



Oral history guidelines

25 May 2023

NSLA libraries commission and collect oral history recordings as part of our role in collecting, preserving and making accessible Australia's and New Zealand's cultural heritage. These guidelines are for use by people who want to create or donate oral history recordings to NSLA libraries' collections.

Oral history is a research methodology involving "extended, recorded interviews undertaken for a particular purpose and often with a view to eventual archiving for preservation and public access."¹ It involves an audio or video recording of peoples' memories of their unique life experiences in a planned, structured interview.

Most NSLA libraries commission oral histories in line with their collecting priorities. These are carefully planned projects, working collaboratively with oral history interviewers and interviewees. They are initiated and overseen by the commissioning library.

Some libraries also welcome proposals from researchers, academics, students, community historians, and interested members of the public for oral history projects that complement their collection development priorities.

Working with NSLA libraries on oral history projects

1. Contact the library

If you have an idea for an oral history interview or are recording oral histories for a project that you think meets a library's collecting criteria it is essential that you contact the team responsible **before** you commence. Contact details can be found on each library's website; links to information and contact details current at the time of writing are included in Appendix 1 of this document.

Once you have discussed your proposal, the library will advise you of next steps, such as submitting a proposal document and/or project plan, as well as any technical or equipment requirements.

2. Recording standards

The international archival standards for oral history recordings are set by the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives². Interviews should be recorded using the following minimum parameters:

- 48kHz recording frequency
- 24-bit bit depth
- uncompressed .wav files
- stereo recordings using separate microphones for interviewer and interviewee, on a recorder that enables each input to be controlled separately.

¹ Source: Oral History Australia: <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/guidance/what-is-oral-history/>

² *The Safeguarding of the Audiovisual Heritage: Ethics, Principles and Preservation Strategy* (IASA-TC 03), IASA, 2017: https://www.iasa-web.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publications/TC03_English.pdf



3. Recording equipment

Digital equipment used to record oral history interviews must be high-quality. Some libraries require the use of their own recording equipment and training in how to use it, others allow interviewers to use their own equipment as long as it meets quality requirements.

4. Training

Anyone proposing an oral history project is expected to have a level of knowledge of oral history best-practice, including project planning, ethics and permissions, interview techniques, file management and transcribing. As well as university and accredited training, workshops are offered by state associations of Oral History Australia and by the National Library of New Zealand. Some libraries may have additional training requirements.

5. Deliverables

The library you are working with will give you details of everything you need to deliver to complete the project. Each library has its own forms and specifications for documentation. Generally, deliverables will include:

- digital files of all recordings
- transcripts
- completed forms relating to copyright and conditions of use (such as an interviewee's access restrictions)
- a photograph of the interviewee.

Donating existing oral history recordings to a NSLA library collection

If you are considering donating existing recordings to a NSLA library, it is essential that you contact the library first to discuss whether it is appropriate for their collection. (See Appendix 1 for library contact details.)

Whether recordings are historical or contemporary, made by professionals or amateurs, they will be considered according to the library's current collecting priorities, existing collections and the significance³ of the item in regard to its topic and/or interviewee.

Generally, donations must be accompanied by relevant copyright and conditions of use permissions. Exceptions may be made for recordings of high significance.

³ Significance can be defined as "the historic, artistic, scientific, social or spiritual values that items and collections have for past, present and future generations." *Significance 2.0*, Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2009: <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/museums-libraries-and-galleries/significance-20>

Appendix 1: Contact details

(as at March 2023)

Alexander Turnbull Library (National Library of New Zealand)

Enquiries/project proposals: submit via [Ask a Librarian](#)

[Oral history advice](#)

Collecting priorities: [Oral History and Sound collecting plan](#)

Donations: [Offer material to the Alexander Turnbull Library](#)

National Library of Australia

Enquiries/project proposals: select@nla.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [What we collect: Oral history](#)

Donations: [Archival Offer Form](#)

ACT Heritage Library

Enquiries/project proposals: act.heritage.library@act.gov.au

[Oral history kit](#)

Collecting priorities: [What do we collect?](#)

Donations: [How to donate](#)

Library & Archives NT

Enquiries/project proposals: lant.oralhistory@nt.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [Oral histories](#)

Donations: [Donate to the collection](#)

State Library of New South Wales

Enquiries/project proposals: collections.library@sl.nsw.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [What the library collects](#)

Donations: [Acquisitions and donations](#)

State Library of Queensland

Enquiries/project proposals: submit via [Ask a Librarian](#)

Collecting priorities: [Content guidelines: Memory collections](#)

Donations: [Donating to the collection](#)

State Library of South Australia

Enquiries/project proposals: SLSAOralHistory@sa.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [Collections policy](#): [Collection development](#)

Donations: [Donate to our collections](#)

State Library of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Archives

Enquiries/project proposals: tas.archives@libraries.tas.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [Collecting priorities](#): [Collection development policy](#)

Donations: [Add to our Tasmanian heritage collections](#)

State Library Victoria

Enquiries/project proposals: submit via [Ask a Librarian](#)

Collecting priorities: [Collection Strategy 2020-24](#)

Donations: [Offer collection material to the library](#)

State Library of Western Australia

Enquiries/project proposals: collections@slwa.wa.gov.au

Collecting priorities: [Collecting priorities](#)

Donations: [Donate to our collections](#)