Oral History Interviewing – DCOHC Workshop: January 15, 2025

Outline

- HumanitiesDC
- What is oral history?
- DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC)
- *Oral History Interviewing* grant overview and past examples
- Room introductions
- Grant specifics
- Application questions
- Review process

- Q&As throughout!

Who We Are

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What We Do

At HumanitiesDC, we connect curious people with bold questions to the powerful stories of our vibrant city. Through our grantmaking and public programs we help build a community where all can engage in intellectual exchange, reflect on our connected stories and celebrate our various cultures.

- Curated Public Programs – Community Journalism, Culture Series, DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC), Fellowships

- Community Grants - $1M to 60+ grantees across 8 wards

2025 HUMANITIESDC.ORG

GRANT APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN!

HumanitiesDC

Cycle I: Due February 18, 2025, at 5:59 pm

| Visions - Projects + Events | Community Culture & Heritage | Oral History Interviewing - DCOHC | Beyond the Archives - DCOHC |

Cycle II: Opens March 4, due May 1, 2025, at 5:59 pm

| General Operating Support | Continuing Oral History Projects - DCOHC |

What are the Humanities?

Human stories allow us to navigate the complexities of our past, present, and future. The humanities help us learn from history and literature, empathize through language and comparative religion, and challenge our assumptions with philosophy and ethics. They are a compass for interpreting what humans make and exploring what makes us human.

They help us understand...
- ❖ Our past, through history, anthropology, & archaeology
- ❖ Our story's public expressions, through literature, language, and art history/theory/criticism
- ❖ Our story's meaning, through ethics, philosophy, comparative religion, and the law

Link to the National Endowment for the Humanities Definition

What is Oral History?

"The value of oral history lies largely in the way it helps to place people's experiences within a larger social and historical context. The interview becomes a record useful for documenting past events, individual or collective experiences, and understandings of the ways that history is constructed. Because it relies on memory, oral history captures recollections about the past filtered through the lens of a changing personal and social context." - Oral History Association (2018)

- **In taking a life history approach, the oral historian seeks to document the narrator's journey through life, from early childhood through the present moment. The goal is to probe the ways in which the narrator's life story resounds with overtones and undertones of broader historical significance.**

- Related to journalistic-style interviewing, storytelling, and sociological/anthropological research, but distinct in its depth, breadth, and approaches to subjectivity and informed consent.

- Oral histories are tools within the humanities. You can interview people about non-humanities topics too!

Importance of Oral History

- A way that culture and values are shared to strengthen community and inform new generations over time; a crucial part of individual and community identities

- An interdisciplinary, interview-based method of producing historical documents, for future generations to better understand the lived experience of history, and the many meanings that people make of these experiences

- A chance to deepen and complicate the written record of history

- A means of understanding the experiences that produce perspectives different from one's own

