

Establishing ethical relationships

Oral history is person-centered research. The creation of a recorded interview is a partnership between the interviewee and interviewer. To succeed, the oral history partnership requires mutual respect and trust. With careful attention to the following matters, interviewers will go far toward establishing rapport with their interviewees and making the oral history experience mutually rewarding.

Informed consent

- ◆ Explain to interviewees their rights and interests in the recordings and the information they will share in the interview.
- ◆ Reveal to interviewees the purposes of the interviews and the goals of the project.
- ◆ Explain the procedures that will be used during and after the interview, including how the recording will be processed, where recordings and transcripts will be deposited, and potential uses of the memoir.

Long-range outlook

- ◆ Commit to producing the highest-quality interview possible.
- ◆ The useful life of the interview extends far beyond today, so strive to gather information that will be relevant to future users.
- ◆ You may be the only person who records your interviewees' stories, so take time to include their memories on subjects beyond your own immediate interests.
- ◆ Make every effort to place completed interviews in an archives where they can be preserved for the future and used by other interested researchers.

Relationships & reputations

- ◆ Be sensitive to real and perceived differences between you and your interviewee (age, gender, race, class, educational level, nationality, religion, et cetera) and take care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes.
- ◆ Respect the privacy of the individuals and communities from which you collect oral histories and avoid bringing them undue notoriety.
- ◆ Make your interviews accessible to your interviewees and their communities.

Correct representation of meaning

- ◆ Give interviewees the opportunity to respond to questions as freely as possible.
- ◆ Do not subject interviewees to biased assumptions.
- ◆ Give interviewees the opportunity to review transcripts created from the recordings and provide corrections as needed.

The Oral History Association sets the standards for interviewers to follow in establishing and maintaining ethical relationships with interviewees, the public, and the oral history profession in its

General Principles and Best Practices for Oral History.

The latest edition of the guidelines is available online at

<http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/principles-and-practices/>