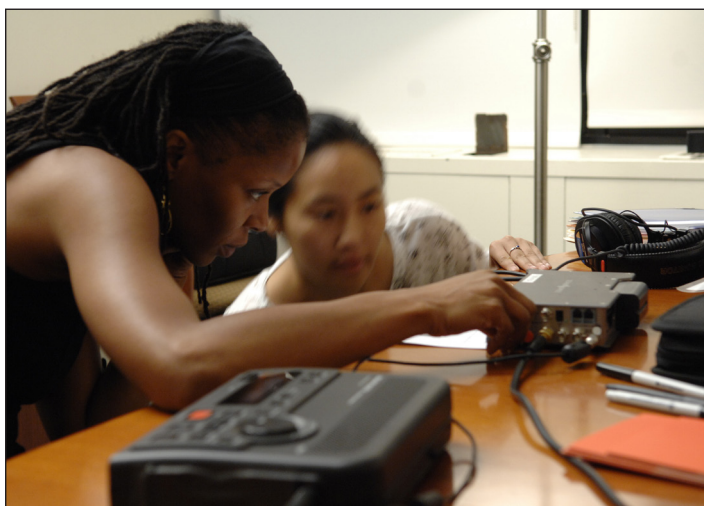
Technical Guidelines for Editing Interviews

We encourage you to edit the interviews (.wav files) from your collection for use by your organization. Working with sound can be intimidating at first, but it will be rewarding once you've learned the necessary skills.

StoryCorps uses a professional program called ProTools to edit audio; however, this may be too expensive for most organizations. We recommend that you download free editing software, such as Audacity. It will enable you to excerpt and edit 40-minute interviews into more usable two- to four-minute segments, or cut up to eight minutes of raw audio.

If you've never edited audio before, set aside at least one full day to learn how to operate Audacity. After you've mastered the program, editing individual segments should be pretty simple, and the amount of time it will take to create a finished product will depend on how much editing you do and how long your piece is. If you are familiar with editing, the amount of time needed to learn Audacity decreases accordingly.

Directions on how to download, install, and use the program are at audacity.sourceforge.net and audacity.sourceforge.net/manual-1.2/tutorials.html.



WORKING WITH AUDACITY SOFTWARE

IMPORTING AUDIO. To get the audio from the your CD or data file into Audacity, you'll need to import it onto a track. To create a track, go to the Project menu at the top of your screen and choose "Import Audio." Then, select the audio you wish to hear and edit. You should be able to "see" the file—every peak and valley in the wave formation is somebody talking or taking a breath.

PLAYING AUDIO. Toward the top of the Audacity screen, you'll see buttons that look like ones you would see on a CD player. They work exactly the same way. To begin to hear the audio, place the cursor at the beginning of the track and press the "record" button or just hit the space bar. You can stop listening by pressing the space bar.

For questions or help with editing, visit audacity.sourceforge.net/contact.

EXPORTING AUDIO. When you've excerpted the audio selection you want to use, you'll need to export that piece of audio. You can do this by going to the File menu and choosing "Export as a Wav" (high quality) or "Export as an Mp3" (slightly lower quality). Next, name and save the file. It will then be ready to put on a CD, on your website, in a podcast, etc.

We recommend editing segments in mono format rather than stereo. Select a track, then click "Stereo Track to Mono" under the Tracks menu.

