SOUNDMAP 101 · STEP 2

Gather your sound materials

Build a sound inventory for your site: narration, field recordings, music, and archival sound. Decide what to preserve, amplify or introduce.

Plan your sounds · Record with a phone · Find free sounds · Edit and prepare for Echoes

Start with a sound inventory

Now that you've listened deeply to your place, before you record, list every sound your map needs, stop by stop. For each one, decide what you're doing with the place:

Preserve

Record a sound that's already here and play it back unchanged.

Amplify

Record an easy-to-miss sound up close and play it louder than life.

Introduce

Bring in a sound the site doesn't have today: your voice, a story, an animal, the past.

Stop	Sound	Approach	Record or source?	File name
1 Trailhead	Welcome	Introduce	Record (voice)	Stop01_Welcome_Voice
2 Vernal pool	Spring peepers	Amplify	Record (ambience)	Stop02_Peepers_Amb
2 Vernal pool	Wood frog call	Introduce	Source	Stop02_WoodFrog_FX
Whole trail	Forest bed	Preserve	Record (ambience)	Trail_Bed_Loop

Recording your voice with a phone

Built on NPR Training's field recording checklist, the standard radio producers work from, adapted for a phone and a sound map narration.

NPR PRINCIPLE	ON YOUR PHONE
Always wear headphones	Plug in earbuds, record a 10-second test and listen back before the real take.
Get close, stay close	The mic is on the bottom edge. Hold it a hand's width from your mouth.
Choose the right mic	The built-in mic is fine. A clip-on lav keeps your voice even if you move.
Prevent problems early	Pick a quiet, soft room. Airplane mode on, fans and AC off.
Record room tone	Before you stop, stay silent for 20 seconds. It can be used to patch edits later.

Which app? The one already on your phone: Voice Memos on iPhone, the Recorder app on Android.

Recording field sound with a phone

Same NPR checklist, now for the sounds of your site: the layer that makes a sound map feel like the place.

NPR PRINCIPLE	ON YOUR PHONE
Anticipate the sounds	Walk the site first and list the sounds you expect at each stop.
Actions make sound	Steps on a boardwalk, a gate, water over rocks. Record what moves.
Get close, stay close	Bring the phone to the sound, then hold still. Handling noise ruins takes.
Watch the wind	Shield the mic with your body or a foam cover. Listen for rumble.
Don’t forget ambience	90 seconds at every stop, phone set down. It becomes your background layer.

Finding free sounds, and reusing them well

Source	Good for	Can I use it?
NPS Sound Gallery	Park soundscapes, animals	Public domain; credit NPS
Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain sound libraries	Birds, water, weather	Public domain; credit NPS
Freesound.org	Nature, Foley, effects	Varies: CC0 free; CC BY needs credit; NC is noncommercial only
xeno-canto	Bird and insect calls	Creative Commons; many are NC or no-edits, so check each
USGS Frog Calls	Frogs and toads	Check the page's terms

Consent. Ask first: "I'm making a sound walk for [place]. May I record you and use it there?"

Copyright. Free to hear is not free to use. Skip commercial music.

Keep animal calls in headphones. Parks ask that recorded calls not be played aloud near wildlife.

Sources: nps.gov Sound Gallery and park sound libraries · Freesound license FAQ · xeno-canto terms

Editing on your phone

Keep it light: trim, clean up, fade, level. These free tools are probably already on your phone.

Task	iPhone	Android	Any computer
Record	Voice Memos	The phone’s Recorder app	Record on the phone
Trim	Voice Memos › Edit › Trim	Recorder app trim (varies by phone)	Audacity (free)
Clean up noise	Voice Memos › Enhance Recording	Finish on a computer	Audacity Noise Reduction
Fades and levels	GarageBand (free)	Finish on a computer	Audacity Fade In / Fade Out

Simplest path: record and trim in Voice Memos or Recorder, then do fades and levels in one session on a computer.

Getting files off your phone

Recordings don’t live in a normal folder on your phone. Send them out, then gather them in one folder on the computer where you’ll build in Echoes.

iPhone

Tap the recording’s title to rename it. Then tap ••• › Share and choose AirDrop, Mail or Save to Files.

Android

Open the recording, rename it, then Share to Google Drive or email it to yourself.

Then

Drop everything into one folder named for your map. That folder is what you upload in Step 3.

Format rule: upload the file your phone makes. iPhone saves M4A, which is fine. Never convert to MP3.

Preparing files for Echoes

Trim

Cut handling noise and dead air. Leave a breath before and after the voice.

Fade

A short fade in and out prevents clicks and the jarring starts testers noticed on prior walks.

Level

Make it loud, then play it on speakerphone at the site. Hard to hear? Go louder.

Format

Keep the file your phone makes (M4A on iPhone). Never convert to MP3.

Name

Name each file for where it lives: stop number first, then what it is.

EXAMPLE FOLDER

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Stop01_Welcome_Voice.wav
Stop02_Pool_Voice.wav
Stop02_Peepers_Amb.wav
Trail_Bed_Loop.wav
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Some things we've learned

From building prior walks with partners who had never made a sound map. These are the fixes we'd hand anyone starting out.

WHAT HAPPENED	SO NOW
Sounds started and stopped abruptly	Build fades into the file, not just in Echoes.
Narration got lost outdoors	Mix loud, then test on speakerphone at the site.
Pauses let walkers look up	Pause longer than feels natural between sentences. Walkers aren't only listening; they're looking, moving and taking in the place.
Exact species names sped up sourcing	Write "wood frog," not "frogs," in your inventory.
Files labeled by stop made handoff easy	Name every file by stop number before you share it.

TRY IT · ABOUT 45 MINUTES

Make your first stop

1. Pick one stop from your inventory.
2. Record 30 to 60 seconds of narration.
3. Record 90 seconds of ambience at that spot.
4. Find one sound you can’t record, and log its credit.
5. Trim, fade, name and send all three to your folder.

DONE WHEN

Three files sit in one folder, named by stop, loud enough to hear outdoors, with a credit line for the sourced sound.

That folder is your starting point for Step 3: building in Echoes.