

# LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!



## A Guide to Short Form Video Storytelling

September 2024



**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
Coastal Program

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Support for production of this guide was provided by the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program**. The Coastal Program works with local communities to restore and protect natural habitats that are important to fish, wildlife, and people. Learn more about the Coastal Program at <https://www.fws.gov/program/coastal>.

Additional project support was provided by the **Land Trust Alliance**. Find the Land Trust Alliance online at <https://landtrustalliance.org>.

This guide was prepared by **Bold Bison Communications & Consulting** with support from Adam R Wolf Photography. Bold Bison Communications & Consulting provides forward-thinking communications solutions, engaging strategy and facilitation services, and inspiring workshops and trainings for nonprofits, particularly in the conservation, climate, and local food movements, as well as the arts and cultural institutions. Learn more at <https://boldbison.com>.

A complementary webinar for this manual may be viewed free of charge at <https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/explore/making-the-most-of-video-to-tell-your-stories#content>

For questions on this guide, please contact [hello@boldbison.com](mailto:hello@boldbison.com).

Published September 2024

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
PLANNING YOUR VIDEO STRATEGY	8
BASICS OF VIDEO PRODUCTION	14
FILMING YOUR VIDEO	21
EDITING AND POST-PRODUCTION	31
PUBLISHING AND BUDGETING	36
APPENDIX	41

# 1 | INTRODUCTION



Photo: Bold Bison Communications & Consulting

**This guide is designed to help you incorporate video storytelling, and specifically short-form video content, into your organization's communications strategy.**

# Introduction

## PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL

In 2016, the Land Trust Alliance, with support from the US Fish & Wildlife Service – Coastal Program, published the Creating Video for Impact manual to help land trusts and others to capture and share their conservation stories through video. At that time, making a video for your organization was a major achievement. The production team may have gone through rounds of edits, reframing the story, refining talking points, and changing shot selections.

The video often was created for a single purpose, such as for a website, fundraising campaign, or a tutorial explaining conservation easements to landowners. Once its purpose was complete, its value often diminished. On occasion, you may have found additional uses for the video, but it often opened with an old logo or presented dated information. So, while video was an effective way to tell stories, it would be static — and often expensive, time-consuming process.

However, the pandemic shifted how many organizations approached video. First, we saw an increased interest in **video content on social media**. And through TikTok, Instagram Reels, and other social media platforms, short form video became the dominant form of social media content, with most major platforms prioritizing a continuous stream of videos. Additionally, cut off from in-person engagements, many land trusts opted for **new video content and virtual event strategies**, often learning the basics of video production on the fly.

Consequently, knowledge of video storytelling and delivery methods have markedly shifted since the first manual was published in 2016. This complementary guide aims to reinforce the production lessons of those early pandemic years while offering guidance on how to determine a video strategy for your land trust that accounts for this new method of short-form storytelling.

This guide assumes that **video is not a single project, but rather a tool to enhance your storytelling** to better reach online audiences. Today, video can be everything from the pixelated, choppy footage captured by the wildlife camera shared on social media or it can be the highly polished production for use at an annual fundraiser. The truth is that video is a highly effective method of communication that — just like email, websites, or social media — requires a nuanced approach to achieve your goals.

Finally, keep in mind that even within this expansive topic of video production, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. We have presented the material below in a sequential manner; however, the process should be thought of holistically. To that end, this guide seeks to make producing short form video more accessible and useful, while offering guidance on determining a manageable approach for your organization. Throughout, we highlight the

## Introduction

many ways your organization can make the most of video, sharing best practices and providing recommendations on where video can best support your communications. It is also vitally important to keep in mind how quickly social media strategies and user preferences can change. While certain techniques may not work forever, it is important to experiment and determine what works best for your organization.

## IMPORTANCE OF VIDEO CONTENT FOR LAND TRUSTS

Videos are an engaging, visual way that land trusts and nonprofits can tell their story, demonstrate their impact, and connect with new audiences. Video content vividly captures the beauty and significance of conserved lands, showcasing the open spaces, wildlife, and ecosystems your organization has helped to protect. By presenting stunning visuals of these protected areas, you can help evoke an emotional response from viewers, fostering a deeper connection to the land.

Video storytelling is also a powerful way to highlight personal stories and testimonials. Interviews with passionate staff, dedicated volunteers, community members, and landowners who benefit from the conservation efforts can humanize your projects, making your mission more relatable and compelling. These narratives can also illustrate the tangible benefits of land conservation to communities, such as enhanced biodiversity, recreational opportunities, and climate resilience.

They can serve as educational tools, explaining complex conservation issues in an accessible way. Through animations, infographics, and expert commentary, you can clarify how their work addresses your region's conservation and development challenges.

### Short Form Video for Social Media

Short form video content for social media refers to concise, engaging videos typically lasting between 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Driven by platforms including Instagram Reels, TikTok, Facebook Stories, and YouTube Shorts, short form videos are designed to capture attention quickly and convey a message efficiently, catering to the fast-paced consumption habits of social media users.

Land trusts can leverage this form of storytelling to highlight key aspects of their work, such as showcasing success stories, promoting upcoming events, or sharing impactful testimonials.

## Introduction

Effective short form videos are visually compelling and often rely on strong storytelling elements. This can include a clear beginning, middle, and end, with a focus on a single, powerful message. High-quality visuals, engaging music, and concise text overlays can enhance the viewer's experience. As we will explore in this guide, most social media platforms have built-in tools to help you add these finishing touches.

While the social media landscape is ever changing, video content has consistently remained a mainstay of most platforms. There are tips and tricks to each platform, certain tips for filming short form content, and audience considerations for each platform—all of which are covered in this guide.

## Video Content as a Communications Strategy

While video content is an impactful and effective strategy to share your story, always keep two things in mind: first, in video production there are no 'one size fits all' answers and you should focus on the strategy that is appropriate for your team's size, needs, and capacity. Second, short form video content is a tool to support your overall communications strategy, and ultimately, your mission, just like your website, newsletter, and brochures.

## 2 | PLANNING YOUR VIDEO STRATEGY



Photo: Dani Tinker/USFWS

**Planning your video strategy includes considering your goals and success, your target audience(s) and what action you want them to take, the key message you want to convey, and where you will reach your audience.**

## Planning Your Video Strategy

### DEFINING YOUR GOALS AND AUDIENCES

Like any communications resource, ease in making a video is greatly increased when we have a sense of what success looks like for the project. When planning a video, your first thoughts should be about who the video is for and why you are making it. Are you trying to solicit donations for a crowdfunding campaign? Are you trying to recruit volunteers for a stewardship program? Understanding that success will inform everything about the video content you produce.

