

## Connecting Communities with Libraries, Archives, and Historians through Oral Histories

The University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Information Science, UNT's Oral History Program, and Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Library and Information Science request \$69,734 for a one-year **National Leadership Grant** (NLG) under the **Forum Grant** category. This project will convene librarians, archivists, oral history practitioners, public historians, community memory workers, and other stakeholders working in oral history stewardship from across the nation to identify successful approaches and synthesize best practices and strategies to respond to existing and emerging challenges around building, implementing, preserving, and accessing community oral history projects. The project will connect disparate perspectives and approaches of various stakeholders in community oral history projects and programs. The anticipated project deliverables include a white paper that compiles a summary of the field's current status, challenges, and recommendations for future directions as derived from the forums and follow-up focus groups, and a resource guide that compiles existing oral history guidelines and projects/programs.

This proposed project aligns with Objective 3.2 of the IMLS NLG program, which is to support innovative approaches to digital collection management. The project's outcome will establish a baseline of current oral history curation practices, provide an assessment of current practices, and further support the improvement and enhancement of access to and use of oral history.

### I. Project Justification

Everyone has a story to tell. Our stories are testimonies about the past, about the present, and about our communities. When they are systematically collected, translated, and then archived, our stories enable people – both in our communities and far from them – to deeply and intimately understand the experiences of a person in a specific time and place.

Documenting historical memories and stories through oral history has long been recognized as offering invaluable historical resources on subjects that may not be sufficiently represented in written records. The documentary value of oral history as a type of spoken-word cultural heritage in library and archives collections – as well as the role of librarians and archivists as curators of such collections – has been extensively discussed in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field (e.g., Grimsley & Wynne, 2009; Swain, 2003; Yap & Barsaga, 2018). Libraries and archives have been long-time participants in national oral history projects, such as the *Veterans History Project*<sup>1</sup>, and they have further used oral history to broaden the scope of experiences represented in their collections (Schull, 2017). Cultural heritage institutions have sought to make their collections more comprehensive, and oral history has become an important focus of curatorial practice. Even so, archives and other cultural heritage institutions have recently experienced a marked rise in interest in oral history initiatives. This includes an interest in oral history creation, preservation, and programming. The growing importance of oral history in the archives space is reflected by a rise in professional publications and presentations on the topic (e.g., Gosch, 2021; Senese, 2021; Williams, 2019). Archivists, librarians, archival scholars, and oral historians have found the growth of oral histories in archival spaces to impact the field positively. Kelly and Horan (2020) describe the use of oral history in archives as “a commitment to imagining the creation of the archive as a pedagogical process” (p. 244). Similarly, McKemmish, Chandler, and Faulkhead (2019) place oral histories as part of the records continuum, which enables archivists, records creators, and users of archives to experience archives in their “living contexts” (p. 281).

Increasingly, along with a growing interest in community history/community storytelling projects, oral history has been regarded as an essential part of many community-based archives where community members record, share, and save their unique individual and community memories. In recent years, high-profile community

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/vets/>

oral history/storytelling projects, such as *StoryCorps*<sup>2</sup> and *The Moth*<sup>3</sup>, and community voice/story projects, such as *Shelf Life Community Story Project*<sup>4</sup> and New York Public Library's *Community Oral History Project*<sup>5</sup>, have facilitated growth in the popularity of oral histories. Further, oral history has emerged as a way to share, document, and preserve community members' lived experiences of uncertainty, like the COVID-19 pandemic, to connect to one another across isolation. It is true that oral history has become a powerful "way to democratize archives and to make libraries the place that gathers and presents community memories" (Milbrodt, n.d., cited in Schull, 2017).

Oral history has been vital in uncovering and capturing communities' histories and shared memories, especially for communities who are marginalized or underrepresented in textual records (Craft, 2018). Community oral history has been the dominant form of popular oral history practice over the last 40 years (Osmond, 1998). Whether defined by place, identity, interest, heritage, occupation, practice, or some combination thereof, communities are well suited to a rigorous and productive application of oral history practice (Nyhan & Flinn, 2016). This is because oral history suggests that what is important is not just the articulation of historical events and facts, but how they are remembered by the participants – not simply as memories of an event, but also as community memories of environment and place (Affleck & Kvan, 2008). Consequently, stories in community oral history can provide a whole new dimension to documenting and understanding communities that is not widely present in dominant scholarship. As oral history itself is utilized to represent non-dominant histories, it is imperative to recognize that oral history creators have varied levels of access to preservation technologies and archival repositories.

