

# Pack 103, Item 11

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**How to use vox pops in your farm radio program**

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***What is a vox pop?***

A vox pop is a collection of short interviews with members of the public, revealing their knowledge and opinion on a specific topic. The purpose of the vox pop is to show your listeners that there is a *range of opinion* in their community on a specific topic.

In a farm radio context, a vox pop is a radio *format* that is usually used with other formats (e.g., expert interview, accountability interview, panel discussion, research report) in a program that deals with a specific topic.

***How can a vox pop help me serve my listeners better?***

* Listeners will want to learn more about this topic.
* Listeners will hear a range of opinion on the topic.
* Listeners will respect you for interviewing people like them.
* Listeners will be encouraged to speak out themselves.

***How can a vox pop help me produce better programs?***

- It will give me a taste of the *range* of opinion, and possibly the *trending* of opinion on a specific topic.

- It will stimulate my listeners’ interest and set them up for the other material I have prepared on this topic.

- It will give me clips I can use to prompt answers from officials or experts or groups of farmers.

- It will give me a clip I can use in a promo for my program.

- It might expose me to an important minority point of view.

- It will add variety to my program.

- Listeners will appreciate that I want to know their opinions on matters of importance.

***How do I get started?*** (Learn more about these and other points in the *Details* section below.)

- Choose the overall *topic* to be covered in your program.

- Create a vox pop *question* that will prompt clear and interesting answers.

- Interview people to gather a range of opinions about the topic.

- Edit the interviews into a tight package representative of the range of opinions gathered.

***Details***

**Choose the overall *topic* to be covered in your program.** Only use the vox pop for a topic that is *current,* and is *of interest to your listeners*. Don’t, for example, do a vox pop about a national postal museum, unless you know that this is of currently interesting to your listeners. On the other hand, if you know local farmers are upset with the management of the government’s fertilizer subsidy, then a vox pop is a good way to kick-start your coverage of that issue. For example, you might have already planned to interview an official, and have plans for a panel discussion of farmers affected. Now you can decide to add a vox pop to stimulate the interest of listeners and to show your official and your panelists the interest and the range of opinion on the topic.

**Create a vox pop question that will prompt clear and interesting answers.** If your topic is simply about the merits of government-subsidized fertilizer, you might ask an open-ended question such as: *“What do you think of how the government’s fertilizer subsidy is managed?”* This should prompt a range of answers that you can discuss with your official and the farmer panel. On the other hand, if there is significant concern that the fertilizer subsidy is not working, you can ask a closed-ended question such as “Is the government-subsidized fertilizer distributed fairly?” This will prompt a simple “yes” or “no” reply, and you can tally up all the “yes” and “no” answers as a very informal poll. Then, having already asked a close-ended question, you can ask the same people an open-ended question, such as “How can the system be made better? That will give you some ideas to use in your other coverage of this topic.

**Gather a range of opinions about the topic.** The vox pop should give your listeners a range of opinion from a range of people. Try to ensure that your vox pop represents the public you serve. While you might be able to get all the interviews in one place, you might have to go to a second place to flesh out the range of opinions. For example, if you do your interviews at a market where there are mainly women, you might have to go to another place to get comments from men.

**Edit the interviews into a tight package.** The purpose of the vox pop is to *stimulate audience interest* by showing that there is a range of opinion and comments on a specific topic. The vox pop is not intended to discuss the issue nor to resolve a problem. For the sake of interest, edit each speaker to 10-15 seconds whenever possible and bundle the interviews together. If an interviewee goes on for three minutes, tell them that you will be using only about 15 seconds, and ask them if they want to do their interview again. Sometimes longer vox pop interviews can work, especially if you ask open-ended questions. But then each interview should be introduced by the host. Start using vox pops with short interviews to master the discipline!

