

Project Evaluation Guidelines

Consider these questions when planning or evaluating an Oral History project.

Purposes and Objectives

1. Are the purposes clearly set forth? How realistic are they?
2. What factors demonstrate a significant need for the project?
3. What is the research design? How clear and realistic is it?
4. Are the terms, conditions, and objectives of funding clearly made known to judge the potential effect of such funding on the scholarly integrity of the project? Is the allocation of funds adequate to allow the project goals to be accomplished?
5. How do institutional relationships affect the purposes and objectives?

Selection of Recording Equipment

1. Should the interview be recorded on sound or visual recording equipment?
2. Are the best possible recording equipment and media available within one's budget being used?
3. Are interviews recorded on a medium that meets archival preservation standards?
4. How well has the interviewer mastered use of the equipment upon which the interview will be recorded?

Selection of Interviewers and Interviewees

1. In what ways are the interviewers and interviewees appropriate (or inappropriate) to the purposes and objectives?
2. What are the significant omissions and why were they omitted?

Records and Provenance

1. What are the policies and provisions for maintaining a record of the provenance of interviews? Are they adequate? What can be done to improve them?
2. How are records, policies, and procedures made known to interviewers, interviewees, staff, and users?

3. How does the system of records enhance the usefulness of the interviews and safeguard the rights of those involved?

Availability of Materials

1. How accurate and specific is the publicizing of the interviews?
2. How is information about interviews directed to likely users? Have new media and electronic methods of distribution been considered to publicize materials and make them available?
3. How have the interviews been used?

Finding Aids

1. What is the overall design for finding aids?
2. Are the finding aids adequate and appropriate?
3. How available are the finding aids?
4. Have new technologies been used to develop the most effective finding aids?

Management, Qualifications, and Training

1. How effective is the management of the program/project?
2. What are the provisions for supervision and staff review?
3. What are the qualifications for staff positions?
4. What are the provisions for systematic and effective training?
5. What improvements could be made in the management of the program/project?

Ethical/Legal Guidelines

What procedures are followed to assure that interviewers/programs recognize and honor their responsibility to the interviewees? Specifically, what procedures are used to assure that:

1. The interviewees are made fully aware of the goals and objectives of the oral history program/project?
2. The interviewees are made fully aware of the various stages of the program/project and the nature of their participation at each stage?
3. The interviewees are given the opportunity to respond to questions as freely as possible and are not subjected to stereotyped assumptions based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, or any other social/cultural characteristic?
4. The interviewees understand their rights to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to seal portions

- of the interviews, or in extremely sensitive circumstances even to choose to remain anonymous?
5. The interviewees are fully informed about the potential uses of the material, including deposit of the interviews in a repository, publication in all forms of print or electronic media, including the Internet or other emerging technologies, and all forms of public programming?
 6. The interviewees are provided a full and easily comprehensible explanation of their legal rights before being asked to sign a contract or deed of gift transferring rights, title, and interest in the recording(s) and transcript(s) to an administering authority or individual?
 7. Care is taken so that the distribution and use of the material complies with the letter and spirit of the interviewees' agreements?
 8. All prior agreements made with the interviewees are honored?
 9. The interviewees are fully informed about the potential for and disposition of royalties that might accrue from the use of their interviews, including all forms of public programming?
 10. The interviews and any other related materials will remain confidential until the interviewees have released their contents?

What procedures are followed to assure that interviewers/programs recognize and honor their responsibilities to the profession? Specifically, what procedures assure that:

1. The interviewer has considered the potential for public programming and research use of the interviews and has endeavored to prevent any exploitation of or harm to interviewees?
2. The interviewer is well trained to conduct the interview in a professional manner, including the use of appropriate recording equipment and media?
3. The interviewer is well grounded in the background of the subject(s) to be discussed?
4. The interview will be conducted in a spirit of critical inquiry and that efforts will be made to provide as complete a historical record as possible?
5. The interviewees are selected based on the relevance of their experience to the subject at hand and that an appropriate cross-section of interviewees is selected for any particular project?
6. The interview materials, including recordings, transcripts, relevant photographic, moving image, and sound documents as well as agreements and documentation of the interview process, will be placed in a repository after a reasonable period of time, subject to the agreements made with the interviewee and that the repository will administer their use in accordance with those agreements?
7. The methodologies of the program/project, as well as its goals and objectives, are available for the general public to evaluate?
8. The interview materials have been properly cataloged, including appropriate acknowledgment and credit to the interviewer, and that their availability for research use is made known?

What procedures are followed to assure that interviewers and programs are aware of their mutual responsibilities and obligations? Specifically, what procedures are followed to assure that:

1. Interviewers are made aware of the program goals and are fully informed of ethical and legal considerations?
2. Interviewers are fully informed of all the tasks they are expected to complete in an oral history project?
3. Interviewers are made fully aware of their obligations to the oral history program/sponsoring institution, regardless of their own personal interest in a program/project?
4. Programs/sponsoring institutions treat their interviewers equitably by providing for appropriate compensation, acknowledging all products resulting from their work, and supporting fieldwork practices consistent with professional standards whenever there is a conflict between the parties to the interview?
5. Interviewers are fully informed of their legal rights and of their responsibilities to both the interviewee and to the sponsoring institution?

