

HumanitiesDC

HISTORY
LITERATURE
LANGUAGES
ETHICS
PHILOSOPHY
ARTS APPRECIATION

Oral History Interviewing – DCOHC Workshop: January 14, 2026

Outline

- HumanitiesDC
- What is oral history?
- DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC)
- *Oral History Interviewing* grant overview and examples
- Room introductions
- Grant specifics
- Application questions
- Components of a successful application and common issues
- Review process

- Q&As throughout!

Who We Are



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- Oversees HumanitiesDC's grants portfolios
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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 – ~$900,000 to 50+ grantees across 8 wards; ~10 OHI grantees



2026 Grant Cycles

Cycle I: Due February 18, 2026, by 5:59 pm

- Community Culture & Heritage
- Oral History Interviewing - DCOHC
- Visions - Projects + Events

Cycle II: Opens March 3, due May 1, 2026, by 5:59 pm

- Beyond the Archives - DCOHC
- Continuing Oral History Projects - DCOHC
- General Operating Support

https://humanitiesdc.org/grant-opportunities/

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.

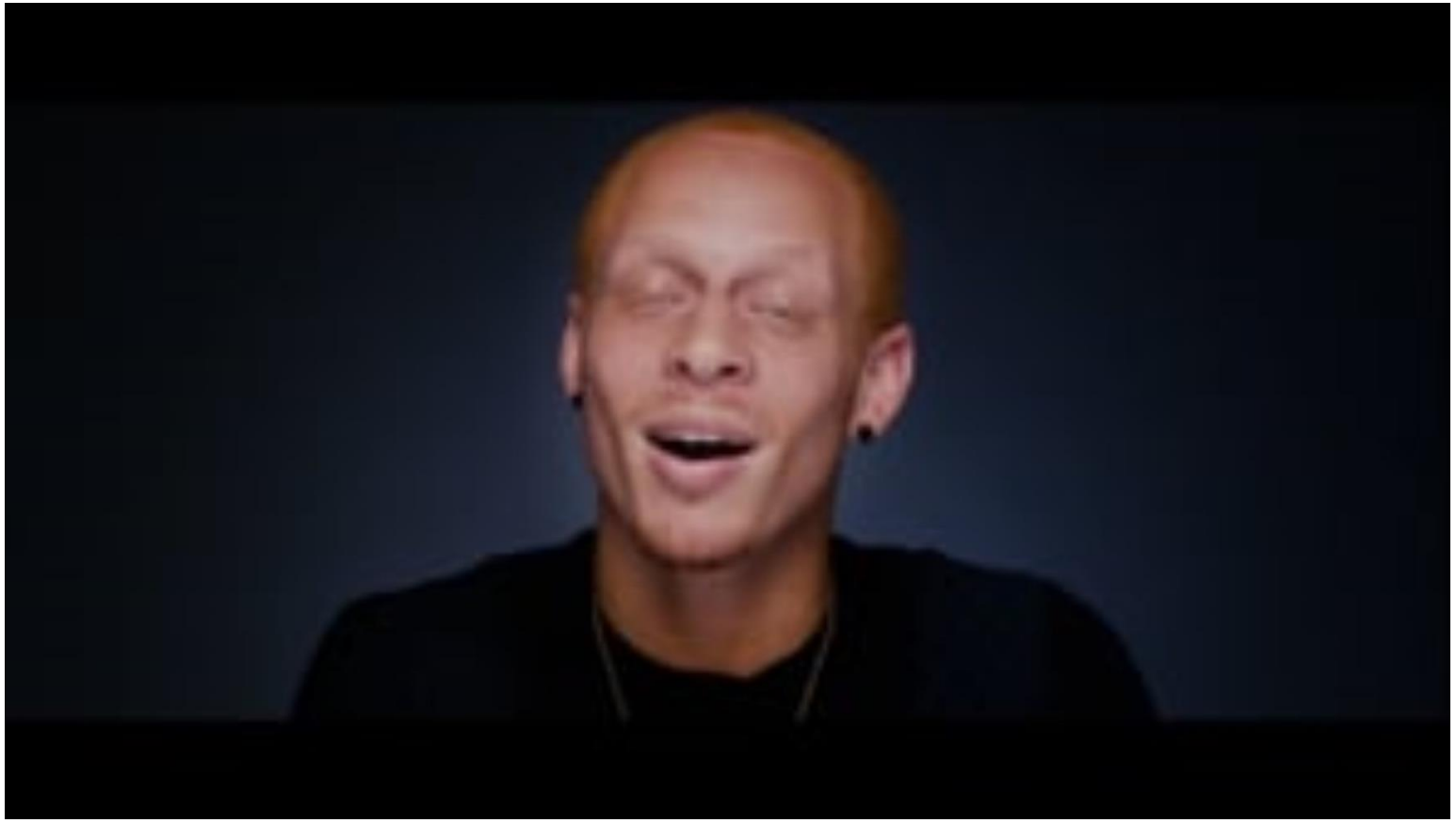
- Oral histories are tools within the humanities. You can interview people about non-humanities topics too!