Through its rise in visibility, oral history is as vibrant as ever and has become an essential part of many community archives<sup>6</sup>, which collect materials that tell the stories of a communities' unique histories and cultural heritages. Through community archives, we see that community oral history projects are collaborative and participatory. They are community efforts that can inspire community members to tell their stories and bring together people interested in exploring a changing community, its history, and its identity (Cordes, 2016). Therefore, in addition to recovering information about the past, community oral history has proven to be an efficient documentation tool for preserving local historical identity, promoting public history, discovering connections among people, and building connections and trust within communities (Chancellor & Lee, 2016; Madsen, McNicol, & O'Mullan, 2015; Mutibwa, 2016; Robinson, Cambrice, & Earles, 2017; Tebeau, 2013).

Additionally, our understanding of oral history has been altered and has evolved with technological advances over time. Digital technologies have dramatically changed the oral history field in recent years, opening many possibilities and empowering people to engage with oral history like never before (Boyd & Larson, 2014). Many different groups and communities outside the traditional cultural heritage professional fields are now empowered to create oral history and present it online. They have grown more comfortable with new technology and equipment, expanded to video, and discovered the endless possibilities of posting interviews, transcripts, and recordings on the Internet. Community memory workers, public/local historians, folklorists, ethnologists, anthropologists, archivists, librarians, teachers, journalists, and digital humanists of the modern era are utilizing and expanding a range of technologies to collect, preserve, understand, interpret, and disseminate stories.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://storycorps.org>

<sup>3</sup> <https://themoth.org>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.shelflifestories.com>

<sup>5</sup> <http://oralhistory.nypl.org>

<sup>6</sup> The terms "community" and "community archives" are defined broadly here. Community may include organizations, urban neighborhoods, and rural, small-town settings as well as shared social identity. Community-based archives are defined as collections of materials gathered, collected, and shared primarily by members of a community to document their collective history, identity, heritage, and memory.

However, as Grimsley and Wynne (2009) argued, while such technologies created more fluid access points to oral histories (e.g., Christel, Richardson, & Wactlar, 2006; Gustman, et al., 2002), communities often face challenges in fulfilling their mandates to collect, preserve, and make accessible their oral history, especially in terms of practice sharing, capacity building, and sustainability, as evidenced by the report of the Architecting Sustainable Futures project<sup>7</sup>. Sikes (2021) described how inconsistent archiving practices across repositories made the *Appalachian Oral History Project* difficult to access. Additionally, Stecklein (2021) addressed ethical concerns in archiving oral histories created during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges make clear that the rise in interest in oral history needs to be supported with resources for archivists and others who are unused to working with oral history records. Additionally, resources on sustainability and preservation are needed for oral history creators who are unfamiliar with archival practices.

The discussion on what oral historians and archivists have to offer each other has been ongoing over the past several decades with vital questions being asked, including **how can they advance their shared interests in creating, interpreting, disseminating, and preserving oral histories?** Prior to this past decade, much of this discussion has mainly taken place in oral history literature as traditional historians have not taken an active role in collecting resources for preservation. While archivists and librarians are becoming more visible in this conversation, their active participation in oral history, both as collector and creator, is relatively understudied and deserves further support and resources (Flinn and Perks, 2013; Merryman, 2018). Further, even as best practices come to light, community oral histories do not always fall neatly into most established standards that archivists and librarians have set forth. Communities define the way the materials in the archives are preserved, represented, and accessed. While professional archival standards may inform the practices in these organizations, they often establish standards based on their philosophies and values. This can raise difficult questions when professionals become involved in decisions on appraisal for preservation, the basis for that appraisal, and the description of oral history collections (Flinn, 2007; Matusiak, et al., 2017). **Due to different perspectives and the needs of these groups of creators and collectors of oral histories, there are gaps in practices and capabilities regarding challenges, constraints, and limitations of community oral history projects.**

As such, this project will convene librarians, archivists, oral history practitioners, public historians, community memory workers, and other stakeholders in oral history from across the nation to share their experiences and lessons learned, identify current and emerging challenges and gaps in practice and standards, and pinpoint the latest solutions and implementations for community oral history projects. The project will connect disparate perspectives and approaches of various stakeholders in community oral history projects and programs.

