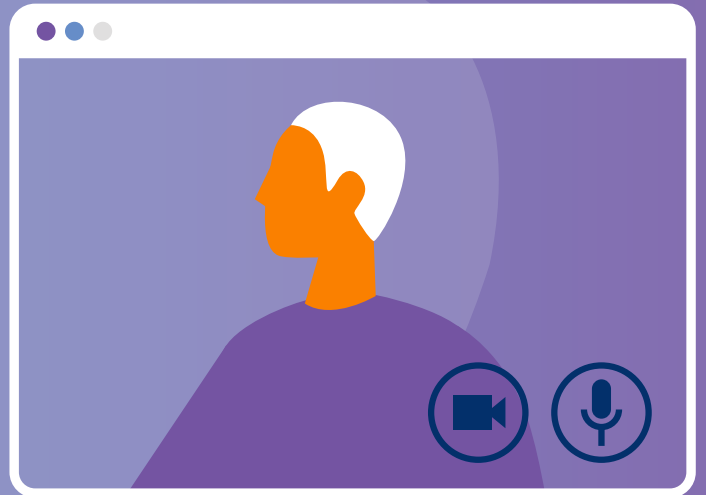
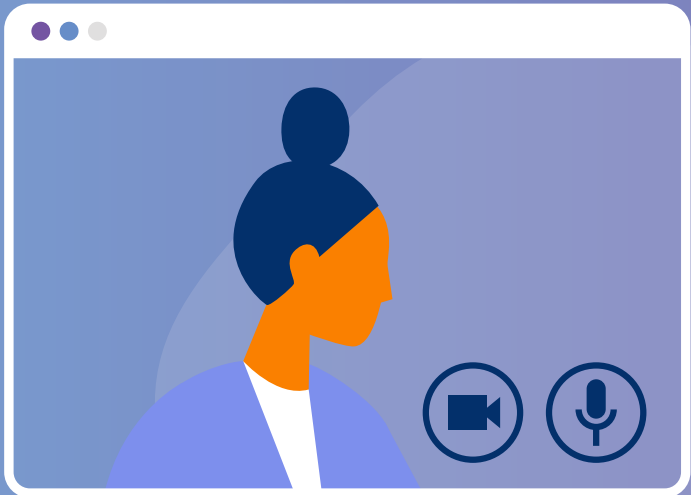


2020

interview toolkit

The Collaboratory | Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State



 Collaboratory



I'm asking questions that are interesting to them. That's quite different from just asking questions that are interesting to me. If you ask a question that is interesting to them, they stop being in this mode of being a person who's answering a question. It stops being an interview or a Q&A and it starts being a conversation.

— **Krista Tippett, American Public Media**

This is a guide for interviewing people in a way that creates engaging content. This guide will help you ask the questions that will help push past superficial responses and instead draw out authentic stories. Our goal is to empower offices to tell the incredible stories of ECA programming in a deeper and more memorable way. This guide can be used with the [Collaboratory's Podcasting Toolkit](#) and/or [Storytelling for Public Diplomacy Toolkit](#) to find good stories from ECA program alumni.

Secondarily, our goal is that when ECA colleagues use this toolkit and record the interviews, they will create effective content which can also be used to create 22.33 podcast episodes. This will help ECA offices to continue to shape the podcast to reflect their work and significantly increase the amount of material produced for public consumption.

part 1: before the interview

Preparation: What is your story?

Before going into an interview, you should have a general idea of what the story will be, based on a working framework of story structure combined with background information on the participant.

Research:

- » **Do as much reading/research on the person's background as possible.**

Listen to their TED (style) talks, read their articles, visit their website, look at their Linked In profile. Sometimes the story jumps out from their online persona. Knowing small details also helps build trust and credibility with your guest.

- » **Ideally, your research will allow you to form an idea of what the interviewee's story arc* might be.**

Having an idea of how the story might develop helps you steer the interview, keeping it on track and moving towards a proper conclusion. Think about their personal journey, their hurdles, their unique perspective.

- » **Write down the questions you want to ask.**

Be familiar with them. Get curious!

All good stories follow a similar arc of SUCCES*:

- » **Stakes**

What's at stake and why do we care? The interview should take the participant through the "hero's journey" of 1) a desired goal; 2) the obstacles along the way; 3) a final resolution.

- » **Unexpected**

Flip the script! If they mention a song, ask them to sing it. If they refer to another language, ask them to demonstrate it. If they drop an interesting detail, grab it, ask them to elaborate, find out more. Sometimes a passing detail can lead to an interesting insight. Don't be afraid to deviate from the expected storyline and go off script when the opportunity presents itself!

- » **Concrete**

Stories come alive with the specifics. Ask for real examples, small details, using all five senses to set the scene. Sometimes we literally ask interviewees to close their eyes and use their sensory memory to describe scenes.

