



FACT SHEET

HOW TO RESPONSIBLY
COVER GUN VIOLENCE
SURVIVOR STORIES

GUN CONTROL



WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF GUN VIOLENCE?

Gun violence survivor:

Someone who has been threatened or shot by someone they know or a stranger using a gun.

Family and friends of someone threatened, injured or killed as survivors:

Friends and family will suffer psychological trauma as a result of the threat, injury or loss of a loved one.

Witnesses of gun violence as survivors:

When gun violence happens there may be people who witness it and are directly or indirectly linked to the situation. Their witness accounts are important for making sure perpetrators of violence are held responsible for their actions.

Perpetrators of gun violence as survivors:

Someone who acknowledges their role as a perpetrator of gun violence and wants to give an account of how they reformed or got caught. To give an account is the same as telling their own story. Their account can inspire others to give up a violent life.

DID YOU KNOW?

As a survivor

YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE about whether to speak to the media or not. If you choose to speak to a reporter, it is important to understand that you will have little control over what is actually reported and how it is presented to the public.

NEVER SPEAK “OFF THE RECORD”. Everything you say during an interview is on the record.

TAKE TIME TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW and consider having a support person with you. You may also wish to appoint a spokesperson to deliver consistent messages to the media. A spokesperson is someone who speaks on your behalf.

If a police investigation is ongoing or criminal proceedings are underway, MEDIA COVERAGE CAN AFFECT THE PROCESS AND POTENTIALLY IMPACT THE CRIMINAL CASE. It is important to discuss what you can and cannot say with the police, the court, lawyers or victim services before speaking with reporters.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU POST IN SOCIAL MEDIA SPACES. Journalists can seek and publish this information.

Media outlets often fight for access to private information restricted by the courts because it is “in the public interest”.

As a survivor

YOUR PRIVACY MAY BE DIFFICULT TO GUARD. Expect the media to potentially report the nature and details of your case.

Remember that the MEDIA CAN REPORT ON A CRIME, the investigation and criminal proceedings AT ANY TIME, including after the trial concludes. Such reports may take survivors by surprise months or years later.

MEDIA INTEREST AND COVERAGE VARIES from case to case and declines over time. Reporting depends on whether a story is considered “newsworthy” compared to other news that competes for coverage at the time.

THE TONE OF MEDIA COVERAGE CAN CHANGE IN AN INSTANT. For example, initially the media may portray the survivor in a positive light and then suddenly coverage can become more negative. Survivors may be blamed for what happened to them, for instance, if it is discovered they had a criminal record.

AS A YOUTH REPORTER

1. When interviewing trauma survivors, proceed with caution and compassion

- When approaching a survivor, identify yourself as politely as possible before asking questions. Tell them the material could be published.
- Treat each person with dignity and respect.
- During the introduction, simply say, “I am so sorry for what you’re going through” or “I am sorry for what happened”. Let them see that you care.
- Give survivors a sense of control. Ask them where they would like to do the interview or if there is someone they would like to have with them.
- Never say, “I understand how you feel,” because you don’t, even if you have experienced a tragedy yourself. That is the biggest mistake a reporter [interviewing trauma survivors] can make. A better approach is, “I would like to tell your story”. Saying this signals that it’s their story and gives them control.

2. Never assume they will say yes

- Tell the survivor you would like to tell her/his story. Remember it is their story. When she/he

says yes, respect that she/he has honoured you to tell her/his story accurately and ethically. If she/he says no, respect that decision and offer to tell it at a later date if she/he wants to.

3. Ask about them, not just about what happened to them

- Ask about the person’s life, not just to make small talk, but to get an understanding and provide context for the story. Often it is the survivor who steers the interview toward the trauma, when she/he is ready and you, as the reporter, have the context.

4. Use third parties

- Some survivors won’t respond directly to your request for an interview. But you might be able to reach a family member, pastor, funeral director, neighbour or co-worker to help you contact the survivor and ask for an interview.

