Continuing Oral History Projects - DC Oral History Collaborative Reviewer Training – May 2025

Outline

- Overview of HumanitiesDC, the humanities, oral history, and the DC Oral History Collaborative
- Overview of Continuing Oral History Projects grant
- Timeline of grant review process
- Weighted review criteria
- Overview of scores and comments
- Evaluation questions
- General evaluation tips/instructions
- Implicit bias
- Timeline of post-review period
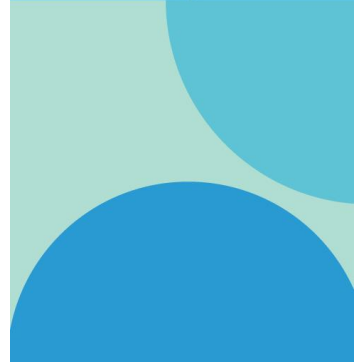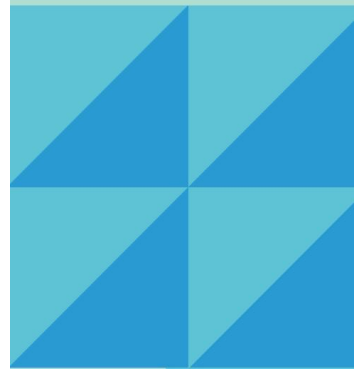
Who We Are

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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.

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

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

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

Our Guiding Principles

- **Equity-driven:** We strive to center equity principles across our organization, internally and externally. This focus helps us broaden access, inclusion, and diversity in all our work to create structures that share power and core decision-making.

- **Community-powered:** As an organization based in the humanities, we recognize that our work would not be possible if not for the strength and experiences of all the people who make up our city. Our aim is to build authentic relationships and collaborations that reflect the vibrancy of our community.

- **Creative vision**: We relish opportunities to venture into unexplored territory. We strive to bring a creative and entrepreneurial spirit into our collective work with the hopes of continuing to explore how the humanities can act as a connector across all our lives.

- **Amplifying voices:** We seek to use the power and resources made available to us to create spaces and opportunities to celebrate and share Washington, DC stories, culture, and experiences, especially those traditionally marginalized or left out of mainstream narratives.

- **Acting with integrity**: We are a curious group, excited to always better our grantmaking, public programs, internal culture, and community partnerships. We strive to be reflective, accountable, and ever-learning as we foster transparency across our organization and build mechanisms for feedback.

What is Oral History?

- An **interdisciplinary, interview-based** method of documenting the lived experience of historic moments to inform future generations.

- A way that culture and values are shared to strengthen community and inform new generations over time

- 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

- Easy to learn, but difficult to master

DC Oral History Collaborative Grants

DC Public Library

+

HumanitiesDC

↓

DC Oral History Collaborative

- 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)

Continuing Oral History Projects Grant

- Eligibility: DC-based individuals, community groups, and nonprofit organizations that have *completed and closed out a grant-funded DC Oral History Collaborative Project.*

- Maximum Award: $8,000 (plus an additional $5,000 may be requested for translation of transcripts)

- Project Period: July 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026

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

- 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).

- Link to RFP, link to workshop recording

- In 2025 we received 16 eligible Continuing Oral History Projects applications and will fund 5

Grant Review Process

1. **Read list of assigned applications to see any conflicts of interest**

2. **Submit conflict of interest form**

3. **Read through each application (evaluation is only based on application, no outside info)**

4. **Write out quantitative scores and qualitative comments**

5. **Finish all evaluations by May 29* at 12pm**

6. **Virtual, required panel meeting.** Panel number and panel meeting date were provided in email from May 8. During this meeting, you'll discuss applications with others on your panel. After the meeting, you'll have 24 hours to revise evaluations based on the conversation.

7. **Revise evaluations (if necessary)**

8. **End of review period**

Deadline to Finish Reviews

Thursday, May 29
at 12pm (noon)
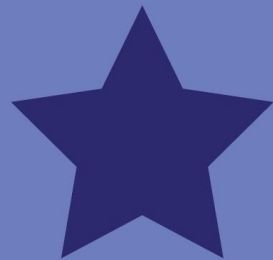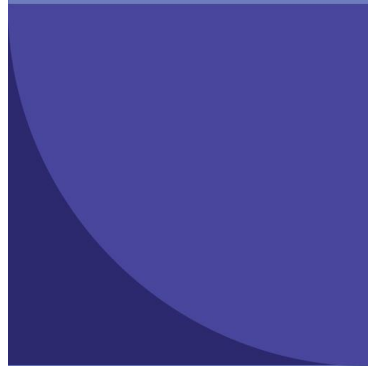
Weighted Review Criteria

Capacity and Personnel - 10%
The Project Director has the necessary passion to bring the project to completion. If there are other team members and/or collaborators, they are clearly identified and their involvement is explained. If one person is involved in different aspects of the project such as planning, development, and/or implementation, then their role is explained.