- Open to digressions, surprises, and unforeseen pathways in the conversation

- An art of relationships

- Easy to learn, but difficult to master
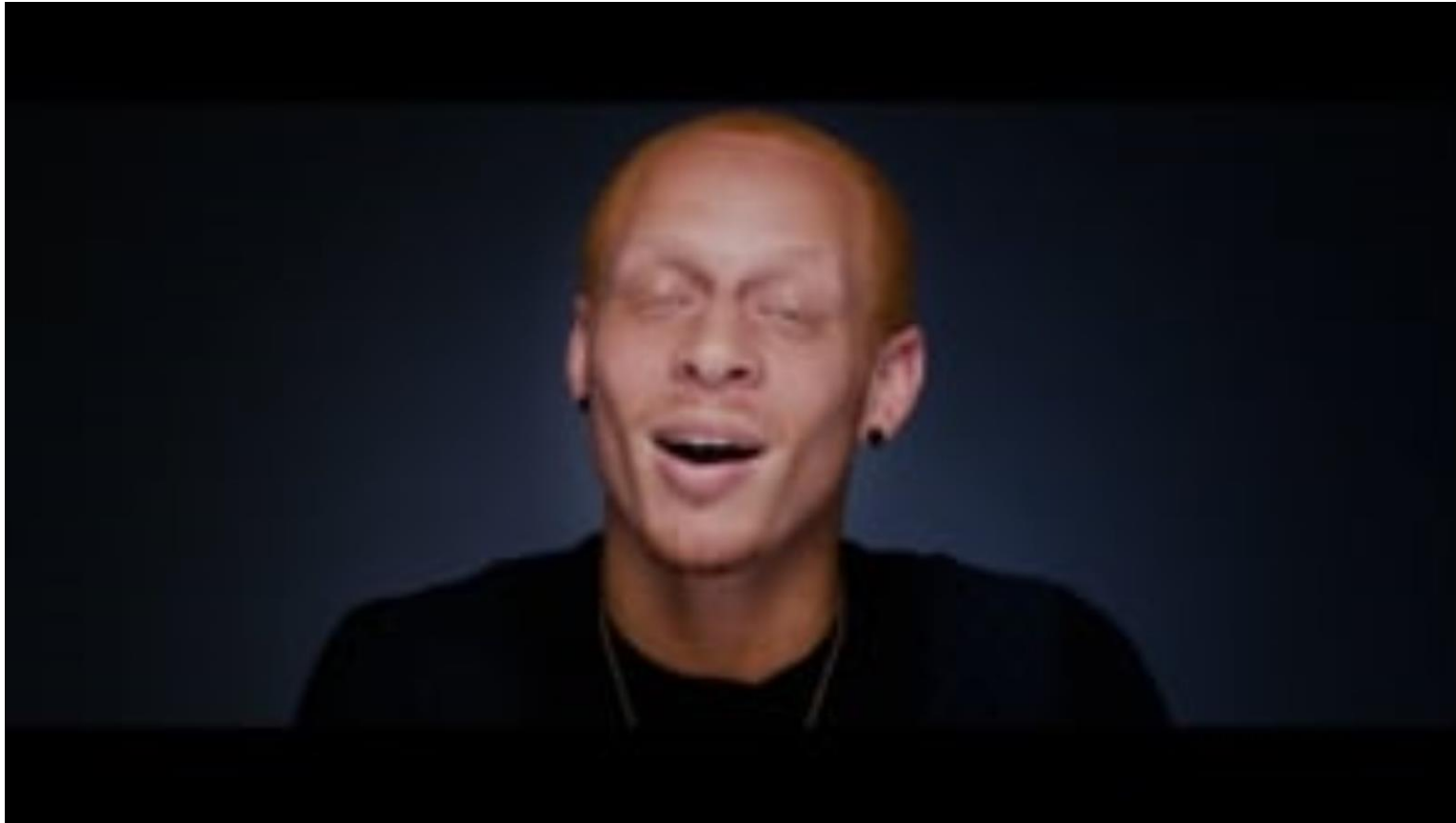
DC Oral History Collaborative Grants

The DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC) is a partnership between HumanitiesDC and the DC Public Library (DCPL). It was created in 2017 as a city-wide initiative aimed at documenting and preserving the history of Washington's residents and communities through oral history via grantmaking, training, and public projects. HumanitiesDC DCOHC grantees are considered members of the Collaborative!

3 DCOHC grant opportunities:
- Oral History Interviewing (Cycle I)
- Beyond the Archives (Cycle I)
- Continuing Oral History Projects (Cycle II)

Oral History Interviewing Grant

- Eligibility: DC-based individuals, community groups, nonprofit organizations

- Maximum Award: $8,000 to conduct and archive at least 5 interviews (plus an additional $5,000 may be requested for translation of transcripts)

- Project Period: May 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026

- Projects that explore DC life, history, and culture through interviews with the people who have lived it

- Grantees must attend a three-session, in-person oral history training workshop on May 6, 8, and 12 and will work with staff and consultants throughout the course of their projects

- Final deliverables required: media files, transcripts, indexes, release forms, and metadata for each interview. These are ultimately housed in the People's Archive at the DC Public Library (DCPL).

- Application due February 18, 2025

Link to RFP

Oral History Interviewing Project Examples

Bank on Her: Exploring the Effects of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act - Leslie Aroon Walsh is capturing the experiences of adult women who lived in the 1970s and exploring how their lives were changed due to the passing of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act.

Mount Pleasant: The Rise and Fall of Cultural Community Centers - Shilpi Malinowski interviewed residents to tell the stories of Mount Pleasant and their relationships to community institutions such as La Casa and the Community of Christ, the Latin American Youth Center, La Clínica del Pueblo, Marx Café, Bancroft Elementary School, and Bell Multicultural High School.

