

Reaching the public

If you do nothing more than collect and preserve interviews—a large undertaking in itself—you have rendered future generations a valuable service. But the outcomes of the interviewing process can be packaged in innovative ways to reach the public. Indeed, some oral historians argue that public programming not only educates the public about the past but motivates the participants in a project and perhaps inspires persons to volunteer as narrators and helpers.

The process from production through editing to publishing requires significant amounts of time, thought, planning, and energy, not to mention money; but the product, whether it is a radio series, video documentary, Internet site, or book, can repay the investment by increasing public enlightenment and creating favorable publicity for the project.

- ◆ If public programming or publication is your goal, remember to plan carefully from the outset. Go for the highest possible sound quality in your recordings and best visual interest in your video or digital pictures. Obtain the best recorders and microphones you can afford, even if you have to rent them. Then, practice using the equipment before every interview.
- ◆ You may wish to take photographs of interviewees for use later in slide shows, exhibits, or publications. Also, you may want to ask interviewees for permission to make copies of their personal photos or documents that might enhance the project.
- ◆ After the interview, an index or transcript will be most helpful, if not essential, for preparing publications or programs.
- ◆ A signed legal-release form transferring copyright is a must for those considering the creation of public programs. Ethical practice requires you to tell the narrator that the recording might be used in a production or publication. Because of user restrictions, subject, or quality, some interviews may not lend themselves to public distribution.

Consider these possibilities . . . and then think of more.

- ◆ Video or audio productions or simple PowerPoint or slide-tape shows incorporating oral history recordings, old photographs, and period music
- ◆ Plays, monologues, dramatic readings, art work, or musical compositions based on oral history stories and storytellers
- ◆ Productions or vignettes for radio stations and television. For this type of series, oral history recordings must be broadcast quality.
- ◆ Digital audio and/or transcripts or essays displayed on the World Wide Web
- ◆ Bound volumes of transcripts, possibly including photographs and other material relating to the narrators and the topic under study
- ◆ Regular columns in a hometown newspaper or Sunday supplement magazine
- ◆ Magazines, journals, or pamphlets of community oral history, folklore, and folk craft
- ◆ Tours of community sites based on information shared in oral histories
- ◆ Community-wide reception for participants in the project, including exhibits and listening stations
- ◆ Museum exhibits or traveling displays incorporating quotations or sound bites from audio recordings