This may seem rudimentary; however, remember that short form video content is exactly that—short. You have limited time to convince your audience to take a specific action after watching the video. The messaging, visuals, and call to action should all reinforce your goal.

Inherently tied to the goal(s) is a consideration of the audience, so always ask for whom are we making the video. Consider who you are trying to reach, such as local community members, potential donors, volunteers, or even voters. Different audiences have different preferences and expectations, such as which social media platform they prefer to use. For instance, younger audiences might prefer quick, dynamic videos on platforms like Instagram or TikTok, while older demographics might turn to Facebook or YouTube for longer, more detailed video content.

#### **Key Questions:**

- What are we hoping to achieve through the video?
- What is our call to action?
- Who is our audience and where are we likely to reach them?

## Planning Your Video Strategy

### MESSENGERS AND MESSAGES

Once you have identified your goals and audience(s), you should start thinking about the specific messages and the best messengers for the video. Who will appear in the video and what they will say?

Choose a good spokesperson for your videos. You want someone who is comfortable in front of the camera and who is knowledgeable about the project or subject as well as your organization. Ensuring that the spokesperson is properly prepared goes a long way to getting the footage that you need, so share the video's vision, outcomes, and interview questions with the spokesperson in advance.

Another important consideration is the idea of a trusted messenger – someone that the audience can readily trust. While you could craft a wonderfully worded message delivered by your Executive Director, it probably won't come across as authentically as a similar message delivered by a project partner or local resident who can offer a testimonial that will resonate with your target audience(s). For instance, if you are trying to raise awareness among families, ask some parents or teachers who can attest to the quality of your organization to appear in the video.

The same holds true with messaging: no amount of polished PR points will compensate for an energetic and passionate partner who wants to share their story and vouch for your organization. You can work with them to hone a message, but always remember in short form video to keep it simple and focused on your key message.

#### **Key Questions:**

- Who is a trusted spokesperson?
- What story are we hoping they can share?
- What key points do we need to ask them to convey?

## Planning Your Video Strategy

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLATFORM

Your final major consideration in your video strategy is thinking about where you will reach your target audience, and this is where you can begin thinking more specifically about your distribution.

For many land trusts, you will want to share much of your video content with as many supporters as you can, and it is a good idea to post your videos across your social media accounts. However, audiences turn to different social media platforms for different reasons and each platform has developed characteristic video preferences that users have come to expect.

**YouTube:** Ideal for longer educational and documentary content. Use YouTube to host detailed videos, virtual tours of conserved lands, and expert talks. YouTube also utilizes Google’s search engines, so its algorithm can help attract viewers interested in conservation topics.

**Facebook:** Ideal for longer videos and detailed storytelling. Use Facebook for in-depth content, such as documentary-style videos featuring a project, interviews with landowners, or, if you are ambitious, livestreaming from events or talks.

**Instagram:** Best for visually stunning, short-form content. Use Instagram Reels and Stories to share quick, engaging clips that highlight beautiful landscapes, wildlife sightings, and behind-the-scenes looks at your work. High-quality visuals are key here.

**TikTok:** Finally, TikTok is the place to be for short form video content, including creative, fun, engaging content that raises awareness about conservation issues. You will often see TikTok accounts mimic popular trends, challenges, and hashtags to help increase their visibility, even if it does not always feel “on mission.”

#### Key Questions:

- What social media platforms do we use currently?
- What kind of video are we making (e.g., longer or shorter, fundraising, or project updates)?
- Do we need to make any changes to the video based on the platforms we are going to use?

## Planning Your Video Strategy

### PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

As you consider the audience, key message(s), and platform, you may start to see how important it is to be strategic in your planning and efficient in your storytelling when producing a short form video.

Say, for example, your land trust wanted to attract younger families in your region as members. Your considerations for your video strategy might look something like this:

**Success:** Increased membership with our land trust

**Audience:** Younger parents in their 30s and 40s

**Messenger and Messages:** Other members who are parents or partners who can speak to the benefit you provide to the community

**Platform:** Instagram, the platform heavily favored by our target audience

With these factors in mind, you might decide that you want to produce 3-4 short testimonial videos from parents, teachers, and elected officials talking about how your land trust has improved quality of life in your community, along with a series of short video clips showcasing your publicly accessible preserves, volunteer opportunities, member-exclusive events, and other ways for families to get involved.

To do this, you would want to:

- ✓ Schedule interviews with partners/parents
- ✓ Develop your key message and call to action
- ✓ Assess your equipment needs
- ✓ Identify which projects and locations you want to feature
- ✓ Capture new b-roll or collect photos to add depth to your videos

## Planning Your Video Strategy

When it is time for editing, you might edit your interviews down to short 60-second testimonials, highlighting the impact of your land trust and your call to action (e.g., visit us, volunteer, or become a member). Finally, you can post your videos online—whether social media, YouTube, or your website—and share the links with your supporters.

You can supplement these main testimonial videos, too, by creating a few social media posts using the b-roll of your project, encouraging viewers to learn more by watching the full video.

# 3 | BASICS OF VIDEO PRODUCTION



Photo: Chris Eng/USFWS

**After deciding to produce video content, you may be wondering where to start. This next section will give a high-level view of what goes into video production before moving into specific guidance.**

## Basics of Video Production

### TERMINOLOGY

A 60-second video can require a lot of careful planning and hard work, even with a clear sense of your video strategy. The process can start to feel daunting; however, there are steps you can take to make the process more manageable and enjoyable.

At its basic level, production of short form videos involves planning, capturing high-quality footage, and editing to create engaging and concise content. Let's start with reviewing some key terminology.

**Footage:** Footage quite simply is the video files you capture on your camera that you will edit into engaging video content.

**B-Roll:** A specific type of footage, b-roll is the supplemental visuals that accompany the footage of your subject. For land trusts, this often includes shots of landscapes, wildlife, and people enjoying the land.

**Voiceover:** Much of the short form video content online lately features a speaker narrating the information on screen, known as a voiceover. These are often recorded for a video or can be extracted from a filmed interview.

**Pre-Production:** This phase is where all the creative brainstorming, planning, and coordination takes place.

**Production:** This is when you record all the shots and interviews that will be in your final video.

**Post-Production:** This final step (commonly referred to as “post”) is where all the elements get edited together and combined to create the final video.

