

Guidance on budgeting for oral history contractors & Table of current fees (2019) charged by oral history practitioners

Oral history projects vary a great deal in their duration, scope and activities and require a major commitment of time and effort from oral history practitioners, participants and volunteers. Oral History Society (OHS) Regional Networkers have highlighted that organisations often underestimate the amount of time, budget and expertise it takes to deliver high quality results.

This document is intended as a **guide for organisations** setting up projects and estimating budgets for grant applications, or commissioning professional oral history practitioners to carry out some or all of the tasks required to deliver their projects. It has been drawn up by a group of experienced freelance oral history and heritage professionals from around the country who have been advising and working in this field.

Projects often rely too heavily on substantial volunteer involvement to deliver all aspects of oral history activities – recording, archiving and using oral testimony. While volunteers, with training, are able to support many of the tasks, the level of time commitment and responsibility expected of them can be too demanding and can result in a high drop-out rate. Without sufficient professional time built into the budget this can result in missed targets and poor quality interviews. These factors should be taken into account in the initial planning stages by building in sufficient resources – professional and financial – to carry out a range of activities as required.

We recommend that organisations consider employing paid oral history practitioners with relevant skills and experience to carry out key roles needed to deliver oral history projects. Where paid employed staff are appointed, the pay scales will be profiled, assessed and graded within the organisational staffing structures. The salary scales for such posts under longer term contracts are listed in the table below. Increasingly though, organisations are commissioning freelancers in a wide range of roles – from advice and consultancy, to recording and editing interviews.

Commissioning freelancers: Freelancers provide a range of services depending on their experience and particular area of expertise. This document and the table below aim to provide some clarity around the range of specialist skills and time required to carry out oral history activities and a table of fee rates charged by freelancers.

- **Consultancy and Mentoring:** This may be required at project planning stage and/or over the course of the project, and may include help with grant applications, project design, ongoing mentoring of staff and volunteers. Establish what is required of the consultant and when. Estimate the time for their input to include research, meetings, admin and reports.

- **Project Management:** When estimating the number of days of support that is required, build in time for planning, preparation, meetings, emails, phone calls, documentation, archiving and ensuring copyright and clearances are obtained.
- **Training:** The OHS and HLF advise projects to build in 3 days of training: an introductory day; a follow-up session to review and guide volunteers' work; and a third day at later stages of the project focused around dissemination of oral history content, including editing, exhibition and website design. Many trainers charge for preparation time for tailored training and travel.
- **Workshops in schools:** This is best done by someone with oral history experience as well as an understanding of the school environment and curriculum. As with other types of oral history projects, school workshops require time for planning and preparation, liaising with teachers, setting up and delivering sessions. Half day sessions (or shorter depending on age and ability) work better than a full day.
- **Oral history audio interviewing:** Experienced freelancers are skilled in recording in-depth life stories, building a rapport and putting interviewees at ease. It is important to build in a time allocation for research, preparation, setting up, conducting, processing, summarising interviews and preparing the material for archiving.
- **Video interviews:** Filming oral history interviews has until recently been out of the realm of most projects because of the high costs. As technology has improved, cameras have become easier to operate and prices have reduced. But without good technical training you will probably still need to factor in the cost of a second person to work the camera and budget for the additional daily expenses this will incur.
- **Transcription:** Transcripts provide a verbatim account of the full interview in text form. They form part of the documentation associated with individual interviews and facilitate archiving, key word search and analyses, and also make it easier to select content for use in publications, exhibitions, websites etc. Transcribing is a very time-consuming process and many projects understate the cost, skill and time this takes. It is best done by professional transcribers as volunteers are generally unwilling to do detailed verbatim transcripts.
- **Time-coded summaries:** Summarising interview content by specific time intervals or topical segments provides an overview of the content of the recording and the time codes help identify relevant content more quickly. Writing good summaries takes time and practice and this should be built into the oral history practitioner's time allocation. [*See time guide below*]
- **Audio Editing:** Audio editing is a specialist skill as it involves sifting through numbers of interview transcripts and listening to the original audio to identify relevant and good quality clips, and then select and fine edit them. Projects often underestimate the time this activity

takes and do not make adequate financial provision for this task which can exceed many hours. When full time-coded summaries or detailed transcripts are available, it can take approximately one hour to produce 60 seconds of edited audio (or 8 extracts in an 8 hour day). However, it takes longer if summaries and transcripts are not available to help locate the audio. Additional time should be allowed to produce text, images and any relevant permissions to accompany them. Creating content for audio-visual displays, apps, CDs or podcasts may require more complex editing and multi-track mixing. This can take longer and may require particular specialist skills so production costs may be considerably higher.

