

Tips for Creating an Oral History Project at Your Library

Making the case

- Libraries need to think outside the box to maintain funding. Projects like these can build community support and provide evidence for libraries' continued relevance
- Big risks bring big rewards. These rewards can range from significant grant funding to awards to creating lifelong fans of the library to strengthening your community
- Publicize your project locally and nationally, within the library world and outside. This will develop support, introduce you to new characters and stories, and bring recognition to all the participants and to your institution

Finding partners

- Think broadly about community organizations, government agencies, or businesses that might have an interest in your project
- Remember that partners can contribute on a variety of levels. One may provide space for an event; another may work with you every step of the way
- Partnerships can help you identify subjects for your project. For example, your local senior center will have excellent contacts in the seniors community, and the VFW will be tied into a network of veterans.

Funding the project

- Consider grants, in-kind donations or donations of labor or expertise
- Partnerships are often key to the success of a grant proposal
- A well-established volunteer corps can help libraries accomplish major projects with little additional funding

Planning and preparing

- Think all the way through to the end-product before you start. Do you want to create a book or documentary? How will you preserve and make accessible what you collect and produce?
- Consider how to gather the histories: one-on-one or group interviews, bringing people to your library, going to their homes or meeting places
- Create timelines and budgets and delegate tasks. All of this will constitute planning for grant proposals as well as the project itself

Legal considerations

- You will need lots of release forms: for people who are being audio- or videorecorded; for any material you scan or digitize. Many samples are available on the internet. These should be signed in advance

The One-Room Schoolhouse Project
A Successful Model for Outreach, Partnerships, Senior Services, and Local History
Elizabeth Goldman • Bill Harmer • Tina Patterson
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- If your final product includes photographs or material that doesn't come from one of your interviewees, be sure it is not protected by other copyright before publication or distribution
- If you produce a book or documentary, make sure the library retains copyright to the finished product. This allows you to make more copies, distribute in digital, and make alterations in the future if necessary

Special events

- Events can be a great way to evoke memories and to bring people together to share stories
- If possible, visits to sites relevant to your project (in this case, a restored one-room schoolhouse) are guaranteed to create invaluable material
- Events also let the participants celebrate the experience. It doesn't all have to be work. (But if you are filming, film everything!)

Things to consider when working with seniors

- Many seniors don't think their story is worthy. Remind them that you value their words and wisdom, and they will be thrilled to be a part of it
- When interviewing seniors, be flexible and let the story go where it goes. Often, the direction it takes will be more interesting than what the interviewer had in mind.
- Be cognizant of the needs and resources of the organization you're working with. Like any other partner organization, a senior center or retirement home may have different types and levels of resources to contribute

Preserving the history

- Think about what you want to produce as a finished product: a book, documentary, special collection, exhibition, website, etc.
- Develop a plan for who will archive the material you collect. If your library has a local history collection, this may be an obvious place
- Material that is digitized should be done according to archival standards for quality and format. Archival standards can also provide guidance on storage and long-term preservation
- Consider adding a web-based element to your project. You will end up with a lot of material that doesn't fit into your final documentary or book, and the web is a way to make raw footage, documents, and transcripts available

Bringing everyone together

- Share the reward and the glory with all agencies or groups that participate
- Regularly reward the participants, letting them know their support and involvement is key to the success of the program