

General Principles in Evaluating Oral History-Type Activities

An oral history is a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants in past events and ways of life. Oral history is a recorded conversation about the past with named individuals in which knowledge about specific events and individual lives is narrated in story form. Biographical in nature and historical in scope, the scholarly oral history interview is rooted in particular recollections about history based on the individual perspective of the narrator.

An oral history may be subject to human subject research regulations depending upon the purpose of the recording or intended use of the product. Guidance to help an investigator determine when an oral history project would be considered research and, therefore, be subject to HSC review follows:

- Oral history activities, such as open ended interviews, that **ONLY** document a specific historical event or the experiences of individuals without an intent to draw conclusions or generalize findings would **NOT** constitute "research" as defined by DHHS regulations 45 CFR Part 46.

Example: An oral history video recording of interviews with holocaust survivors is created for viewing in the Holocaust Museum. The creation of the video tape does **NOT** intend to draw conclusions, inform policy, or generalize findings. The sole purpose is to create a historical record of specific personal events and experiences related to the Holocaust and provide a venue for Holocaust survivors to tell their stories.

- Systematic investigations involving open-ended interviews that are designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (e.g., designed to draw conclusions, inform policy, or generalize findings) **WOULD** constitute "research" as defined by DHHS regulations at 45 CFR Part 46.

Example: An open ended interview of surviving Gulf War veterans to document their experiences and to draw conclusions about their experiences, inform Department of Defense policy, or generalize findings about the long-term effects of certain experiences.

- Oral historians and qualitative investigators may want to create archives for the purpose of providing a resource for others to do research. Since the intent of the archive is to create a repository of information for other investigators to conduct research as defined by 45 CFR Part 46, the creation of such an archive **WOULD** constitute research under 45 CFR Part 46.

Example: Open ended interviews are conducted with surviving Negro League Baseball players in order to create an archive for future research. The creation of such an archive would constitute research under 45 CFR Part 46 since the intent is to collect data for future research.

Investigators requiring additional guidance on how to categorize a particular project involving oral history should contact the Office of Sponsored Programs. Principles and best practices for conducting oral histories are available on the Oral History Association website at: <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.