Sections 4 and 5 of this guide delve deeper into each of these terms and phases.

### CONTENT TYPES AND GENRES

Another way to help you find the best place to start with video is to ask yourself what specifically you are going to produce. As a reminder, your organization does not need to be generating as much video content as you possibly can. Rather, thinking about types, genres, or some simple storytelling frames that you feel comfortable producing can help make your video content strategy more manageable.

Making a video that follows some established video genres can also help your viewers know what to expect from your videos. Some examples might include:

**Preserve Spotlights:** Great for platforms like Instagram, these videos are highly visual and can show off the beauty of the lands you have protected and encourage others to visit. It only takes a few moments outside with a camera on a beautiful morning or during a perfect sunset to produce this type of video.

**Easement Testimonials:** These short stories are very similar to a happy customer testimonial. In the course of one or two minutes, you can create a brief narrative that explains why a landowner chose to protect their property with a conservation easement, what makes the site special, and why they chose to partner with your land trust.

**Volunteer Profiles:** Many land trusts rely on volunteers and want to show their appreciation for those in their community who help support stewardship, events, or office management. You could informally interview several volunteers about why they choose to support your land trust as a way to inspire others to get involved.

**Event Recaps:** Short recap videos allow audiences to experience the event. Those who attended can share personal accounts of their experience and show how much fun they had at the event.

**Project Summary:** A longer form of storytelling, project summary videos can help you showcase the history and impact of a particular project, such as a community engagement campaign or a land protection success. These might involve interviews with several project partners and might take several weeks to produce.

## Basics of Video Production

**Wildlife Highlight:** You can regularly post a short video that informs viewers about the local ecology or wildlife. It is likely that your land trust already has much of this information ready to turn into a video and it can be a meaningful way of sharing with viewers some of what makes the land you protect so special.

**Casual Interview or Behind the Scenes:** You can use platforms such as Instagram or TikTok to create engaging, on-the-spot content that highlights your activities or promotes upcoming events. For example, when staff members are out in the field conducting wildlife surveys or habitat restoration, they can quickly film a short clip using their mobile devices. These videos can then be **edited directly within the apps**, adding music, text overlays, and filters to make the content more appealing and professional. Additionally, spontaneous interviews with colleagues or volunteers can be easily captured and shared, offering a behind-the-scenes look at your work.

There are plenty of options to choose from, so focus on video content that supports your overall communications strategy.

## Basics of Video Production

### ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

#### Camera

Finding the right camera can be a challenge. Should someone get a camcorder or a video camera? Should you use your phone? What about a mirrorless camera or a DSLR? An old photographer's joke is: *"What is the best camera in the world? The one you have with you!"* Choose a camera that is easy to bring with you in the field and that you are comfortable using.

The good news is that you have many options (e.g., smartphones and DSLRs) for shooting quality video footage. The most important thing is to shoot footage that is compelling and engaging.

Although you may not want to shoot a fundraising campaign with your phone, much of the informational and educational short form content found online today was filmed with smaller, mobile cameras like the ones in most smartphones. **Smartphones** or **GoPro** can be an affordable and beginner-friendly option.

If your land trust is looking to invest in camera equipment, consider a mirrorless system such as the **Sony a6600** or the **Canon EOS R5**. These are both budget-friendly entry-level cameras that will meet nearly all of your content needs. Most beginner camera kits come with what is called a kit lens that will cover most uses. These will often include a wide-angle lens (15-28 mm), which will be used to capture your interview footage, landscape shots, and most of your b-roll, and a telephoto lens (70+ mm), that you can use to capture footage from a greater distance, especially wildlife.



*From smartphones to professional cameras, you have several choices to support video production and fit your budget.*

## Basics of Video Production

### Microphone

High quality audio is key not only for making your video content accessible to viewers, but also for retaining your audience’s attention—bad audio will result in poor video engagement. To capture high quality audio, you need a microphone.

There are two types of microphones that are beginner-friendly: a **shotgun mic** and a **lavalier mic** (or “lav mic”). A shotgun mic is a microphone that sits on top of your camera and is directional, meaning it will pick up the audio that is facing the front of your camera. These microphones are great for shooting wildlife or indoor events. If you are using one of these in a windy outdoor setting, you will need to purchase a wind muff (“dead cat sleeve”) to go over the microphone.

For clearer sound when shooting interviews, you will need a lav mic. A lav mic is a microphone that will have a receiver and transmitter. The receiver will sit on the camera while the transmitter will connect to a wire that is clipped onto the subject. This type of microphone will pick up the subject’s voice while limiting background noise. Typically placed on one’s chest, the lav mic’s proximity to the subject’s face will affect the recording’s tonal quality. Some experimentation may be required to achieve the desired sound quality.



*Small lavalier microphones can be placed at chest height for an interview without causing much visual distraction.  
Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*

## Basics of Video Production

### Tripod

A tripod is essential for filming an interview (and it can be used for b-roll footage), as it stabilizes your camera and prevents the shaky camera effect. You can find many low-cost options for a tripod. If you are filming on a smartphone, be sure to look for either a tripod that comes with a smartphone mount or an adapter.



*Using a tripod will stabilize your camera during an interview, allowing you to focus on asking questions and engaging with the speaker.*

### Editing Software and Apps

Most of your video editing can be done by editors on social media platforms. If you are creating more produced or polished content, you can purchase an editing app or download a free one to your tablet, phone, or computer.

Editing options do not have to be complex or expensive. **iMovie** or **Premiere Rush** are excellent free choices for someone who is just getting started, since these options are designed for folks with limited experience. Both of these can be downloaded to your computer or mobile device, and only take a few steps before you are editing your content.

More advanced video editing options include purchasing **Premiere Pro** and **Final Cut Pro**. While both have a greater learning curve, tutorials are readily available online — often for free and it is not uncommon for beginners to start with the basic functions before trying more advanced functions.

See section 5 of this guide for specific guidance on video editing.

## 4 | FILMING YOUR VIDEO



Filming your video can be intimidating, but it is also one of the most fun aspects of the process. This next section will offer guidance and considerations on important steps when filming video content.

## Filming Your Video

### PRE-PRODUCTION

Pre-production is the critical planning phase that sets the foundation for a successful short form video. This stage involves developing a clear vision, organizing resources, and ensuring all elements are in place before filming begins. Pre-production is an important time to map out the visual elements you will need to tell your story and to coordinate logistics of your video, including locations, permissions, and schedules.

