

## Black Georgetown Community History Project

### Oral History Resources based on presentation by Dr. Anna Kaplan

#### What is oral history?

- “For many indigenous communities, oral history is inextricably connected to identity. It is a collective enterprise essential to cultural survival, naming the world, asserting power and belonging, and narrating relationships across time and space to land, sea, sky, and each other.” – Nēpia Mahuika (Ngāti Porou, a Māori tribal community from Aotearoa New Zealand) in “Rethinking Oral History & Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective”
- Both the interview process and the products that result from a recorded spoken or signed interview –Oral History Association
- Helps place people’s experiences within a larger social and historical context –Oral History Association
- Captures recollections about the past filtered through the lens of a changing personal and social context –Oral History Association
- A dynamic, collaborative relationship between the interviewer and narrator –Oral History Association

#### Preparing for an oral history interview

- Invite the person to do an oral history
- Explain what it is, how long it may take, what the process is, and the preservation and/or use plan
- Choose the Recording Technology
  - *Archival-Quality Digital Audio File:*
  - *Broadcast .WAV file format (audio)*
  - *Sample rate of at least 48kHz*
  - *Bit-depth of at least 16 bits (preferably 24 bits)*
- A high-quality audio recording does not necessarily mean it is a good interview. A good interview is not necessarily a high-quality audio recording.
- Research
  - On people, communities, place(s), events, historical themes or experiences
- Create an Interview Guide
  - State your objective for the interview
  - Give a paragraph of background info
  - Write out possible questions, grouped by theme and organized by possible interview flow
- Share themes not questions with narrator

#### Conducting an oral history interview

- Record a lead that includes names, date, location, purpose of the interview and verbal permission to record
- Be curious
  - Ask open-ended questions
  - Ask for descriptions, stories, and examples
  - Don’t assume or skip over insider knowledge- ask for an explanation
  - Follow the narrator’s lead
  - Ask follow-up questions

- The interview guide is a guide not a script
- Be an active listener and let the narrator finish their stories and thoughts
- The last question
  - Is there anything you wanted to share but didn't?
  - Is there anything you wish I had asked about?
  - Is there anything else you want to add?

#### What to do after the interview

- Sign release forms or archival donation forms *after* the interview is over
- Narrator keeps a copy
- Transcribe the interview
- Give a copy to narrator
- Notes and reflections on the interview
- Create something with it and/or share it with others
- Keep in personal archives and/or donate to an archive?
- Multiple copies in multiple locations
- Physical copies: store in stable environment (cool, dark, low humidity)
- Digital copies: more than 1 person has access
- Update files/technology regularly
- Can you open and play or read the files?
- Do you have the (working) device required to play the recording?

#### Where to find oral histories

- [Dig DC](#)
- [Citizens Association of Georgetown](#)
- [Chevy Chase Historical Society](#)
- [Run Ann Overbeck Capital Hill History Project](#)
- [American University Humanities Truck](#)
- [Interactive Map from the DC Oral History Collaborative and HumanitiesDC](#)

#### Additional Resources

- [Ask Doug: Choosing a Digital Audio Recorder](#)
- [Oral History Association](#)
- [DC Oral History Collaborative](#)
- [DC Public library's Studio Lab at MLK](#)
- [Library of Congress](#)
- [Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region](#)

