

Since its founding in 1967 the Oral History Association (OHA) has developed and promoted professional standards for the practice of oral history. It has worked to encourage the creation of recorded interviews that are as complete, verifiable, and accessible as possible, and to discourage both ill-informed interviewing and the misuse of the interviews produced. Yet equally it has sought to promote high standards without suppressing creativity, for ingenuity and inspiration have a role to play in our field and new developments in scholarship and technology have had – and continue to have – profound affects upon it.

Given the dynamic and creative nature of oral history, this iteration of *Principles and Standards for Oral History* is the current endpoint of a long evolutionary process. The OHA issued its first Goals and Guidelines in 1968, stating the broad principles, rights, and obligations that all interviewees, interviewers, and sponsoring institutions needed to consider as they conducted interviews and developed oral history projects. Then in 1979, prompted by various funding agencies that wanted a clear set of standards against which to assess proposals, leaders of the OHA met at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, to produce a comprehensive set of Evaluation Guidelines. These were discussed at OHA's annual meeting, approved by its governing Council and endorsed by the membership. Organized in checklist form, the Evaluation Guidelines identified the myriad issues involved in planning, conducting, processing, and preserving oral history interviews. Not every guideline applied to every oral history initiative, but taken together they have evolved into an important and well regarded set of professional standards and a baseline for continuing dialogue among oral historians.

Over the next decade, new issues arose including the growing use of videotape for interviews; the increasing use of oral history both within educational settings and by individual researchers, outside of an archival or programmatic context; and a heightened awareness of the social content of oral history. The need to revise the existing guidelines was apparent, and in 1988 the OHA appointed four committees to examine those sections of the existing Evaluation Guidelines that required revision or entirely new material. After a year's work, the committees presented their proposals to the members of the association at the 1989 annual meeting, where their reports were discussed, amended, and adopted at the general business meeting. During the next year, the chairs of the four Evaluation Guidelines committees analyzed, revised, and expanded the 1968 Goals and Guidelines into a new Statement of Principles and Standards, aligned with the revised Evaluation checklists. As in the previous year, this Statement was presented to the membership for amendment and adoption at the 1989 annual meeting.

If this two-year process sounds cumbersome, it was. But its many stages were designed deliberately to foster thoughtful debate among a wide cross-section of oral history practitioners, to help ensure the document's broadest possible application and acceptance. The most intense discussions predictably focused on ethical issues. Following broader trends within the academy and society at large, a greater awareness of the effects of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity and culture on interviewing, together with a heightened concern about the impact that the oral history projects might have on the communities in which the interviews were conducted, were woven into both the Statement of Principles and Standards and the Evaluation Guidelines. The scope of these documents were thus expanded beyond the conduct of interviews and management of projects, to include attention to ways oral history interviews are used for a variety of purposes and in a variety of settings.

The new standards and guidelines also encouraged oral historians to make their interviews accessible to the community in which they were conducted and to consider sharing the rewards and recognition that might result from their work with interviewees. In addition, they sanctioned the use of anonymous interviews, a challenging issue among historians, for whom anonymous sources are suspect, but nonetheless an important protection when dealing with sensitive subjects or socially vulnerable interviewees.

During the 1990s, rapid advances in technology required a further revision, to address new ways of recording, preserving, using and distributing oral history. In 1998 an ad hoc Technology Update committee presented additional revisions for discussion and adoption by the membership at the 1998 annual meeting. These revisions included new sections on recording equipment and tape preservation and encouraged practitioners to pay more attention to technical standards for recording and to new technology and media, particularly the Internet. At the same time they considered some of the ethical issues that the new technology posed.

This 2009 version of the Principles and Standards and Evaluation Guidelines represents a considerable revision of those documents. Over the years they had grown by accretion, becoming more of a mini-manual than a statement of core principles; and in their length and detail they had become unwieldy, indeed burdensome to all but the most conscientious of practitioners. At the same time, oral history's scope has continued to widen: in classrooms and communities, in research seminars and historical organizations more and more people are "doing oral history" outside the purview of established programs and centers, often with limited knowledge of standards of professional practice. Recognizing this, in 2008 OHA appointed a committee to review and revise the existing documents, with the goal of making it more accessible to all who do oral history. Seeking counsel from colleagues both within and outside of OHA, the committee developed a document that both retains the core principles and professional standards of previous iterations and recognizes the diversity of uses to which oral history is being put. This current version has clearly divided the statement Principles and Standards from the Evaluation Guidelines; has reduced the former to its essentials; and considerably shortened the latter, encouraging oral historians to turn to the available literature for more detailed guidance. We have also edited the document for stylistic consistency.

All of those who labored in the preparation of the several iterations of the principles and standards and the evaluation guidelines trust that they will offer positive assistance to anyone conducting or using oral history interviews, teaching oral history, or managing oral history collection. While these guidelines and standards provide a basis for peer judgment and review, their success will ultimately depend more on the willingness of individual oral historians and oral history projects to apply them to their own work.

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