

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION SURVEY RESULTS

FALL 2021

THE CONNECTICUT ORAL HISTORY
COLLABORATIVE

PREPARED BY

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SUBMITTED

December 6, 2021

BACKGROUND

A significant infusion of funding from the state allowed CT Humanities to bring together representatives from Connecticut institutions with knowledge on oral histories and collections where they reside in the state. The Connecticut Oral History Collaborative is comprised of representatives from CT Humanities, Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO), Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA), Connecticut State Library (CSL), Connecticut Historical Society (CHS), Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program (CCHAP), Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC), Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA), University of Connecticut (UConn), Dodd Human Rights Impact, Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), Hartford Public Library (HPL), Trinity College, and Conservation ConneCTion, a program of the Connecticut State Library. Their objective is to work with statewide partners to understand and assess Connecticut's historical and cultural resources as pertains to oral history collections, identify organizations' needs, and create greater access to these resources for our residents.

An online survey was created by members of the Oral History Collaborative and was sent via email to museums and historical societies, public libraries, colleges and universities, public and private schools, religious organizations, community and ethnic organizations, cultural centers and theaters, arts organizations, as well as independent oral historians. The survey opened September 24th and was scheduled to close November 19th but was left open a few additional days to accommodate institutions that wanted to participate but were also working on CT Humanities grant applications due on November 15th.

The oral history survey was designed to be brief and collect preliminary data to inform the next steps of the Collaborative. Press releases encouraged institutions and organizations in Connecticut to participate in order to develop a better understanding of the state's oral history collections. Prospective participants were informed that their feedback would help develop a funding strategy to organize, digitize, and preserve oral history collections; provide technical support to organizations; and offer professional development opportunities around oral history, digitization best practices, and more.

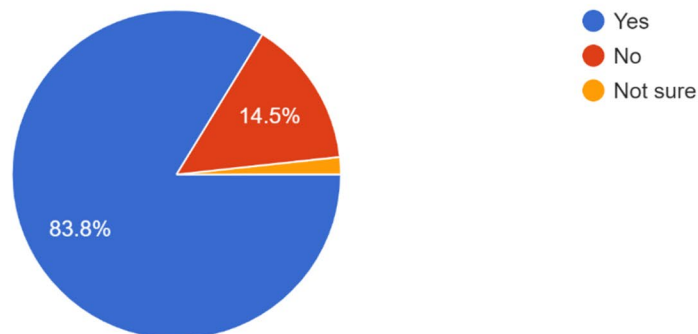
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Participation rates were very good and as CT Humanities, CLHO and Conservation ConneCTion each promoted the online survey, more were completed. During the period the survey was open a number of institutions completed more than one survey. After comparing the responses, duplicate surveys were deleted. In the end 117 responses were collected. More than half of the respondents were from museums or historical societies, the next largest group were public libraries, followed by colleges/universities/public and private schools. The remaining groups include community and ethnic organizations, arts and theater groups, and religious organizations.

Most of the respondents knew the contents of their oral history collection and were able to successfully complete the survey. A small number did not know and did not have quantitative information to refer to regarding their collection. The following chart demonstrates the large number of participating institutions which have oral history collections.

Do you have interviews, oral histories, or similar materials in your collections?