Programming Examples: Using StoryCorps Interviews

EXHIBITS

- **Sauk Prairie River Project** partnered with a school and edited its 16 interviews into six-minute segments. The segments were played at the exhibit “Museum on Main Street” at the Sauk Prairie High School River Arts Center. Visitors could sit in small kiosks and listen to the stories on iPods. Additionally, the school created a photo album using the photos of participants and included the interview CDs in the album. They created a photo wall at the school where the CDs were made available for listening.
- The **Shelburne Museum** designed two listening stations to be displayed alongside the national Alzheimer’s Quilt. The listening stations contain locally recorded interviews (produced by Vermont Public Radio) and several nationally recorded interviews (produced by StoryCorps). Please contact StoryCorps to obtain permission to use edited segments produced by StoryCorps.
- **Geneva History Center** celebrated their town by making the interview opportunity available for their public community for five days, which created content for an exhibit called, “Every Story Counts: Everyday Stories of Everyday Genevans,” which won an award for the Center. You can see photos of the beautiful exhibit [here](#).
- **The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, which we mentioned, hosted the MobileBooth in June. They built a tab in their [Facebook page](#) showcasing the inspiring stories of everyday people helping others, [here](#), which is lovely but requires you to “like” their page. They also built a basic [mobile phone app](#) to access from their Visitor Center.

LISTENING EVENTS

- On Veterans Day, StoryCorps Atlanta partnered with the **Atlanta History Center** (AHC) and the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) to present “Stories of Sacrifice: Listening to America’s Veterans.” The program of the event included videos from the AHC’s Veterans History Project, a piece shared by AJC editor Kevin Riley on replacement soldiers, and stories from StoryCorps’ Military Voices Initiative.
- The **Points of Light Institute** recorded conversations of committed volunteers discussing the role service work had played in their lives. Two of the interviews were edited by a professional producer and played at the National Conference on Volunteering and Service in New York City.
- **The Robert Russa Moton Museum** started a free “Brown-Bag Lunch Series” for the public to listen to the StoryCorps interviews about their county’s civil rights struggles, and discuss the history and current issues together. The Friday gatherings at the museum have generated healing, reconciliation, and more conversation. You can read more about their listening lunches in a [local news article](#).

SPEAKERS ON PANEL EVENT

- On September 16, StoryCorps Atlanta co-hosted “Coming to America: Stories from Atlanta’s Immigrant and Refugee Communities,” with Atlanta History Center, public radio station WABE, Welcoming America, and the **National Civil and Human Rights Museum**. Participants relayed the impact it had on their lives to tell their story.
- StoryCorps’ **Military Voices Initiative** hosted “A StoryCorps Talkback at the Brooklyn Museum” presented in conjunction with the exhibition “WAR/ PHOTOGRAPHY: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath.” During the event, edited clips were played of stories from both veterans and war photographers. Following the clips, StoryCorps moderated a panel discussion on the importance of telling their stories.

Great Questions List

Before your conversation, ask your interview partner what he or she would like to talk about and what stories the or she would like to share. Then prepare a list of questions to ask during the interview. **You can use some of the suggested questions below, or come up with your own list.** For more great questions, visit storycorps.org/questions.

Great Questions

What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
Who was the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her?
What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
What are you proudest of in your life?
How has your life been different from what you'd imagined?
How would you like to be remembered?
Do you have any regrets?
What does your future hold?
Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?
Is there something about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?
Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to?

Great Questions for Friends

What is your first memory of me?
Was there a time when you didn't like me?
What makes us such good friends?
How would you describe me? How would you describe yourself?
Where will we be in 10 years? 20 years?
Do you think we'll ever lose touch with each other?
Is there anything that you've always wanted to tell me but haven't?

Great Questions for Grandparents

Where did you grow up?
What was your childhood like?
Who were your favorite relatives?
Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?
How did you and grandma/grandpa meet?
What was my mom/dad like growing up?
Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?
Was she/he well behaved?
What is the worst thing she/he ever did?
What were your parents like?
What were your grandparents like?
How would you like to be remembered?
Are you proud of me?

Great Questions for Older Community Members

How long have you lived in _____?
How has it changed over those years?
What was it like when you grew up here/first moved here?
What do you miss most about the way it used to be?
Who are some of the great characters from here?
Do you remember any great stories or legends about our town?

Great Questions for Parents

Do remember what was going through your head when you first saw me?
How did you choose my name?
What was I like as a baby? As a young child?
Do you remember any of the songs you used to sing to me? Can you sing them now?
What were my siblings like?
What were the hardest moments you had when I was growing up?
If you could do everything again, would you raise me differently?
What advice would you give me about raising my own kids?
What are your dreams for me?
How did you meet mom/dad?
Are you proud of me?