- **Video montages:** The production costs of video montages using graphics, music and special FX can be considerable depending on the complexity and length of the film you wish to produce.
- **Project outputs:** Producing books, CDs, content for exhibition displays, webpages, apps and trails requires specialist skills and sufficient time for research, writing, editing, proofing, collaborating with designers, printers and other professionals.

The table below outlines current (2019) fees charged by professional oral history practitioners.

Table of current (2019) fees charged by oral history contractors

Fee rates for commissioning freelancers for different aspects of oral history projects and a realistic time estimate required for various tasks. The rates below do not include VAT. When obtaining quotes we suggest projects check the VAT status of any contractors.

| Type of work | Rate 1 day = 8 hours | Scope of work | Notes |
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| Consultancy and Mentoring | £350 – £400 per day | This may include advice on project design; writing grant applications; mentoring and professional advice during the project | Rate varies according to the nature and duration of the work |
| Project Management | £300 - £350 per day | Overall responsibility for delivering project activities, may include managing staff and/or volunteers; finances; liaising with partners, contractors, stakeholders; cataloguing, archiving; meetings and admin | Rates and responsibilities may vary depending on size, type and duration of project; number of staff/volunteers |
| Training | £400 - £500 per day + travel [Tailored training may require additional preparation time] | Planning and preparation; delivery of workshops; preparing and providing supporting materials/handouts; liaising with project co-ordinators | OHS advises groups to budget for 3 days training over the project: introductory; review and follow-up; session on developing content for exhibitions, websites, compilations etc. |
| Training workshops in schools | £150 - £200 for half day | Planning, booking, preparation, delivery | Allow for half a day: 2 hour session + set up and pack up |

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| Oral history audio interviewing | £250 - £350 per day | This includes research time; arranging interviews; working up questions; recording, processing, archiving; documentation; liaising with interviewee and commissioning organisation; admin; obtaining permission forms and thank you letters. | In-depth life story interviewing may take more than one session and often exceeds the actual duration of the recording. Build in time for setting up, discussion of the project and breaks |
| Oral history video interviewing | £350 - £500 per day [depending on use of camera operator] | This includes research time; arranging interviews; working up questions; recording, processing, archiving; documentation; liaising with interviewee and commissioning organisation; admin; obtaining permission forms and thank you letters. | Video interviews can take more time to set up and pack up the equipment, manage lighting. Factor in higher costs if a camera operator or technician is required. |
| Producing time-coded summaries | £250 - £350 per day | Summarising interview content by specific intervals of time or topical segments | Allow at least two hours to summarise one hour of recorded audio |
| Professional transcription | c. £80 - £120 per recorded hour | A full unabridged and verbatim account of audio content into text form | Allow for between 5-7 hours transcribing time per recorded hour |
| Audio Editing | £250 - £350 per day | This includes selecting and editing extracts from longer interviews to produce audio compilations for use in exhibitions and/or websites | Approximately 60 mins of editing time for 60 secs of edited audio. With good quality recording & verbatim transcript provided, an experienced editor could produce 8 crafted extracts from long interviews in one day, with accompanying text & credits. Fewer extracts could be produced if recording quality variable & only a summary provided. |
| Creative Audio Editing | £250 - £350 per day but takes longer. Costs will vary depending | Creating more complex material, such as soundscapes, podcasts, audio trails, audio guides or tracks with scripted narration and/or music and sound effects. | The time required will depend on the scope and complexity of the finished product. Discuss requirements with the freelancer to get accurate estimates. |

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| | on complexity of brief. | | |
| Creative Video Editing | £350 - £600 per day depending on complexity of edit required | For editing to produce film montage using music / graphics / special video FX / Voice over | The time required will depend on the scope and complexity of the finished product. Discuss requirements with the freelancer to get accurate estimates. |
| Salaried staff employed on contracts | Project Manager: £28K - £38K Interviewers: £24K - £30K | This may vary depending on the project, organisation and range of skills required. | For longer periods of work, professionals may be offered a negotiated day or hourly rate depending on scale and budget. Employed staff salaries may be profiled, assessed and graded within organisational staffing structures |

Additional factors affecting self-employed freelance rates:

Most freelancers have a sliding scale of charges depending on expertise, location, number of days work, and the type of organisation. It is worth bearing in mind that freelancers, unlike employees, are responsible for organising their own public liability and professional indemnity insurance, pensions, day-to-day running costs and office admin. In addition, commissioning organisations do not have to administer the following: freelancers' tax; National Insurance or pension arrangements; pay for statutory or sick leave, nor provide office facilities as they would for their employees. These factors are reflected in the fee rates quoted here.

Our aim has been to provide a set of guidelines that are a true reflection of our current charges and activities, which we hope will be helpful to all other professional oral history practitioners, community projects and funders.

This information has been compiled by: Padmini Broomfield, Sarah Gudgin, Julia Letts, Helen Lloyd, Juliana Vandegrift

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