



Outreach Guide

One of the things we discussed at BTA is due diligence. For our purposes, due diligence is not a legal or business term but rather a call to action.

Due diligence: The minimum amount of effort or work one should do before releasing the responsible in good faith.

The purpose of this definition is to keep ourselves accountable to a reasonable degree. Sometimes people will just be impossible to get ahold of again - this can be because of any number of reasons, and one of the most consistent struggles of an oral historian. Use the table below to determine your own best practices in regards to outreach and communication.

Reflection Questions	Narrator 1	Narrator 2
<i>What is the narrators comfort level with me/technology?</i>		
<i>What is the max amount of reachouts before becoming invasive or annoying?</i>		
<i>What is the min amount of times I can reach out before it becomes neglectful?</i>		
<i>How have I met the narrator where they are at? How have I tried to eliminate barriers?</i>		

If you find that you've reached the end of the path with outreach attempts, be sure to **keep the door open!** Your narrator might be going through something outside of your awareness or understanding, and may respond once things settle down. You always want to make sure you give them some way to connect with you when they're ready.



Preparation and Research

You don't know what you don't know.

Before going into an interview, it is important to have some **background knowledge** about the person you are interviewing, what you're **hoping to learn** from your narrator, and any other **relevant contextual information**.

For example:

- *Is there some element of a story only they can explain?*
- *Do you need a recording of this person singing or making other unique sounds?*
- *Has this person been interviewed before for this project/archive? Have you listened to it?*
- *What is this person's relationship to public housing (and the topic of your specific project)?*

If time and capacity allows, we suggest conducting a short and informal **pre-interview** with narrators. Pre-interviews are typically 5-15 minute, relaxed, and un-recorded phone calls.

Goals of the Pre-Interview:

- *Establish rapport and trust with the narrator.*
- *Set expectations for the flow, content, and technical set-up of the interview.*
- *Learn initial information about the narrator to assist your interview preparation.*

Pre-interviews can happen **in combination with outreach** (for example, if someone is on the fence about being interviewed and wants to learn more about what to expect).

Turn to page 30 for a full list of interview preparation steps.
Turn to page 31 for a checklist topics to cover in a pre-interview.



Oral History Outreach Guidance
As of: Nov. 28, 2022

Finding narrators can be a deceptively difficult part of the oral history process. It can often be the hardest problem to troubleshoot, because when you keep hitting brick walls... there's not much to go off of! Here are some pointers about how to find people, and how to talk to them about a possible oral history interview.

Timing:

- I will typically wait about **5-10 days** between first and second attempts at contact through the same avenue (ex, emailing both times)
 - If changing contact mode (ex, emailing first and then calling next), you can wait a shorter amount of time
 - Get creative if you aren't hearing back—do they have any social media accounts that you can DM? Have you tried emailing and calling? Have you tried calling at different times of the day?
 - For emailing, you can always CC me as the “Oral History Manager”. Sometimes this helps get a response!
- Be aware of holidays (including non-traditional US ones, like Jewish holidays), weekends, and the season when deciding when and how often to contact someone. Use any context clues about the person's identity to help you be mindful of when people may be slower to respond to contact requests.
 - For example: are they a teacher? An organizer? How might their schedules and modes of communication be impacted by these identities?
- If you haven't gotten a response after **3** attempts at contact through **one** mode (**5 total attempts** through different modes), that lack of response is your response. Assume that that lead is a dead end for now.
 - There is a chance they will get back to you later, but I wouldn't push it any further from your end. They are either uninterested, too busy, or are not checking those contact methods (that inbox, that voicemail, etc).

What to say?

For any of these options, I suggest preparing a **short** blurb of what you will say to folks that you approach. Keep your first message on the shorter side—a long email is intimidating for most folks!