## II. Project Work Plan

### Project Design

The proposed project would accomplish the following project goals:

Goal 1: Bring together community memory workers, librarians and archivists, and academic and public oral historians across the country to understand current efforts and perspectives; and explore current practices, existing and emerging challenges, and the latest solutions for community oral history projects;

Goal 2: Identify community oral history practitioners' needs as well as priorities; and assess gaps in their knowledge and the skills necessary to perform full oral history curation; and

Goal 3: Propose strategies and recommendations for community oral history project planning, project implementation, and long-term maintenance of community oral history records.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://architectingsustainablefutures.org>

The project will be conducted in the following six phases. See the attached Schedule of Completion for further explanation and a timeline of activities.

**Phase 1: Initiating Project**

During the initiation of this project, PI and Co-PIs will convene a project advisory board, which will primarily provide advice or counsel to the project and make recommendations for project activities. See the Project Advisory Board section of this narrative.

We will hire a graduate student assistant to assist with project administration and documentation during this phase. Under the PI’s guidance and supervision, the student assistant will conduct a comprehensive environmental scan, which includes: 1) a systematic scoping review of published peer-reviewed journal papers, conference proceedings/presentations, and grey literature; 2) a comprehensive Internet search of publicly available community oral history projects/programs and oral history best practices guides; and 3) consultations with the project advisory board members, who will be fully informed about the purpose of the project and encouraged to share their opinions on the issues and priorities considered important to them. For this environmental scan, we pose the following questions:

- What is known about community oral history, and which aspects of community oral history matter to different stakeholders?
- What are the key uncertainties regarding community oral history?

This environmental scan will help the project team establish common ground for the forums and post-forum focus groups.

A project website and Twitter account will be created during this phase to host project information and post periodic updates to keep the public informed.

**Phase 2: Planning Forums**

We will develop a series of four virtual mini forums that will invite oral history practitioners involved in community-based oral history projects to identify good practices, share the challenges and lessons learned, and prepare an actionable roadmap for building, implementing, preserving, and sustaining community oral history projects. The forums will showcase how oral history has been practiced in the speakers’ respective communities. They will also explore the current state of proven methodologies and strategies practitioners have tried and found effective, challenges they have faced, and the solutions they found to overcome them.

The virtual format will allow broad engagement by various stakeholders in oral history and ensure project resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The mini forums will be organized under specific themes; we believe it is vital to host four separate forums to allow for focused, deep dives into each forum topic instead of having this event with a full day of activities. Note that the themes of the forums described below are provisional; final themes will be confirmed through input from the project advisory board. Forum agendas will be framed to address our foundational questions. Examples of speakers are given in each forum description with speaker bios in the following section.

The table below presents foundational questions the forums seek to explore aligned with forum themes.

| Foundational Questions  | Forum   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the burning needs and emerging issues and challenges involved in developing, implementing, and sustaining community oral history projects?</li> </ul> | Forum 1: Oral History and Community<br>Forum 2: Creating/Collecting Oral History<br>Forum 3: Preserving/Archiving Oral History<br>Forum 4: Accessing/Using Oral History |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What factors should be considered before embarking on community oral history projects?</li> </ul>  | Forum 1: Oral History and Community   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are oral history curatorial practices and standards applied in different community archives projects?</li> </ul>   | Forum 2: Creating/Collecting Oral History<br>Forum 3: Preserving/Archiving Oral History                                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What administration and technical workflows, standards, methodologies, tools, and techniques have been developed and deployed across different community oral history projects and how?</li> </ul>           | Forum 2: Creating/Collecting Oral History<br>Forum 3: Preserving/Archiving Oral History                                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can institutional libraries and archives leverage the skills and abilities of oral history practitioners, as indicated by their current practices, to provide relevant and inclusive support?</li> </ul> | Forum 1: Oral History and Community<br>Forum 3: Preserving/Archiving Oral History<br>Forum 4: Accessing/Using Oral History |