What procedures are followed to assure that interviewers and programs recognize and honor their responsibilities to the community/public? Specifically, what procedures assure that:

1. The oral history materials and all works created from them will be available and accessible to the community that participated in the project?
2. Sources of extramural funding and sponsorship are clearly noted for each interview of project?
3. The interviewers and project endeavor not to impose their own values on the community being studied?
4. The recordings and transcripts will not be used unethically?

Recording Preservation Guidelines

Recognizing the significance of the recording for historical and cultural analysis and the potential uses of oral history interviews in non-print media, what procedures are followed to assure that:

1. Appropriate care and storage of the original recordings begins immediately after their creation?
2. The original recordings are duplicated and stored according to accepted archival standards [i.e. stored in closed boxes in a cool, dry, dust-free environment]
3. Original recordings are copied to the best preservation media before significant deterioration occurs?
4. Every effort is made in duplicating recordings to preserve a faithful facsimile of the interviewee's voice?
5. All transcribing, auditing, and other uses are done from a duplicate, not the original recording?

Recording/Transcript Processing Guidelines

Information about the Participants:

1. Are the names of both interviewer and interviewee clearly indicated on the recording/abstract/transcript and in catalog materials?
2. Is there adequate biographical information about both interviewer and interviewee? Where can it be found?

Interview Information

1. Are the recordings, transcripts, time indices, abstracts, and other materials presented for use identified as to the program/project of which they are a part?
2. Are the date and place of the interview indicated on the recording, transcript, time index, and abstract and in appropriate catalog material?
3. Are there interviewers' statements about the preparation for or circumstances of the interviews? Where? Are they generally available to researchers? How are the rights of the interviewees protected against improper use of such commentaries?
4. Are there records of contracts between the program and the interviewee? How detailed are they? Are they available to researchers? If so, with what safeguards for individual rights and privacy?

Interview Recording Information

1. Is the complete original recording preserved? Are there one or more duplicate copies?
2. If the original or any duplicate has been edited, rearranged, cut, or spliced in any way, is there a record of that action, including by whom, when, and for what purposes the action was taken?
3. Do the recording label and appropriate catalog materials show the recording speed, level, and length of the interview? If video recording, do the recording label and appropriate catalog information show the format and scanning system and clearly indicate the tracks on which the audio and time code have been recorded?
4. In the absence of transcripts, are there suitable finding aids to give users access to information on the recordings? What form do they take? Is there a record of who prepared these finding aids?
5. Are researchers permitted to listen to or view the recordings? Are there any restrictions on the use of the recordings?

Interview Transcript Information

1. Is the transcript an accurate record of the recording? Is a careful record kept of each step of processing the transcript, including who transcribed, audited, edited, retyped, and proofread the transcripts in final copy?

2. Are the nature and extent of changes in the transcript from the original recording made known to the user?
3. What finding aids have been prepared for the transcript? Are they suitable and adequate? How could they be improved?
4. Are there any restrictions on access to or use of the transcripts? Are they clearly noted?
5. Are there any photo materials or other supporting documents for the interview? Do they enhance and supplement the text?
6. If video recorded, does the transcript contain time references and annotation describing the complementary visuals on the video recording?

Interview Content Guidelines

Does the content of each interview and the cumulative content of the whole collection contribute to accomplishing the objectives of the program/project?

1. In what particulars does each interview or the whole collection succeed or fall short of the objectives of the project or program?
2. Do audio and visual recordings in the collection avoid redundancy and supplement one another in interview content and focus?

In what ways does the program/project contribute to historical understanding?

1. In what particulars does each interview or the whole collection succeed or fall short in making such a contribution?
2. To what extent does the material add fresh information, fill gaps in the existing record, and/or provide fresh insights and perspectives?
3. To what extent is the information reliable and valid? Is it eyewitness or hearsay evidence? How well and in what manner does it meet internal and external tests of corroboration, consistency, and explication of contradictions?
4. What is the relationship of the interview information to existing documentation and historiography?
5. How does the texture of the interview impart detail, richness, and flavor to the historical record?
6. What is the nature of the information contributed? Is it facts, perceptions, interpretations, judgments, or attitudes, and how does each contribute to understanding?
7. Are the scope, volume, and representativeness of the population interviewed appropriate and sufficient to the purpose? Is there enough testimony to validate the evidence without passing the point of diminishing returns? How appropriate is the quantity to the purposes of the study?
8. How do the form and structure of the interviews contribute to making the content

understandable?

