

## I. Tips for Pitching Media

### **Sending the Pitch**

The most effective pitches are individually tailored to each person on your contact list. Pitches should be first sent to the individual via email. The pitch note should be included in the body of your email (no attachments). The email should be addressed directly to the individual.

- **Timing:** Send out the pitch in the morning, when people are more likely to be checking email.

### **Following Up**

If you are pitching your story to someone you do not have an established relationship with, it is appropriate to follow up with a phone call or a second very short email a day or two after sending the pitch note.

### **Phone pitch tips:**

1. Always ask the individual if this is a good time to talk first.
2. Tell them that you are following up to the previous email you sent.
3. Give a brief (under 15 seconds) pitch on what and when you hope to speak with them about and why they might find it interesting. *If the person in question is a media contact:* share how your story connects with the issues they cover.
4. Ask the individual if he or she is interested in learning more. *If the person in question represents an organization:* suggest setting up a time or event for you to share your story with the organization more broadly. *If the person in question is a media contact:* ask if they would like to cover the story.
  - If it's a yes, follow through quickly with the next steps.
  - If it's a no, thank them for their time. *If the person in question is a media contact:* Ask if they think someone else at the outlet might be interested and then follow up with that person next.

## 2. How to Build a Contact List

### **How to Build a Contact List**

1. **Identify organizations and groups** that you want to share your news with. These can include local schools, community organizations, any professional associations you belong to, your church, your alma mater, community leaders, and other relevant groups or organizations. Also, **determine the local media** outlets that are most read in your area, such as popular newspapers in your community, weekly alternative papers, news websites, television news stations, and most listened to radio programs.
2. **Decide the contacts and reporters** from those organizations and outlets that should be included in your list.
  - **Organizations/Groups**
    - Perform a search on the organization or group's website to identify the appropriate individual to contact about community news and announcements or the contact form.
    - For example, you could contact School Administrators at your local schools, the Director of Communications at community organizations and professional associations, and/or the Alumni Relations Coordinator at your alma mater.
    - Although it's ideal to contact a single individual, it's inevitable that some groups won't have specific contacts – or it might seem confusing as to who is best suited to receive your news. If you're struggling to find the appropriate person, use the contact form or submit your pitch note to the general email.
  - **Media Outlets**
    - Many media outlets have specific reporters who cover various industries or topics, so try to find a reporter who writes about topics that are relevant to your trip. Generally speaking, reporters who cover community or local news are good to include on your list as well. It could also be local feature writers, who profile interesting members of the community, or someone who covers topics like volunteerism, agriculture or global development.
    - If you're having trouble identifying a specific reporter, TV news directors and assignment editors typically assign stories as appropriate for the reporting staff and are a good place to start as a general contact.
    - For radio, DJs who cover the morning and afternoon drive time or popular local radio shows could be included.
3. **Create a contact spreadsheet** with name, outlet, title, phone and email (example below).
  - If you are unable to find contact information on the organization/publication's website, do an Internet search to find the contact information elsewhere. For example, if a reporter is on Twitter, they often include their email address on their Twitter page.
  - If you are still unable to find the information, include the general information for the organization or publication. You can also call the organization or publication directly to request the appropriate contact information.

Name	Title	Phone	Email	Notes
Jane Doe	Agriculture Reporter	202-222-2222	<a href="mailto:j.doe@washpo.com">j.doe@washpo.com</a>	Pitched on [DATE].
John Smith	Assistant Principal	202-740-2000	<a href="mailto:jsmith@washingtonhs.com">jsmith@washingtonhs.com</a>	Pitched on [DATE].

### 3. Pitch Notes

#### Pitch Note Example

Hi Jane,

Did you know that U.S. volunteers play an important role in our government's efforts to end hunger across the globe? My name is Taylor Smith, and I will be traveling to Rwanda as a volunteer to help a rural community improve how it raises animals like chickens and goats. I think I have a unique story to share that your audience would be interested to learn about. Could we connect in person or over the phone? I would love to tell you more about the great work that volunteers like myself are doing in developing nations.