**Other tips to create exciting and useful vox pops**

**Consider the length of the interviews.**How brief each opinion should be depends on your interviewees - and your listeners. Younger interviewees might be able to have their say in fifteen seconds. Older farmers who don’t spend their days talking to other people might need thirty seconds or more. Be sensitive to the time each person needs to express themselves clearly. However, remember that the purpose of the vox pop is just to show a *range* of opinion, not pursue those opinions in depth. And you want your listeners to left with an impression of that range by making it a tight package of relatively brief comments.

**Be welcoming and fair.** When you approach a potential vox pop interviewee, don’t ambush or surprise them, and don’t be unclear about your intentions. Walk up to a person with your mic lowered, and say, “Hi. I’m Georgia Kwabena from Charm FM. We’re gathering comments about the fertilizer subsidy. Can I ask you few questions?”

**Don’t draw wrong conclusions!** If you interview ten people for your vox pop segment, and eight of them say that they had worse maize harvests this year, don’t conclude that eight out of *every* ten people in your area had worse maize harvests. What you *can* say on air is that “eight out of the ten people we interviewed had worse crops this year.” A vox pop does not have the accuracy of, for example, a random door-to-door survey.

**Find a good place to do your vox pops.** Typically, the vox pop segment should reflect the viewpoints of a wide range of citizens—old and young, men and women, richer and poorer. Find a place where you will encounter a wide range of people, such as a market or a bus station. If it works, then you will have the convenience of having a place you can always go to record vox pop interviews.

**Listen for minority opinions and trends.** While your vox pop interviews are likely to give you a predictable range of opinion on a topic, they might also throw up a comment you have never heard. Remember that minority opinion and explore it to decide whether you should do some programming about it in the future. Also, your vox pop interviews might reflect a trend that you did not expect. For example, if you interview ten farmers and eight of them say the government’s subsidized fertilizer initiative is working well, use that evidence to investigate what has changed. Perhaps the government has made its system fairer and more transparent this year! Or, if nine out of ten mothers fear for their daughters on their walks to and from school, then you probably have a major issue to cover.

**Also use vox pops with specific groups.** A vox pop typically gathers the opinions of a range of citizens—old and young, male and female. But the format is equally helpful if you want to gather a range of opinions from a specific group—like high school students, or women who grow cassava, or older farmers. Choose an interview location where you are likely to find the kind of people you want to interview, e.g., high school students outside school at the end of the school day, or women cassava growers at the weekly market.

**Use a vox pop as a promo for a future program.** If you have a special program in three weeks that deals with safety issues for girls walking to school, do a vox pop on the issue in advance. Run the vox pop as a promo during the three weeks before the special program goes to air.

**Use a vox pop to try out a junior broadcaster.** While you might want to do all the vox pops yourself, you can also use them to try out a junior broadcaster or a trainee. We all have to start out somewhere, sometime! It will give that person great training and will show you what they are capable of doing. Just make sure that you decide on the vox pop question together!

***Where else can I learn about vox pops?***

* DW Academie (Deutsche Welle), undated. *The Vox Pop*. <http://www.dw.com/popups/pdf/1495715/the-vox-poppdf.pdf>
* American Student Radio, undated. *Making your first vox pop*. <http://americanstudentradio.org/wp-content/uploads/ASR/Vox-Pop-101-KritEdit.pdf>
* Zeeshan Kasim, undated. *Voxpop and interviewing for radio*. Slide show. <http://www.slideshare.net/ZeeshanQasim/voxpop-interviewing-for-radio>



***Definitions***

A *vox pop* is a collection of informal interviews with members of the public that reveals their knowledge and opinion on a specific topic. A vox pop is a radio *format* that is usually used as one element in a program that deals with a specific topic in a variety of ways. It is sometimes called a *streeter,* which emphasizes that it is done in an informal location with whoever happens to walk by. *Vox pop* is Latin for “voice of the people.”

A *format* is a specific way that sounds and words are assembled for use in a radio program.

An *open-ended question* prompts a detailed reply. Example: “What do you think of the government’s fertilizer subsidy?”

A *closed-ended question* prompts a one-word, or at least brief reply. Example: “Is the government’s fertilizer subsidy working?”

## Acknowledgements

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