

Oral History Projects: How To Get Started

Introduction

Undertaking an oral history project is very exciting and rewarding, but time needs to be invested in planning the project well and thinking through practical issues so that your project is realistic, achievable and successful. If you have not been involved in an oral history project before, there are several practical things you can do to help you get on the right track.



Online advice and information

There lots of information on line. Here are just a few sites it might be worth browsing.

The Oral History Society <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/getting-started/> can provide you with practical advice and guidance in setting up and running your project. It may be that you revisit the site at different stages of your project.

The East Midlands Oral History website <https://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/infosheet.html> has lots of useful fact sheets at to help you with different aspects of oral history work.

The Manchester histories website has a number of toolkits including one for oral history. <https://manchesterhistories.co.uk/getinvolved/toolkits>

National Lottery Heritage Fund at <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/oral-history-guidance> produces detailed guidance on planning an oral history project. This is a must if you are hoping to apply for funding from them.

If you have a particular project in mind it's worth searching the internet to see who else might have undertaken a similar project elsewhere. It may provide you with useful contacts who can give you the benefit of their experiences and may provide you with ideas for outcomes for your project.

Contact Us:

If you are planning an oral history project and you think we can help, do get in touch. We may be able to:

- provide help and guidance
- put you in touch with others doing similar oral history projects
- suggest a home for your oral history material
- provide training in oral history interviewing techniques
- provide training in historical research techniques

Contact us via our webpage at <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/waas> or phone 01905 822866.

Checklist

There are several basic things you need to think about when planning an oral history project. Some of these are practical such as choosing equipment and working out a budget. Others relate to the ethical issues you will need to consider and the approach you might want to take.

The following questions in this checklist will help you with planning your project:

WHY ARE YOU DOING THE PROJECT?

- Do you have/need a theme for the project? This might be an event (WW2) a place (your village) a topic (farming).
- Is there a need for your project? If so, what evidence do you have?
- Have you done some research to make sure you aren't duplicating a project which has already been done or is ongoing in your area?
- Have you set a goal so that your project has a clear sense of direction and you can keep focussed on the task?
- Have you set targets to show how you will meet your objectives?
- What outcomes do you want to achieve eg a publication, an exhibition, a website, performances, a digital resource? How does this fit with your funder's objectives?
- Is oral history the best approach? Can you achieve your objectives without doing oral history?
- What resources are required to meet these objectives?
- What benefits/differences will it make to the local community?

BUDGET

- Where's the money for your project going to come from? If you are bidding for funds, check the funding organisation's requirements carefully.
- Is your budget realistic? It may need to cover staff, equipment, training, travel, publicity/promotional material, stationery, performances, learning resources, website set up, storage, cataloguing.

PROJECT PLAN

- When do you plan for the project to start and finish?
- Have you drawn up an outline plan for each activity so that you can see what needs to happen when? Is the timescale realistic?
- How will you monitor the progress of your project?

PROJECT TEAM

- Who do you need to help you with your project? What roles will they play? You may need a range of skills and expertise at different points in the project.
- Who will manage the project?
- Will everyone be volunteers or will anyone be paid?
- If you are using volunteers how many do you need? How will they be found and selected? What skills do they need to have?

- What training/mentoring will they need?
- Are you planning to hire in expertise eg trainers, playwright, web designer, recording editor, interpreters? If so have you already made contact to check their own commitments?
- Are you intending to involve children/young people? If so, have you already approached a local school as they will need time to incorporate your activities into theirs and consider any child protection issues. Have you involved them in the project planning?
- Do you need to work with partners? If so, who in the community might you partner and what can they bring to the project? Have they made a definite commitment? Do they have the same aims and outcomes as you for this project? Have you defined roles? Have you asked them for a letter of support?

EQUIPMENT

- What sort of equipment are you going to use for your project? How much does it cost? How much will you need for your interviewers?
- What level of technical expertise will you need to use it?
- Will you need to run training sessions?
- Are you going to borrow or purchase it?
- Are you going to record in audio or video format?
- Are you going to take photographs of participants?
- Do you need computer equipment and software?
- How will you back up your recordings? Digital recordings create large files. Do you have enough space to store them during the life of the project? Do you need an external drive?
- What will happen to the equipment once the project is finished?

INTERVIEWS

- How are you going to find and engage prospective interviewees? What perspectives will be represented? Is important in your project to get a balance of ages, genders, and roles? Are there enough people around to be interviewed?
- How many people are you going to interview? Be specific about the number of interviews you will record, how long they will be and how many will be summarised and/ or transcribed. Transcribing is a time consuming task.
- Can you cope with a large number of contacts to follow up?
- Will you be gathering other resources from interviewees besides interviews?
- If you want extracts from interviews for a DVD, CD, website or exhibition etc who is going to do this?
- How will you ensure the resources produced are appropriate to the audience?
- How will you store personal details and who will have access to them? How will you document the interviews?
- What legal and ethical considerations such as copyright and data protection do you need to consider?
- Do you have creative commons licences in place?

RISKS

- Have you explored what might go wrong so you can have some plans in place? Examples of this might be the project manager leaves, you can't get enough volunteers or participants, costs spiral.
- Have you identified any risks re personal security/safety of interviewers and interviewees or in the involvement of young people and children?

STORAGE

- Are you going to deposit your recordings with a local library, museum or archive? If so have you discussed this with them to make sure it is the kind of material they take in? What are their requirements/expectations? Do you have an agreement in place? Are there any costs associated with this?
- If not, have you given some thought to how you are going to preserve the recordings permanently and make them available. Will this change over time?
- How else will the public access your work eg publication, exhibition, online?
- Will the medium you have used still exist in five or ten years' time? If it might not, what arrangements do you have in place to migrate the information to another format? Have you budgeted for this?

EVALUATION

- Have you a plan in place to evaluate your project and its achievements?
- How will you promote and publicise that to participants, partners, the public at large?

LAUNCH/PUBLICITY

- How will you promote your project?
- Do you have any plans to launch the outcomes of your project? Have you budgeted for this?



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