### 1. *Forum 1: Oral History and Community*

The first forum, “Oral History and Community,” will showcase different types of community oral history projects and initiatives. This forum aims to explore work being done to document and preserve the history of various communities to understand how each community’s identity, heritage, history, activism, and experiences are being represented through oral history. This forum will feature presentations by six speakers who will share their project’s missions, including the motivations behind the projects, the overall scope and purpose of their projects, the target audiences, the outcomes of the projects, and stakeholders of the projects. In particular, each speaker will talk about how they defined and characterized their “community,” how they identified, reached out to, and built a network with their community members, and how they coordinated and utilized community-building events as opportunities to engage with potential contributors/users. Some diversity, equity, and inclusion-related discussion topics will be incorporated into this forum; for instance, “whose voices are present in community oral history” vs. “whose voices are silenced or marginalized in community oral history.” Speakers for this forum will include community oral history practitioners and community archivists – such as Benji de la Piedra (Director of the Herbert Denton Community History Project in Central Arkansas) and Lae’l Hughes-Watkins (Founder of Project STAND) – who have been directly involved in community-based oral history projects.

### 2. *Forum 2: Creating/Collecting Oral History*

The second forum, “Creating/Collecting Oral History,” will cover relevant issues and concerns regarding creating and generating oral histories, including developing interview questions, identifying and training interviewers and interviewees, audio vs. video for interviews, remote interviewing, recording interviews and quality control, transcribing interviews, digital technologies pertaining to recording oral history, and ethical issues involved in oral history interviews. This forum will be led by four to five speakers who will consist of a mix of scholars, public historians, community practitioners, and professionals in historical societies who have direct work experience in creating and collecting oral history. Examples of possible speakers include Sady Sullivan (Independent oral historian) and Eric Marcus (Founder and host of the Making Gay History podcast and archive).

### 3. *Forum 3: Preserving/Archiving Oral History*

The “Preserving/Archiving Oral History” forum will include best practices and considerations for long-term preservation and archiving of oral history, such as documenting born-digital and digitized oral history, platforms and repositories for presenting oral history, long term storage of oral history records, licensing oral history and rights management, and maintaining data integrity. This forum will be led by four to five speakers, including librarians, archivists, and community memory workers who can draw on hands-on work and real-world experiences of archiving oral history. Examples of possible speakers include Carla Alvarez (Latino

Studies Archivist at the University of Texas at Austin Libraries) and Mark Phillips (Associate Dean for Digital Libraries at UNT Libraries).

#### 4. *Forum 4: Accessing/Using Oral History*

Our last forum, “Accessing/Using Oral History,” will address a variety of topics, including promoting oral history collections and engaging the entire community, publishing oral history podcasts, incorporating oral history into historical records, using oral history as research and educational experiences, Oral History as Data (OHD), and ethical concerns related to using oral history. Speakers for this forum will include oral/public historians, librarians, archivists, history scholars and teachers, community members, and digital humanities researchers and professionals. Examples of possible speakers include Adrienne Cain (Assistant Director of the Baylor Institute for Oral History) and Jamie Lee (Founder and Director of the Arizona Queer Archives).

The speaker lineup will include a variety of oral history practitioners, experts, and community members engaged with memory work. While the final lineup is still being developed, the project team’s informal network has identified the list of potential speakers; see the Supporting doc 2 for potential speakers’ short bios. We have not invited those identified above yet, but this diverse group has the kinds of experiences we will target for this role. Additional forum speakers will be identified and invited through recommendations/referrals from the project advisory board who have firsthand experience working with various types of community archives and oral history projects and initiatives. The project team also plans to identify and invite representatives from archives organizations/initiatives and county/local historical societies, such as *South Asian American Digital Archive*, *Southern Oral History Program*, *Lesbian Herstory Archives*, *Gerber/Hart Library and Archives*, *Houston Metropolitan Research Center*, *National Museum of the Pacific War/Admiral Nimitz Foundation*, and *Oklahoma Historical Society*.

