ECHO

How to Preserve & Share Your Town's History

How to Preserve & Share Your Town's History!

Echo Needham

In this tutorial, we will share our journey on how we took an idea and generated over 25,000 views across various social media platforms, and how we published our own eBook.

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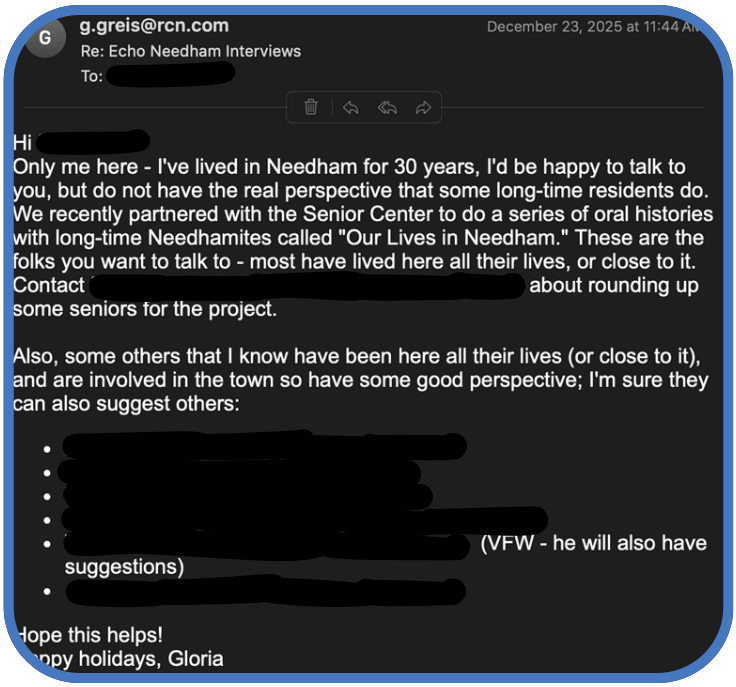
Reaching Out

The first and most important step in pursuing this kind of preservation is to research and contact senior centers in your community. Without this, you will not be able to collect interviews effectively.

To do this, it is advisable to create an email template you can tweak for a specific situation. Trust us, doing this will make your lives much easier. Once you have this, you must research senior centers and how to contact them. In our experience, showing you did more than just a Google search by mentioning specific information about a particular center was more likely to get a response.

And don't worry! Not everyone is going to say yes. Rejection is natural. Even in our rejections, we were referred to different people or centers that were more likely to respond positively.



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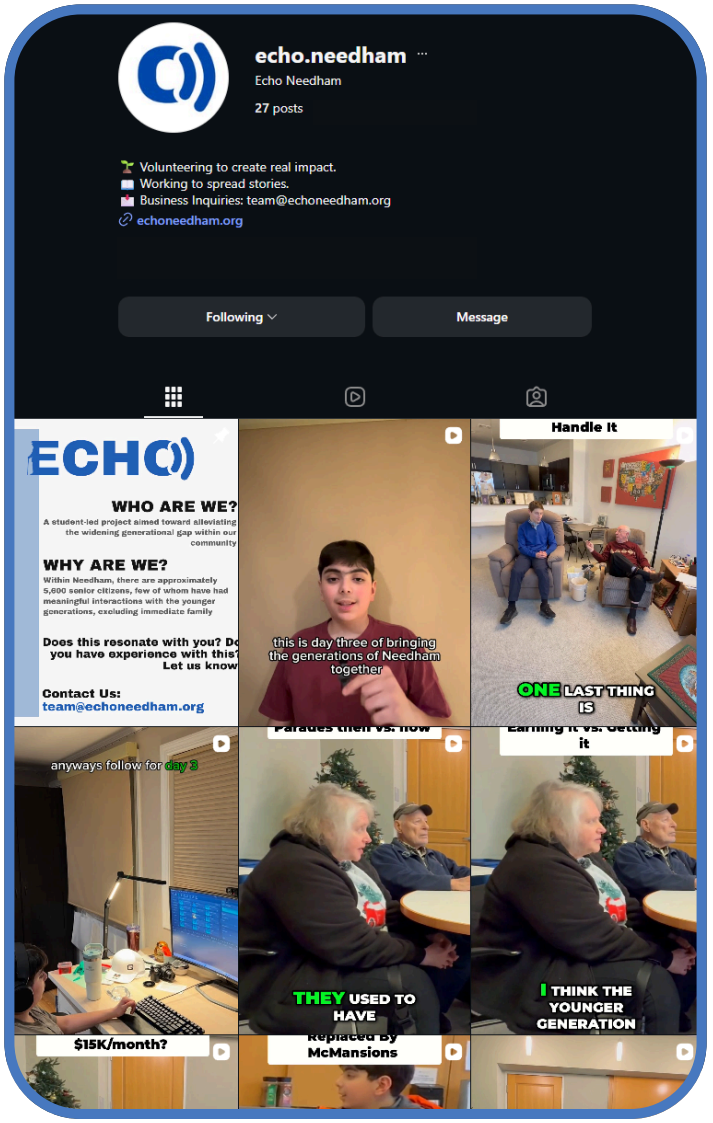
Social Media Presence