Focus on what context you need to give to get to a pre-interview or additional conversation. A few things to address:

- What is the purpose or goal of the project?
 - Is it to get published? To archive interviews? Background research? General practice? etc... Most people want to know if and how/where the interview may be shared.
- What are your values and ethical approach to interviewing?
 - In particular, be clear that this is an oral history interview, which is different from other forms of interviewing (journalistic, ethnographic) in its ethics and how those ethics inform practice.
 - Narrator's authority, comfort, and experience in the interview is one of our biggest priorities in our practice. They do not have to answer or talk about anything that they don't want to.
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- Logistics: What is the central "ask"? What parts of the experience are adaptable based on their comfort and needs?
 - Set expectations: we usually set aside 1.5-2 hours of time for interviews. They can be shorter if that time commitment is too much. The interview can be over Zoom or in person (if in similar areas of the country).
 - "The general topic/focus of the interview is _____. That being said, we want this to be a positive experience for you too, so please let us know if there are any parts of your life or topics that you would like to avoid."
 - (for NPHM interviews, we usually focus on public housing but may also have an additional theme/focus that we want to ask about. For example: entrepreneurship in PH).
- **Offer a pre-interview before setting the expectation of a full oral history interview.**
 - On this note, consider whether it makes more sense to start building a friendly relationship with the potential narrators before asking for an interview or a pre-interview. Depending on which of the following strategies you're trying, it can be off-putting to have someone approach you and ask for something right away.

Lead suggestions:

1. Social media, especially Facebook

Social media is a great place to look for narrators, particularly ones that have some sort of "group" feature. Many public housing communities have Facebook Group pages where people stay connected with others who lived in the same developments, share news, plan events, etc. Facebook is a platform used primarily by millennials and older, so keep that demographic in mind to decide whether it is a good tool for you. Another site that I am curious about as a possible

narrator recruitment spot is Reddit, given the structure of Subreddits. That being said, I have not looked into this at all myself!

Social media without groups—Twitter, Instagram—will also connect you to people you don't know, but I'm not sure whether they would be all that helpful because it's harder to find people who identify with a certain community or demographic. They are worth a try! Keep in mind that social media outreach may bring a lot of responses that you don't have control over. This can be helpful but also overwhelming!

2. In-Person Community Events

In-person community events can be a great place to go during the early stages of a project. They often help you learn more about a community while also being an avenue to meet specific people to interview. This is the outreach location that I would focus on building relationships **first** before asking for an interview or even a pre-interview. As you get to know someone, you'll probably have a better idea of what sorts of histories they might share with you, whether they would enjoy being interviewed, etc. I suggest having business cards or other small cards with your contact info on it, which you then give to people and tell them to contact you if they are interested. If they are enthusiastic, you can also ask for their contact info and take initiative to follow up.

For public housing communities, NPHM goes to a lot of reunion/family fun day picnics during the month of August. But again, our primary objective is to tell people about the museum and our various programming. Getting specific people who are interested in being interviewed is an added bonus.

3. Secondary Introductions through friends/loved ones/community

If you have any friends with community members who fit your project, you can ask them to introduce you to said person/people. This also works well if you already have 1-2 narrators and are looking for more people to interview. Be respectful of folks' time and their pre-existing relationships—you do not want to negatively impact the relationships that are already established by being too pushy in your outreach. Again, offering a pre-interview before talking about the big, full oral history interview will help lower the commitment level. Be okay with being told, "No thank you" at any step of the process.

→ Includes snowball sampling (getting new leads from the people you successfully build relationships with)

4. Relevant organizations or other affinity groups

If there are any sort of formal or informal groups related to your target demographic, try to get involved with them. They might have an in-person meeting that you can attend and then proceed with the advice under #2. They might have a mailing list that you can either email directly or email the admin of—and then you might be able to include a blurb about your project in the mailing list. My biggest suggestion, if there is a group like this, is to introduce yourself to the leader of this group. Tell them a bit about what you are looking for, and then they may be able to make direct introductions to people that they think would be a good fit (akin to #3), clear a few minutes in the next meeting for you to speak, etc.

As always, be respectful and remember that your agenda is not the main reason people are getting together. Defer to the mood and needs of the community, be okay with showing up for them before they show up for you.