

## BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORIANS

- 1. Familiarize yourself with the Oral History Association's guidelines.** First developed in 1968 and revised and updated regularly, these guide the practice of ethical oral history and form the foundation on which solid oral history projects are built. Becoming familiar with them will help your project get off to a strong start.
- 2. Focus on oral history as a process.** Using standard historical research methods, you are setting out to explore a historical question through recorded interviews, giving them context and preserving them in the public record—in addition to whatever short-term goals your project may have, such as using interview excerpts to create an exhibit or celebrate an anniversary.
- 3. Cast a wide net to include community.** Make sure all appropriate community members are involved in your project and have an opportunity to make a contribution. Community members know and care the most about the project at hand, and the more closely they are involved in every aspect of it, the more successful it will be.
- 4. Understand the ethical and legal ramifications of oral history.** Oral historians record deeply personal stories that become available in an archive for access both in the present and the future. So oral historians have ethical and legal responsibilities to abide by copyright laws and respect narrators' wishes while also being true to the purposes of oral history.
- 5. Make a plan.** At the outset, define your purpose, set goals, evaluate your progress, and establish record-keeping systems so details don't get out of control.
- 6. Choose appropriate technology with an eye toward present and future needs.** Technology is necessary for recording interviews, preserving them in an archive, and providing access and using them for public displays. Make wise decisions about the technology you use.
- 7. Train interviewers and other project participants to assure consistent quality.** Oral history interviews differ from some other interview-based research methods in the amount of background research and preparation required. Make sure interviewers and other personnel are thoroughly trained in oral history principles, interviewing techniques, recording technology and ethics.
- 8. Conduct interviews that will stand the test of time.** This is the heart of the oral history process, but its success depends on laying solid groundwork.
- 9. Process and archive all interview materials to preserve them for future use.** Oral history interviews and related materials should be preserved, catalogued and made available for others to use in a suitable repository, such as a library, archive or historical society.
- 10. Take pride in your contribution to the historical record.** Share with the community what you've learned, and celebrate your success.

Mary Kay Quinlan, Nancy MacKay, and Barbara W. Sommer, Volume 1, "*Introduction to Community Oral History: Community Oral History Toolkit*" (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013):12-13.