

## GUIDELINES FOR ARRANGING A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR SPEAKER

Holocaust survivors are people, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945. In addition to former inmates of concentration camps, ghettos, and prisons, this definition includes, among others, people who were refugees or were in hiding.

A program with a Holocaust survivor can provide an opportunity to learn more about the nature of the Holocaust in Europe and possibly more about Americans' responses to the refugee crisis. Some survivors sought to leave their homes in search of refuge during the 1930s and 1940s while others did not have this opportunity based on the timing and where they lived as the war expanded throughout Europe and the Soviet Union. Audiences hearing a Holocaust survivor can learn first hand about the persecution and threat posed by the Nazis and their collaborators and the challenges individuals and communities faced in response.

Finding a Holocaust survivor who is willing to give a presentation about their experiences may be difficult given the advanced age of this group. Holocaust survivors may be contacted through an organization in your community or region. Please consult the Association of Holocaust Organizations [here](#) to find out if there is a local organization that helps arrange survivor speakers. Once you have identified an individual who will serve as a guest speaker, you will need to consult directly with that organization as to any associated costs.

If you are working with another organization or are in direct communication with a Holocaust survivor please send a confirmation letter in advance of your program, reiterating clearly the information listed below and encouraging the speaker to contact your program coordinator with any questions.

### WHEN REQUESTING A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR TO SPEAK YOU WILL NEED TO PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Name of library where program will be held
- Date, time, and purpose of program
- Audience profile (age, size, topics of interest)
- Location of program, address
- Name, phone number, and e-mail address of the program coordinator in library

### CHOOSING A PROGRAM FORMAT

Please discuss this program format with the speaker in advance to ensure his or her comfort. If the speaker is an experienced speaker, he or she may wish to have a powerpoint.

#### 1) Lecture

A stand-alone (or more likely seated) lecture is one format, with the individual speaking about his or her experience for 40–45 minutes followed by a 15–20 minute question-and-answer period with the audience.

#### 2) Interview

In this format, the interviewer asks the individual questions and they should be relevant to the exhibit's content if possible. There may be experienced interviewers in some communities who could serve as moderators, including

local radio and television personalities as well as oral history experts from museums and universities. Suggestions for sample questions are listed at the end of this guide.

## CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HOSTING A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR GUEST SPEAKER:

### 1) Showing Sensitivity in Dealing with a Difficult Topic

Please remember that the guest speaker may not have English as their primary language and sharing private and often traumatic memories in a public setting may be difficult; many find they are able to share their history only once in-a-day--or not even that often. Your sensitivity to this is critical to planning a successful program. Even second generation family members may find these difficult topics to recollect for a public audience.

### 2) Planning for the Visit

Please arrange for the guest speaker to stay overnight if the trip involves air travel or a car ride of more than two hours each way. Identify a local “point person”—someone affiliated with your organization who will address the needs of the speaker during his or her stay. Please arrange for all transportation throughout the trip, including travel to and from the program, to meals, and for other occasions that may arise. Be aware of the speaker’s dietary needs if food is offered.

### 3) Preparing the Venue

Please have a glass of water accessible to the speaker during his or her presentation. Ensure that lighting is not directly in the speaker’s eyes. Keep house lights on if the program takes place in a theater or auditorium; speaker’s often like to make eye contact with the audience. Provide a chair for the speaker, even if he or she intends to stand at times while speaking. Use microphones in larger venues; please discuss this with the speaker in advance so he or she is comfortable with the equipment (chair and microphone, podium microphone, hand-held, lavalier, etc.). Find out if the speaker intends to invite guests and reserve seating for them.

### 4) Managing the Audience

Please ask the audience to turn off all cell phones before the speaker begins. Ask the speaker’s permission in advance before videotaping his or her presentation. Some speakers prefer not to be recorded. Photography is allowed after the presentation only if the speaker has previously agreed. Have the audience refrain from eating or drinking during the presentation.

### 5) Introducing the Speaker

Explain why your organization has invited the individual to speak. Many speakers have prepared introductions that they will share with you. Talk with the speaker ahead of time to see how he or she would like to be introduced. Keep the introduction short—no more than three minutes. Do not tell the speaker’s history for him or her; provide only a general outline. Sometimes speakers have a photograph of themselves before the war or images of their family and hometown that they want to show. If the speaker has visual materials relating to his or her story, it may be incorporated into the introduction or used in the presentation. Please determine the speaker’s preference. Announce the length of the program and encourage audience members to stay for its completion, both to demonstrate respect for the speaker and to minimize disruptions

## 6) Conducting a Question-and-Answer Session

Encourage your audience to come prepared to ask questions. Always allow for ample time for the audience to ask questions; most speakers enjoy engaging with their audience and the audience is often curious to learn more. It is recommended that you appoint a moderator for the question-and-answer session to prevent or curtail inappropriate discussion of political or other topics that may make the speaker uncomfortable. After a member of the audience asks a question, your moderator should repeat the question to ensure that both the speaker and the audience have heard it. You may also wish to have the audience write questions on notecards for the moderator to collect and review. This often minimizes the number of “speeches-as-questions” or questions that may have been too painful or uncomfortable for the speaker.

## 7) Following up on the Program

Thank the speaker for coming by sending a formal letter of appreciation. Speakers appreciate receiving notes from members of the audience. Do not give out the speaker’s contact information to the audience, but offer to pass on messages sent to the library. You may want to present him or her with a small gift to commemorate the experience.

### SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

The speaker may or may not have seen the exhibit *Americans and the Holocaust* but it is highly recommended that they experience the exhibit prior to the program. The following questions may be more relevant to them and the program audience if both have viewed the exhibit. It may also be helpful to consult the Library of Congress Veterans History website which gives recommendations on how to prepare for and conduct oral interviews of speakers [here](#).

### *Americans and the Holocaust* General Questions for Holocaust Survivors

- Tell us about your memories of your family and community before the war?
- Did you or your family experience acts of persecution in your community?
- Did your family seek to move away from your community or seek to immigrate?
- If you or your family sought to immigrate, what do you remember was involved in that process? Did your family stay together at this time?
- Did an individual or an organization assist you or your family to immigrate to the United States?
- How did you get information about the war and what was happening to Jews in Europe?
- Were you separated from your family?
- Where did you live during the war? Did you experience life in a ghetto or concentration camp?
- What helped you survive the war and the Holocaust?
- What was your life like in the years immediately following the war? Did you live in a Displaced Persons Camp or have family members who did?
- How did you adjust to life in the United States once you immigrated? Did any person or organization help you once you arrived?