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



DC Oral History Collaborative Grants

The DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC) is a partnership between HumanitiesDC and the DC Public Library. 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 II)
- Continuing Oral History Projects (Cycle II)

Oral History Interviewing – DCOHC

- Eligibility: DC-based individuals, community groups, nonprofit organizations
- Maximum Award: $8,000 (plus an additional $5,000 may be requested to translate transcripts)
- Project Period: **May 1, 2026 – January 31, 2027**
- 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 4, 11, and 18** 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.
- Applications close **February 18, 2026 at 6:00 pm**

Link to RFP

Shilpi Malinowski

Mount Pleasant: The Rise and Fall of Cultural Community Centers



Example #1 Interest Area

***Christ House*: This oral history project will explore the profound impact of Christ House over the past 40 years through the lived experiences of those who built, sustained, and were transformed by its work.** At its core, this project is an opportunity to document the origins of Christ House, the evolution of medical respite care, and the personal stories of healing and hope that have defined its mission. A key area of focus will be capturing the voices of Christ House's **founders**—individuals now in their senior years who had the vision and determination to create the first medical respite facility in the country. Their firsthand accounts will offer invaluable insight into the challenges they faced, the decisions they made, and the unwavering commitment that shaped a model of care now replicated nationwide. Documenting their experiences is a time-sensitive endeavor; by preserving their stories now, we ensure that future generations can learn from and build upon their legacy. **Beyond the founders, we will also explore the experiences of former patients, staff, volunteers, and community partners. Their perspectives will illustrate how Christ House not only provided medical care but also restored dignity, inspired service, and influenced broader efforts to make healthcare more equitable.** These stories will shed light on the realities of homelessness and healing in Washington, DC, bringing attention to systemic challenges while celebrating the resilience of individuals and communities. Oral history is the ideal tool for this inquiry because it captures the depth and nuance of lived experience in a way that traditional historical records cannot. **Unlike written reports or statistical analyses, oral history provides space for individuals to share their journeys in their own words, preserving emotion, perspective, and personal insight. This method is particularly important for marginalized voices—such as those who have experienced homelessness—ensuring that their stories are affirmed and dignified rather than reduced to impersonal data points.** […]

Example #2 Interest Area

Kai Walther: In this oral history project, **I will explore how and why gay men took part in the "unsanctioned" activity of cruising, with its potential for dangerous or violent encounters, legal consequences, and spread of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), as well as possible intimate relationships, social encounters, and sexual freedom.** I will additionally examine the ramifications of cruising on DC's nascent gay communities and culture. My inquiry will focus on the years between **1970 and 2000**. The time period for my research begins in the 1970s during the rise of the gay liberation movement, which included increased direct action activism, emergence of gay pride, and the American Psychiatric Association's removal of homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. The 1980s, conversely, were most notable as the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, compared to the previous decade, increased conservatism and anti-gay discrimination. Anti-gay abuse and institutional discrimination continued into the 1990s (Don't Ask, Don't Tell; Defense of Marriage Act), as did the impact of HIV/AIDS. However, gay rights movements, pride parades, and "gayborhoods" such as the one in Dupont Circle also gained traction throughout the decade. Cruising largely originated as a way for gay men to meet each other clandestinely, as they did not have access to the same structures, institutions, and general societal acceptance for sexual and romantic encounters as did their heterosexual peers. **Gay men in the US have been cruising long before 1970, but I am particularly interested in cruising during this period of heightened visibility, tragedies, and progress for gay people.** Oral history is the ideal tool for this inquiry not least because very few archival materials even address gay cruising. Historically, records of LGBTQ life were rarely preserved, and if they were preserved, often destroyed, due to legal and societal restrictions on homosexuality. Information on gay cruising faced additional barriers to preservation due to the taboo around sex, not to mention gay sex. Oral histories about cruising help fill this gap in the archive. **They also diversify the historical sources base by including perspectives of those whom the established LGBT organizations, movements, and narratives did or could not represent.** Furthermore, oral histories rely on the perspectives and experiences of people who actually lived through the particular moment or movement about which they are speaking. **For a topic as potentially sensitive or controversial as cruising, it is important to hear from the people who actually engage(d) in the practice. They are the experts, and it is only through recording their stories, the way they want to tell them, that this history will be documented.**

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 4, 11, and 18, 2026 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, 2026, includes explanation of funds spent and brief overview of progress to date.
    - 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, 2027, 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, 2027. Report includes explanation of funds spent, documentation of all expenditures, and project evaluation.

