

ILLINOIS VOICES 250



*Your voice is part
of our national story*



Created by  Illinois Humanities in partnership with



You're invited.

As the United States of America marks its 250th birthday, your story matters.

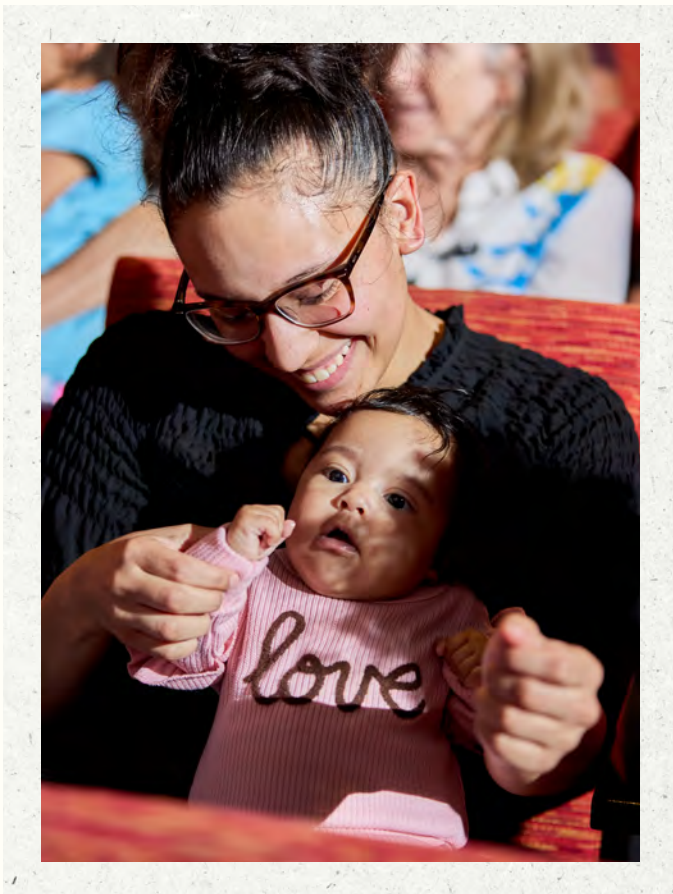
Illinois Voices 250 is an invitation to share and record your thoughts about this milestone anniversary.

Whether your perspective is personal, historical, critical, hopeful, or uncertain, your voice matters. What does the 250th Anniversary of the United States mean to you?

Your story will be saved along with recordings from people living throughout all 102 counties in Illinois.

In this Conversation Guide, you'll find tips on how to record your story and some suggested questions to help you dig into this moment in history.

Here are a few reasons to be part of Illinois Voices 250.



Spend time with someone you care about.

Take time to talk about the things that matter most with someone important to you.

Make the most of this moment.

Use this milestone anniversary to reflect on the past, think about the future, and share what YOU think is important about where we are, where we've been and where we can go as a country.

Build understanding.

Your recording will help other people better understand the wide variety of experiences and ideas in our community.

Do it for future generations.



How does it work?

1. Decide who you want to record a conversation with. (Most stories are recorded as conversations between two people).
2. Visit ILHumanities.org/ILVoices250
3. Pick some questions for your conversation from the conversation guide (p. 9)
4. Record your conversation. (It's free to participate.)
5. Once you record your conversation you can decide whether you want to share it with the public.
6. **BONUS:** share a photo on social media!

What is Illinois Voices 250?

Illinois Humanities is partnering with the Illinois America 250 Commission and StoryCorps Studios to create **Illinois Voices 250**, a statewide time capsule of conversations with people in all 102 Illinois counties, in honor of the country's 250th anniversary.

This project celebrates and preserves the voices of everyday Illinoisans: who we are, what we care about, and who we hope to become. By documenting diverse stories, reflections, and memories from people across the state, Illinois Voices 250 will create a lasting record of this moment in our history.

These conversations will be made available in 2026 and archived in a special collection at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress for future generations.



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How to Participate

It's easy! *Anyone can contribute to Illinois Voices 250.* You don't have to be a professional speaker or have any previous experience.

Step 1

Pick a conversation partner.

A friend, a family member, someone you work with or live with, a teacher, a mentor, etc.

Step 2

Get ready to record.

Go to ILHumanities.org/ILVoices250 and follow the instructions to log on to our digital recording portal (similar to Zoom).

Step 3

Record your conversation.

You can use the suggested questions at the end of this guide or come up with questions of your own. You can also record in any language.