Contribution to DC History - 15%
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 can be hyperlocal and have a defined, narrow focus provided that the proposed interviews will tell stories about life in Washington, DC.

Weighted Review Criteria, Con't

<u>Project Description, Feasibility, and Timeline</u> - 40%
The scope of the area of interest/research topic is both clear and focused on a particular area. The applicant clearly describes why they want to conduct and archive additional interviews. The timeline is within the grant period and feasible.

<u>Community Collaboration</u> - 25%
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.

<u>Budget</u> - 10%
The applicant clearly describes how funds will be used, and all expenses are directly tied to the proposed project activities. Budgeted expenses are allowable. (Unallowable expenses include food and beverages, tuition and scholarships, debt reduction, re-granting, and funding to foreign or domestic government agencies. If the applicant is using a fiscal sponsor: no more than 10% of the grant can go to the fiscal sponsor.)

Scores

- Scores are from 1 to 10, with 10 the highest possible score

- Scores must match comments!

- Staff will calculate weights of your scores. If you want to do these calculations, you can plug your scores into the score calculators included in each evaluation form. Staff will use these same formulas in our own calculations.

- Staff will send out final, weighted scores before the panel meeting

- Staff mostly use the scores to determine grantees

Comments

Comments:
1. justify/match scores

2. help staff with funding decisions

3. are given to applicants if requested

Measuring Success*
The goals or impacts of the project are achievable and clear. The applicant has a clear plan for assessing the project's success.

• While the outcomes are not fully measurable, the applicant has set targeted attendance goals with thorough plans to monitor foot traffic and website traffic.

• Since there are also plans to survey attendees, the description would benefit from details on how the surveys will be physically collected and evaluated.

• Since this is a 4-part series, the plans to assess the event's success would be strengthened with evaluations following each event to inform the success at the following.

9,508 characters left of 10,000

Measuring Success Score*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Example of a strong comment & score

Measuring Success*
The goals or impacts of the project are achievable and clear. The applicant has a clear plan for assessing the project's success.

clear plan

9,990 characters left of 10,000

Measuring Success Score*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Example of a comment that does **not** match the score

Comments, cont.

Effective comments are:	Poor comments:
• Concise, easy-to-read and understand • Presented in constructive manner • Specific to individual proposal • Reflect your experience and expertise • Realistic about capacity of applicant • Highlight application's strengths and identify areas for improvement • Relevant to each section of the application being reviewed • Analyze rather than summarize or paraphrase	• Make derogatory remarks • Question applicant's honesty or integrity • Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information • Offer limited explanation or detail • Reflect personal biases • Penalize an applicant because you feel the organization does not need the money • Copied over or summarized applicant's answer without analyzing • Comments don't reflect scores

Time for the evaluation questions!

Link: [How to access/review evaluations in grants portal](#)

Introduction, Instructions

Scoring Guide:
- 9-10: Proposal has *ideal* responses for the stated criteria. A truly outstanding fit in most, if not all, respects.
- 7-8: Proposal has *good* responses. Answers are strong overall, though possibly raise a few concerns.
- 4-6: Proposal has *adequate* responses. Answers have strengths, but they don't meet the highest standards outlined in the review criteria.
- 1-3: Proposal has *unsatisfactory* responses. Answers don't sufficiently address the questions.

Evaluations should be primarily based on applicant's responses to the listed questions at the top of each weighted section, but also review the rest of the application for more context.

Capacity and Personnel

- Remember that applicants/personnel have already conducted oral history interviews!

- Project director in charge of overall project, shapes goals and activities. Might be hands-on and/or delegates to others.
  - Has the "necessary passion" to bring the project to completion. This may be related to prior work that is relevant to this project, as well as connections to the topic area. Applicant should be clear about WHY they want to do this project.

- Team and collaborators work with project director on overall project or specific tasks. Not required!
  - Ex) assistant, researcher, second interviewer

Does it make sense why these people are working on the project? Are their roles explained?