REMEMBER**BOTTOM LINE:
DO NO HARM!****5. Before the interview: Prepare**

- **Is the survivor's experience a good fit for your show?** Can they provide the insight you need?
- **Is the survivor a minor?** Find out what restrictions there are in telling their story in terms of the law and existing child rights.
- **Are there broader legal considerations?** Does the survivor have any restrictions due to a pending criminal or civil trial? Will telling their story have an impact on legal proceedings relating to the survivor's attack?
- **Can the survivor remain anonymous?** Many survivors are comfortable using their real name, while others may prefer to use a pseudonym (i.e. a made-up name) or first name only. Ask the survivor if they have a preference and check with your newsroom's policies on citing sources and anonymity.

6. At the start of the interview: Set expectations

- **Explain how the interview fits into the larger story.** Explain to the survivor their role in telling their story. Are they the main focus, or do you just need a brief soundbite?
- **Set a time frame.** Give the survivor a realistic expectation of how long the interview will last. Is this an in-depth interview, or do you just need five minutes on the phone? Let the survivor know that they can take a break at any time, for any reason.
- **Provide an overview.** Are you focusing on a specific aspect of the survivor's experience? If possible, provide a few examples of the questions you may ask.
- **Be upfront about editorial control.** Does someone else from your team have editorial control? If someone else could cut or take out parts of the interview, inform the survivor. If possible, offer to share the edited and recorded interview with the survivor before it is aired.
- **Talk about fact checking.** Are there any steps

in your editorial or review process that involve verification or fact checking? For instance, will you need to speak with the perpetrator, law enforcement officials, or other individuals who may be involved with their story? If so, let the survivor know before you start the interview. Be clear about these requirements up front, so they have an opportunity to decline if they are uncomfortable with the process.

7. During the interview: Be respectful

- If you're not sure how to address a particular aspect of the interview, **ask for help.**
- **Avoid generalising.** Some survivors may be hesitant to discuss certain aspects of their experience, while others may be more willing to share. Let the survivor share their story in their own words. While paraphrasing (or rewording what was said, especially to achieve greater clarity) may be a helpful technique to understand the interviewee, it runs the risk of generalising their experience.
- **Try not to make assumptions.** Recognise that every survivor has had a different experience, and may be at different points in their healing process. Try not to assume something has already taken place, such as that the survivor has confided in friends or family, has reported the incident to the police, or that the survivor feels a certain way.
- **"Victim" or "Survivor"? Ask your interviewee if they have a preference.** For some, "victim" may be applicable to a recent assault, while "survivor" may be more appropriate after a period of healing. Ultimately, it's an individual preference, though this guide refers to survivors rather than victims.
- **Be mindful and respect boundaries.** Ask if there is anything the survivor would prefer not to discuss. Let the survivor know that it's OK if they don't want to answer every question you ask.

8. At the end of the interview: Show appreciation

- **Thank the survivor for sharing their story.** Phrases like “Thank you for sharing this with me – I can only imagine how difficult that must have been for you,” or “I’m sorry this happened to you,” can go a long way.
- **Avoid giving advice.** It’s natural to try to give people solutions, especially if you have dealt with a similar situation. Keep in mind that survivors may have already taken action, or may not be looking for another solution. Instead of saying, “You should report,” or “You should find a therapist,” take a more supportive approach by asking, “Would you be interested in resources that may help with healing and recovery?”
- **Ask for additional input.** Ask the survivor if there is anything else they would like to share with you. Some aspects of their experience might not have been addressed as a direct answer to your questions. Give the survivor the opportunity to share any additional information.
- **Discuss next steps.** Follow up with the survivor to let them know when the story will run. Email a link, if possible.

9. Keep in mind

Stories about violence have the potential to trigger difficult memories for someone affected by these crimes, or cause intense emotions for anyone listening to or reading about the crime.

- **Provide resources.** Connect your audience with the help they deserve. It could be as simple as broadcasting the number or adding it to your WhatsApp group.
- **Notify your audience.** Before airing the show or interview, you can let your audience know that this show will be covering issues related to gun violence that may be triggering or stressful for some listeners.
- **Take care of yourself.** It can be difficult to listen to survivor stories and to help those in need. **Practising self-care** can help ease the stress that may come with helping others. Spend time with your own support system, such as loved ones or pets. Take time for the things you enjoy, such as photography, watching a funny movie, or running.

