



# GUESTBOOK PROJECT

EXCHANGE STORIES CHANGE HISTORY



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### Exchanging Stories - Changing History

Exchanging Stories-Changing History is an ongoing Guestbook project that invites youths from divided communities to meet, to exchange their stories of conflict, to digitally record the experience and to engage in a new, shared creative project.

The [Exchanging Stories-Changing History](#) initiative creates opportunities for young people from communities that have been polarized by boundaries and borders, by religious and cultural beliefs, war, acute poverty or injustice, to use digital filmmaking to record their stories and to imagine a different future. Working with peace organizations, community art groups, corporate partnerships, innovative schools and cultural workers we encourage the next generation to exchange stories in order to change history. Our goal is to transform hostility into hospitality by creating new stories.

### Exchanging Stories Youth Peace Prize

For young people who are living in divided communities the emotional damage can be unbearable if left unchecked, unspoken and unheard. Our communities have stories that unite us and stories that separate us from each other. Guestbook is establishing the [Exchanging Stories Youth Peace Prize](#) to encourage youths in divided communities to meet, to exchange their stories and to develop creative responses to societal conflict through digital filmmaking. Current available Peace Prize funds are \$1000, and winning films will be screened in Boston.

In 2015 we are inviting peace educators and partnership organizations including Global Unites (Uganda, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Columbia, etc.), Fireflies Peace Council (Bangalore), School in a Box (Mozambique), Balkans Center for the Study of War and Peace (Zagreb) , IADT and NerveCentre (Ireland), Sarit Larry (Jerusalem), Stepping Stones (Boston) , Center for Digital Storytelling (CA), South Asian Jesuit Mission (Vietnam) to submit sample videos to Guestbook's Exchanging Stories-Changing History Project. These videos will be judged by a small independent panel of experts and will be specially recognized for their contributions. Our aim in 2015 is to create an online collection of Exchanging Stories-Changing History videos which will serve as models of creative peacebuilding for youths in divided communities all over the world. We hope to make a global call for video submissions to the Exchanging Stories Youth Peace Prize in 2016.

The ultimate goal is to empower and inspire a new generation of creative peacebuilders to transform conflict through empathic imagination and the use of digital media.

# Best Practices and FAQ

## Who Can Apply?

In 2015 we are soliciting videos from established peace organizations and partnerships to work with [any two young people who are living in a divided community](#) or experiencing a conflict that they are willing to share and transform.

We are looking for videos which [record youths exchanging stories](#) that are in conflict, and who are committed to creating a new story.

Our target age group is between 12 and 30 years old. Youths should conceive of the major content of the videos themselves. The material participation of young people is an important defining criteria of the Exchanging Stories-Changing History Project. That said, we expect that in many cases adults will and should be involved in facilitating roles. In certain cases Guestbook will be able to provide technical or editing assistance if requested by the partnership organizations.

## What Should the Story Be About?

We are looking for [stories by and about young people](#) who are willing to take a step towards peace or reconciliation by seeking out an exchange of stories across a divide.

They can be stories about different versions of histories, borders and boundaries, religious beliefs, cultures and traditions. But they can also be more general stories about youths of different races, different genders, different classes, different sexual orientation, different abilities or disabilities, where those stories have been in conflict in communities.

We are looking for stories about people who share their side of the story and are willing to hear the other side – and above all invent a new story together.

We are looking for short video projects that record what it is like to hear the other side and, where possible, to reimagine a third story by combining and transforming both sides into something new.

There is no one or right way to make an Exchanging Stories-Changing History video or to create something new. A new story might be an alternative history, movement or dance, slam poetry, spoken word, peace performance, a new song or dramatic narrative, a creation of visual art work or even the documentation of a public event that is an innovative experiment in building bridges between the two versions of the stories.

We encourage creativity, experimentation and digital filmmaking of all styles and genres. See [guestbookproject.org/youth-peace-prize](http://guestbookproject.org/youth-peace-prize) for sample videos.



# Steps for Getting Started on Your Guestbook Exchanging Stories - Changing History Digital Filmmaking Project

## 1. Identify a Story

The first step is to identify a story that has divided your community, in the past or present. Your story can be about a specific incident, it may have happened to you or to one of the participants in the film, it may have happened to a friend or family member, or you may choose to describe an event, myth, history or belief system which has defined your broader community, but separates it from another.

Take time to think about what you want to say. How does the event or situation make you feel or affect your life? How has it shaped your values or those of your community?

## 2. Find the Other Story.

The next step is to find another story, to find a partner willing to talk about different versions of this story of your or their community, and work with you to create this film story. This can be anyone from your neighborhood, school network, geographic area, who represents "the other side" and has another point of view.

## 3. Plan your film.

You will need access to a camera, recording equipment, and editing software. At its most basic this can be a Smart phone and basic/free computer editing software. It may be that you approach a student filmmaker, a friend, educator or community activist with access to digital film technology, somebody you trust and who enjoys the creative process of shooting and editing movies. In certain cases Guestbook will be able to provide technical or editing assistance if requested by the partnership organizations.

Arrange a time and good place to meet, (see ideas for the best way to plan your initial session below), and share stories. You may or may not want to record the first session. After you have a sense of what you each want to talk about, make an outline plan for your film project. How will you tell a succinct version of each of your stories? Will the participants interview each other? Or develop a script together.