As our focus in developing these events is to ensure that the speakers bring forth a range of backgrounds and experiences to highlight a variety of best practices, challenges, and experiences in oral history, half the speakers will be included via direct invitation, and the other half will be included via nomination. With this inclusive balance, we aim to bring in speakers through targeted recruitment and a broader, more open nomination process that will allow us to include speakers who may not be known to the project team. The open call for nominations will be included in a project website and Twitter. We will also solicit nominations through various professional organizations’ listservs or forums, including *H-Oralhist*, *Oral History Association (OHA) Archives Interest Group*, *Society of American Archivists’ Announcement*, *American Folklore Society’s* listserv, *Storytell* listserv, one of *National Storytelling Network’s* listservs, *American Historical Association (AHA)’s Communities*, *AMLA-L list*; and *LASA email list*.

#### ***Phase 3: Hosting Forums***

We chose to host virtual forums, which are open to anyone who is interested in community oral history, instead of in-person events. The virtual forum is a great tool to reach and engage with a broader audience of practitioners interested in community oral history stewardship. We will use Zoom as our forum platform for delivering live sessions. We will also livestream our Zoom forum to YouTube; this allows forum attendees to join via Zoom or watch on YouTube, so forum content can reach a larger audience without any extra effort.

Forums will begin with speaker presentations, followed by an open forum format focused on questions pertinent to each forum’s theme. As a session moderator, PI and Co-PIs of this project are responsible for preparing facilitated discussion questions in collaboration with the presenters and ensuring that the presenters are informed regarding the session’s structure, flow, and timing.

The series of forums will be recorded and archived for subsequent free download on our project website. We will also create a forum hashtag to cultivate and sustain conversations via Twitter and other social media platforms. To promote our virtual forums, we will share our forum events with various regional, national, and international archives and oral history-related associations, including *Society of American Archivists*, *Society of*

*Southwest Archivists, Archives & Records Association, International Oral History Association, Canadian Oral History Association, Texas Oral History Association, Southwest Oral History Association, and Michigan Oral History Association*, as well as those individuals who are in charge of or involved in relevant community-based oral history initiatives or projects.

After each forum, forum speakers' presentations and summaries of discussions will be posted on the project website for free access. Forum attendees will also be encouraged to participate on the forum's Twitter to continue the discussion and connect with other attendees and speakers. A post-event survey will collect feedback on the speakers, content, and audience satisfaction.

#### ***Phase 4: Planning Focus Groups***

The project team will conduct post-forum focus groups, which will serve as sources of in-depth and rich context of the needs and priorities of community oral history practitioners – i.e., what community oral history practitioners have experienced and learned from the projects they were involved in, what challenges they have faced, and with whom they collaborated.

Focus groups are suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic and gaining deeper insights (Gibbs, 1997). They also allow researchers to engage with participants and probe when responses need more explanation (Barbour, 2008). During the focus group interview process, the project team will gather data about opinions on a subject, problem, or experience and expectations held by interviewees about the subject. Participants can develop a critical level of intensity and sharing through the group process, leading the focus group members to build upon and expand on each other's ideas and comments.

The primary target of focus groups is community oral history practitioners, including local/public historians, community memory workers, members of community groups or organizations and local volunteers, who are or have been engaged with oral histories within their communities. But we will also recruit professionals in memory institutions, such as librarians and archivists, who worked collaboratively with communities to explore how they view community oral history practitioners and their collaboration/partnership experience. The project team will conduct three to four focus groups with an anticipated attendance of five to six people in each group, given three to five focus groups is generally considered reasonable for the early exploration of a new area (Kitzinger, 1994).

Focus group participants will be recruited nationally through an email invitation sent to those who attended our virtual forums and relevant professional organizations' listservs or forums. The project team will also work with the Portal to Texas History, our project partner, to recruit focus group participants as they have directed the Rescuing Texas History Mini-Grants program, which has a goal of helping local community organizations and individuals digitize their materials.

Focus group questions will be framed around the following research questions and reviewed by the project advisory board. Sample focus group questions for community oral history practitioners can be found in Supporting doc 3. The project team will prepare the applications for IRB approval in advance.

- How do community oral history practitioners identify themselves?
- How do community oral history practitioners define and determine the way community oral histories are preserved, represented, and accessed?
- Where and how do community oral history practitioners seek and use resources and support for their projects?
- How do community oral history practitioners and professionals in archives/libraries collaborate and work with one another?
- How do community oral history practitioners define and address the sustainability of community oral history projects?