My trip is part of USAID's Farmer-to-Farmer program, which focuses on promoting sustainable economic growth, food security and agricultural development worldwide. Highlights of what I will be doing include:

- **Living in the community and learning more about the challenges they face.**
- **Helping a women's group build chicken coops and goat pens.**
- **Teaching this group best practices on raising chickens and goats at home while keeping their families healthy and safe.**

Please let me know if you'd like to set up some time to talk, or if you have any questions. You can follow my journey on social media, and I'd be happy to share more information about this important work upon my return. I hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks,

Taylor Smith  
Phone: 000-000-0000  
Email: email@email.com  
@mytwitterhandle

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## 4. Tips for Talking With Reporters

### Preparing for Interviews

1. **Know your outlet:** If you know in advance that you'll be participating in an interview, spend some time reading articles by the journalist to get a feel for her or his style. If the interview is for TV or radio, take time to listen and watch previous segments. Get a feel for the host, the mood of the show and the way topics get covered.
2. **Know your message:** Craft your top message in advance. Your goal for the interview is to get your information across regardless of the questions asked. Take time to determine the top three points you want readers, viewers or listeners to take away from your interview and practice saying those lines out loud. During the interview, remember, repetition is key, as is hitting each of your main points.
3. **Practice makes perfect:** Prepare twice as much as you think you should. Have the top three points you want to get across front and center in your mind. Read previous articles by the reporter and spend some time thinking about the type of questions a reporter could ask and how you would answer.

### Talking to Reporters

When speaking with journalists, it is important that you clearly communicate that you are expressing your own opinions, and that your comments are not reflective of opinions of Feed the Future nor the U.S. Government. This disclaimer is standard for any government employee, but is an important reminder to give to reporters.

Journalists will usually look to have a straightforward, on-the-record conversation. However, there are times when you might want to provide background information and speak off-the-record. It's important to understand the terms and definitions used by journalists and know how to negotiate those terms.

- **On-the-record:** When you are speaking "on-the-record," everything you say can be quoted and directly attributed to you by name. If you are doing an interview with a journalist, it will be assumed that you are on-the-record unless you specify otherwise.
- **Off-the-record:** If you are speaking "off-the-record" with a journalist, it should mean that nothing said will be used in their reporting in any way, nor will they pursue anything said in an off-the-record conversation.
- **On-background:** The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position.

These rules are not interpreted the same by every reporter, so be prudent and explain what you mean if you have to go "on-background" or "off-the-record." Anything that you say in an interview has the potential to be published, so if there is information you'd rather keep private, then it's best not to mention it in an interview.

## 5. Following Up With Contacts

Whether you've had a relationship before or during your trip, you can reach out to a reporter or organization after your trip is concluded to share your volunteer journey with a wider audience. Speaking with reporters or among community organizations can provide a great platform to talk about your volunteer experience and what you learned. You never know who you will inspire with your story!

This section includes tips for sharing news with reporters or key organizations/stakeholders (e.g., businesses, schools, community groups) after you've returned from your trip.

- Introduce yourself to the reporter or organization, explain why you volunteered, and discuss the impact that your work will have on both the global and local community. If preferred, set up time to talk over coffee.
- Explain what is new or different about this trip, and how the reporter may be able to use it to inform their coverage – possibly in recurring articles about volunteers like you. Tee up potential, compelling story ideas about your volunteer experience.
- When giving updates on your volunteer trip, set the scene by providing context to the work you did (i.e., historical, situational). Give examples of human impact – use real names and quotes, where possible – to demonstrate why your work matters on a very personal level. Quantify the impact of your work where possible.
- Refrain from using technical or complex scientific terms – this will help reporter or stakeholder, and ultimately readers, clearly understand your work.
- Share any photos, videos, or audio that are particularly relevant to your work.
- Exchange contact information so that you will easily be able to provide updates if they're interested:
  - Phone number
  - Email
  - Digital storage links (e.g., DropBox) for audio or video files
- Establish check-in intervals to share news or updates.