- » **Credible**

Your subject is already credible as a program participant. But make sure they avoid platitudes ("the program was great"), and instead relate actual events, feelings, and perceptions.

- » **Emotional**

Don't be afraid to go there. Stories build empathy and connect humans emotionally. Laughter, tears, excitement, anger... If it's real it will connect with the listener on a more powerful, more memorable level.

- » **Simple**

Long elaborate anecdotes sometimes lose the audience. It's okay to keep it short and simple. Feel free to interrupt if it's necessary to keep things on track and moving forward.

Interview Tips:

A good interview cannot be done without being completely present and active listening. Everyone has their own interview style, but the most important thing is to be fully present in the moment, giving the interviewee your complete attention, and following your instincts. Your role as an interviewer is to make listeners feel like insiders in the world of your story. Feel free to share your own stories when appropriate—it helps build greater trust and elicits deeper sharing from your interviewee. Come prepared with pre-determined questions in case you need them, but follow the story where it goes, asking for follow-ups rather than focusing too much on the next question. Remember to:

» **Have a conversation, not an interview.**

» **Start with some easy, light-hearted questions to loosen up the interviewee.**

» **Ask for facts.**

What happened?

» **Ask for reasons.**

Why did that happen? Why do you think you did that?

» **Ask for emotional responses.**

How did it make you feel?

» **Put in them in the hypothetical.**

What if you wouldn't have gone on the program?

» **Get them to audition ideas.**

When you are trying to get someone to be expressive (especially if it's something difficult to express), it's ok to throw some options at them to see if that's what they're trying to say. Only audition ideas if they're struggling; You don't want to lead the story.

» **Don't be afraid of silence.**

Sometimes the most interesting answers come in those moments. Remember that your interviewee is thinking.

» **Keep the tape rolling until the person is out the door. The last thing they say is often the best.**

Ok you're ready to start! Now what?

part 2: the interview

Go into the interview as if you're about to have a casual conversation with a really amazing person. Be enthusiastic, give them a little power (ask them if they have any questions for you first), give context, give direction, ease into it – for their sake and yours.

Sample Pre-Interview Script:

» **Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me.**

» **Feel free to stop and start over or rephrase.**

» **I may interrupt you from time to time, to ask for clarifications or to rephrase.**

» **Make sure to tell your interviewee to include the question or topic in their answer.**

e.g. "6 years" is not helpful," whereas "I've been working at Microsoft for 6 years" is informative.

» **Let's have fun with it! I'm excited to hear about your experiences in X.**



Interview Questions

We like to book a minimum of 45 minutes to do 22.33 interviews, but the time of the actual interview will vary. Sometimes you might be confident that after just 30 minutes you have all the material you need to tell a good story. Sometimes you might need an hour and many more questions to elicit enough information for a good story. Generally, the longer the interview, the longer the required editing time.

Introduction:

- » **What is your name?**
- » **Where are you from?**
- » **What do you do for work?**
- » **What program did you participate in?**
- » **Where did you travel for your exchange?**

We encourage 22.33 guests to give us this block of information in any way they would like.

Warm up questions:

You can throw away the answers – the point is to put the person at ease, to have fun.

- » **What's your favorite way to travel?**
- » **What would your 12-year-old self think of your work / life now?**
- » **Very important, what's your favorite animal and why?**



Setting the stage:

- » **What is your background?**
- » **How did you come to participate in the program?**
- » **Was there a turning point in your life that led to your decision to participate in an international exchange?**
- » **Why X place?**
- » **What expectations did you have before beginning the program/before traveling to X?**
- » **How did it feel to start the exchange? Tell me about your first impressions in the very beginning.**
- » **Talk about some early times when you remember deeply feeling like you were a foreigner?**
- » **Describe a time you were forced out of your comfort zone. How did it feel? What was the outcome?**
- » **What misconceptions did you have about the country you travelled to?**
- » **What misconceptions about your country were you eager to correct in the country you traveled to?**
- » **What did you learn about yourself as a (X nationality) while living in X?**

Transformation:

Always remember: The ultimate building block of all narrative is chronology: and then what happened? And then what happened? And then what happened? Keep chasing the story until you get it!



