



## 2012 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
  - Include the answers to the following in the Attachments Section of the Heritage Grant Guidelines (*answers should be brief — no more than 2 pages total in length*).
1. A brief explanation **of the interview topic and at least one central question** the project will explore.
  2. A **list of people you plan to interview** and why.
  3. **Sample interview questions.**
  4. An explanation of **how and where the interviews will take place** (in homes, audio taped or videotaped, etc.).
  5. A **description of the role your consultant will play in training interviewers** and offering feedback on interview techniques.
  6. A description of who will **transcribe** the interviews and when it will be completed.
  7. 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.
  8. A **sample release form** that you will use as a model in the project.

Before You Write Your Grant...

### **DECIDE ON YOUR SPECIFIC TOPIC**

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

Projects which plan to only record the memories of elderly residents about the "old days" are less competitive 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 or a farm cooperative.

**Think of your interviews as a research project in which you are seeking to preserve individual stories tied together in a common theme.** What is the common theme? The better you are able to focus this theme, the more useful and effective your interviews will be. For example, you could 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. Or a project's common theme could focus on the roles of women and children on the farm and how they changed after World War II.

### **CONSIDER 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.

### **UNDERSTAND 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.

**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, eight interviews will cost approximately \$2000. This includes the administration, collection, and transcription of the oral histories.

**All interviews should ideally be audio taped or recorded with a digital audio recorder.** Camcorders are an acceptable and popular way of recording interviews, but audio should be used as a backup method during video interviews to ensure against mechanical failure. Currently, audio is still more useful than video 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.

### **KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT**

**Usually, volunteers or professionals donate their services and 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 product for a videotaped interview needs to be on a DVD to enable the widest possible viewing.

You should consider including funds to make DVD copies of your tapes if they will be recorded on the smaller videotapes (digital videotapes) or mini DVDs.

### **PREPARE FOR TRANSCRIPTION**

**Include the transcription of all interviews in your final application.** Audio is easier to use for transcribing than video. 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. Furthermore, digital media is not eternal. Even though a high quality DVD-R can last over 20 years if properly stored, technology changes so rapidly that the data on the DVD-R will need to be migrated to a new storage medium within 20 years. **Transcription is the only way to guarantee that your community's stories will not be lost over time.**

One Project Director involved in an oral history project shared this: *“For future projects we would know that transcription is a difficult, delicate process. Conversational speech simply does not translate into elegant, well-punctuated prose! People of all ages tend to mumble, whisper, tap their fingers, speak in incomplete sentences, switch topics mid-sentence, and go off on tangents. But when it is all said and done, that is what adds interest to these stories.”*

### **GET YOUR 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 Society's website, [www.kshs.org](http://www.kshs.org).

### **PROVIDE ACCESS TO 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.

If your project receives KHC Heritage Grant support, you will be required to notify a **statewide archive** about the project and provide them with the opportunity to copy any materials produced and/or catalogued with KHC funds. To see a list of statewide archives, click on the following link [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org) click on grants, then click on heritage grants.

Choose one of the archives from this list, and contact the archivist to talk about the project as early as possible. The cost of copying tapes and transcripts will sometimes be assumed by the archive. In other cases, funds may be added to the KHC grant award for this purpose.

### **QUESTIONS?**

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