Source 1: Information drawn from blog written by **Sherry Ricchiardi** | November 07, 2016: **Interviewing trauma survivors**

Source 2: Adapted from: RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network): **interviewing survivors**

REMEMBER

Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is key to the promotion and protection of children’s rights.

EXTRA RESOURCES

- **Children’s rights and the media: A resource for South African journalists**
- **A guide for crime victims and survivors: If the media calls**
- **More tips from Steve Buttry, director of student media at Louisiana State University’s Manship School of Mass Communication, can be found [here](#).**
- **The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is an excellent resource. Highly recommended: A video titled “Getting it right – ethical reporting on people affected by trauma”. Victims and survivors tell in their own words how the media treated them.**
- **MediaWise for better journalism has a range of resources see <http://www.mediawise.org.uk/>**

HOW TO DO SURVIVOR STORIES: MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTHS

A victim and survivor of gun crime is the same thing.

Criminals don't bother with gun control - what we need is crime control to stop gun violence.

Gun control doesn't reduce crime.

A survivor's experience is key to a good story, even if this means lying to get an interview with a trauma survivor.

Telling a survivor you want to interview for your show, "I understand how you feel" is a good way to connect with them.

If a survivor says no to an interview request, keep pressuring them to say yes, eventually they will, and you'll get the interview.

It's OK to use a survivor's full name in a story.

FACTS

Only the person who experienced the trauma determines whether they are a victim or survivor.

Strong controls over legal guns reduce the chance of them being used illegally. Licensing gun owners and registering firearms reduces the chance that guns will fall into the hands of people who commit acts of violence.

Empirical evidence from South Africa and across the globe shows that stronger gun control laws have helped reduce gun violence, including gun-related suicide, murder and crime, such as armed robbery.

While a survivor's experience will enhance your show, avoid getting interviews on false pretences. It is an unethical journalistic practice to lie to your interviewees, and also insensitive to the survivor. Use your creativity to make your show interesting if you aren't able to find a survivor to interview.

Telling a survivor you understand how they feel may come across as insensitive to them, especially if you haven't experienced what they have been through. Stick to listening and asking questions instead of trying to convince them you understand. Not understanding can make for interesting conversation.

It is better to find a survivor who is willing to be interviewed than to pressure someone who is not ready to talk about it. It will make your interview process much easier to conduct and listen to. If you cannot find a willing survivor to talk to, find someone else! e.g. a lecturer or counsellor or someone from Gun Free SA.

It is only OK to use a survivor's full name in a story if they have given you permission to do so. If they request to remain anonymous then you must respect that wish. Remember that someone can change their mind and that consent can change.

As a radio reporter your job is to tell other people's stories, which means you should not get affected by what they tell you; if you are affected, then you are not a good reporter.

If a survivor agrees to tell their experience to a reporter, it shows that they have fully recovered and can talk about their experience easily and objectively (this means with no emotions).

It is normal for you to feel various emotions and to empathise with a survivor or victim. This doesn't make you a bad reporter, it just makes you human! It is also important that you take care of yourself: Talk to your friends, family, supervisor and co-workers about difficult stories, make sure you have enough time to do what you enjoy and contact a support service for help if you feel you are not coping.

Always remain sensitive in your language and approach to a survivor's story. Try not to assume to know how they feel about their experience and take your cues from them. It may take a survivor their whole life to overcome their experience/s. So always remain sensitive and respectful when asking questions. If you can tell that a certain story is still difficult to talk about, move on to something else.

Source: gun control myths and facts

EXTRA RESOURCES

- **Trauma Support South Africa: All hours number**
+27 061 156 7938
WhatsApp: 081 5030 330
- **Lifeline national hotline:**
24 Hour Counselling
011 422 4242 OR 0861 322 322
- **Lifeline JHB:** <http://www.lifelinejhb.org.za/contact-us.ashx>
- **Adcock Ingram Depression and Anxiety Helpline**
0800 70 80 90
- **Suicide Crisis Line**
0800 567 567 or SMS 31393
- **Pharmadynamics Police & Trauma Line**
0800 20 50 26
- **Destiny Helpline for Youth & Students**
0800 41 42 43
- **SADAG Mental Health Line**
011 234 4837
- **Akeso Psychiatric Response Unit 24 Hour**
0861 435 787
- **Find a Support Group in your area**
0800 21 22 23