Contribution to DC History

- Is the project connected to DC?

- Could the interviews contribute to future research? Do you think people would be interested in hearing/reading these interviews? Why or how?

- The research topic might be hyperlocal or small in scope, but the interviews should still tell stories about life in DC
    Ex) interviewing people from a single apartment building, or who were part of the dance scene at a specific club

Area of Interest or Research Topic

- Is the area of interest/research topic clear? Focused? Compelling?

- All applicants already completed a project on this topic

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.

Reason for Continuation

- Does the applicant explain why they want to continue their project? Does their reasoning make sense?
  Ex) narrators were unavailable, new angle for area of interest, etc.

- Do you think this project should continue?

Timeline

- Will funded activities only happen during the grant period?

- Does the timeline make sense? Is it too ambitious, or too vague?

Translation Enhancement

- Additional funding specifically to translate transcripts into different languages. English language transcripts are required for projects to be added to the DCPL archives.

- Not applicable to every application, not included in weighted criteria. Write/choose "N/A" if the applicant doesn't request this.

- Did the applicant explain why translating the transcripts will make the project more accessible?
    - Ex) interviews about life in a particular neighborhood where many languages are spoken

Community Collaboration

- Does the recruitment strategy make sense? Are the prospective narrators identified? Is this community relevant to the area of interest/research topic?

- Will the narrators and their communities be active participants in the project, or will they only tell their stories?
    - Ex) connections to other narrators, suggestions for interview locations

Budget Clarity and Allowability

- Does the applicant explain the budget clearly?
  Ex) these funds will pay the project director and narrators

- Lump sums are ok, some applicants provide calculations

- If someone requests $8000, why?

- Are there any unallowable expenses?

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* in the future.

Optional Comments

- Additional Comments for Applicant: overall thoughts or suggestions, would also be shared with applicant if they request comments

- Additional Comments for HumanitiesDC: will not be shared with applicant. This is to note general or specific thoughts/concerns/questions just for staff about the application

Application Questions Not Visible to Reviewers

- How applicant found out about grant opportunity
- Contact info other than the applicant's
- Proof of age/DC residency for individual applicants
- Fiscal sponsor letter of confirmation
- Total estimated interviews
- Community share back session
- Accessibility section
- Authorized signature

General Tips and Instructions

- Start evaluations as early as possible to finish by deadline. You'll have time after the panel meeting to revise scores/comments. ***Tell us as early as possible if you need to drop out!!***

- Don't be overly harsh or provide too much leeway, which is a tricky balance!

- Provide constructive comments: "amazing response" or "unclear plan" --> "applicant has a clear plan for assessing program success" or "recommend providing more details about how events are marketed to the intended audience"

- Be honest, trust your experience and expertise. Ensure your feedback is reflected in the comments.

General Tips and Instructions, Cont.

- Don't be concerned about how many projects we can fund.

- Don't compare applications to each other; instead, try to honestly and consistently apply scoring rubric to the responses. Think of each application as standalone.

- Don't conduct your own research about an applicant/project; focus on what's in the application

Implicit Bias

- Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding in an unconscious manner.
- Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible

How implicit bias can influence your review:
  - Prior knowledge or experience with applicant (not necessarily conflict of interest)
  - Personal experience with project's content, history, location, audience, etc.
  - Thoughts about writing style, polished "good grammar"
  - Opinions on sex/gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability, etc., as well as project content

Implicit Bias, cont.

To limit implicit bias:

- You are a reviewer, not a critic
- Focus on content of application as written
- Frame comments as recommendations
- Don't compare applications to each other
- Adhere to review criteria

Chicago Beyond Mirror Tool: useful to think about how to recognize bias during reviews

Post-Review Period

- Staff discussion to choose highest-scored applications in each panel up to how much budgeted for each grant program

- Staff review of likely grantees, including budget review, Guidestar/Charity Navigator, internet search for news, concerns from reviewers

- During/after the staff review, slate of selected awardees are sent to board with overview of full review process. Board votes on process, NOT grantees.

- Applicants are notified; grant acceptance and disbursement process, and full list of grantees sent to reviewers, then publicly acknowledged.

- **$125 honorarium per grants cycle to reviewers who submit all evaluations before the deadline (May 29 at noon) AND attend the panel meeting. More information to come.**

- **Open House July 9 – Save the Date!**

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