- » Briefly describe your exchange project?
 - » What was the most surprising part of the exchange?
 - » What was the most challenging?
 - » What was the most inspiring? Was there a lightbulb moment when you realized you saw the world differently?
 - » Can you think of a specific time when you felt like you had acclimated—even just a little bit—to your new culture? Describe what happened and how it felt.
 - » Describe one person from your exchange that really made an impact on you?
 - » Describe a time during the exchange when an assumption you had was proven wrong.
 - » How are you different now than at the beginning of your exchange? (You don't have to catch us up on all your life, but tell us how things have changed for you.)
- » Describe a time when you were the beneficiary of an extraordinary act of kindness.
 - » Describe a time on the exchange when you felt particularly proud.
 - » Describe a time when you said to yourself I wish my friends or family back home could see me now.
 - » Describe a time when you took a leadership role during your exchange—what was the impact of this?
 - » Can you describe a time when you felt proud to represent your country?
- Fun:**
- » If you were to turn on the radio today, what song would immediately take you back to your exchange?
Bonus points if you can get them to sing it.
 - » What was your craziest/scariest/most surreal food experience? Are there any foods you greatly miss?
 - » Describe the time that you laughed the hardest on your exchange?
 - » What is a new favorite word/phrase/name that you learned in language/culture of the country you lived in?
 - » What is your favorite purchase from your exchange and why?

Difficult Topics:

Sometimes, when you have established trust and rapport, interviewees are willing to talk about difficult things. We try and create a space that is safe and respectful, and will make a great effort to never put pressure on someone or to encourage them to discuss something they are not comfortable with. That said, sometimes a story's positive resolution is made much stronger by the degree of difficulties they encountered along the way. If your interviewee is willing to "go there," go with them and make sure their trust in you is reinforced.

» **Tell me about a time when:**

- *You clashed with people on your exchange (colleagues, home stay family, others).*
- *Was there ever a time when you questioned why you were there or what you were doing? Describe that time.*

Future:

- » **After this exchange, are you more or less optimistic about the future? What makes you optimistic for the future?**

Ending questions:

- » **Is there a single memory you'll hold onto from this exchange?**
- » **When you close your eyes and think about X, what do you see/ hear/ smell?**
- » **What is one thing you want people to know about your program / your country of exchange / one piece of advice to pass on?**
- » **Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't get a chance to?**

Thank you, thank you:

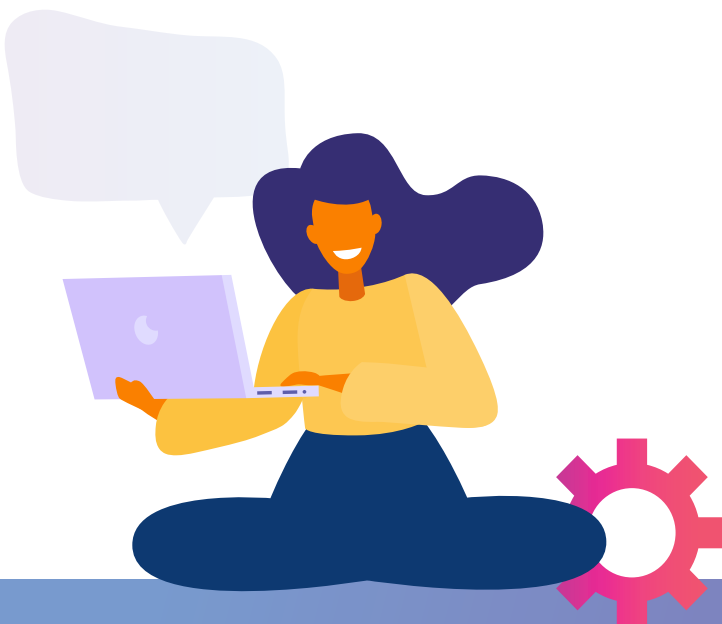
Wow they just gave up a lot of their time and trusted you with their story! Thank them a lot!

- » **Let them know that you will send them a copy to review once the episode is done, and you will send them a copy once it's out.**

part 3: after the interview:

It is amazing how deeply people can bond over the course of an hour-long interview. When the COVID crisis struck and 22.33 reached out to people we'd interviewed sometimes 18 months earlier, the amount of people who were happy to jump right back in and share more about their lives was astounding. Make sure after the interview to be gracious and communicative.

- » **Send a written thank you.**
- » **Send a link to the edited episode as soon as you have it, and try to be as open as possible about scheduling the episode.**



- » **Reach out again when the episode airs, sending the public link, graphics, and another big thank you.**

Remember, you are hoping your interviewee, after having a good experience, will help you to promote their episode.

- » **Stay in touch.**

In Conclusion: What's in This for Program Offices?

22.33 will continue to collect and produce “life-changing stories” from ECA exchanges. However, having program offices with the ability to elicit compelling stories from “their people,” will not only help maintain the high quality and diversity of the material we release, it will also be of great value to individual offices.

- » **Because program officers have more travel and/or interaction time with their participants, there are more opportunities to collect stories;**
- » **In the course of collecting participants' stories, program officers will invariably learn more about the actual program— other anecdotes, best practices, areas for improvement, etc., that might not surface in other evaluation settings;**
- » **As previously stated, these interviews bring people even closer, allowing program officers to establish even deeper relationships with their participants;**
- » **The stories that come out in this kind of interviews are memorable and profound, and will find their way into future briefing papers, press releases, public remarks, etc.**