RADIO PRODUCTION GUIDE

HOW TO RESPONSIBLY COVER GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVOR STORIES



PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

WAYS TO TALK ABOUT HOW TO RESPONSIBLY COVER GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVOR STORIES

- As a youth reporter, how can you make sure that you tell a gun violence survivor's story in a responsible and ethical way?
- What are some of the things you want to achieve by telling the story of a gun violence survivor?
- What are the ways you can prevent a gun violence survivor or your listeners being re-traumatised by her/his story?

CHOOSE AN ANGLE

As a youth reporter, how can you make sure that you tell a gun violence survivor's story in a responsible and ethical way?

How to talk about: 'What are the ways we can be responsible journalists when reporting on a gun violence survivor's experiences?'

- Be prepared for the interview
- Explain the process of editorial decisions
- Be patient, considerate and don't generalise
- Understand and respect any legal restrictions around the survivor sharing her/his story

FORMATS



VOX POP



Aim

To get many opinions on one topic.



Who do you talk to?

Anyone in the community.



Question

Can you describe the meaning of a trauma "survivor" versus a trauma "victim"?



AUDIO COMMENTARY



Aim

To get people's opinion about a topic that they care deeply about.



Who do you talk to?

A community activist, or a youth activist campaigning for the rights of survivors of trauma.



Questions

- How can responsible and ethical reporting about trauma contribute to how we think about traumatic events?
- Does the way in which we speak about trauma survivors affect how our audience sees and how much they support survivors?
- How can we help support survivors when we report their stories?
- What are the ways trauma survivors can ensure they are safe and stories are not abused when they agree to speak to the media?

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR SHOW



Use your produced radio formats, your research and the suggested script and questions to write your own script.

Suggested questions for the interview with a community leader or a representative from an organisation campaigning for the protection and dignity of survivors of trauma:

- What are key tips for media to report responsibly on survivors of violence?
- How does responsible reporting of survivors' stories contribute to changing perceptions?
- In what ways can a survivor's story be empowering?

[INTRO:]

Host 1: It's just gone [TIME] and you're in time for the [NAME OF SHOW] on [RADIO STATION]. My name is [NAME]...

Host 2: And my name is [NAME], and today's show is all about, how to do "survivor stories".

Host 1: That's right. Did you know that we youth reporters have so much responsibility when it comes to reporting on survivors' stories.

Host 2: First off, we must respect the survivor. That one is a priority.

Host 1: That's right. And we must also come prepared for the interview and take into consideration that this person has been through a very, very difficult time. We can't just rush things. We must be patient. We must also be honest. And tell them about any editorial decisions when it comes to their story.

Host 2: Okay, it sounds like we must tread carefully and uphold the survivor's dignity at all times, during the interview and even after the interview.

Host 1: Exactly right! Now let's hear from the people on the streets about what they think about survivors of traumatic events.

[INTRO VOX POP]

[VOX POP]

[OUTRO VOX POP]

Host 1: Mmmm! Some interesting descriptions there! Let's hear more on this topic from someone who knows more about how the media should be reporting on survivors of trauma.

[INTRO INTERVIEW]

[INTERVIEW]

[OUTRO INTERVIEW]