Having an active and healthy social media presence is crucial. It is likely your main way to spread knowledge about your project to others.

Our suggestion is to find the most important snippets from long-form interviews to post as short-form content, along with occasional comedic/algorithm-based content. These two types are both important, but for different reasons: the former lets you share the most important parts of your interviews with a wider audience, and the latter helps get your accounts known and recommended.

We highly recommend having at least a YouTube and an Instagram account, but whatever else you want to do is up to you. **Make sure** you can commit to being active on all platforms before branching out. Apart from these two main ones, we also recommend a LinkedIn account for professional connections.



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Interview Questions

While it is good to have some scripted questions for interviews, feel free to go far off script if you can. This will make the interview more natural, and will help make the interviewee feel more valued than if you were reading off a paper.

Our baseline questions are shown right. Feel free to use them for yourselves, but please tweak them to make sense for your community. Asking questions unrelated to your community will feel dishonest and careless.

Additionally, allow time for an 'awkward' pause between the time that the interviewee finished speaking before you start your questions. This pause will incentivize the interviewee to elaborate further, giving you information you would not have otherwise.

1. Can you describe what the town of Needham was like when you were growing up, or when you first moved here? What buildings, businesses, or landmarks are gone now that you remember clearly? Do any of these places have special meaning to you?
2. During a time of major challenge or crisis in the past, like the 1980s recession or a notable natural disaster, how did the people of Needham come together (or perhaps not come together)? What is your opinion on this response (i.e, was it satisfactory or could it have been done better, and if so, how)?
3. Tell me about a time in your life when you faced a major decision or a significant turning point, maybe about career, education, or family. What made that choice so difficult, and what eventually helped you decide?
4. As you moved through your adult life, did your definition of 'success' change? If so, how?
5. Who has been the most influential person in your life, like a mentor, a family member, or a friend? What specific lesson or gift did they give you?
6. Technology has changed so much. Could you share a memory about the first significant piece of technology you remember using, like the first computer or a new appliance? How do you think technology has changed how we connect with others?
    a. Do you think modern shifts in technology cause similar shifts in society as before?
7. From your perspective, what do you think young people today often misunderstand about your generation? And conversely, what do you think your generation might misunderstand about today's youth?
8. How has Needham changed over the years? Were there more trees, open fields, or smaller houses? More apartment complexes?
9. What were the major annual events or traditions that the whole town looked forward to? (e.g., parades, fairs, town meeting attendance, school sports rivalries)
10. How would you describe the feeling of the community back then? Did people know their neighbors more/less than they do now?
11. Have you seen an increase or a decrease in family-owned businesses in Needham? Do you think that is for the better or for worse?
12. What kind of person/family typically moved to Needham 20-30 years ago? Has that changed?

