

Recording Remote Dialogues

These tips and resources (compiled by WiLS staff with input from IMLS APP cohort members as well as outside experts) are meant as an introduction to remote digital recording as well as to offer some guidance and tool options for best practice. WiLS, IMLS, and any affiliates are not officially endorsing any products mentioned below.

START HERE

Oral History Association Remote Interviewing:

<https://www.oralhistory.org/remote-interviewing-resources/>

OHA Decision Tree:

<https://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Remote-interviewing-guidelines-10.8.2020.pdf>

CONSIDERATIONS

- Remember to think about your community or narrators as participants.
- Prioritize participant capacity/know-how (especially regarding technology) and giving your participants a positive experience. Be sure to consider **Accessibility**.
 - “Remote interviewing can be a key item in an inclusive oral history toolkit. Oral historians working in a disability justice framework have experience with remote interviewing from which oral historians new to the remote interviewing practice can learn valuable lessons. Disability rights activists have long worked to develop and gain access to the very tools we are all now relying on for working, learning, and communicating remotely. In acknowledging this lineage, it is important to also recognize that disabled people were often denied access to the very types of remote access now widely mandated.” - Oral History Association
 - “Understanding the accessibility features of the platforms you may use in a remote interview is work you should do before the interview process begins to better understand and meet the needs of narrators. Narrators or interviewers with hearing, speech, or visual impairments may find some platforms and modalities of interviewing more accessible than others. You may ask if your narrator has limitations on how long they can look at a screen, or sit for an interview, or if you need to plan for any interpretation or translation services.” - Oral History Association
- What is your budget? What do YOU feel comfortable with as a project manager? What will be best in meeting your long-term project objectives (for many people this will be about finding a balance between creating comfortable environments for engaged dialogue and recording quality interviews (etc.) for future use).

RECORDING PLATFORMS/TECHNOLOGY

These are just some of the platforms and tools that are available for this type of work. A reminder that prices and operations may have changed since this list was initially created.

VIDEO/AUDIO

- Zoom: zoom.us
- WebEx: (similar to Zoom) <https://www.webex.com/>
- TheirStory: online platform for oral history community story gathering <https://theirstory.io/welcome>
- Zencastr: designed for podcasting but can work for different types of recording <https://zencastr.com/>
- Squadcast: is another option and could be preferable to Zencastr in some ways; however, it has a limit to how many hours you can record per month. There seems to be an option to get a customized plan that may offer more hours, but more research is needed. <https://squadcast.fm/faq/>

AUDIO ONLY

- FreeConferenceCall: <https://www.freeconferencecall.com/>
 - Storage: "When the meeting ends, you'll receive a link to your recording or access it anytime from your History & Recordings page. You'll get 1GB of recording storage free." (from Free Conference Call website)
- Voice Memo and Voice Record Pro apps on the iPhone¹:
 - On iOS, the built-in [Voice Memo app](#) can capture perfectly fine audio. In order to improve audio even further: Settings > Voice Memos > Audio Quality and change the quality to **Lossless**.
 - For more control, [Voice Record Pro](#) (iOS only) provides a home screen where you can adjust various settings. You can play with the gain control to keep distortion down to a minimum, or increase the sample rate, bit rate, and encode quality to boost the fidelity of your final recording.
- [JK Audio QUICKTAP Telephone Handset Audio Interface](#): The JK Audio QuickTap is a simple, passive telephone tap designed for capturing telephone conversations.
 - Case Study: [JK Audio QuickTap \(Baylor University Institute for Oral History\)](#)
- [JK Audio CellTap 4C Wireless Phone Audio Tap Adapter](#): The CellTap 4C Wireless Phone Audio Tap Adapter from JK Audio is a passive device designed to allow you to record phone calls for

¹ (Comments/tips provided by a cohort member)

interview and archival purposes. It's intended to be used in conjunction with a recording device or mixer.

MICROPHONES

Why: Without an external mic, participants will be using the built-in mics on whatever device they are using which typically results in not-great audio quality. A lot of folks have earbuds that have a mic built in - that is a step above the mic in your computer. For the BEST audio quality, consider buying external mics that you can use for your end of the recording and/or send to your participants.

What to buy (just ONE suggestion of many options): Blue Snowflake USB Microphone

<https://www.bluemic.com/en-us/products/snowball/>

The Blue company is widely known for its quality products and this is the cheapest version of their USB mic options.

How to clean mics (and other tips) from Transom:

<https://transom.org/2020/recording-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Headphones: Depending on what tool(s) you are using to record, it might be good or even necessary for participants to wear headphones; in some cases not using headphones will produce an echo that will result in confusing audio. Be sure to test your recording method and try to have headphones handy to test how they impact the audio recording and quality.

REGARDLESS OF WHAT TOOL(S) YOU CHOOSE, ALSO CONSIDER...

- Where will the file(s) go as soon as recording is ended?
- What next steps will you do to ensure proper preservation and storage of the file(s)?
- What metadata/info needs to be recorded during and/or immediately after the interview?
- How will you get the legal release signed?

For a more complete list of considerations for recording interviews in general, please refer to Recollection Wisconsin's [Guidelines and Recommendations for Oral History Projects](#).

(SELECT) FURTHER READING/RESOURCES

- Case Study: [Zencastr Interview Process \(Vermont Folklife Center\)](#)
- Case Study: [Zoom \(Columbia Center for Oral History Research\)](#)
- Webinar: 'Oral History at a Distance: Conducting Remote Interviews,' (Baylor): <https://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/index.php?id=969450>
- Resources: [COVID-19 Response: Digital Accessibility and Other Best Practices for Remote Work](#)
- Article: ["Immunodeficiency and Oral History,"](#) by Sarah Dzedzic
- Article: ["Recording During The Coronavirus Pandemic"](#) by Jeff Towne, [Transom.org](https://transom.org)
- Sample Letter for Recording Participants: [Marshfield Story Project Virtual Story Circle](#)