

GUIDELINES FOR ARRANGING A WORLD WAR II VETERAN SPEAKER

Eyewitnesses to the events covered in *Americans and the Holocaust* often have compelling stories that can be presented in a program. Audiences learn about the individual sacrifices made by our armed forces during WWII. They may better understand the impact of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Nazi threat to the United States and what people did in response. Finding a World War II veteran speaker who is willing to give a presentation about their military experiences may be difficult given the advanced age of this group.

Veterans may be contacted through an organization in your community or region. Consult with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to find out if there is a local VFW organization that helps to connect local World War II veteran speakers who may be willing to speak about their experiences [here](#). The listing of 2019 Military and Service Organizations put out by the Department of Veteran's Affairs is [here](#) and lists state organizations. 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 World War II veteran 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 WORLD WAR II VETERAN 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 WORLD WAR II VETERAN GUEST SPEAKER:

1) Showing Sensitivity in Dealing with a Difficult Topic

Please remember that the guest speaker may be elderly 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.

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 Questions for World War II Veterans:

- Did you choose to enlist, or were you drafted?
- How did you feel about joining the military?
- What did you believe you were fighting for?
- Where were you stationed during the war?
- Did you encounter victims of the Holocaust in your service?
- Where were you at the end of the war?
- Did you liberate or visit a newly-liberated concentration camp?
- What was your role as part of the US military after the war ended?
- Do you remember how you felt when you saw images of concentration camps? Did it change how you thought about the war or your service?

Americans and the Holocaust General Questions for speakers who lived during 1933-1945:

- Before or during the war do you remember anything reported in the newspapers about Hitler and Nazi Germany? How did it make you feel?
- What do you remember prior to 1941 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Do you remember how you learned that war had begun in Europe, and how you felt about it?
- Did people in your community seem fearful or concerned about German spies in the United States?
- How did you learn about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor? How did you and your family feel?
- Many ordinary Americans made sacrifices during the war on the homefront. Do you remember any sacrifices that your family made to support the war effort?
- When did you first learn about the Holocaust? Did you remember hearing about the persecution of Jews before this?