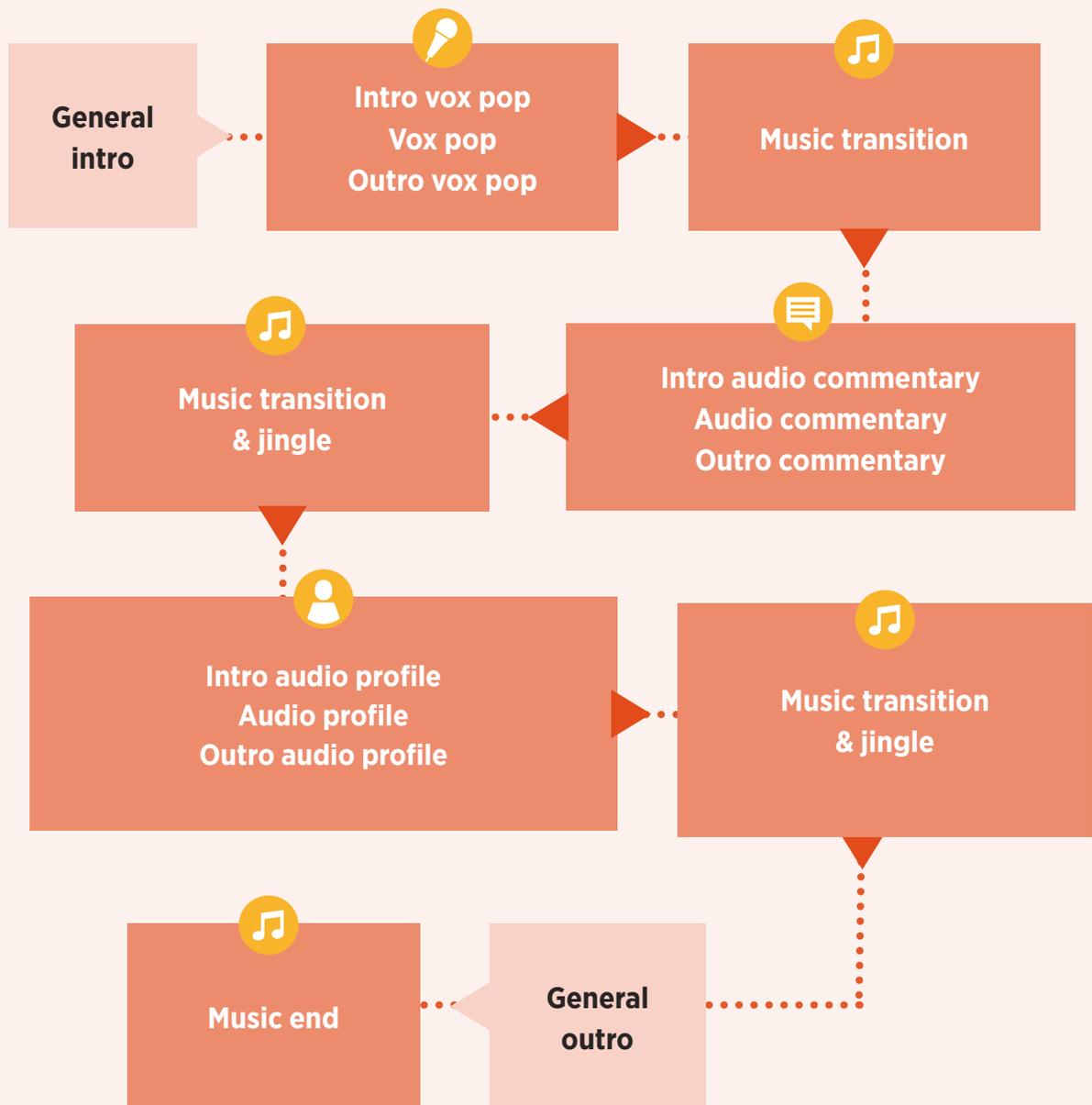
[OUTRO:]

Host 1: Today, we've learnt so much about how to do "survivor stories".

Host 2: That's right! Before we discussed this topic, I never really thought about the responsibilities we have as the media in telling survivor stories responsibly and ethically.

Host 1: True story. I have a lot more information about how best to approach survivor stories. Thank you all for staying tuned! Next week on [DAY] at [TIME] we'll be talking all about [NEXT WEEK'S SHOW TOPIC]. Until then, it's bye from us!

SHOW OUTLINE



ETHICS AND CONSENT

This may be a sensitive topic for some, so make sure you inform your audience to respect those who share personal stories in the space. It is also a good idea to have local referral services you can share on air for people suffering from trauma and stress from violence and loss. Repeat these a few times during your broadcast.

OUTREACH OUTLINE FLOW

When you create your outreach outline, be aware of the flow and the energy that certain activities generate. You don't want to start with a bang and end on a whisper.