## 6. Storytelling Tips\*

*\*Courtesy of the Peace Corps*

One of the most compelling, heartfelt ways to share your experience is through storytelling, whether that is in a presentation to your family and friends, in a blog/op-ed on the Feed the Future, Farmer-to-Farmer and/or Peace Corps website or in your local news outlet, etc. Storytelling is a great way to continue your work with Feed the Future, show your commitment to the initiative, and share the culture and experiences you encountered in a personal and engaging way. When you share your stories, you inspire others to learn more about the program and potentially get involved. As returned volunteers, it's our personal responsibility to bring these stories home.

### **Finding Your Story**

It can be daunting to summarize your experiences in a 5-10 minute story. Don't think of this story as a summary of your service, but as a window giving specific insight into your host culture or your experience. Below are a few exercises to help you brainstorm story ideas that you might share related to your experience:

- **Sit down and list all the people you met during your trip.** Now try another two-minute exercise, this time listing all the places you went, including specifics like "Fred's porch," "George's barn" or "Maria's farm." After you are done with your lists, review them and circle places or people you think could be elements of a good story.
- **Try some brainstorming lists that relate to a selected theme.** For example, if the theme is "cultural arrival," try making a list of cultural surprises. Other potential themes include: "Why I joined F2F/Peace Corps," "my local inspiration," "host country heroes," and "neighbors."
- **Try using certain words as prods for stories.** For example, tell a story about the word "almost" or the phrase "that is when I knew I had truly arrived."
- **Think about the deeper meaning,** in addition to the entertainment value. There is action: who, what, where, and when, but make sure you know the important deeper meaning of why that gives the story meaning and importance.

### **Crafting Your Story**

**Plot:**

1. **Context:** When and where is the story taking place?
  - Context should be minimal.
  - You need to transport your audience to your country of service.
  - Use easily relatable reference points.
2. **Action:** What happens in the story?
  - What are the actual events and dialogue?
  - This is the main and most interesting part of your story.
3. **Tension:** Raise the stakes.
  - Think about where the tension is and how you can build up the tension.
4. **Change:** It is not *really* a story unless something fundamentally changes.

- The change is often internal, like a shift in perspective.
- 5. **Closure:** Do you deliver on your promise after setting up a central question?
  - Chekhov says that if you introduce a gun in act one, it better go off by act three.

### Other Elements:

1. **Meaning:** What is my story *really* about?
  - Why am I telling this story? Why does this event matter?
  - The meaning often relates to how you frame the story with your opening and closing line.
  - What did it mean for your cultural acceptance, life as a Volunteer, deeper understanding, and emotional well-being?
2. **Senses:** If people can picture it, then they can better relate.
  - Can listeners see my story?
  - Using all five senses can bring your story to life.
3. **Insight:** Let your listeners in on your thoughts, feelings, and in-the-moment reactions.
  - Give them a backseat pass to your brain through your internal voice.
  - Try to maintain the “ignorance of the moment.” Rather than commenting on your behavior based on knowledge gained later, keep the storyline consistent with what you knew at the time.
  - Try not to give away the resolution before the climax.
4. **Characters:** Keep them compelling and few.
  - Try to use dialogue to help bring each character to life.
  - In an oral story, your audience only has so much memory capacity.

### Rules of Good Storytelling

1. **Allow yourself to be vulnerable:** Trust the audience with information about yourself, and remain humble, personal, and intimate.
2. **Use dialogue:** Move the plot forward with dialogue to develop characters and make it fun. If possible, do not be afraid to try to take on a character.
3. **Show. Don't tell:** Instead of saying, “the people I worked with were amazing,” let them hear an amazing quote from one of those people.
4. **Be specific:** “Breakfast was good.” vs. “My Fruit Loops and toast hit the spot.”
5. **Find a way to frame your story:** Find the context of why you are telling the story. This relates to what your story is really about.
6. **Use the rule of threes:** This principle suggests that things that come in threes are inherently funnier, more satisfying or more effective than other number groups. A series of three often creates a progression in which the tension is created, built up and finally released.
7. **Get the audience on your side:** If they like you, they will be much more open and attentive to your story. One way to impress them is to throw in a bit of translated local language. This will also transport them and teach them something about the country.
8. **Have perspective on the story:** There is no crying in storytelling. If the story is still too close to you, it is not ready for an audience.