#### Scripting & Storyboarding

Even for short form videos, a script can be helpful. It ensures that you cover all necessary points and stay on message. The script can outline the narrative flow, key messages, and any on-screen text. For instance, in a 30-second video highlighting a new conservation project, a script can help you quickly introduce the project, its importance, and a call to action, all within the allotted time.

Depending on the length of your video and the amount of new video footage you will need to capture, you could consider using a storyboard as well. A storyboard lays out major shots in a video, providing a visual guide for the filming process and ensuring smooth, coherent storytelling. Even for short form videos, storyboards can save time during filming by providing a clear blueprint, reducing the need for reshoots.



*Creating a script can help organize your video and ensure you capture your key messages in your video. For more formal videos, such as for fundraisers, you may choose to create a full written script for speakers.*

## Filming Your Video

### Shot List

You can also prepare a shot list in advance, so you do not forget to shoot any key visuals. Longer videos will need more expansive shot lists, while short form videos may only need a handful of supporting shots. Fortunately, the longer your shot list, the more footage you will collect, allowing for plenty of adjustments and reuses in the future.

## VISUALS

As you prepare to shoot your video, remember that the visuals are equally as important as the spoken content. The visuals will complete your story, make your video more relatable, and reinforce your messages for the audience.

### B-Roll

B-roll (i.e., supplemental footage) can vary greatly, but should complement your story. For example, you can overlay b-roll on top of someone speaking to reinforce what is being said. B-roll may include wildlife, landscapes, drone footage, or people doing an activity, such as hiking, fishing, or horseback riding.



*B-roll adds much needed depth and visuals to your video storytelling. Be sure to capture b-roll or images that support the main points or messages of your video.*

*Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*

## Filming Your Video

### Free and Low-Cost Stock Footage Options

Stock footage and stock music can be a lifesaver when editing. If you need compelling imagery for when your interview subject tells a story or if you need to replace a b-roll shot, stock imagery can be invaluable. Websites like **Storyblocks** or **Artlist.io** offer low-cost stock footage options that can be used for any type of work. Nonprofits can also access free usage of **Canva Pro**, which includes stock footage.

### Drone Footage

Many organizations have begun using drones for stewardship and easement monitoring purposes, and as a result, are able to capture great visuals for marketing videos. Drones are easy to use and can now be quite affordable, and if you are working on a storytelling piece or a fundraising video, they can add a lot of production value.

If your organization acquires a drone, be sure to register it with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and follow all regulations, including keeping the drone in the pilot's line of sight during the flight. As a note, the FAA does require that all drone pilots who are being compensated for their work pass an exam to become a certified drone pilot (known as the Part 107 exam). There is a small fee for this exam and typically requires 10-20 hours of preparation time. If you are unsure if you are required to complete this certification, you can use this form from the FAA to determine eligibility.



*Visually compelling drone footage allows you to showcase unique perspectives on your projects and events, but be sure you are familiar with and permitted to operate a drone in natural areas.*

*Photo: Bold Bison Communications & Consulting*

## Filming Your Video

### PRODUCTION TIPS

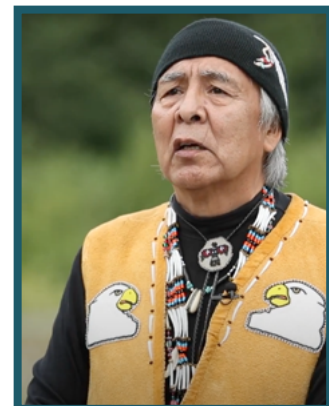
For non-videographers, the filming process can be one of the more intimidating aspects of video production. The following guidance is intended to make the process easier for you as the camera operator. After all, a little bit of prep can go a long way towards a video that feels polished and professional.

#### Horizontal and Vertical Filming

When considering short form video content, a key question is whether you should film your video content at a horizontal or vertical orientation, since so much social media video content is consumed via smartphones. If you are creating a video to show at an event on a large screen or to host on your website, you probably want to film it with the traditional horizontal orientation. However, if the video is made for social media, it may be best to film vertically or film farther away so the vertical crop will work with your framing. When in doubt, you can always film your b-roll twice at both orientations!



*B-roll footage captured at horizontal and vertical orientations will capture different perspectives.  
Photo: Bold Bison Communications & Consulting*



*Interview subjects may feel tight when cropped to vertical format, so you may consider using a wider framing.*

*Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*

## Filming Your Video

### Camera Settings

If your organization has recently purchased a camera and you feel overwhelmed by the dials, menus, and buttons, do not be. Most cameras have automatic and pre-programmed settings. If you use the camera's automatic settings, you will capture very good, usable footage.

If you are more familiar with cameras, you may consider using the camera in manual mode. Manual mode allows you to adjust your camera's image in three ways: ISO (or gain), aperture, and shutter speed. ISO is your camera's sensitivity to light — the lower the number, the clearer the images. Aperture controls the camera's field of depth — a lower number equates to letting in more light, which can blur the background in the shot. Finally, shutter speed refers to how quickly your camera captures video content.

Whether you are shooting in manual or automatic, you should set your camera to a high resolution, such as 1080p (High Definition) or 4K (Ultra High Definition). You will also have to choose your frame rate or frames per second (FPS); 30 FPS is the standard for most content you see on social media.



*Capture footage at high resolution and appropriate frame rates. Note that larger resolutions (4K) and higher frame rates (especially 60 fps) will increase your file size and your storage needs.*

**Pro tip:** If you are shooting in manual mode, you can help ensure you capture smooth footage by setting your shutter speed to  $1/[\text{twice your FPS}]$ . So, if you're shooting 30 FPS, your shutter speed should be  $1/60$ . This will help your final footage appear smooth and clear.

## Filming Your Video

### Lighting

Lighting can seem complicated, but it does not have to be. If you are filming an interview for your video, make sure that your subject is in a shaded or overcast area where direct sunlight does not create harsh shadows across their face. Likewise, avoid having your subject standing in direct sunlight, as it will “wash out” your video. Natural lighting is your best friend. Contrary to popular belief, overcast days can be great for filming because they provide consistent light on your subject without causing shadows. If natural light cannot be avoided, position your subject so they’re neither staring directly into the sun nor are they backlit by a bright light from behind.