### ***Phase 5: Conducting Focus Groups***

Given the current circumstances of COVID-19, focus groups will be conducted via a video conferencing service, such as Zoom. They will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Then transcripts of the focus group conversations will be entered into the NVivo 12 qualitative software to analyze the data based on the grounded theory approach. Two of the researchers in the project team independently will code the transcripts using open coding, in which “concepts are identified, and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). The two researchers will compare their coding and discuss any differences to resolve them.

### ***Phase 6: Finalizing and Publishing Project Deliverables***

A white paper that analyzes and summarizes central themes and recommendations from the forum discussions and the findings of focus groups will be drafted and distributed to the project advisory board for feedback and input. Additionally, a resource guide, an annotated compilation of community oral history literature, existing oral history projects/programs, and oral history best practices guides, which is an outcome of the comprehensive environmental scan, will be prepared. This resource guide and the white paper will be publicly available and widely shared via social media.

The project team will also generate papers appropriate for peer reviewed journals, such as *The American Archivist*, *Archival Science*, *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, and *Oral History Review*. The project team will attend multiple conferences, including the *American Library Association Annual Meeting*, the *Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists*, the *OHA Annual Meeting*, the *International Oral History Association Conference*.

### **Project Team**

The project team includes the following investigators:

- Dr. Jeonghyun (Annie) Kim, Associate Professor of Information Science at UNT, will serve as a PI of this project. Kim was a Co-PI on an IMLS-funded project from 2011 to 2015 that built a Graduate Academic Certificate program in Digital Curation and Data Management. Since then, she has directed and coordinated that program at UNT. She has published her research in leading academic journals, including the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *Library & Information Science Research*, *Archival Science*, and the *International Journal of Digital Curation*.
- Co-PI Dr. Todd Moye is Fenton Wayne Robnett Professor of American History at UNT and Director of UNT Oral History Program, which records, transcribes, and archives oral history interviews covering a wide variety of subject matter in order to preserve local, state, and U.S. history. He initiated and directed the revision of OHA’s Principles and Best Practices when he served as President of OHA in 2017-2018. His research interests include social movements, grassroots approaches to social and political change, and historical memory.
- Co-PI Dr. Ana Roeschley is Assistant Professor of Professional Practice in Archival Studies at Louisiana State University. She has researched community archives and collective memory and has coordinated and moderated a panel discussion in multiple conferences, including the *Society of American Archivists* and the *Association for Information Science and Technology Annual Meeting*. In 2018 and 2019, she and Dr. Kim organized the *Multidisciplinary Information Research Symposium*, which received an outstanding event award at UNT.
- The graduate research assistant (student) with expertise or research focus on community archives, digital preservation, and oral history will be recruited from the diverse pool of Ph.D. and/or Master’s students of UNT.



## **Project Advisory Board**

The project advisory board, who will help identify and select potential forum speakers, provide feedback on the content and structure of the forum, and help disseminate the project outcomes, includes independent community memory workers, archive practitioners, and scholars who have expertise and experience in oral history, community archives, and public history. The following collaborators have agreed to serve on our advisory board so far; see the attached Resumes.

- Doug Boyd: Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries, Past President of OHA, and creator of the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS)
- Kirsten Campbell: Independent community memory worker for the African American community in Baton Rouge and Curatorial Assistant at the Shaw Center for the Arts
- Morgan Gieringer: Head of Special Collections of UNT Libraries
- Carolyn Goldstein: Public History and Community Archives Program Manager in the Joseph P. Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts Boston
- Jamie A. Lee: Director of the Arizona Queer Archives and Digital Storytelling & Oral History Lab at University of Arizona
- Gretel L'Heureux: Oral History Coordinator for the Denton County Office of History and Culture
- Patrick Jones: Associate Professor of History and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska and co-creator of the History Harvest
- Jake Mangum: Project Development Librarian for the Portal to Texas History
- Sarah Milligan: Head of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Oklahoma State University Library, Member of the OHA Council
- Andrew Torget: Associate Professor of the Department of History, Director of the Digital Scholarship Lab at UNT

The following two organizations have also agreed to support the project. They will help us identify forum speakers and focus group participants, and disseminate/promote the project outcome. Their letters of support can be found in Supporting doc 1.

