

TED Prize winner wishes for archive of human wisdom

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StoryCorps founder Dave Isay during the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada on March 17, 2015

StoryCorps founder Dave Isay unveiled a wish to use smartphone applications to archive the spoken wisdom of humanity.

As this year's TED Prize winner, his wish came with the promise of help

from accomplished and influential "tedsters" gathered here for a conference devoted to "ideas worth spreading."

The prize came with an unfettered wish and a million dollars, all of which Isay said has already been spent building a StoryCorps application for smartphones along with a website and back-end system to handle the floodgates it will likely open.

Free StoryCorps applications tailored for mobile devices powered by Apple or Android software became available on Tuesday.

"I would love to see people go into nursing homes, hospitals, even prisons and use this app to give [voice](#) to people who feel their lives don't matter," Isay said before going on stage to announce his wish at TED.

"That would be the ultimate dream."

The application lets people record interviews with those whose life stories they wish to preserve. The application suggests questions and gives the options of uploading interviews online or just keeping them on smartphones.

Voices of ancestors

Brooklyn-based nonprofit StoryCorps has recorded some 65,000 conversation-style chats involving more than 100,000 people in the United States since former [public radio](#) documentary maker Isay founded the project in 2003.

Copies are archived in the US Library of Congress to serve as an oral history told through the stories of people's lives.

Those interested in recording interviews with friends, loved ones or

family members can do so for free at one of the group's StoryBooths in Atlanta, Chicago or San Francisco, but donations are sought.

Those involved in interviews, which are limited to 40 minutes, get copies of recordings on compact discs.

StoryCorps also has a mobile recording team.

Excerpts of stories have made their way onto National Public Radio as well as into books.

"It is the single largest collection of voices ever gathered," Isay said.

Inspirations for the project include oral histories recorded as part of a US Works Progress Administration effort in the aftermath of the Great Depression and the Pulitzer Prize winning author Studs Terkel.

"Some people have called it therapy in a booth, but that is not what this is about," Isay said.

"You can have a conversation with someone who matters to you and hundreds of years from now your great-great grand kids will hear it and understand where they came from."

Uploading wisdom

StoryCorps went from few people showing up at the first lone booth in Manhattan to it now being hard to reserve time in booths. The [applications](#) released on Tuesday were meant to open the longtime US-only project to the rest of the world.

"You find a quiet room, hold out the cell phone, do an interview with a loved one anywhere in the world, and then hit a button and it uploads it,"

Isay said.

"So, the big wish is to upload the collective wisdom of humanity."

Uploaded interviews will immediately be made available at StoryCorps.me website.

Only US interviews will be filed away in the Library of Congress, but StoryCorps is interested in similar partnerships with archives in other countries.

StoryCorps application is only in English but the nonprofit plans to work with the translation team at TED, which makes transcripts of online talks available in many languages.

The video of Isay's wish presentation at the conference is slated to be posted at ted.com on March 25.

"On the tenth anniversary of the TED Prize, it feels appropriate to honor the core of what we stand for: shared ideas and the power of storytelling," said TED curator Chris Anderson.

"Dave Isay has created a remarkable instrument for recording the human experience."

The TED community includes scientists, celebrities, politicians, artists, and entrepreneurs. Since being born in California in 1984, the gathering has grown into a global forum for heady "ideas worth spreading."

TED has won a worldwide following for trademark "talks" during which the accomplished speakers deliver thought-sparking presentations.

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