*Position the subjects of your interviews in neutral lighting or shaded areas. Overcast days make for great filming!  
Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*



*An excellent time to shoot pictures or b-roll footage is during the hours just after sunrise and before sunset — referred to as “golden hours” — when the sunlight is softer and warmer. Photo: Bold Bison Communications & Consulting*

## Filming Your Video

### Background / Location

The location(s) for your video and the background(s) are important, but there are likely many potential locations that can be equally compelling. Be sure to scout a good location that is interesting and where there is no noise or background distractions. The location(s) and background(s) for the video can be an effective way to visually reinforce the key messages of your video. If you plan on shooting outside or in a public setting, make sure to have a nearby backup location just in case you need it.



*If you are filming an interview as part of your video, you may choose to position your interview subject in front of a background that supports their talking points or the key message of the video.*

*Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*

## Filming Your Video

### Sound and Soundchecks

Sound is a key piece of video production. Fortunately, you do not need to be a sound engineer to get this right. Start by making sure you are filming in a quiet space.

If you are recording a voiceover indoors, be sure to listen to the ambient noise before you begin—you might be shocked by how loud a quiet office really is.

If you are filming outside, you will not be able to control all atmospheric noise, but there are a few things to watch out for:

- Are there planes overhead that will disturb the audio?
- Is there a noisy road or a school playground that will soon be used for recess?
- Try to avoid windy conditions as well, as this will “blow out” your audio, which no amount of post-production editing can fix.

Whenever possible, use a microphone and always check that your audio sounds good before you start your interview. There is nothing worse than learning you captured no sounds during an incredible interview. Consider using headphones that can plug into your camera, so you can monitor the audio being picked up during the interview.

**Pro tip:** Wearing clothing made of natural fabrics, such as cotton or wool, will produce less clothing noise than clothing made of synthetic materials.

It can be useful to record a 20-30 second clip of ambient sound from your camera without anyone talking or making noise. This clip can be used by you or a professional editor in the future to reduce background noise and record voiceovers.

### Important Forms to Consider

When filming video content, you may want to consider having participants sign an image and likeness release form, allowing your organization to reuse the footage in the future. Additionally, if you ever interview or film children at events, it is important to have a minor release form signed by their parent or guardian to allow the use of the child’s image. Commercial and television crews often post filming on-site notices to inform people in public places that they may be filmed and that their likeness may be shared. This is a helpful practice if you are filming one of your events or preserves.

## Filming Your Video

### INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Not all short form videos will include a formal interview, but as you grow more comfortable with video production and expand the types of videos you produce, interviews will quickly become part of the process. Additionally, you may choose to use brief excerpts or stories from an interview as previews or teasers that drive audiences to view the full interview on your website or YouTube channel.

Preparation is the key to a good interview. Make sure you spend sufficient time researching your subject/topic and crafting good questions. The key is to have some ideas of the soundbites you want, so do not hesitate to rephrase questions and ask them again to prompt the subject to elaborate. Know what you are aiming for and guide your subject to speak conversationally.

While it is helpful to discuss some messaging ahead of time with anyone being interviewed, most people are not comfortable on camera. Having prepared talking points can often increase their anxiety. In those instances, encourage folks to relax and focus on the general message, reminding them that it's the editor's job to get the specific messaging right.

A helpful tip is to remind the subject to address the interviewer, not the camera, and to try to incorporate the question into their answer.

If you're preparing someone for an interview, do not underestimate the benefit of a pre-interview. This is an informal conversation with your subject off-camera that allows you a chance to tease out any key messages or stories that you want to capture on camera. When it comes time for the recorded interview, you can then offer prompts and leading questions that help your speaker succinctly deliver their message. A pre-interview also helps your subject think about how to frame their message.

## 5 | EDITING AND POST-PRODUCTION



Photo: Bold Bison Communications & Consulting

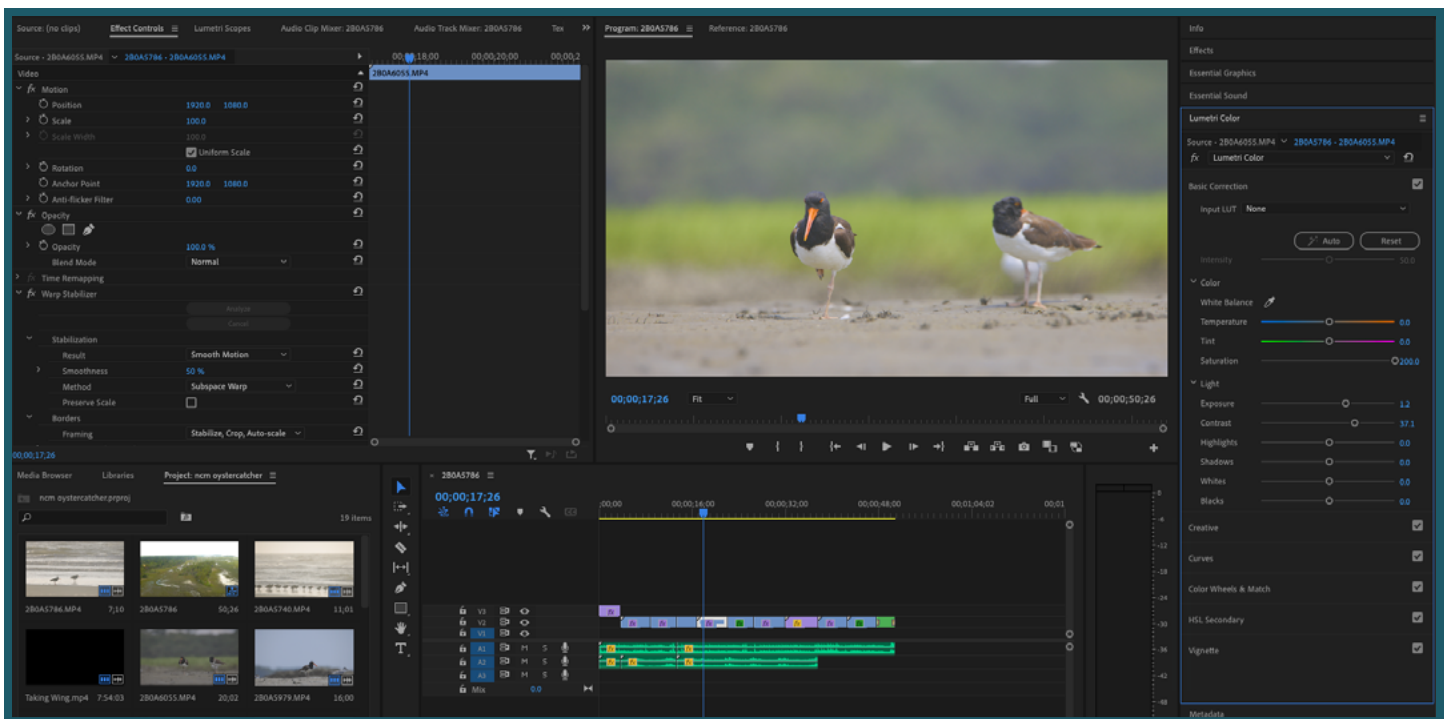
**When it comes to video editing, the most important thing to keep in mind is that this can be very fun. If you are new to editing, block out some time on your calendar, so you can explore and learn some of the standard features in the editing software.**

## Editing and Post-Production

### GETTING ACQUAINTED TO EDITING

As a reminder, you have many options when it comes to editing your video, and you may not choose to use the same option every time. For instance, you may produce a more polished and branded event video using an editing software on your computer, but that same day, you may also string together a few clips on Instagram's editor for a different video.