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!

Allowable/Unallowable Costs

The grant program CAN fund:

- Salaries/Wages
- Honoraria/Stipends
- Consulting Fees
- Recording equipment
- Virtual recording platforms*
- Transcription*
- Space rental
- Project transportation
- Project publicity and promotion
- Translation (extra funds available for transcripts)
- *May use TheirStory instead

The grant program CANNOT fund:

- Any non-program-related costs
- General operation expenses (rent, overhead/indirect, utilities)
- General office supplies
- Food and beverages
- 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 in Cycle II.

Fiscal Sponsorship

- Individuals or community groups without 501(c)3 non-profit status may 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

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

Sample Timeline:

- May - Complete required 3-session training
- July - Recruit narrators
- September - Start conducting interviews; complete interim report
- October - Start transcripts and indexes
- November - Start metadata ***all interviews should be completed by mid-November to close out on time***
- January - Submit final deliverables
- March - Complete final report

We provide extensive assistance throughout the project!

Q&A Break

Weighted Review Criteria

Project Description - 35%

The interest area is focused and specific about what the applicant hopes to learn from narrators' memories and reflections on the past. The applicant also demonstrates why oral history is the ideal tool for the exploration of this topic.

Contribution to DC History - 25%

The applicant demonstrates the importance of capturing these preserved stories for future researchers, residents, and the general public. The research topic might be hyperlocal or small in scope, but the interviews provide important human context to the history of DC and its residents.

Weighted Review Criteria, Con't

Community Collaboration - 30%

The applicant demonstrates how the project would be strengthened through collaboration and community involvement. A recruitment plan for finding narrators is explained. If they are not already connected, the applicant describes why they chose to interview members of this particular community and how they will build these connections.

Capacity and Personnel - 10%

The Project Director demonstrates their motivation to carry the project to completion. This may be displayed through past experiences, connection to the community of inquiry, any research already completed, or other demonstrated passion for the topic area. If other team members and collaborators are identified, their involvement is clearly explained. An individual's role in different aspects of the project's planning, development, and/or implementation is explained.

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

Project Description

- Clear, specific interest area
- Timeline is best guess, remember ~20-50 hours per interview. See sample timeline on website
- Can update timeline as a grantee

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

Community Collaboration

- Community members ideally should be involved in project beyond just being interviewed (connect project director to other narrators, general outreach, location scouting, etc.)
- Thoughtful about narrator recruitment
- Why did you choose this particular community? How are you connected or hope to be connected?
- Translation funds available for transcriptions. Transcripts MUST be in English for archiving

Capacity and Key Personnel

- 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.)
- Remember dates for required trainings in May

Key Application Questions, Con't

Budget

- 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
  - Translation Enhancement funds can't be redirected

ADA Compliance

- Required if organization has 15+ staff members

Appendix (optional)

- Supports application, usually not brand-new information
- Try to keep this under 10 pages, or short videos

Q&A Break

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 motivation 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

Application Review Process

- All submitted applications reviewed by HumanitiesDC staff for eligibility, and then assigned to panels/groups of reviewers
- Reviewers - community members with strong ties to humanities in DC
  - They score applications based on review criteria (available in RFP and application)
- Staff review of likely grantees
- HumanitiesDC's Board affirms review process was followed
- Funding decisions are sent out approximately ten 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.
- Reviewer PoC: Hillary

Resources & Assistance

- Additional overview and grant-specific workshops listed below.
- Sign up for virtual office hours
- FAQ, sample application responses, and draft review also available
- Leah Gage – lgage@humanitiesdc.org
- Hillary Steen – hsteen@humanitiesdc.org

General Info Sessions

- Recording on website
- January 20 at 5:30pm (virtual)

Scan for all upcoming info sessions

Grant Program Workshops (all virtual)

- Community Culture & Heritage (recording on website)
- Oral History Interviewing
- Jan 16, 12pm - Visions – Projects + Events
- Cycle II in the spring

HumanitiesDC

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