

Planning a project: Where to begin?

Oral history projects may be carried out by one person or by a group of people and may result in a collection of interviews with an individual or with several people. At the outset of your project, ask yourself the following questions.

Why is the oral history project needed?

- ◆ Determine what information you are seeking, what information you already know about the topic, and what information is yet unknown.
- ◆ Make sure that oral history is the best way to gather the information you seek. Are there people you can reach who can and will tell you what you want to know?
- ◆ Seek advice on your research idea from persons with various viewpoints on the topic. Ask them to help you refine your topic, uncover background information, and locate persons to interview.

What are the goals & priorities of the project?

- ◆ Make it a goal to achieve the best possible recording under the most favorable conditions so that the interview can be duplicated and distributed and, as needed, upgraded to new formats.
- ◆ Determine what will happen to your recordings when they are done.
- ◆ Decide what you will do with the information you uncover through interviews.
- ◆ Create lists of persons able to provide recollections appropriate to your topic.
- ◆ Set target dates for completion of research, interviews, processing, and programming. Prepare to be flexible; oral history takes time!

What guidelines will the project follow?

- ◆ Develop legal forms to govern the interviews and additional donated materials, such as photographs. This step requires choosing who will hold copyright for the interview.
- ◆ Talk to the archivist of the depository to which you will donate your project. Ask what recording formats the depository accepts, what legal agreements are required, and what accompanying materials may be helpful (photographs, maps, interview notes, research materials, word lists, transcripts, indexes, et cetera). Ask how the archives will maintain the oral history and make it accessible to the public.
- ◆ Choose equipment that will best serve the project goals. Determine who funds, purchases, owns, uses, and maintains the equipment.
- ◆ Become familiar with the general principles and best practices of the Oral History Association, available at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.

Who will do what for the project?

- ◆ Fit individual skills and interests to the variety of tasks available: project director, researcher, interviewer, transcriber, and editor. Additional staff might include a photographer, archivist, equipment expert, Web designer, and fund raiser.
- ◆ Train staff or volunteers to produce and preserve professional quality oral histories.
- ◆ Plan regular meetings to assess progress toward goals.

What financial resources are available?

- ◆ Develop a budget based on your circumstances and stick by it.
- ◆ In addition to personnel costs, include funds for equipment, recording media, processing and storage, record-keeping, travel, publicity, and program production.
- ◆ Seek sources for support locally or through grants.