On a basic level, all video editing software works the same: you will have a timeline on which you can drag and drop footage, trim clips, and arrange your video. You may have your media library, which stores all your footage for the project. There are also correction tools, which allow you to do some basic corrections to audio and video.



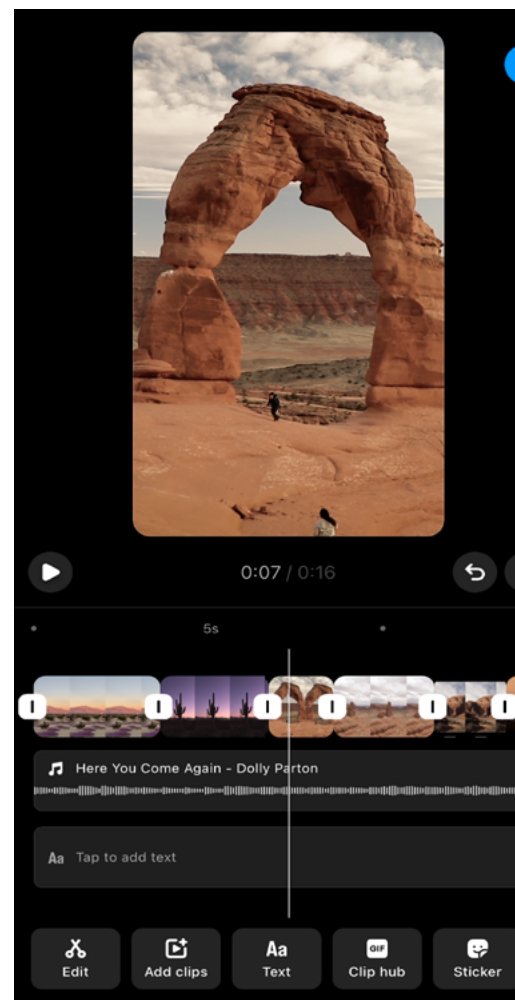
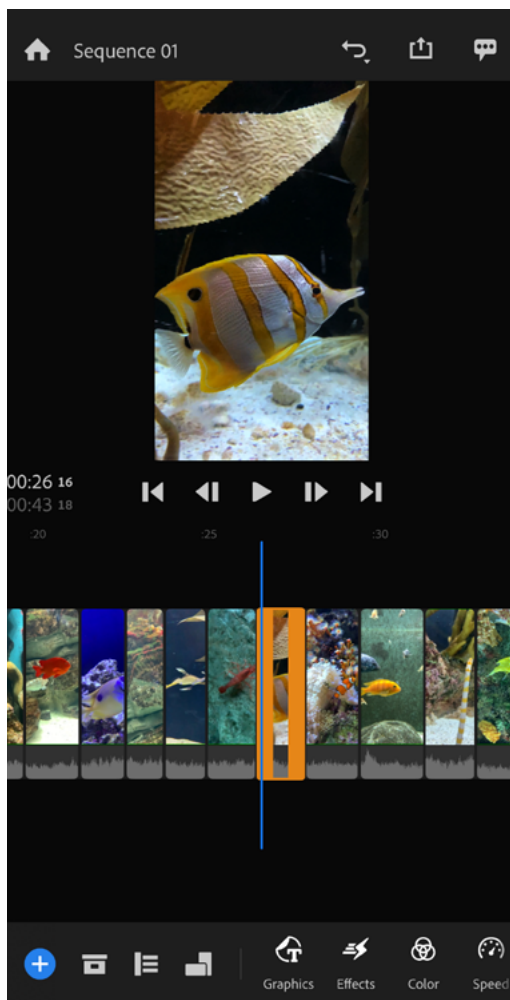
*Video editors can be intimidating when you begin, but it is helpful to understand what you are looking at in the software. From left to right displayed here are footage settings: video preview, the project's media library, the project timeline, and the footage effects/corrections. Most computer-based video editing software includes these same functions.*

## Editing and Post-Production

### Mobile Editing Options

For making quick videos on your smartphone, you may also download an editing app that simplifies the editing process. While you will not be able to make as many adjustments, this is a helpful option for beginners, especially when you are pasting together a few short video clips. These editors allow you to shorten video clips, tap and drag clips to change the order, and make a few minor adjustments to the lighting and sound.

Editing tools on social media platforms, like those on Instagram or TikTok, are designed to help you make quick videos from a handful of shots. You can select the 5-10 shots you wish to use, rearrange them as needed, and then add audio. Audio can include either the original audio from your video shots (which may be helpful if you captured birdsongs, for instance), new voiceovers, or music you select on the platform.



*App-based video editors on your smartphone, such as Adobe Premiere Rush (left) offer the same basic functionality as editing software on a computer. However, the mobile versions are often simplified to help you create content quickly. Social media editing tools, such as Instagram Reels (right), are designed to help you create engaging video content all in one place, including to select and edit footage, choose music, and add on-screen text.*

## Editing and Post-Production

### BASIC EDITING TECHNIQUES

Always follow your gut when editing. If a clip seems too long, make it shorter (5-10 seconds is a good rule of thumb for how long a b-roll shot should be). If your speaker is rambling, shorten what they are saying. If the background music feels too high, go ahead and lower it. Again, many of us regularly consume social media content, so you will likely have a good sense of judgment.

Editing does take time and practice, but it will not take long for you to pick up some skills. As you begin, here are a few basic editing techniques and tips to keep in mind.

**Change up the visuals:** Particularly when using b-roll footage, be sure to use a variety of shots to keep your viewers engaged. Again, follow your gut to tell if a shot is lingering too long, and since you used a shot list, you will have plenty of additional shots to pull from.

