

Module 5

Sharing Your Oral History with the Community

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Supporting Questions

How do you create a version of your oral history to save in an archive?

How do you ensure the oral history reflects what the narrator wants to share?

How do you share your oral history with the community?

1. Can collecting community histories confront the silencing of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders?

Community historians usually produce two public versions of their oral history interviews. The first version is the full recording with written transcripts, which is donated to a library or archive. The second is a shorter, edited version shared with community audiences.

Archives and libraries that keep oral histories usually save both the original recording and the transcript.

Transcripts are useful because they allow the narrator, and future audiences, to read through the entire interview quickly without having to listen to the whole recording. Community historians used to have to listen and transcribe interviews on their own. Today there are many online programs that can create rough transcripts for you.

Once your interview is completed and transcribed, you should make sure to share a copy of the transcript and the recording with your narrator. Your narrator should be given a chance to make any changes, additions, or deletions to the transcripts before the interview is made public. If they ask you to delete a section of the transcript, you should also delete that section from your recording.

It is common for narrators to make small revisions and corrections on the transcripts, such as correcting dates or names. Make sure to allow the narrator to make any written additions to the transcript that they would like. Sometimes when reading a transcript, narrators will think of stories, events, or names that they would like included. The narrator can write an addendum, which is a short statement that can be added to the end of the transcript. If the addendum is long, you can also conduct a follow-up interview to record them. The process of having your narrator check and lightly edit the transcripts is called “clearing” a transcript.

Once the narrator has cleared the transcript you are ready to begin sharing the interview with the community.

2. Why Should You Donate Your Oral History to a Library or Archive?

Community historians understand that having your history viewed first by the community and then by the larger public is an incredibly important step in the historical process. It is critical for challenging **historical silences** around histories of race, gender, sexuality and other forms of marginalization. It also empowers community members to see their own lives and the lives of their families and friends as part of the larger flow of local, national, and global history.

One way to share oral history recordings and transcripts is to donate the cleared oral history to a library or community archive. Community archives are local depositories that are accessible to all members of a community. Many Asian American and Pacific Islander communities run their own historical societies that have archives. Local city libraries also often keep archival collections. While most university libraries wouldn't count as community archives, there are exceptions like the Ethnic Studies Library at UC Berkeley.

Making your oral history recording accessible to the larger public is an important step that you should try to take. Donating the oral history to a community archive ensures that members of the community will be able to access the life history of your narrator in the future.

3. How Else Can You Share Your Oral History?

While donating the oral history to an archive or library is an important step, you should also think about other ways to share your interview. Few people in the community will have the patience to watch an hour-long unedited video recording with your grandmother in an archive. Indeed, even your grandmother might not want to watch that hour-long unedited video of herself. In contrast, if you edit your project into a form that is accessible to other members of the community, they are more likely to learn about that history. Keep in mind that the goal of oral history is to make your community history as accessible to community members as possible.

To shape the broader understanding of history, community historians usually share their work in a variety of venues. In the 1970s, when Margie Lew and the CHSSC began their work, they created books, newsletters, and independent films. Today, community history takes many additional forms. Community history can include social media posts, comic books, plays, pamphlets, presentations, books written in accessible styles, podcasts, and video documentaries.

When you are developing your community history project, you should consider:

- What is the most accessible format for my community to engage with the project?
- How can I distribute this edited version of the community's history to reach as many people in the community as possible?

Perhaps you decide to make a podcast, create a comic strip, or design a short, printed magazine (a 'zine). That alone is not enough. You need to figure out how you will tell your community members about your project. You could, for instance, deliver a presentation of your work at a local community center or religious institution. Whatever you decide, it is important

that you do not skip sharing your project with others. Recording an oral history is only the first step in doing community history. Sharing your project is an equally important step in the process.

4. What You Do After the Interview

- Provide a copy of the interview recording and transcript to your narrator.
- Let the narrator review the interview before you share them with the public. This is an incredibly important step. Oftentimes, narrators will tell memories or stories in the moment that they later decide they do not want to be shared with the public. Providing the narrator with copies of the interview recording and transcript allows them to remove these stories before their interview is shared publicly.
- Ask the narrator if there is anything in the interview that they want to remove or delete.
- Ask the narrator if there are any parts of the narrative they would like to elaborate.
- Remove all portions of the interview that the narrator asks to have removed. Provide a chance for the narrator to include stories or memories they want added to the interview. These additions to the interview could be done in writing or at a second follow up interview.

It is an exciting time to be a community historian. Advances in technology over the last fifty years mean that now anyone can conduct, share, and edit their own community histories. This includes you. There is nothing stopping you from becoming a community historian today. Look around you. The people in your community have interesting and exciting life stories that deserve to be documented. If you expect someone else to document those stories, their history might never be recorded. So take your phone, recruit your friends, and go interview your elders.

Just as members of the Chinese American community are grateful for the work the CHSSC did fifty years ago documenting the history of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles, in another fifty years, members of your community who haven't even been born yet will be grateful to you for the community histories you conduct today. Your community's history deserves to be documented, and you should be the person who documents it.