Handling Interviews

In our experience, the best way to start an interview is to get to know the interviewee personally. This is for several reasons: first, it helps you understand which questions pertain to a specific person and which do not; and second, it makes the interviewee more comfortable, increasing the likelihood that they will open up to you as they would to a friend.

While true awkward pauses are bound to happen, there are many ways to go about dealing with them. First, you can simply wait to see if the interviewee has more to say and carry on from there. Second, you can ask a follow-up question if one interests you. And third, you can simply move on to the next question.

In our efforts, we found that interviews sometimes ran too fast, with interviewees giving shorter answers and not elaborating as much. The easiest way to fix this problem is to ask one or more follow-up questions about the interviewee's answer to help them open up fully. This almost always works and generally prompts the interviewee to elaborate more.

Lastly, a good way to end an interview is to ask the interviewee a more general question, such as "What advice do you have for the younger generation?" or similar. It is also good to try to guide your earlier questions toward your final one, as it will make it easier for the interviewee to give an interesting answer to such a question.

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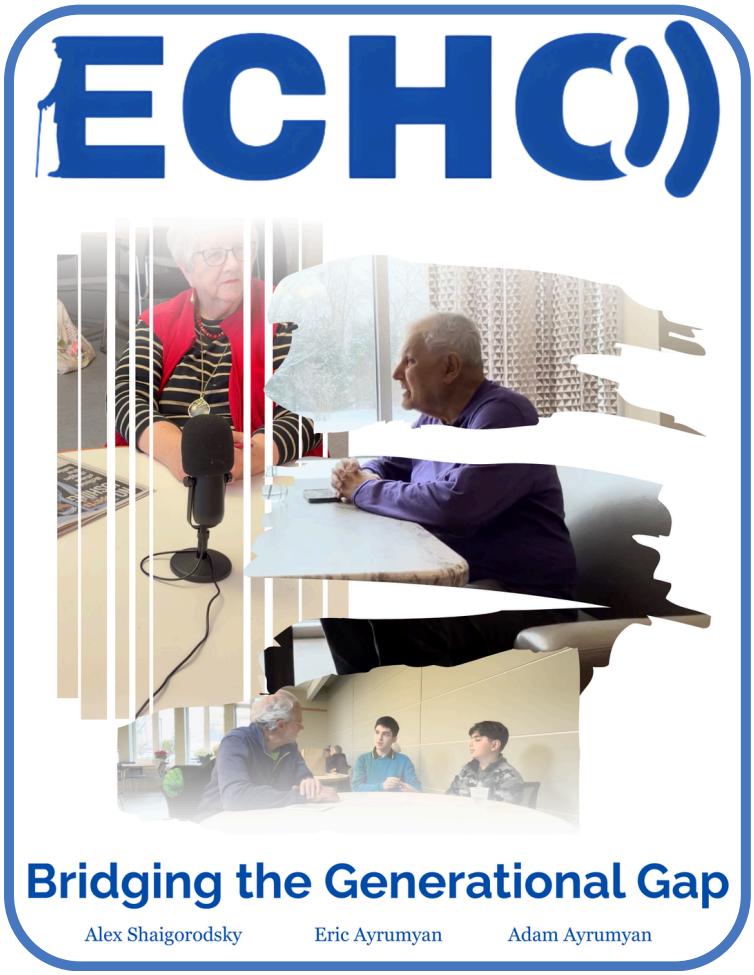
Publishing an eBook

This will be the most time-consuming and possibly also most difficult part of your project. But don't worry! If you can begin the eBook as early as possible and keep it up to date with new interviews, you should complete it in a similar timeframe to your interviews.

There are many ways to structure your eBook. You could do something similar to what we did: split the eBook into sections by theme and include quotes for specific **lessons** we learned, along with a brief paragraph for each quotation explaining it in context. You could also simply list out **transcripts** of your interviews. However, we believe that the latter, while easier to produce, will make the eBook harder for readers to understand.

Lastly, while it is not necessary, having a few extra pages with a map of your community, acknowledgements, etc. can help the reader understand the eBook and your project.

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