

DEPOSITING ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS WITH A LOCAL ARCHIVE OFFICE

If you are thinking of undertaking an oral history project it is important to think about what you will do with the material you have produced once the project is finished. Funders will look at how you intend to deal with the legacy of your project as part of their assessment process. Some projects in the past have obtained some really great interviews, but did not deposit them anywhere, making it difficult for others to use the interviews after the project ended.

The local archive office is an obvious place to deposit recordings, but it is essential to discuss the matter with them first. You need to check that it is the kind of material they take as not all archive offices will take audio visual material. If they do, it usually has to be relevant to their area and fit with their collecting policy.

There may be a cost for depositing your material to cover cataloguing and storage. Funders can usually cover this and expect it to be built into a project budget. Talking things through with archive staff at an early stage will enable you to check any costs which you might not otherwise have budgeted for such as storage, digitisation, transcription or cataloguing work. They can also advise on what you need to do during the project to make it easier for the material to be processed and made available.

If the archive office can't accept the material, they may be able to suggest an alternative place of deposit.

Topics for discussion with the Archive Office

All archive offices are different, so what they need to know about your project and what you need to know about them will vary. Topics for discussion and clarification may include:

1. Timescale of project

Discuss your proposed project timetable and outcomes with the archive office, so they know when your material is likely to arrive and how much there is and can have plans in place to receive and process it. If you intend to publicise that your material will be deposited at the archive office, it is also important to discuss this at an early stage so that potential users' expectations can be managed. The archive office may need to honour commitments to other projects, so may not be able to catalogue and promote your material immediately, especially if they are unaware of its imminent arrival.

2. Storage and processing of collections

Some of the issues you may need to clarify in this area may include:

- Are there any costs associated with depositing?
- What information is required in order to catalogue the material?
- Is there a charge for cataloguing time?
- How soon is it likely to be catalogued and made available after deposit?
- How will it be made available?
- Will it be migrated to other formats to take account of the development of future technologies?

3. Recordings and transcripts

It is essential that you check that the archive office can receive the material in the format in which you are recording and storing it. Not all archive offices are geared up to digital storage. You therefore need to check:

- What format the recordings should be in.
- What format transcripts, summaries and other project material should be in.
- Whether anything needs to be printed out in hard copy.

For each recording to be catalogued the archive office will need information such as name of interviewee, date of recording, name of interviewer, length of recording, topic(s) discussed, whether the interview has been transcribed/summarised. If such information is in electronic format in a spreadsheet, it may be easy to upload to the archive office's accessioning/cataloguing software. Short summaries of interviews will also help with the cataloguing process.

Each recording should be clearly and systematically labelled with a unique number and title so it can be identified (eg 001 Joe Bloggs). All material relating to that recording should have a matching number so it can be identified as relating to the same interview. This will help the archive office to process the deposit, especially if there is a large amount of varied material.

4. Permissions to use/restrictions on material

Each interview will need to have a signed participation agreement together with a signed recording agreement stating how the recording can/cannot be used and indicating the copyright status of the recording. Restrictions on usage should be clearly defined. Issues relating to sensitivity of information or confidentiality should also be clearly highlighted. It can be frustrating those who want to use oral history interviews in the future but cannot because there is no information about permissions. It is important therefore for the archive office to have this information so they know how the project participants wish their interviews to be used and what information might need to be restricted. If you do not have this information, the archive office may not be able to take your material. Archive staff can give advice if you are unclear about the paperwork and may be able to supply sample forms.

Likewise the depositor of the material should also set out in writing how the archive office itself might be able to use the project's material eg online, in exhibitions. This especially important if the project is a one-off and there will be no successor organisation to clarify matters or supply permissions to use material in the future.

5. General project paperwork

Project staff need to include some explanation about the background to the project such as how it was devised, its aims and objectives, how interviewers and interviewees were chosen, together with any risk assessments, question sheets, publicity material etc. This will help to set the recordings in context and explain the project to future researchers. Once it's handed over there might be no one to answer questions.

For more information consult our online depositor information and contact us via our webpage at <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/waas> or phone 01905 822866.