OUTREACH GUIDE

HOW TO RESPONSIBLY COVER GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVOR STORIES



PREPARING FOR YOUR OUTREACH

Different ways to talk about: “How to responsibly cover gun violence survivor stories”

- What are the ways we can help people understand the terms “survivor” and “victim”, including how they get used and by whom?
- In what ways can we advocate responsible and ethical reporting for survivors of traumatic events?
- How can we empower trauma survivors and the media to tell these stories in ways that can help create understanding and awareness?

FORMATS



GUEST SPEAKER



Aim

A guest speaker is someone who can share expert knowledge about the impact statement or tell a personal story related to the impact statement.



Some questions for the guest speaker to think about ahead of time

- What are some of the steps journalists and youth reporters should follow when interviewing a survivor of a traumatic event?
- What should a survivor of a traumatic event be aware of when agreeing to tell her/his story to the media?
- In what ways can a survivor’s story help raise awareness in the community?



PANEL DISCUSSION



Aim

A panel discussion involves a group of people discussing one topic in front of an audience. There is usually time for questions from the audience afterwards.



Examples of opening questions for the panel

- What can we learn from survivors’ stories?
- Can the media be an ally to survivors?
- How can we as a community communicate and show support to survivors?
- In what ways can survivors protect themselves from their stories being misused by the media?

Who is on the panel

Gun Free SA, community policing forum representative, youth activist, social worker, teacher, ordinary community aunty/uncle/youth with experience of gun violence.



IMPACT JINGLE



Aim

A jingle is a short song or tune that is easy to sing along to and remember, and it has a clear message.



HOW TO PRESENT YOUR OUTREACH

Use your outreach formats and your research to write your own script. Here is an example of part of a script. Use it as a guide to create your own script for your outreach activity.

[INTRO:]

Host 1: It's just gone [TIME] and my name is [NAME OF HOST 1] and I am a [TITLE OF HOST] from [NAME OF ORGANISATION]. Thank you all for being here at the [NAME OF VENUE] today.

Host 2: And my name is [NAME OF HOST 2], and today's event is all about, how to do "survivor stories".

Host 1: This is a very interesting topic. I've heard about how we, as the media, can actually make things worse for survivors when we tell their stories.

Host 2: And that's exactly what we, together with our guests, are going to discuss today. Let's get the ball rolling and hear from our guest speaker about how to do "survivor stories" and what responsible reporting can do for us in our community.

[INTRO GUEST SPEAKER]

[GUEST SPEAKER]

[OUTRO GUEST SPEAKER]

Host 1: Wow! That was so very interesting and taught me so much about how to do "survivor stories". I hoped it helped you guys listening too!

[IMPACT JINGLE]

Host 1: Let's keep our energy levels up... Here is some music to help you get out of your seats.

[INTRO MUSIC]

[MUSIC]

[OUTRO MUSIC]

Host 2: Okay, listen up, we have a panel of very interesting people here today who are going to share more about our topic, especially the ways we can actually tell survivor stories responsibly and in a sensitive manner.

[INTRO PANEL DISCUSSION]

[PANEL DISCUSSION]

[OUTRO PANEL DISCUSSION]

[IMPACT JINGLE]

Host 1: Great stuff! This day has been amazing so far. I love learning new things! What about you?

Host 2: For sure! I learned about how to do survivor stories and how it can really be powerful in changing our perceptions about trauma and the survivors who live among us.

Host 1: Thank you guys for attending today, for listening and just being awesome!

Host 2: Next up, it's the final performance of the day. [INTRO PERFORMERS]. Don't forget to catch us next month on [DAY] at [TIME] and [VENUE]. We'll be talking all about [TOPIC FOR NEXT SHOW].