9. To what extent does the audio and/or video recording capture unique sound and visual information?

10. Do the visual and other sound elements complement and/or supplement the verbal information? Has the interview captured processes, objects, or other individuals in the visual and sound environment?

Interview Conduct Guidelines

Use of Other Sources

1. Is the oral history technique the best way to acquire the information? If not, what other sources exist? Has the interviewer used them and sought to preserve them if necessary?

2. Has the interviewer made an effort to consult other relevant oral histories?

3. Is the interview technique a valuable way to supplement existing sources?

4. Does the recording interviews complement not duplicate, existing still or moving visual images?

Interviewer Preparation

1. Is the interviewer well informed about the subjects under discussion?

2. Are the primary and secondary sources used to prepare for the interview adequate?

3. Has the interviewer mastered the use of appropriate recording equipment and the field-recording techniques that insure a high-fidelity recording?

Interviewee Selection and Orientation

1. Does the interviewee seem appropriate to the subjects discussed?

2. Does the interviewee understand and respond to the interview purposes?

3. Has the interviewee prepared for the interview and assisted in the process?

4. If a group interview, have composition and group dynamics been considered in selecting participants?

Interviewer-Interviewee Relations

1. Do interviewer and interviewee collaborate with each other toward interview objectives?

2. Is there a balance between empathy and analytical judgment in the interview?

3. If video recorded, is the interviewer/interviewee relationship maintained despite the presence

of a technical crew? Do the technical personnel understand how a recorded oral history interview differs from a scripted production?

Technique and Adaptive Skills

1. In what ways does the interview show that the interviewer has used skills appropriate to: the interviewee's condition (health, memory, mental alertness, ability to communicate, time schedule, etc.) and the interview location and conditions (disruptions and interruptions, equipment problems, extraneous participants, background noises, etc.)?
2. What evidence is there that the interviewer has: thoroughly explored pertinent lines of thought? Followed up on significant clues? Made an effort to identify sources of information? Employed critical challenges when needed? Thoroughly explored the potential of the visual environment, if video recorded?
3. Has the program/project used recording equipment and media that are appropriate for the purposes of the work and potential non-print as well as print uses of the material? Are the recordings of the highest appropriate technical quality? How could they be improved?
4. If video recorded, are lighting, composition, camera work, and sound of the highest appropriate technical quality?
5. In the balance between content and technical quality, is the technical quality good without subordinating the interview process?

Perspective

1. Do the biases of the interviewer interfere with or influence the responses of the interviewee?
2. What information is available that may inform the users of any prior or separate relationship between the interviewer and interviewee?

Historical Contribution

1. Does the interviewer pursue the inquiry with historical integrity?
2. Do other purposes being served by the interview enrich or diminish quality?
3. What does the interview contribute to the larger context of historical knowledge and understanding?

Independent/Unaffiliated Researchers Guidelines

Creation and Use of Interviews

1. Has the independent/unaffiliated researcher followed the guidelines for obtaining interviews as suggested in the Program/Project Guideline section?
2. Have proper citation and documentation been provided in works created (books, articles, audio-visual productions, or other public presentations) to inform users of the work about the interviews used and the permanent location of the interviews?
3. Do works created include an explanation of the interview project, including editorial procedures?
4. Has the independent/unaffiliated researcher arranged to deposit the works created in an appropriate repository?

Transfer of Interviews to Archival Repository

1. Has the independent/unaffiliated researcher properly obtained the agreement of the repository before making representations about the disposition of the interviews?
2. Is the transfer consistent with agreements or understandings with interviewees? Were legal agreements obtained from interviewees?
3. Has the researcher provided the repository with adequate descriptions of the creation of the interviews and the project?
4. What is the technical quality of the recorded interviews? Are the interviews transcribed, abstracted, or indexed, and, if so, what is the quality?

Educator and Student Guidelines

Has the educator:

1. Become familiar with the “Oral History Evaluation Guidelines” and conveyed their substance to the student?
2. Ensured that each student is properly prepared before going into the community to conduct oral history interviews, including familiarization with the ethical issues surrounding oral history and the obligation to seek the informed consent of the interviewee?
3. Become familiar with the literature, recording equipment, techniques, and processes of oral history so that the best possible instruction can be presented to the student?
4. Worked with other professionals and organizations to provide the best oral history experience for the student?
5. Considered that the project may merit preservation and worked with other professionals and

repositories to preserve and disseminate these collected materials?

6. Shown willingness to share expertise with other educators, associations, and organizations?

Has the student:

1. Become thoroughly familiar with the equipment, techniques, and processes of oral history interviewing and the development of research using oral history interviews?
2. Explained to the interviewee the purpose of the interview and how it will be used and obtained the interviewee's informed consent to participate?
3. Treated the interviewee with respect?
4. Signed a receipt for and returned any materials borrowed from the interviewee?
5. Obtained a signed legal release for the interview?
6. Kept her/his word about oral or written promises made to the interviewee?
7. Given proper credit (oral or written) when using oral testimony and used the material in context?