Step 4

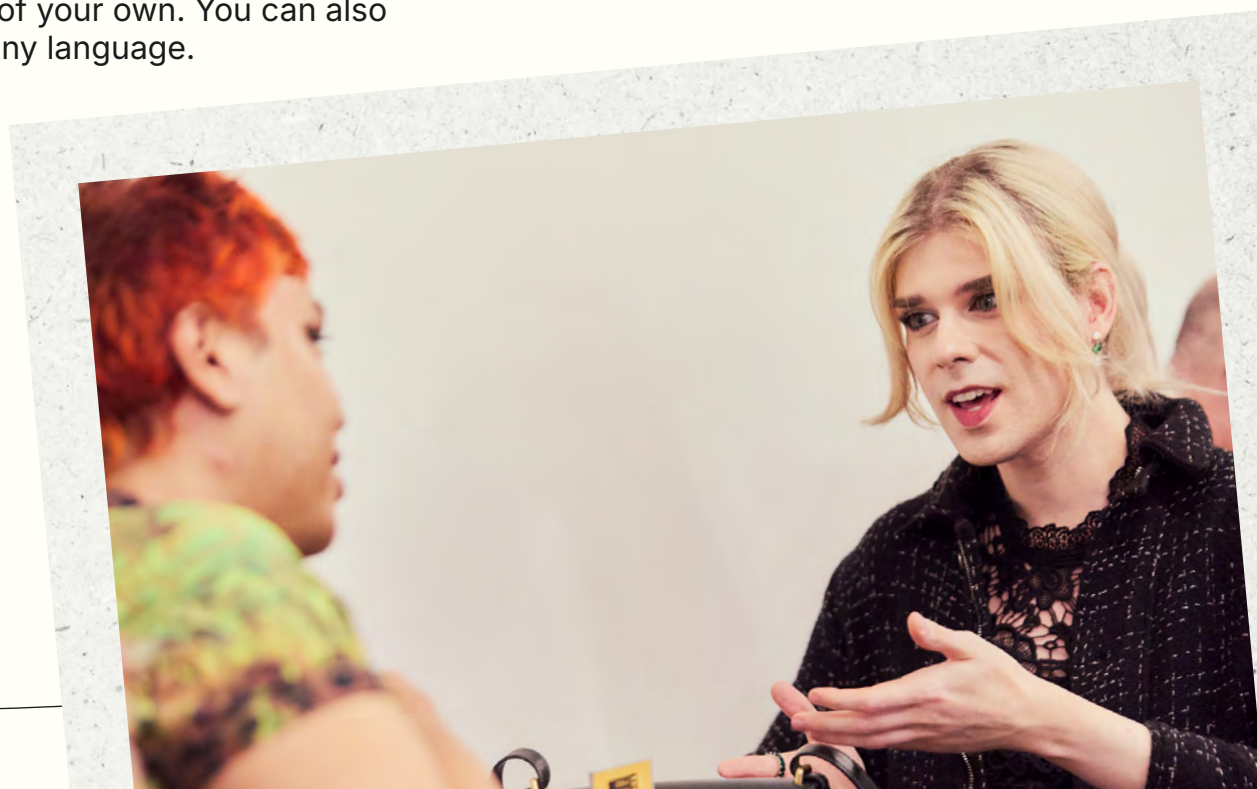
Save your recording.

When you're finished recording, follow the prompts to save and archive your conversation so it can be included in the State of Illinois collection.

Step 5

Give permission to share your recording.

You will receive a copy of your recording and with your permission, StoryCorps will archive it as part of the special Illinois collection and at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.





Your privacy

You will always have the opportunity to choose how much of your story you share and with whom.

You are welcome to record anonymously or use a made up name.

When you are finished saving your recording you will be able to select your privacy settings.

There are three options when choosing who to share your interview with:

1. "Everyone": Your interview and related information will be available online to anyone on the web.
2. "StoryCorps Community": Your interview and related information will be available online to anyone with a StoryCorps Archive account.
3. "Private": Your interview and related information will be private and only accessible online by you.

If you change your mind at any time, you can always go to the archive and change your privacy settings.



Archiving Your Conversation

If you would like your conversation to be part of the historical record, it is important that you follow the prompts for archiving your conversation.

You'll be asked for your name, location, and to add some keywords (like hashtags) that describe the conversation.

Example keywords include:

family history, neighborhood, small business, liberty, community, 4th of July, grandparent, immigration, farming...