- Oral History Association
- Portal to Texas History

## **III. Diversity Plan**

Currently, the oral history field is populated by a diverse group of individuals who come to and work with oral histories in a myriad of often siloed ways. They include, but are not limited to, local historians, librarians and archivists, students, teachers, academic scholars, cultural workers, community organizers, documentary artists, and other community memory workers who might have different levels of expertise, skill, and interest. As such, the goal of the public forums is to address this diverse audience's needs and engage them throughout all aspects of our project, while ensuring that the needs of community memory workers are present and centered. To accomplish such a goal, we will seek forum representation from a wide swath of stakeholders through recommendations from a diverse slate of people and an open nomination process. These include members of our advisory board who actively participate in community memory work as members of underrepresented communities. We will make it clear on our project website and all promotional materials that we seek diverse forum speakers to include a wide array of voices.

Considering that community oral history often has been employed as a tool to collect the voices of previously unrepresented groups (Karrouche, 2019), the project team will include voices and perspectives of underrepresented and/or underserved communities into the project by inviting forum speakers who serve

and/or represent underrepresented, marginalized, and/or underserved identities, including ethnic, racial, and religious identities, as well as sexual and gender orientation, political affiliation, economic status, and physical locations (Caswell, 2014). Such communities include, but are not limited to, native and indigenous people, people of color, immigrants and refugees, people in rural areas, people with disabilities and health conditions, and those from the LGBTQ+ communities; often, these communities are misrepresented or elided entirely by mainstream institutions and from initiating their own archival projects (Flinn & Stevens, 2009).

## IV. Project Results

### Putting the Puzzle Together

Several previous IMLS-funded projects have focused on community archives (e.g., LG-250102-OLS-21, LG-27-19-0230-19, LG-73-16-0003-16), while others have focused on the preservation and promotion of oral histories within institutional archives and libraries (e.g., ARPML-250908-OMLS-22). Additionally, professional organizations and university units like libraries and history departments have created oral history toolkits focused on creating oral histories<sup>8</sup>. Notably, the OHA's *Independent Practitioners' Task Force Toolkit*<sup>9</sup> was created with independent community memory workers in mind. However, independent community memory workers are often disconnected from institutional resources like these toolkits and grant-funded projects. In a sense, it is anticipated that our project deliverables, including a resource guide, will assist those community memory workers in building, implementing, preserving, and sustaining community oral history projects by connecting them with opportunities and resources curated for them. Further, this project will improve strategic planning and decision-making of oral history stewardship by providing examples of archival and community practices that have informed each other and offering successful collaboration models that make community oral history practices accessible to community memory workers. It will ultimately help unify and connect oral history community members, as well as construct and amplify community history and identity.

### Looking Further

As noted in the Project Justification, it is clear that more attention is needed for the specific needs of community memory workers who want to create and collect oral histories. Specifically, if academic oral historians, librarians, and archivists are to work with and serve the needs of community memory workers, these groups must be given more opportunities to come together to share and communicate on their oral history experiences, needs, challenges, best practices, and opportunities for collaboration. Furthermore, silos exist even within academic and professional institutions. Archivists are often tasked with launching oral history programs without the training and tools, while oral historians are tasked with conducting community oral histories independently. Despite various stakeholders' shared interests, they often do this work in siloed systems that do not allow for accessible communication or collaboration with each other. By its design, this project brings these groups together at every step. The needs of all cannot be addressed in silos, nor can they be addressed when a diverse body of participants is not included throughout the lifecycle of a project. This project is part of a larger movement to break down the silos and barriers between community memory workers and professional and academic communities. Through this, the work of community memory workers, oral historians, and information professionals can be better supported, ensuring the creation, curation, preservation, and future access of community oral histories.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include <https://libguides.libraries.claremont.edu/ohtoolkit>, <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/uarchives/transfer/oral-histories>, <https://library.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Oral-History-and-Archive-Toolkit-2018-06-22.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Independent\\_Practitioners\\_Toolkit\\_for\\_Oral\\_Historians\\_2020-2021.pdf](https://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Independent_Practitioners_Toolkit_for_Oral_Historians_2020-2021.pdf)