### **Story Spine**

Another helpful way to think about your story is to see how your story fits into “The Story Spine.” Try filling out the story spine below with key moments in your story:

- **Once Upon a Time** \_\_\_\_\_
- **And every day,** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Until one day,** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Because of that** \_\_\_\_\_
- **And then** \_\_\_\_\_
- **And then** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Until finally/then suddenly** \_\_\_\_\_
- **And the funny thing was** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Ever since then** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Sharing Your Story**

These tips are flexible. They can work for small audiences or storytelling performances, such as open mic nights, classrooms, etc. They can also work one-on-one. It is up to you to determine how to adapt them for your audience’s size, age and interest. Most of these tips are aimed at larger audiences, but telling stories to small groups of friends and family, or just one interested person, has an impact too. If someone is interested in your volunteer experience, you can offer a story as a way to share with structure. Remember to gauge interest before jumping in; it is important not to overwhelm your listener.

#### **Voice: Use your authentic voice.**

1. Try not to over-perform, act or have a “storyteller effect.” You are telling a true story from your life. Be comfortable in your own skin.
2. Be aware of the quality and volume of your voice.
3. Be conscientious of your word choice. Avoid overuse of default words such as anyway, at any rate, like, um, you know, eh, etc.
4. Speak with energy, varying your vocal tone and quality throughout. Enunciate and project. Be aware of your volume speaking into the microphone.

#### **Body: Ground yourself.**

1. Try to stay rooted and minimize superfluous movements. It is best to stay close to the microphone stand.
2. Keep your hands out of pockets.
3. Keep your head up either to maintain eye contact with the audience or to maintain that illusion.

#### **Delivery: Pace yourself.**

4. Make no assumption about how and when the audience will react.
5. Roll with it.
6. Be in the moment.
7. Pause when you get the laugh, and move on when you don’t.

8. Start strong and end strong, crisp, clear and definitive.

### Practice makes perfect!

9. Practice with a friend, family member or peer to work on timing flow and delivery.
10. Telling your story in a shorter timeframe will help you realize the most important elements of the story and focus on them.

### Final tips

11. A good exercise when preparing to present a story is a flowchart of lines or words that move you through the story. Remember stories shouldn't sound too polished or memorized. Your storytelling should feel natural and not highly edited, as a written story might be.
12. Don't assume the audience knows anything about your country of service, F2F/Peace Corps or Feed the Future. Remember to avoid acronyms and any language reference without explanation.
13. Have fun! Storytelling is engaging and makes the audience relax. Hopefully you can enjoy the journey along with them.

## 7. How to Write Blog Posts

Blog articles are great ways to move people to action and shape the public dialogue around a particular topic. Great blogs are carefully constructed. They generally open with an attention-getting paragraph that hooks the reader and presents your main position. The bulk of the piece expands on your main point with evidence and statistics, quotes, anecdotes, and analysis. Blog posts often conclude with a call to action that the reader or yourself will take on.