Example #1 Area of Interest/ Research Topic

Diyanna Monet Burton: I'm passionate about exploring the experiences of women in the dc dance community. **While existing archives of women in the dc dance community can be found through short videos and possibly newspaper articles, their specific oral histories offer more perspective on their challenges and motivations of building their skill and their attempts at connecting with local communities in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Through their oral histories, I want to gain understanding of their firsthand accounts of studios that existed where they either taught or learned, any affiliations to community groups, and exploring their impact on culture and dance history in dc.** While their impact may be instrumental in growing the dance community in Washington, DC through the mid 2000s to early 2010s, many of the women who I'd feature in this project felt the need to move away from Washington to reach great success in their dance careers. Several of them have not returned, which creates more time for their history and stories to be erased.

Example #2 Area of Interest/ Research Topic

Noel Schroeder: Ward 2 is among DC's most affluent wards, and yet has some of its starkest inequality in income and housing. Ward 2 Mutual Aid (formed in March 2020 as a solidarity network of neighbors to support one another through crisis) works specifically on relationship-building and material support to two important and deeply underserved communities: **unhoused residents (primarily Black long-time residents and native Washingtonians) and housing insecure residents (primarily Salvadoran first and second generation immigrants).**

We will interview members of the wider Ward 2 Mutual Aid network, focusing on our two key underserved communities, to document their evolving experiences with housing insecurity and related DC support systems from 2020-2024, and how they worked and organized to address these issues and build community care and safety. We seek to celebrate, uplift, and situate their mutual aid organizing in the fabric of DC's broader organizing on racial justice, community leadership, and collective care and provide a model by which other mutual aid collectives and spaces can document their histories.

We hope to build a clearer understanding of the impact of the pandemic, district policies, and social changes on Ward 2's most underserved residents, and how mutual aid organizing has intersected with their lives. The interviews will shed light on how people survive, collaborate, and build new structures of solidarity and care during a crisis. We hope that it will help us better understand current conditions in DC, and how people can better build community and mutual support going forward.

Oral history is ideal for this project for both story collection and presentation. Oral storytelling will be more accessible to narrators to share their stories, and to community members to experience those stories. The format is more personable and a better fit to our collective's mission to reflect the material conditions of residents' lives.

Who You Are

- Name
- Organization Affiliation (if any)
- Tell us a little about the project you're considering
  - Why is oral history the best project format?

Grant Requirements

- Three-session oral history training workshop: May 6, 8, and 12, 2025 at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in downtown DC. This workshop will occur in the evening.

- Interview at least 5 people over the project period

- Interim report: due September 15, 2025, includes explanation of funds spent and brief overview of progress to date.

  o Before this report deadline, all grantees will have one-on-one meetings with the Community Grants Manager and DCOHC Senior Manager to discuss projects. Additional check-in meetings may be scheduled for later in the project period.

Grant Requirements, Con't

- Deliverables: due March 3, 2026, which is 30 days after the end of the grant period. Prepared in TheirStory, housed in the People's Archive at DCPL.

  - Media files

  - Transcripts - word-by-word text of interview

  - Indexes - time-coded summary of different segments

  - Metadata - information such as date, place, names, length, etc.

  - Release forms – assigns copyright to DCPL (narrator keeps non-exclusive right to copy, use, and publish interview) and allows interviews to be publicly available

- Final report: also due March 3, 2026. Report includes explanation of funds spent, documentation of all expenditures, and project evaluation.

Fiscal Sponsorship

- Individuals or community groups without 501(c)3 non-profit status <u>may</u> apply through a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that serves as a fiscal sponsor

- Fiscal sponsors assume all financial and legal obligations:

  - Application submission

  - Funding acceptance

  - Interim and final report submissions

- No more than 10% of the grant award may be used to pay a fiscal sponsor

- Applicants applying through fiscal sponsors must use the fiscal sponsor's organization account within our grants portal

- Eligibility requirements noted in RFP still apply to the fiscal sponsors

Allowable/Unallowable Costs

The grant program CAN fund:

- Recording equipment

- Transcription

- Translation (extra funds available)

- Virtual recording platforms

- Space rental

- Honoraria/Stipends

- Salaries/Wages

- Project transportation

- Project publicity and promotion

The grant program CANNOT fund:

- Any non-program-related costs

- General office supplies

- Rent, overhead/indirect, utilities, restoration

- Food and beverages/entertainment/social activities/fundraisers

- Tuition and scholarships

- Debt reduction

- Re-granting

- Funding to government agencies

- Interpretive works like films, books, exhibits etc. Grantees interested in these types of projects should apply for a *Beyond the Archives* grant.

Time Commitment

Past grantees have indicated an approximate range of **20-50 hours per oral history interview:**

- Attending trainings, conducting research and pre-interviews, scheduling and conducting interviews, editing transcripts, seeking narrator approval of transcripts, producing indexes, producing metadata, and administering the grant

We provide extensive assistance throughout the project!