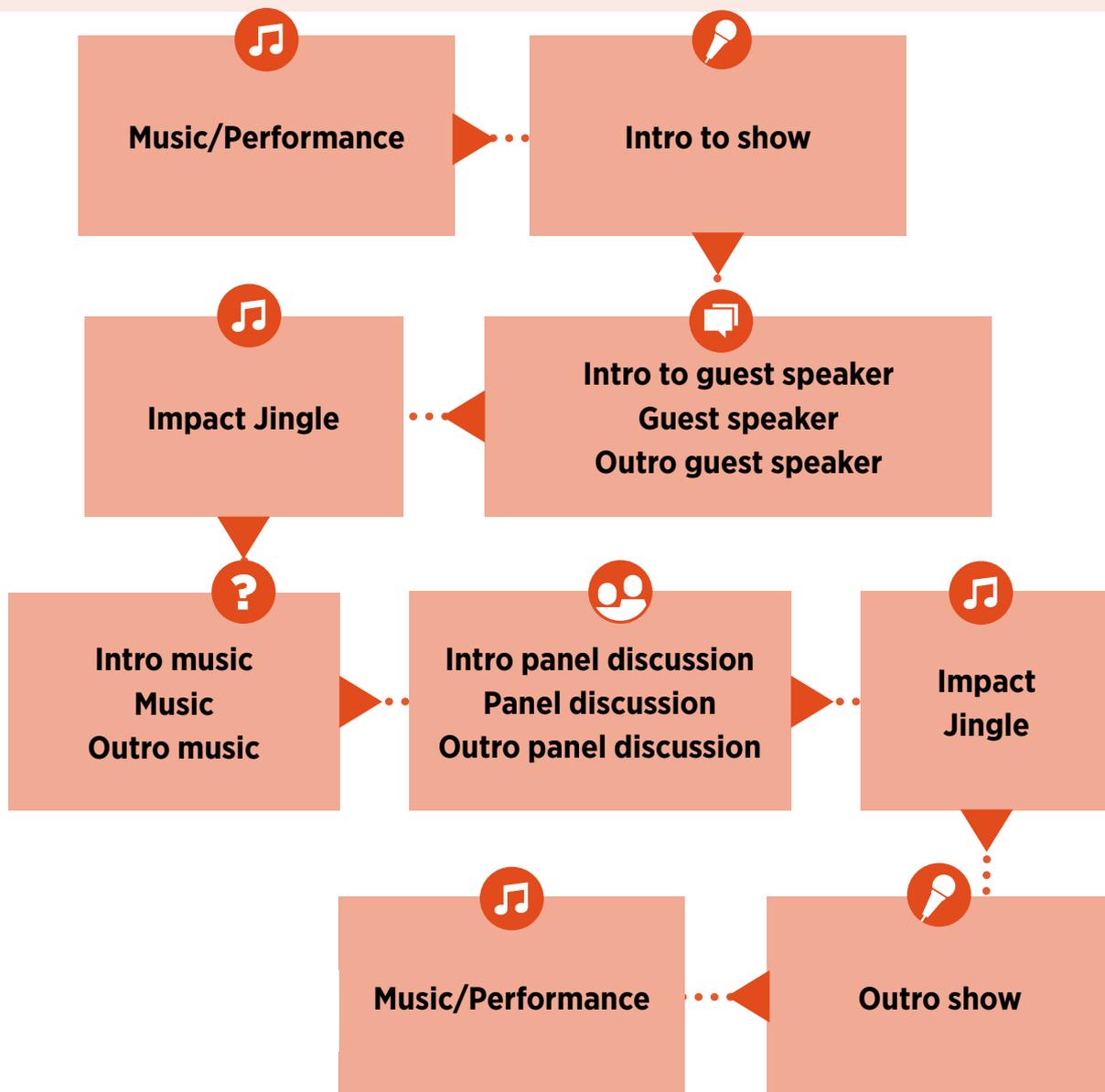
Host 1: Thank you once again for joining us and we hope to see you next time! Until then, it's bye from us!

[MUSIC/PERFORMANCE]

SHOW OUTLINE

An outreach outline is a map to help you stay on track during your event. It is a list of the items and the order in which they will happen in the outreach activity. Allocate a time to each item so that you keep to the time allocation of the outreach activity.

Below is an example of an event that is one hour long.



If any incorrect information comes up in any of your formats, like the quiz, role play or panel discussion, you must correct it. Don't let your audience leave with myths.

Once you've finalised your script, your performance artists, your outreach outline and prepared all your formats, it's time to start your live event!