

UNDERTAKING PAID ORAL HISTORY WORK: POINTS TO CONSIDER

This short guide has been written to assist anyone beginning work as an independent oral historian. It has been kept brief deliberately to avoid duplication with material available elsewhere. Suggestions for content are welcomed.

DEVELOPING THE BRIEF

When undertaking oral history commissions, it is essential that you and the person commissioning you (the commissioner) have a common understanding of the task. Once agreement is reached, confirm arrangements in writing for the commissioner to approve, preferably in writing. A straightforward contract could also be used.

Consider the following points:

ADMINISTRATION

- Discuss what oral history is and what an oral history recording involves. For definitions see *A guide to recording oral history*, Ministry for Culture and Heritage <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/>, *What is Oral History?* <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/advice/index.php> or the papers on *Oral History Methodology* on the OHA's website <http://www.iohanet.org/resources/advice.html>
- Satisfy yourself that an oral history recording best meets the needs of the commissioner and that you have the necessary skills, experience and technical expertise to undertake the work (see below under Professional Competence).
- Identify the scope of the recording i.e. what the commissioner wants to find out, is it a life history or topic-based interview, the expected length of recording (especially maximum length since this can dramatically alter the costs), intended end use - see

A guide for commissioning oral history projects

http://www.ohaansw.org.au/page/a_guide_to_commissioning_oral_history_projects.html
and

Points to Consider before beginning an oral history project

<http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/documents/pointstoconsider.pdf>

- Decide how and how often you will provide progress reports. Identify the person you will liaise with/report to, especially if undertaking a commission for a group.
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INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Make clear what tasks you will undertake, what equipment will be used, the process you will follow, what the commissioner will receive once the work is complete. Be specific about the vehicle for delivery of your work (e.g. CD/DVD, portable USB drive etc) and responsibility for providing copies for the person interviewed. For items usually included in an oral history recording package see DELIVERING YOUR WORK below.
- Identify who will select the person/people to be interviewed, and on what criteria.

- Consider an information sheet for prospective interviewees telling them about the project and giving them a contact person for queries. A letter of introduction from your commissioner can be invaluable.

ABSTRACT OR TRANSCRIPT

- Is an abstract or transcript required? Explain the difference. Does the archive have a preference?
- Who is responsible for this? If someone other than the interviewer allow time for checking.

PRESERVING THE RECORDING FOR THE FUTURE

*Is the recording to be archived? If so, where? By whom? When? It is advisable for arrangements to be discussed with an intended repository prior to recording the oral history interview.

*If there are no immediate plans to archive the recording who will be responsible for maintaining it? Make the commissioner aware that digital recordings require backing up and may require migrating between storage media over time, see "*Risks Associated with the Use of Recordable CDs and DVDs as Reliable Storage Media in Archival Collections: Strategies and Alternatives*" by Kevin Bradley [This used to be accessible on the web but I have been unable to locate it again unfortunately.]

*Will you keep a copy of the recording and for how long? What else will you keep after the work has been completed?

RIGHTS OF INTERVIEWEES

- Make the commissioner aware of your ethical obligations under the *Code of Ethical and Technical Practice* <http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/code.htm>
- Show the commissioner the Recording Agreement Form and point out the rights of the interviewee to restrict access and use of the recording. Identify any difficulties that restricted material would cause.

OTHER

- Address the issue of copyright. Who will hold this? Is shared copyright acceptable?

TIMEFRAME

- Agree a timeframe for the work. Include what will happen if circumstances outside your control make it impossible to meet the timeframe e.g. because of illness or unavailability of the interviewee or unforeseen difficulties.

FEE

- Estimate the time required for each stage of the project, including administration and scoping the project. Include an allowance for time you will spend on unseen elements of the process such as phone calls and making interview arrangements, setting up and

putting away equipment, talking about the interview and the interview process with the interviewee. Keep records of actual hours for each stage so that you can compare with your estimate at the end of the project and identify areas for future adjustment.

- Identify likely additional costs e.g. scanning and printing photographs, travel and accommodation expenses etc, and how you will be reimbursed for these.
- Agree a fee. Consider progress payments at specified milestones (e.g. once recording has been made and when abstract or transcript is sent to interviewee for checking) and a part charge if the project does not proceed after you have done research and preparation. See *Rates of pay - what are you worth?* <http://www.phanza.org.nz/content/rates-pay> and *Fees Guidelines* on the Oral History Association of Australia's website <http://www.ohaa.net.au/>
- Make clear your expectations regarding payment for your work. Be aware that community groups may have set procedures before money can be disbursed e.g. approval by meeting, two signatories to cheques etc, and this may result in delay.

DELIVERING YOUR WORK

Expect to supply the commissioner with the following on completion of your work:

- Biographical details of interviewee (see sample Biographical Details Form <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/pdfs/Biographical-information-form.pdf>)
- Signed Recording Agreement Form - <http://www.natlib.govt.nz/services/catalogues/library-documents/oral-history-recording-agreement-form>
- An audio original version of the recording
- Checked abstract or transcript, time coded – for more information see <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/hands/processing-the-interview-a-guide-to-recording-oral-history>
- Technical information about the recording - when, where and on what equipment, format, audio modification if any etc.
- Contemporary photograph and photograph(s) relevant to the recorded material, scanned and/or printed. Note that increasingly repositories ask for information about photographs: when, where and by whom taken, copyright etc. Provide as much information as possible.

You might also consider providing:

- Research sources
- Interview notes
- Summary of the recording
- Project report (where you undertake multiple interviews)
- an mp3 version of the recording for ease of handling

If you are responsible for archiving the archive will need to be informed about what you are depositing.

GENERAL MATTERS

Professional competence

Awareness and active compliance with the Code of Ethical and Technical Practice

<http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/code.htm>

Willingness to provide information about oral history recording work you have undertaken and to provide referees on request so that commissioners can be satisfied of your suitability to undertake the project.

Record keeping

Keep careful records of the steps you follow in undertaking the commission. Take special care to record when and what items you borrow for scanning and when you return them. Consider recording the time spent (see under FEE above).

Business matters

TAX and GST: Advice is available from IRD on tax and record keeping. Contact your nearest office or look online at *Tools for Business: an online interactive tool to explain what you need to know* <http://www.ird.govt.nz/business-income-tax/tax-for-bus>

Business training may assist <http://www.nzte.govt.nz/develop-knowledge-expertise/Business-Training-Services/Pages/Business-training-services.aspx>

INSURANCE: Ensure your equipment is covered by insurance in the place where you usually work and when you are using it elsewhere. If you work from a home office do not assume that equipment used for business purposes will be covered by your house contents policy. You may need a business tools extension to cover recording and computer equipment etc.

Be aware that some policies will only cover equipment when it is physically with you, not when it is unattended. Also establish whether insurance cover is for full replacement or indemnity.

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