Great Questions about Growing Up

Where did you grow up?
What was it like?
What is your earliest memory?
Who were your parents?
What were your parents like?
How was your relationship with your parents?
Did you get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did?
Do you have any siblings? What were they like growing up?
What did you look like?
How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you happy?
What is your best memory of childhood? Worst?
Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?
Who were your best friends? What were they like?
How would you describe a perfect day when you were young?
What did you think your life would be like when you were older?

Great Questions about School

Did you enjoy school?
What kind of student were you?
What would you do for fun?
How would your classmates remember you?
Are you still friends with anyone from that time in your life?
What are your best memories of grade school/high school/college/graduate school? Worst memories?

Great Questions about Love and Relationships

Do you have a love of your life?
When did you first fall in love?
Can you tell me about your first kiss?
What was your first serious relationship?
Do you believe in love at first sight?
Do you ever think about previous lovers?
What lessons have you learned from your relationships?

Great Questions about Marriage

How did you meet your husband/wife?
How did you know he/she was “the one”?
How did you propose?
What were the best times? The most difficult times?
Did you ever think of getting divorced?
Did you ever get divorced? Can you tell me about it?
What advice do you have for young couples?

Great Questions about Working

What do you do for a living?
Do you like your job?
What did you think you were going to be when you grew up?
What did you want to be when you grew up?
What lessons has your work life taught you?
If you could do anything now, what would you do? Why?
Do you plan on retiring? If so, when? How do you feel about it?

Great Questions about Religion

What role does religion play in your life?
What is your religion?
Do you believe in God?
Do you believe in the afterlife? If so, do you think you'll go to Heaven?
Have you experienced any miracles?

Key Words List

Art

Acting
Art
Comics
Dance
Design
Drawing
Film
Graphic Design
Literature
Painting
Photography
Poetry
Printmaking
Sculpture
Theater
Writing

Beliefs, Convictions

Activism
Anti-Semitism
Charms & Amulets
Conservatism
Classism
Discrimination
Fate
Fortune Telling
Homophobia
Intolerance
Liberalism
Luck
Magic
Magical
Political
Political Parties
Politics
Prejudice
Racism
Scientific
Segregation
Sexism
Stereotyping
Talking to the Dead
Visions
Xenophobia

Community

Architecture
Bars
Cafes
City Blocks
City Planning
Clubs
Coffee Shops
Community Businesses
Community Characters
Community History
Community Organizations
Corner Stores
Districts
Farm Life
Gangs City
Gentrification
Gossip & Rumor
Homecoming
Houses
Housing Projects
Landmarks
Neighborhood Life
Parades
Public housing
Pubs
Rural Life
Restaurants
Street Sellers
Suburbs
Town Life
Urban Life
Urban Renewals

Emotions

Anger
Anxiety
Catharsis
Disappointment
Fear
Grief
Guilt
Happiness
Hate
Homesickness
Hope

Humiliation
Intimacy
Jealousy
Love
Nostalgia
Regret
Relief
Remorse
Sadness
Shyness
Sorrow
Surprise
Sympathy
Trust
Worthy

Education

Achievements & Awards
Boarding School
Changes in Education
College, University
Elementary School
Failures
Grades
Graduate School, Grad School
Graduation
High School
Junior High
Kindergarten
Middle School
Military Academy
Preschool
Professors
Punishments
Schools (Types)
Schoolyard Bullies
Special Education
Teachers
Teaching

Family

Characters
Connections with the Famous
Customs
Expressions
Family Songs
Feuds
Genealogy
Heroes
Home
Jokes
Legends
Naming
Nicknames
Reunions
Rivalries
Traditions
Trips & Excursions
War Stories