### **Tips for Writing Blog Posts**

1. **Have a mission:** Readers appreciate and connect with purpose-driven experiences. Based on your Feed The Future experiences, incorporate your values in your writing.
2. **Keep it short:** Pieces are ideally less than 500 words and quickly immerse the reader in your experiences. Listicles are effective ways to keep the reader engaged and tell an interesting story.
3. **Be authentic:** While posts should be bold with a compelling headline, and visually appealing graphics, they should remain true to lived experiences. Write like how you speak. It will be easier for people to connect to your writing.
4. **Don't wait too long:** Don't go too long without hitting publish, or your audience might forget about you. Sharing something every day or few days is better, but once a week is good too.
5. **Connect with your audience:** Make an effort to connect with your readers – find out what they are interested in and ensure you are continuing to deliver on your writing mission.
6. **Tell readers why they should care:** Put yourself in the place of the busy person looking at your blog post. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask “So what? Who cares?” You need to answer these questions.

Make sure to share your posts with Feed the Future, Farmer-to-Farmer and/or the Peace Corps organizations to maximize visibility of your work and the programs at large. These organizations may also repost your content.

## 8. Sample Social Media Posts

People will be interested to learn about the work you are doing abroad. Posts on your social media channels can help inform others about the work you are doing, the people you are meeting, and the results you are aiming to achieve as part of Feed the Future, Farmer-to-Farmer or the Peace Corps. If you are in contact with a reporter, there may be opportunities to highlight an article written about your experiences or to flag a relevant article about the work for your community of followers.

Make sure to tag Feed the Future, Farmer-to-Farmer, Peace Corps or whatever additional organization you are working with while abroad.

The ideas below can be used to announce your upcoming volunteer experience and keep your followers updated on your journey!

### Accounts and Hashtags to Tag:

- @FeedtheFuture
- @FarmerToFarmer
- @USAID
- @PeaceCorps
- #endhunger
- #sustainability
- #USAIDTransforms
- #foodsecurity
- #peacecorps

Please note the following specification for images on social channels:

- Facebook Image: Image size: 1200 x 628 pixels
- Twitter Image: Image size: 1200 x 628 pixels
- Instagram Images: Image sizes: 1080 x 1080 pixels, 1080 x 608 pixels, 1080 x 1350 pixels

**The following are sample ideas for sharing your volunteer experience on social media!**

Purpose	When	Ideas
Announce Upcoming Volunteer Experience	Prior to trip	Share a post about your upcoming experience to let your followers know what you'll be doing and why you're excited about it.
Announce Volunteer Experience	Prior to trip	Share what motivated you to pursue this volunteer opportunity.
Announce Volunteer Experience	Prior to trip	Share information about the program or organization you're volunteering with.
Announce Upcoming Volunteer Experience	Prior to trip	Encourage your followers to go on the journey with you by following you on the social media platforms you plan to post on.

Purpose	When	Ideas
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Highlight Ongoing FTF Experiences	During trip	Share some examples and photos of the projects you are working on during your trip (if safe to do so). Include stories of the individuals you are meeting and working with -- with their approval first!
Highlight Ongoing FTF Experiences	During trip	Share some of the unexpected or unique insights you are gaining as you go through your volunteer experience. Link to your blog if you're writing one while volunteering.
Highlight Ongoing FTF Experiences	During trip	Share how the work you are doing is alleviating hunger, poverty and/or malnutrition where you are.
Showcase lived FTF experiences	After trip	Share your reflections on what you learned and how you grew personally and/or professionally while volunteering.
Showcase lived FTF experiences	After trip	Share stories of the impact you achieved during your volunteer experience.
Showcase lived FTF experiences	After trip	Share photos and videos you collected during your experience to provide your followers with a snapshot of your experience and why it was meaningful to you and the global effort to end hunger.
Keep the conversation going	After trip	Ask your followers questions about the issues of hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Did they learn anything from your experience? How are they making an impact in their own communities? Why is volunteerism important to them?

## 9. Social Post Content

Your family, friends and perhaps even the individuals you informed about your trip might be interested in following along on your journey; and social media is a great way to do just that. Use the content you capture to craft posts about the work you're doing, and make sure to tag Feed the Future, Farmer-to-Farmer and/or the Peace Corps. Below we have some sample social posts and imagery that you can use as a starting point, however, your own, personalized content is always best.

### **For F2F Volunteers**



**For Peace Corps Volunteers**