**Schedule of Completion**

| Activity                                   | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Project initiation</b>                  |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Establish a detailed work plan           | ■ |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Hire a research assistant                | ■ |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Convene the project advisory board       |   | ■ |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Develop a project website                |   | ■ |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Forum</b>                               |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Environmental scan                       |   | ■ | ■  | ■  | ■  | ■ |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Develop a forum agenda                   |   | ■ |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Invite forum speakers                    |   |   | ■  | ■  |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Post call for proposals/review proposals |   |   | ■  | ■  |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Finalize the forum program and schedule  |   |   |    |    | ■  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Host forums                              |   |   |    |    |    | ■ | ■ |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Focus groups</b>                        |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Develop questions                        |   |   |    | ■  | ■  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Apply for IRB                            |   |   |    |    |    | ■ | ■ |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Conduct focus groups                     |   |   |    |    |    |   |   | ■ | ■ |   |   |   |
| • Analyze focus groups                     |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   | ■ | ■ |   |
| <b>Project closure</b>                     |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| • Develop a white paper/resource guide     |   |   |    |    |    |   |   | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| • Write a final report                     |   |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   | ■ |

## **Digital Product Plans**

This project will create the following digital products:

- A white paper that synthesizes the environmental scan, summarizes the findings of forums/focus groups, and articulates the direction for a national agenda for community oral history; and
- A resource guide that is an annotated compilation of existing oral history guidelines and projects/programs/collections

These digital products will be made available in a printable PDF format and published under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) to allow sharing and attribution. Therefore, these digital products are free to be shared but must be given proper attribution in reuse.

Along with these digital products, forum speakers' presentation slides will be released as archival PDFs and presentation recordings will be converted into standard MP4 format.

Both digital products and forum presentation slides/recordings will be deposited to the UNT institutional repository, UNT Scholarly Works (<https://library.unt.edu/scholarly-works>), for long-term preservation and access. All content in the UNT Scholarly Works has a permanent URL for each item and will be visible on all major search engines. The URL for the items in the UNT institutional repository will be available on the project website.

Also, all focus group interview transcripts will be saved as a TXT file. Due to privacy issues, transcript files will be anonymized and made available on the UNT data repository (<https://library.unt.edu/scholarly-works/data-repository>) and the project's Open Science Framework (OSF) site.

## Organizational Profile

The University of North Texas (UNT) is a four-year public Doctoral University with a Carnegie Classification of Highest Research Activity (R1). The institution was founded in 1890 as a normal and teacher-training institute; its name changed from North Texas State University in 1988. UNT is in Denton, Texas, a town of over 151,219 in the Dallas/Fort Worth area of over 6.4 million. The University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. UNT is the 6th largest university in Texas, and among the 30 largest in the United States, with a combined enrollment of over 42,000.

The mission statement of UNT: “At the University of North Texas, our caring and creative community empowers our students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.” The responsible party for the mission statement is the Office of the President; it was revised and approved on February 2020.

The UNT College of Information (CI) is a member of the iSchools organization and is comprised of three departments: Department of Information Science, Department of Linguistics, and Department of Learning Technologies. Faculty and graduate students are highly productive in a wide variety of research efforts related to human information seeking, learning, and use behaviors; human-computer interactions; development, delivery, and evaluation of information and education systems and services; information and education policies and ethics in public and private sectors; computational linguistics; and the study of endangered languages. The CI has multiple research centers and labs and a record of success in obtaining research funding from sources such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Texas Education Agency, and others.

The Department of Information Science (DIS) faculty is currently comprised of 26 full-time faculty, including 20 tenure-system faculty. As of the Fall 2021 semester, the Department of Information Science (DIS) had 1,923 students enrolled in its graduate and undergraduate programs. The DIS master's degree programs in Information Science and Library Science are accredited by the American Library Association and ranked 20th nationwide by *U.S. News & World Report*. A new master's degree program in Data Science was added in 2018. The DIS Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Information Science offers seven concentrations created and implemented jointly with other academic units, in addition to a general program of study. The DIS faculty are diverse and, through residential and distance learning programs, proudly serves a diverse student population from across the state, nation, and world.