## What might this new story (video) possibly look like?

Be as creative as you dare. There is no one or right way to make a film. It could be an alternative history, an on camera performance as theater, movement or dance, slam poetry, spoken word, a new song or narrative drama, an integration of new visual art work or even the documentation of a public event that is an innovative experiment in building bridges between the two versions of the stories.

### 4) The Recording and Production Sessions)

Find the right place for recording your interviews/stories, safe, quiet and comfortable for both of you. Make sure to check that your equipment is working, and you are well lit (check out our video resources and tips & tricks at [guestbookproject.org/video-resources](http://guestbookproject.org/video-resources)). Go out and capture your visual material. Then shoot your exchange.

### 5. Edit your project.

You can use whatever software to edit you like, we provide suggestions below. Just remember to have the settings for HD format (it is usually the default).

### 6. Submit your video to Guestbook. Here are the Guidelines:

- a. Videos should have running times between 3 and 15 minutes.
- b. Videos should have a title and credits naming the participants.
- c. Videos should be in HD format accepted in one of three submission contexts;
  - i. Link to Dropbox download
  - ii. Private or Public Link to Vimeo hosted video with download capability.  
Creating and using a Vimeo account is free and information on how to compress, upload, and share your videos are available [vimeo.com/help/faq/uploading-to-vimeo](http://vimeo.com/help/faq/uploading-to-vimeo)
  - iii. Dvd (see e below)



## Submit your video to Guestbook (Continued)

d. To submit your video, please send an email to [info@guestbookproject.org](mailto:info@guestbookproject.org) with the subject "Exchanging Stories Submission" the following information:

- i. Title of your Video
- ii. Duration
- iii. Vimeo Link URL
- iv. Password
- v. Names of Participants
- vi. Primary Contact Email

e. If you cannot provide the HD video file, a Send a DVD to Guestbook Project, Address:  
*Please Note: Submission should include DVD region number and format (PAL/NTSC)*

Guestbook Project  
c/o Sheila Gallagher, Co-director  
31 Oakview Terrace, Jamaica Plain, MA USA 02130

## Making A Story About Conflict and Differences- Some Things to Think About

If the idea of talking with someone that has a very different view of history, or the conflicts that have existed in your neighborhood, local community, country, is new to you and your partner, you might want to consider these ideas for ways to make your conversation/collaboration succeed. These ideas come from people who have worked with participants across different perspectives, and may be helpful.

### Respect and Caring

Listening to someone who thinks differently from you is hard for anyone. You may find yourself wanting to react, to try and win an argument. But sharing stories is not really about opinion, about winning an argument, its about trying to understand a different view of the world. Opinions build walls, but stories build bridges. Try and find a way to just consider what they are saying with as much compassion as you can, can you imagine if their story was your story? Treat each of your stories with respect, don't cut someone off, don't interrupt. Let them finish their story, and then you share yours.



## Neutral Places

Find a place to exchange stories where you both feel safe and comfortable. It is important to secure the safety and privacy of everyone participating. When in question, ask the advice of an adult who is trusted by both sides.

## Be Honest

Tell your own story in a creative, open and engaging manner. What are the most important details? Which can be left out? It is important to be honest and not hide the pain and sadness that is inside your story. If counseling support is available, it might be useful to have someone experienced in supporting people around issues of social or personal trauma as part of your process.

## Equality

Allow equal time and space for each partner in the dialogue. Not everyone is a big talker, some people find it natural to talk about their experience, for others it can be hard. Find a way to give equal time in the process to both persons, and make sure both versions of your stories are roughly equivalent in the finished video.

## Keep It Simple

Great stories don't need to be that fancy in terms of design and production. Sometimes having someone just speak their heart straight to a camera can be powerful and effective. Feel free to work with simple, personal camera phones and use low cost or free editing software. If you have access to better cameras, sound, lights, and other production equipment and supplies, through your school, college, non-profit/NGOs, or peace groups, then use it!

## Language

We can take stories in any language, but they will need to be subtitled in English. If you can use English, that would be great. There may be some limited opportunities for assisting with subtitling.

## Research

Feel free to use other interviews, particularly if some older people can provide additional context. But remember, the main format for the videos is an exchange of stories between two young people, and the more you shoot, the more work it is to edit. Leave yourself time for researching and identifying additional visual or sound materials (photos, recordings of songs, maps, etc.)



## Public versus Private

Be sensitive to the private and public character of the story/stories you are recounting. Does everyone involved feel comfortable with all of the parts of the way the story is told. Make sure people give written permission to use their quotes, images, material, etc. For people in immediate conflict zones, or where these issues remain hotly and at times violently contested, be especially aware of what and how the stories can be told. Again, rely on experienced journalists, NGO/non-profits, facilitators, and social workers if you believe you need feedback on the process.

## Be Creative and Bold

Your new "story" should be surprising, original and innovative. You are using your video to create something new, to make a space for peace and dialogue that may never have existed. You are inventing your own future, and the future of your community. So have fun, experiment, play, and don't be afraid to fail.

For Tips and Tricks on making videos, please check out our resources page ([guestbookproject.org/video-resources](http://guestbookproject.org/video-resources)). If you are unable to use Vimeo, please contact the Guestbook Project at [info@guestbookproject.org](mailto:info@guestbookproject.org) and we will work with you to find an alternative submission process.