**Avoid harsh or sudden cuts:** As you are reviewing the initial draft of your video, watch for any cuts from your editing that feel sudden or abrupt. Cutting between different takes or different moments in an interview can lead to sharp changes in audio quality or on-screen lighting. In these instances, you can use a transition effect to smooth things over.

**Cut out the “umms,” “uhhs,” and stumbles:** No one is a perfect public speaker, so it is very common that someone offering an interview or voiceover will need a minute to collect their thoughts, even mid-sentence. You do not need to catch all of these while filming, but you might be amazed by how much time you can cut from a video just by removing those verbal stumbles.

**Listen a few different ways:** Before sharing your video with the world, watch it on a few different devices and with and without headphones. A video that sounds great on your computer speaker may be too loud for headphones. A quick check across different devices should catch any unintended errors. The same applies for watching on a few different screens!

Remember, video editing is like working on a mosaic: you have many pieces to work with between your primary footage and your b-roll, so you can take time to arrange the pieces, clean up talking points, and rearrange sections to make the best final video.

### Royalty-Free Music

Once you are happy with your narrative and visuals, consider adding music or sound effects as an additional dimension to your video project. **YouTube Studio** offers free music for videos used on YouTube. **Artlist.io** provides stock music and sound effects as well. If you post on Instagram or TikTok, trending audio and music can be used for content; however, stock music and audio are guaranteed to work across all platforms without risking copyright violations.

## Editing and Post-Production

### CAPTIONS, SUBTITLES, AND 508-COMPLIANCE

You may want to consider making your video 508-compliant so all viewers can understand both the visual and audio aspects of the video. When it comes to video, closed captions and audio descriptions are the two key functionalities to ensure 508-compliance.

Closed captions are the text transcript of the spoken words and audio sounds in the video — what each speaker says in addition to supplemental audio. You may have seen notation in closed captions about bird calls or idyllic background music.

Similar to alt-text for still photography, audio descriptions are written descriptions used by assistive devices to describe what is happening on screen in a video between dialogue. For instance, you might see, “A drone flies over a wetland as migrating birds take flight.”

There are several professional services you can use to help ensure your content is accessible. You can use transcription tools, such as **Otter.ai**, to create a full transcript with timestamps to assist viewers. Additionally, many of the social media platforms can help as well: YouTube will generate editable closed captions of your videos or you can upload your own. If you are using social media platforms, you can turn on the auto captioning option.



*Closed captioning helps increase the accessibility of your video content. Video hosting platforms, including YouTube, allow you to edit or upload your own closed captions.*

*Photo: Firefly Imageworks, Inc./USFWS*

## 6 | PUBLISHING AND BUDGETING



Once you have completed filming and editing your video, you can share it with your audience, keeping in mind the distribution strategy you outlined at the beginning of the project.

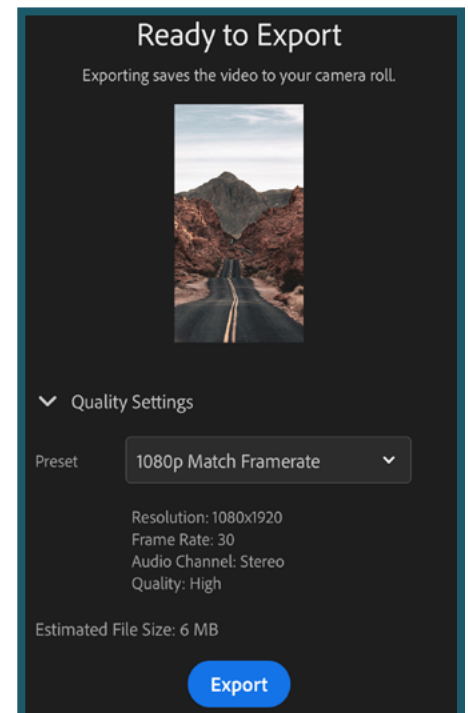
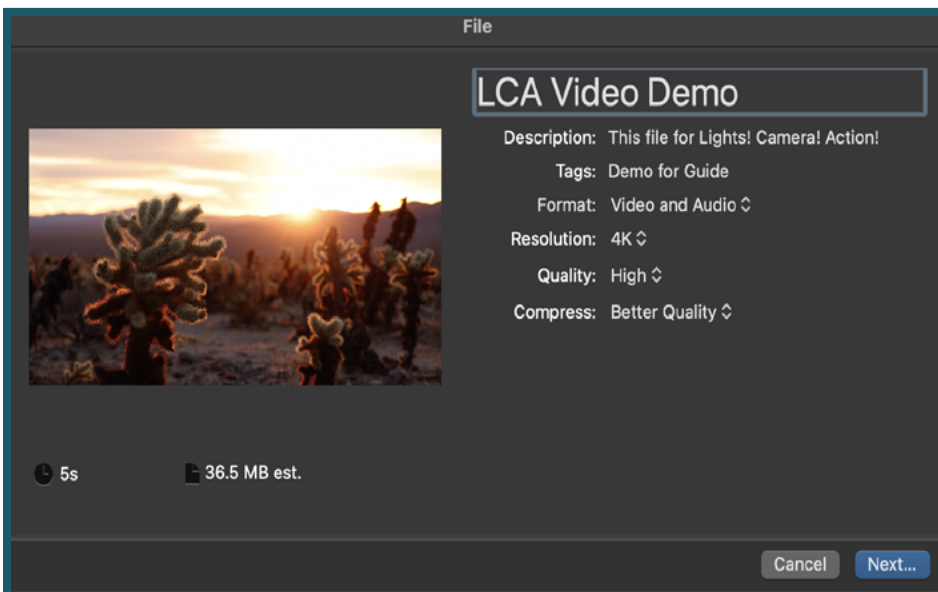
## Publishing and Budgeting

### EXPORTING AND PUBLISHING

Once you have completed your edits, it is time to get it ready to share with the world. Prepare a schedule for where and how you are going to share the video. For example, consider sending the video through your e-blast initially so that your core followers will see it first. Then for greater exposure, share your video on all your social media channels and post it to your website. There are also a few final steps to take to ensure the video looks great online after all the work you put into producing it.

#### Export Settings

If you have the option, always export video files as .mp4 files (versus .mov on Apple computers) since .mp4 files are more easily accessible across devices. YouTube supports 4K footage, so you can export a YouTube specific version at higher quality. If your video is meant for Instagram or a similar platform, export your final file in 1080p, since these platforms will crudely downgrade 4K video content to 1080p before it is posted, resulting in some pixelated finished video.