You are welcome to record anonymously or use made up names. The more information you add, the easier it will be for future generations to find and learn from your recording.



How to have a great conversation

1. *Plan Some Questions Before you Record Anything*

You can use the questions suggested in this guide or write your own, and share them ahead of time with your partner. This will help you get the most out of your time together.

2. *Ask Warm-Up Questions*

Press the record button and follow the prompts to introduce yourself and your partner. Then ask a few warm-up questions, like "tell me about what you were like as a kid" or "what is your first memory of me?"

3. *Ask Open-Ended Questions*

Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no." Instead, use language like "Tell me about..." or "What was it like when..." This lets the storyteller steer you toward what is most important to them.

4. *Ask Follow-Up Questions*

Be prepared to ask follow-ups or diverge from your question list if you're curious about something. If you'd like to hear more, try "And then what happened?" or "How did that make you feel?" or "What were you thinking in that moment?"

5. *Think Of It As a Conversation*

Use your selected questions as a guide, not a script. If your partner goes off topic, go with it. Think of it as a conversation; there's no right or wrong thing to talk about, as long as it's meaningful to you.

6. *Tell a Story*

Don't hesitate to tell a story about your partner, and to bring up your favorite shared memories. This can be a time to tell your partner how much they mean to you, and why you want to record with them today.

7. *Keep Future Listeners In Mind*

Keep in mind that future listeners may not be familiar with the specific people and places that come up in your conversation. Ask for additional details with questions like "Who was Uncle Steve?" and "Why was he such an influence on you?"

8. *Encourage Vivid Details*

Questions that encourage vivid details can make the story special. Invoke the senses by asking your partner to remember these details. For example: "What did your kitchen smell like when you were growing up?" or "What images stand out when you think about Abuela?"



9. *Plan Some Reflective Questions*

Keep an eye on the timer so that you are aware of when there are 10 and 5 minutes left. End your interview with one or two closing questions, such as “What legacy would you like to leave?” or “What advice would you give me about being a parent?”

10. *Relax and Be Yourself*

Enjoy the opportunity to share stories and reflections with your interview partner. Be yourself, be curious, and let the conversation flow.

Suggested Questions

Ask any of the following questions – or make up your own! – then activate your listening skills and follow your curiosity.

1. Can you tell me about where you grew up?
2. What does it mean to be “from” Illinois?
3. Tell me about a time when you felt a sense of belonging in your community.
4. Tell me what you know about your ancestors. What would you want to say to them?
5. What do you want future generations to know about this moment in American history?
6. What does the pursuit of happiness mean to you? What do you think it meant to the people who came before you?



***BONUS:* Share A Photo on Social Media**

Share your conversation on social media! Don't forget to tag Illinois Humanities [@ilhumanities](#) and StoryCorps Studios [@storycorps](#).

[#ILVoices250](#) [#IL250](#) [#MyVoice250](#)

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, run into any issues, or are interested in partnering with Illinois Voices 250, we'd love to hear from you. Please email ILVoices250@ilhumanities.org.

THANK YOU!

We're grateful for your participation in Illinois Voices 250. Every conversation adds to the collective story of Illinois, capturing voices and perspectives that deserve to be heard. Thank you for helping document this moment in our state and country's history.

This initiative is created in partnership with StoryCorps Studios, a national nonprofit dedicated to recording and preserving the conversations between everyday people.



About Illinois Humanities

Illinois Humanities is a statewide nonprofit organization that activates the humanities through free public programs, grants, and educational opportunities that spark conversation, foster reflection, build community, and strengthen civic engagement for everyone in Illinois. We envision an Illinois where the public humanities are central to making the state more just, creative, and connected. www.ilhumanities.org

About the Illinois America 250 Commission

Illinois America 250 is an inclusive, statewide effort that uplifts local stories, places and programs, builds pride and showcases how Illinoisians bring the ideals of Declaration of Independence to life. Visit www.il250.org to learn more.

About StoryCorps

StoryCorps is committed to the idea that everyone has an important story to tell and that everyone's story matters. Our mission: to help us believe in each other by illuminating the humanity and possibility in us all — one story at a time. Since our founding in 2003, we've helped over 700,000 people across the country have meaningful conversations about their lives. These recordings are collected in the U.S. Library of Congress and in our online archive which is now the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered.

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit, sharing select stories with the public through weekly broadcasts, our podcast, animated shorts, digital platforms, and best-selling books. For more information about StoryCorps, visit storycorps.org/about.

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Illinois Humanities



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