

Kansas Humanities Council 2009 Grant Guidelines for Oral History Projects

The Oral History guidelines are a supplement to the Heritage grant guidelines. In preparing a grant application, follow the deadlines and instructions for a Heritage Grant, plus the additional information found below.

Topics

Oral history projects should have a well-defined topic or topics that will be explored.

Projects which simply seek to record the memories of elderly residents about the "old days" are less effective (and less competitive as grant applications) than those which pursue a particular theme, i.e. the history of an occupation such as farming or railroading; a time period such as the Dust Bowl or World War II; the history and development of an organization such as the Swedish Heritage Society, farm cooperative, etc.

Think of your interviews as a research project in which you are seeking answers to important questions, as well as recording individual stories. The better you are able to focus on the "big questions" you want to answer, the more useful and effective your interviews will be. For example, "how did the roles of women and children on the farm change in our community after World War II?" is a more fruitful direction for oral history research than the broader "what was life like on the farm after World War II?"

Or, let's say your plan is to interview a group of first- and second-generation immigrants about ethnic traditions that were practiced and how those were passed on to the next generation. **The outcome of an oral history project should be more than just a catalog of traditions and how they varied from family to family.** It should also help you to address larger questions, such as "what roles have the church and other cultural organizations played in carrying on traditions?" or "how and why has the practice of our traditions changed over time?"

Training

Oral history projects will include at least one training session for first-time interviewers, or interviewers who lack significant oral history experience. Your project consultant should conduct the training. The consultant can help interviewers refine and test their techniques, develop sample questions, and set goals for the interviews they will conduct. Ongoing discussion with the consultant, such as sending them a completed interview for review, is important.

Interviewing Methods

Develop a list of sample questions to be asked during the interviews and provide this list in your grant application. However, keep in mind that every interview will be somewhat different. Talk to your consultant about how to develop these questions.

Include a list of potential interview subjects in your grant application. The goal of oral history is to obtain a *first-person* account. Choose interview subjects with first-hand knowledge of your topic, rather than those who can only share stories about events that occurred before they were born. For oral histories, community historians are usually utilized as resource people, rather than as interview subjects.

Many oral historians suggest that the most effective interviews are conducted in the interview subject's home. A studio or other institutional setting may offer technical advantages, but many interview subjects will be more at ease in familiar surroundings.

How many interviews are possible with a KHC grant? Oral history projects almost always take longer than anticipated. According to the Kansas Historical Society, “based on costs for standard oral history projects, a ratio of approximately eight interviews to every \$2000 of project costs is expected” (*Kansas Veterans of WWII Oral History Projects, 2005*).

All interviews should ideally be audiotaped. Videotape is an acceptable and popular way of recording interviews, but audiotapes should be used as a backup method during videotaped interviews to ensure against mechanical failure. Audiotapes are more useful than videotapes for transcribing interviews.

Interviewers should be sensitive to the person they are interviewing. It's important to ask in advance for the interviewee's permission to be taped. All interviewees must sign a release form.

Technology Issues

Usually, volunteers, or professionals donating their services, record interviews on donated equipment such as tape recorders and camcorders. Heritage grants seldom pay full fees for professional videographers. A professional quality video or documentary can be an excellent way of sharing outcomes of the project and creating educational resources. However, video production

is *not* eligible for funding through this grant. It can count as cost-share, if the sponsoring organization secures funding elsewhere.

With audiotapes, always use name brands and avoid 120-minute tapes, which tend to break.

The final produce for a videotaped interview needs to be VHS size or on a DVD to enable the widest possible viewing. You should consider including funds to make VHS or DVD copies of your tapes if they will be recorded on the smaller home videotapes or on 3/4" equipment.

Transcription

Include the transcription of all interviews in your final application. Audiotape is easier to use for transcribing than videotape. Either volunteers or special assistants hired with grant funds may create the transcripts. Transcription is a time-consuming process (allow three to four hours clerical time for each hour of tape). However, transcripts make the interviews easily accessible to researchers and ensure that the contents will not be lost. Both audiotape and videotape decay over time; fading of videotapes begins within 7 to 10 years. Transcription is the only way to guarantee that your community's stories will not be lost over time.

Release Forms

Release forms that meet the requirements of US copyright law must be obtained from all individuals interviewed. The release forms ensure that future researchers will be able to read and reproduce the interviews. You should submit a copy of the release form that you will use with your final application. A sample release form can be found on the Kansas Historical Societies website, www.kshs.org.

Access to the Project Materials

At the end of the project, all original tapes, transcripts, and release forms should be placed in a public archive such as a library or museum that is accessible to researchers during regular hours. KHC allows for modifications of this requirement by Native American groups who want to preserve confidential religious and tribal information.

In addition, the Heritage Program requires you to contact a statewide archive and offer them the option of copying the materials. Choose one of the archives from the list below, and contact the archivist to talk about the project as early as possible. The cost of copying tapes and transcripts will sometimes be borne by the archive. In other cases, funds may be added to the

KHC grant award for this purpose. Contact KHC staff for more details.

Statewide Archives

Farrell Library, Kansas State University, Manhattan KS 66506

Archivist: Anthony Crawford, 785-532-7466

Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence KS 66045

Archivist: Sheryl Williams, 785-864-4284

Kansas State Historical Society, 6425 SW 6th, Topeka KS 66615

Archivist: Patricia Michaelis, 785-272-8681, ext. 270

Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Box 68,

Wichita KS 67260

Archivist: Lorraine Madway, 316-978-3590

Special Collections & University Archives, Leonard H. Axe Library, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg KS 66762

Archivist: Randy Roberts, 620-235-4883

Recommendations for Your Grant Application

The most successful oral history applications will include:

- An explanation of **the interview topic and central questions** the project will explore.
- A **list of people you hope to interview**.
- **Sample interview questions**.
- A **sample release form** that you will use as a model in the project.
- An explanation of **how and where the interviews will take place** (in homes, audio taped or videotaped, etc.).
- A **description of the role your consultant will play in training interviewers** and offering feedback on interview techniques.
- A description of who will transcribe the interviews and when it will be completed.
- The **name of the public archive** that will house the project materials upon completion, and the name of the statewide archive which will be offered the opportunity to copy tapes and transcripts when the project is completed.