After You Put Deliverables in TheirStory

1. HumanitiesDC sends deliverables to DCPL

2. DCPL performs quality control on required deliverables (spellcheck, formatting, etc.)

3. DCPL imports everything into the People's Archive Digital Repository (DigDC)

4. Everything is published, publicly available, and easy-to-find!

Q&A Break

Weighted Review Criteria

Capacity and Personnel - 10%

The Project Director has a demonstrated passion to bring the project to completion. If other team members and collaborators are clearly identified, the reasoning for their involvement is explained. An individual's role in different aspects of the project's planning, development, and/or implementation is explained.

Contribution to DC History - 25%

These preserved stories would be interesting to future researchers, residents, and the general public in learning about Washington, DC and its residents. The research topic might be hyperlocal or small in scope, but the interviews tell stories about life in our city.

Weighted Review Criteria, Con't

<u>Project Description</u> - 35%

The scope of the area of interest/research topic is both clear and focused on a particular area. It is also clear why oral history is the ideal tool for the exploration of this inquiry.

<u>Community Collaboration</u> - 30%

The applicant demonstrates how the project would be strengthened through collaboration and community involvement. A recruitment plan for finding narrators is explained, and prospective narrators are identified. The applicant notes their own connection to the community. If they are not already connected, the applicant describes how they will forge these connections and why they chose this particular community.

Key Application Questions

Grants portal instructions

Applicant Information
- Fiscal sponsors submit application on behalf of sponsored entity (and sign submitted application)
- Organizational info or proof of DC residency

Capacity and Key Personnel
- Write about your passion as the project director! Why do you want to do this project? Project director is the driver of the project activities and usually the point of contact.
- Don't necessarily need team members, but most projects benefit from this (so project director doesn't do everything themselves, community buy-in, etc.)
- Any familiarity with oral histories?
- Remember dates for required trainings in May. Ideal that the main interviewer attends all three trainings, but other team members are welcome too

Contribution to DC History
- Ok for project to be hyperlocal (focused on one building, etc.)
- What makes your project interesting?

Key Application Questions, Con't

Project Description
- Clear research topic/area of interest
- Translation funds available for transcriptions (why would this be helpful?)
- Timeline is best guess, remember ~20-50 hours per interview

Community Collaboration
- Why did you choose this particular community? How are you connected or hope to be connected?
- Thoughtful about narrator recruitment
- Community members ideally should be involved in project beyond just being interviewed (connect project director to other narrators, general outreach, location scouting, etc.)
- Shareback session is optional and should be small and semi-private

Key Application Questions, Con't

<u>Budget</u>

- Explain each budget category by line item, provide equations as needed for more complicated calculations (like salaries), think of how you want to record interviews and where they'd take place
- Budget is a plan! Can redirect funds as project progresses

<u>Accessibility Section</u>

- Required if organization has 15+ staff members

Successful Applications

- Clear and detailed research question
- Compelling contribution to DC history
- Explanation as to why oral history is the best format for project
- Ideas/explanations about how to connect with community, including narrator recruitment
- Project director's passion shines through
- Personnel roles are defined
- Don't propose collecting oral history interviews that have already been recorded and archived in DCPL. Try to review DigDC before submitting application.
- Only request funding for collecting and archiving new oral history interviews. Can budget a small portion of funds to host a small event to share the collected oral history interviews with narrators, but this grant is not for hosting public events, creating podcasts, or editing videos.
- DETAILED

- If you remember the above, lack of oral history experience isn't a big problem!

Common Application Issues

- Project scope is too broad
- No explanation of importance to DC history or why oral history is the best format
- Unclear description of community involvement and/or narrator selection
- Looks like application was written in a rush
- NOT DETAILED

Q&A Break

Application Review Process

- All submitted applications reviewed by HumanitiesDC staff for eligibility

- Eligible applications reviewed by reviewers - community members with strong ties to humanities in DC

  - Reviewers score applications based on review criteria (available in RFP and application)

- Staff review of highly-scored applicants (i.e. likely grantees)

- HumanitiesDC's Board affirms review process was followed

- All eligible applicants are told about decision approximately eight weeks after application deadline

- Grantees receive funds approximately two weeks after notification

- Interested in reviewing applications? Check out our website! You may be both an applicant and a grant reviewer, but you would not review applications for the same grant program you apply to.

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