



Section 2

How to Create a Successful Commemorate Program

Suggested best practices and guidelines for implementing a customized and sustainable Commemorate program in your organization.



In this section

Case Studies 3

On Lok Lifeways
Aegis of Las Vegas

Strategies to Make It Work 5

Make It Easy: Start Small
Create a Fun, Welcoming Atmosphere
Ask Your Staff to Help

Ideas to Make It Last 8

Publicity
Partnerships
Continue the Conversation
Our Last Pieces of Advice

ON LOK LIFEWAYS

On Lok Lifeways is a network of centers serving diverse aging communities in the Bay Area. StoryCorps brought portable recording equipment to their 30th Street Senior Center for a day of recording. We collaborated with their recreation specialist, Nicholas Sager, to present some of the collected material in “Memories Are Made of This,” a public event exploring the connection between memory loss and music.



What worked

Even though On Lok is a relatively small network of agencies with few resources to spare, their planning and attention to detail turned one day of six interviews into a successful event with benefits lasting far beyond our partnership. Some of their strategies included:

- Inviting press to the recording day and following up later with reporters
- Informing the entire senior center staff that StoryCorps interviews were taking place
- Ensuring staff were on hand to assist participants and translate when necessary
- Hosting staff listening lunches after the recording day to acquaint staff with the project and the stories of their clients
- Bringing the experience to others in the Bay Area by participating in “Memories Are Made of This”

AEGIS OF LAS VEGAS

Aegis Living is a private, family-owned company that is a leader in the senior living industry with 35 communities in Washington, California, and Nevada. Aegis of Las Vegas provides dedicated and innovative care for those living with Alzheimer's or dementia. Through careful planning, Aegis was able to maximize the value of their one-day recording and guarantee a successful experience for every participant. By capitalizing on local resources, they were also able to work with other groups in Las Vegas, including their local public radio affiliate.

Aegis has publicly broadcast interview segments of their own residents, and have presented this reminiscence work to other agencies within the Aegis network.

What worked

- Aegis worked with Interviewers to help select objects from the Storyteller's life and bring them to the interview to help spark memories.
- The organization set up and staffed a welcome table to personally welcome all StoryCorps participants.
- Aegis worked with their local public radio affiliate, KNPR, to have some of their collected interviews edited and broadcast. The StoryCorps interviews lead to a second public radio broadcast to educate listeners about the impact of Alzheimer's disease on the family.
- The StoryCorps materials were then presented to other local senior services agencies as well as other Aegis communities in order to educate them about the StoryCorps interview experience.



1. MAKE IT EASY: START SMALL

Record one or two interviews to start.

Instead of planning a comprehensive program at the beginning, record one or two interviews to determine what will be successful in your organization. Become familiar with the entire process from start to finish so you can refine it based on organizational needs. Learn how to operate recording equipment, test different recording spaces, and train support staff to aid in the process.

Give yourself plenty of time.

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 excited and motivated. Those who might need more convincing can benefit from seeing the success of your first interviews.

Make adjustments and set achievable goals.

You can learn from these initial interviews whether you need to make any changes to the process in order to guarantee the best results. Try setting a goal of collecting a few interviews each month, then determine the schedule that works best for you.



2. 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.
- Make taking photographs fun—ask the participants to “ham it up” for the camera. Encourage residents to display their photos in their room.
- Engage participants in conversation after their interview. Ask them to retell a story to keep their memory fresh and reinforce their feeling of accomplishment.
- Provide participants with a CD copy of the interview and their photos. You can also give the participants a certificate commemorating their participation. Sample certificates are in Section 3.
- Invite local press to visit your organization. Your participants will feel like celebrities.
- Let staff and caregivers know that the Storyteller participated in an interview. They can ask them about it the next time they see each other.
- Consider making interview segments available for others to enjoy. Create an exhibit using photographs and quotes from interviews. Interviews can also serve as get-to-know-you activities for new clients, and can be a fun way to highlight birthdays and other occasions.
- Encourage older children and teenagers to interact with their loved ones through your program.



2. ASK YOUR STAFF TO HELP

Teamwork is essential to make collecting interviews a long-term success. Here are some suggestions of who you can bring into the project.