Food

Baking
Cooking
Drinking
Eating
Ethnic Foods
Favorite Foods
Recipes
Ritual Foods

Historical Eras

1940's, Forties
1950's, Fifties
1960's, Sixties
1970's, Seventies
1980's, Eighties
1990's, Nineties
2000's
Civil Rights Movement Operation
Enduring Freedom
Iraq War
Korean War
Operation Iraqi Freedom
Vietnam War
War in Afghanistan,
Afghan War
War on Terror 9/11/01,
Sept. 11, 9/11
World Trade Center bombing (1993)

World War II, WWII, Second World War
Cold War
Pearl Harbor
Great Depression
Victory in Europe Day
Gulf War
Victory in Japan Day
Hurricane Katrina

Holidays

Carnival, Mardi Gras
Chinese New Year
Christmas
Cinco de Mayo
Columbus Day
Día de los muertos
Divali
Easter
Good Friday
Halloween
Hannukah
Independence Day, July 4
Juneteenth
Kwanzaa
Labor Day
Lent
May Day
Memorial Day
New Year's Day
Passover
Ramadan
Religious Celebrations
Saint's Day
Saint Patrick's Day
Thanksgiving
Valentine's Day
Veteran's Day
Yom Kippur

Identity

Assimilation
Acculturation
Bisexual
Citizenship
Ethnic Identity
Gender Identity
Heterosexual
Lesbian
Female Identity, Womanhood

Male Identity, Manhood
Transgendered Identity
Generational Identity
Middle Class
National Identity
Pets
Poverty
Racial Identity
Regional Identity
Sexual Identity
Gay, Homosexual
Queer
Social Class
Tribal Identity
Wealth

Natural Disasters

Destruction
Earthquakes
Floods
Escape and Survival
Fires
Floods
Hurricanes
Relief Organizations
Rescue
Tornados
Tsunamis

Music and Song

Composing
Favorite Songs
Instrument Making
Instrument Playing
Listening Habits
Singing

Transportation

Airplanes
Bicycles
Boats
Buses
Cars
Motorcycles
Railroad Trains
Subway Trains
Streetcars, Trolleys
Taxis
Walking

Sample Participant Schedule

Interviews for May 2011

	Participant 1 Storyteller (First name, last initial)	Does the person have memory loss?	Participant 2 Interviewer (First name, last initial)	Phone number (include area code), email address	Relationship. Also notes including special needs:
Wednesday, May 4: 1pm					
Friday, May 6: 12pm					
Thursday, May 12: 4pm					
Friday, May 13: 1pm					
Tuesday, May 25: 3pm					
Friday, May 28: 12pm					

Interview Introduction Card

INTRODUCTION CARD

My name is _____ and today I'm talking with
my _____.

Today's date is _____ and we're in
_____.

RELATIONSHIP, NAME

ORGANIZATION NAME OR CITY

Sample Interview Certificates



CERTIFICATE

This certificate honors the
story you have shared today.
The recording will be
preserved for future
generations, so that your
unique voice may inspire
others for a very long time.

Storyteller

Interviewer

Date


Sunrise Health
Centre
"Respect, Honor and Joy"
103 Royal Rd.
Raleigh, VA 21090
555-434-5887

Recording in Progress Sign

Shhh!
Recording
in progress
QUIET, PLEASE.

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FROM: Library Name

CONTACT:

Library Name

Contact Name | Phone Number

Email

[LIBRARY NAME] to record interviews as part of the [NAME OF PROGRAM]

DATE - [LIBRARY NAME] will begin recording the important voices of its community, including stories of the people it serves and their families and friends. [NAME OF PROGRAM] is inspired by StoryCorps @ your library, a national program designed to help public libraries across the country collect the stories of their communities.

INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRAM

Inspired by the StoryCorps model, [NAME OF PROGRAM] interviews are recorded conversations between two people who know and care about each other.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON HOW PARTICIPANTS CAN RECORD STORY

About [Library Name]

LIBRARY BOILERPLATE