*Export settings in iMovie (left) configured to export 4K footage for hosting on YouTube, a website, or for use on a large format screen and settings in Premiere Rush (right) for exporting short content for social media at 1080p.*

## Publishing and Budgeting

### Writing Effective Descriptions and Titles

Compelling titles and descriptions help on platforms like Instagram and YouTube because they serve as the first point of contact with potential viewers. A well-crafted title might grab attention, encouraging users to watch the video. For example, a title like “Saving the Last Forest” immediately conveys urgency and importance, drawing in viewers who care about conservation.

Descriptions provide additional context to your video and help reach wider audiences online. On Instagram, a succinct description paired with strategic hashtags can significantly boost visibility, helping the video reach a wider audience. On YouTube, a detailed description can improve search engine optimization (SEO), making the video easier to find through the platform’s search function.

### Evaluating Performance

After promoting and posting your content, how do you know if it was successful? The easiest way to measure your success is to determine if you achieve your goals and outcomes. For example, did you reach your fundraising goal or gain community support for your project.

If you are using a social media scheduling software such as **Hubspot** or **HootSuite**, you already have access to analytics about your posts. These platforms tell you the level of engagement and impressions for each of your posts. In other words, the number of people who liked or commented on your post and the number of people who saw your video. See if this engagement is higher or the same as your other posts. You can also look at how many people watched it.

**YouTube Studio** is also a great resource for people posting videos. You can see how your video is performing by going to the analytics page. Additionally, you can see how much of the video your audience is watching. Are they watching the whole video? If not, maybe you should consider shortening your content in the future.

Once again, there are no right answers for distribution strategy. You may also want to think about boosting a social media post if you really want to attract new views, and don’t forget that you can post video multiple times, as not everyone will see it the first time. This is ultimately a trial-and-error process to find what works for your audience.

## Publishing and Budgeting

### BUDGETING FOR VIDEO PRODUCTION

When forming your equipment budget, make sure to account for both your equipment costs as well as operating and/or variable costs. You will certainly need to develop a budget that is appropriate for your organization; however, you can also look for creative ways to share costs among departments or partners, such as splitting the cost of a drone between the marketing and easement monitoring budgets.

Assuming you are creating video content entirely in-house, your equipment costs will include:

- Camera
- Camera storage cards
- Microphone(s)
- Tripod
- Video editing software (typically an annual subscription)
- External hard drive/cloud storage for media files
- Computer, if you need a new device for editing

Your variable costs will often be project specific and, depending on whether you are hiring outside assistance, can vary greatly for each project. Some variable costs to account for include:

- Staff time
- Transportation
- Stock footage or audio acquisition
- Location rental fees
- Professional services, if applicable, such as:
  - Videography
  - Editing
  - Animation
  - Translation
  - Accessibility support
  - Voiceover costs (if applicable)

## Conclusion

### “THAT’S A WRAP!”

Whether you are planning a video, filming, and editing, or distributing your video stories, remember that there is not one way to produce an effective and compelling video. This is a fun medium and a powerful way to share your stories.

We hope this guide makes it easier for you to produce a video that allows you to stand out among all the social and online media vying for everyone’s attention. And most of all, we hope you create a culture of storytelling at your organization, with video as valuable assets that yields benefits for years to come.

The final two sections ahead are meant to serve as additional resources for you when producing a video. The first is intended as a list of at-a-glance reminders for each step in the video production process, from equipment selection, filming, to video editing. The second is a video creative brief that will help map out your video, whether you are producing it in-house or with a contractor. The brief will make sure you capture all the needed sound bites and visuals during your video shoot.

Please feel free to reach out to the authors of this guide with any questions – and to share the videos you produce! We can’t wait to see them.

### **Bold Bison Communications & Consulting**

hello@boldbison.com

boldbison.com

## 7 | APPENDIX



These final two sections are meant to serve as additional resources for you when producing a video.

# AT-A-GLANCE TIPS AND REMINDERS

## **Basics**

- Tell a story
- Do not just start filming – prepare a plan
- Clearly define a purpose and outcomes (e.g., a measure of success) for the video
- Select the specific audience(s)
- Determine when and how the video will be distributed
- Use compelling visuals early to draw in attention of audience

## **Tips for Script Writing/Sound Bites**

- Prepare a video script or outline (this will save time when editing)
- Have people being interviewed to repeat your question (what’s the best way to protect pollinators? “the best way to protect pollinators is...”)
- Make your argument in three points (“conservation is good for our planet, our health, and our economy”)

## **Tips for Filming**

- Always use a microphone and check your mic before you begin the interview
- Remind interviewees to relax; they don’t need to be perfect; they don’t need to do it in one take
- Check lighting (don’t point the camera towards the source of light/at the sun)
- Check that the audio is good, before starting your interview
- If recording inside, make sure there’s no echo
- If recording outside, stop for distracting background noise (airplanes, cars, sirens)
- Make filming feel conversational (interviewee doesn’t need to look straight into the camera)

## **Tips for Editing**

- Video editing takes time to learn, but it can be fun. The more time you invest in learning the software, the quicker and easier video editing becomes
- Voiceovers can be your best friend (if you forgot to mention something, you want to re-record, or the interview footage didn’t turn out the way you wanted)
- Listen to the audio on both a speaker and with headphones
- If using b-roll, make sure footage on screen speaks to what is being said by the interviewee
- Less is more in terms of transitions, effects, and on-screen text

## **Video Editing Software Options**

- iMovie: free for Mac/iPhone/iPad
  - Cannot create vertical format video for social media
- Adobe Premiere Rush: Free
- Adobe Premiere Pro: \$23/month
  - Includes Premiere Rush on mobile (same-day editing, i.e. volunteer events)
- Adobe Creative Suite: \$60/month
  - Includes all Adobe products (best for a full-time staff person)
- Final Cut Pro: one-time \$300/device (Apple computers only)
  - Best for high-quality/full-production editing on newer Mac models

## **Equipment**

- Smartphone
- Video capable Camera ~\$750-\$1,000
- Tripod ~\$40-\$100
- External microphone ~\$30-\$40

# VIDEO CREATIVE BRIEF



1. Project description or video title:

2. Describe the objective(s) of this video:

3. Who is the target audience:

4. What is the target length:

5. How does this video help tell the story of our land trust:

6. What are the key messages we must reinforce in this video:

7. Who are they key voices to include:

8. What shots must we film: