

VERMONT VOICES – A CONVERSATION IN THE STYLE OF NPR’S STORYCORPS

ABOUT STORYCORPS INTERVIEWS

A StoryCorps interview is 40 minutes of uninterrupted time for meaningful conversation. A facilitator will sit in the room during the interview, and will take notes and monitor audio. Facilitators are not interviewers, though they may ask a question during the recording.

KEY FACTS

Participants are the interviewers

While our facilitators are trained to interview participants who do come alone, the best StoryCorps interviews take place between two people who know each other well. The significance of the relationship between the participants can greatly increase the quality of their experience and the quality of the stories.

The interviews are not scripted

StoryCorps interviews are not meant to be rehearsed or read from notes. We encourage creating question lists to aid participants who would like some prompting while maintaining spontaneity and flexibility during interviews.

Stories are the goal

We encourage participants to tell stories from their personal experiences. Personal experiences describe vivid memories or reflections on the impact of significant people or events-- not simply dates, places, and chronologies. For that reason, we try to avoid using the term “oral history” and refer to the experience more as a “conversation” during which participants are free to ask questions back and forth, and talk about whatever they want.

Participants decide whether or not to archive their interview

After the interview, we will send you an audio recording via e-mail or CD, if you prefer. If you would like, it may also be possible to share your story with other others via our archive.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- 1) **Choose about 10 main questions** for your interview. This gives a broad outline of what you’re interested in and where you might want the interview to go.
- 2) From this list, **choose a 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.
- 3) Start with **open-ended questions that don't assume the answers**, letting the storyteller steer you towards what is most important to them. These questions start with "Tell me about..." or "What was it like..." or "How did you feel when...".
- 4) 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, “What are you most proud of in your career?”

You may hear stories you’ve never heard before.

- 5) **Think of it as a conversation**, speak normally, and address the person you are interviewing. There is no right or wrong thing to talk about, as long as it's meaningful to you.
- 6) Don't hesitate to share a favorite story about the storyteller or memories you shared together as you go along. This can be a time to tell your interview partner how much they mean to you or **share something you've always wanted to tell them**.
- 7) 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 like, "Who was Uncle Bill?"
"Why was he such an influence on you?"
- 8) Questions that **encourage vivid details** can be surprising and make the interview special. "Can you paint a picture in words of your block?" or "What are some images that stand out when you think about your grandfather?"
- 9) Your facilitator will signal when there are 10 and 5 minutes left in your interview. It can be nice to **plan some reflective questions** as time wraps up. "Looking back, what were the happiest times?" "What advice would you give to me about being a parent?" "What are your hopes for the future?"
- 10) Most of all, **relax and have fun**. Enjoy the opportunity to share the stories, thoughts, and the emotional closeness that comes with this experience.

More tips for a great conversation:

Look at your partner, not the microphone.

Stay interested and engaged.

Be yourself; you can laugh or even cry.

Emotional questions like "How does this make you feel?" often elicit thoughtful responses. Don't be afraid to ask.

Be curious and honest and keep an open heart. Great things will happen.

Questions for a great conversation:

What was the happiest moment of your life?

What are you most proud of?

Who was the most important person in your life?

What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?

What is your earliest memory?

How do you want to be remembered?

Who was your first love?

Is there anything you've never told me but want to tell me now?