Staff

Staff can play integral roles in the interview collection process—ask them to help by securing private recording rooms, or making sure participants know where to go, or train them to operate the equipment during the recording session. Those who know your Storytellers well can serve as excellent Interviewers or Facilitators for the interviews.

Caregivers

Friends and family are likely the people most interested in helping preserve the memories of their loved ones living with memory loss. Caregivers can use the materials in this packet to prepare Storytellers for their interview, assist them throughout the process, serve as Interviewers or Facilitators, and help promote your project by encouraging potential Interviewers and Storytellers to participate. If your organization hosts a listening event to share the stories you collected, caregivers can discuss the value of the interview experience and how it enhanced their relationship with their loved ones.

Volunteers

Recruit volunteers to greet and welcome participants, serve as Interviewers or Facilitators, and help you edit and archive the interview material. If your organization 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
- local oral history projects
- other agencies serving the senior/memory loss community

GETTING STAFF INVOLVED



Hold a meeting to inform staff about StoryCorps. Play clips from the companion CD and distribute copies of this toolkit. The more they know, the more eager they'll be to help.

If you work at a skilled nursing or long-term care facility, talk to your rehabilitation team. Occupational and speech therapists may be able to incorporate Commemorate interviews into their treatment plans.

Consider using the interview process to honor direct care staff's relationship-building skills. Choose staff who have close relationships with clients to serve as interviewers, then highlight them in your newsletter or at a listening event for their commitment to personal, attentive care.



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

1. PUBLICITY

Publicizing Commemorate interviews as part of your organization's programming is an opportunity to showcase your commitment to individualized care and activities. Being featured in local press or a newsletter is a great way to make participants feel special and can heighten excitement about your program.

- Use our press release template in Section 3 to invite local press to visit during an interview session and speak with participants.
- Submit articles or op-ed pieces to a local newspaper in your community. Explain how and why you participated in StoryCorps, and if possible provide quotes and anecdotes from participants.
- Use photos from your recording days to enhance your marketing and communications tools, such as brochures and flyers. Write about the program in your organization's newsletter.
- Post photos, interview clips, and articles about the program on your organization's website or blog.



2. PARTNERSHIPS

Some of our greatest partnerships were a result of one community organization, such as an adult day center, collaborating with another interested group, such as a museum, school, or radio station. Joining forces allows you to take your project to the next level and introduce StoryCorps and your organization to entirely new audiences.

- High school programs regularly encourage students to interact with elders and learn personal versions of history. Consider working with a teacher in your community to create a regular activity between students and your clients.
- Local caregiver support organizations and memory loss advocacy groups would benefit greatly from hearing about your programs and listening to the stories you've recorded.
- Local history centers, public libraries, 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.
- One way to build relationships with other agencies is to share resources. Consider developing a joint program with other agencies in your area.





3. CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

We want your Commemorate program to introduce a culture of storytelling at your organization.

- Interviews can educate staff about the Storyteller. Those who have heard a recording can engage with the Storyteller on topics discussed in the interview. Talking about these memories with the Storyteller is a great way to keep him or her talking and remembering.
- Have a family night event and play segments of interviews for caregivers and loved ones.
- Use the interview to engage a group of your clients in reminiscing. Play a segment, talk about the content, and ask each client if he or she can share a similar experience.
- Replay the interview for the Storyteller and talk about it during a one-on-one activity. For the more advanced client, play segments of the interview for sensory stimulation. Hearing familiar voices is often calming.
- Incorporate interviews into your programming by playing segments associated with weekly or monthly themes. If the theme is international travel, you could interview one of your clients who spent some time in another country, or who immigrated to the United States. Then play a portion of the interview during an activity.
- Use interview segments during in-services and trainings on memory loss or dementia. Real stories are a great way to spark interaction in your audience and humanize clinical conditions.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR PROGRAM

The advice in this toolkit is based on StoryCorps' extensive experience recording interviews and partnering with memory loss organizations across the nation. We hope you will use the advice and program model illustrated in this toolkit to customize a project that fits the needs of your organization.

The most important thing is that these interviews happen, and that the participants and your organization see a tangible benefit from them.

SET GOALS

However you implement the program, start small and set goals for growth. Collect a few interviews each month to determine what rhythm works best for you.

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

We want to know if this toolkit was helpful and if your organization was able to make Commemorate a regular feature of your programming. Please get in touch with us!

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