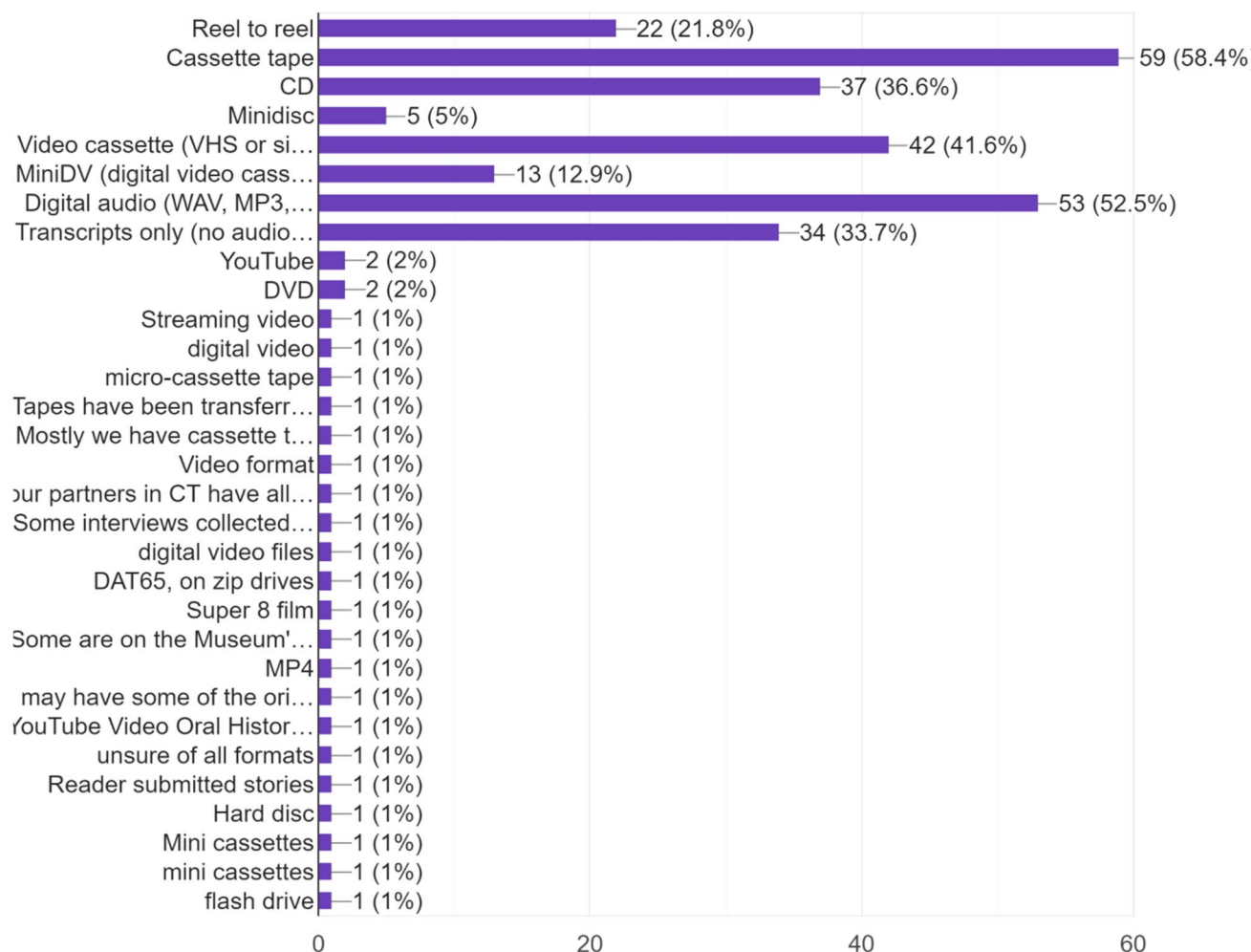
117 responses



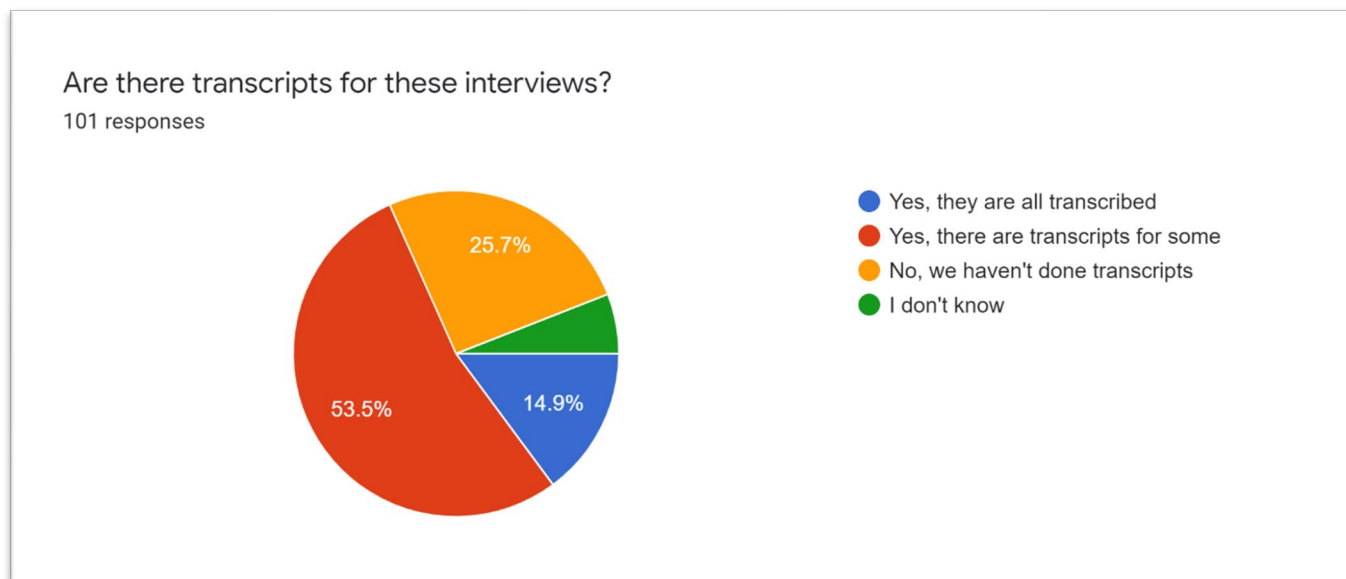
The questions regarding what format was used to collect oral histories or interviews documents the wide variety of media which has been and continues to be used.

If you think you may have interviews/oral histories, what format do you think they are in? Please check all that apply.

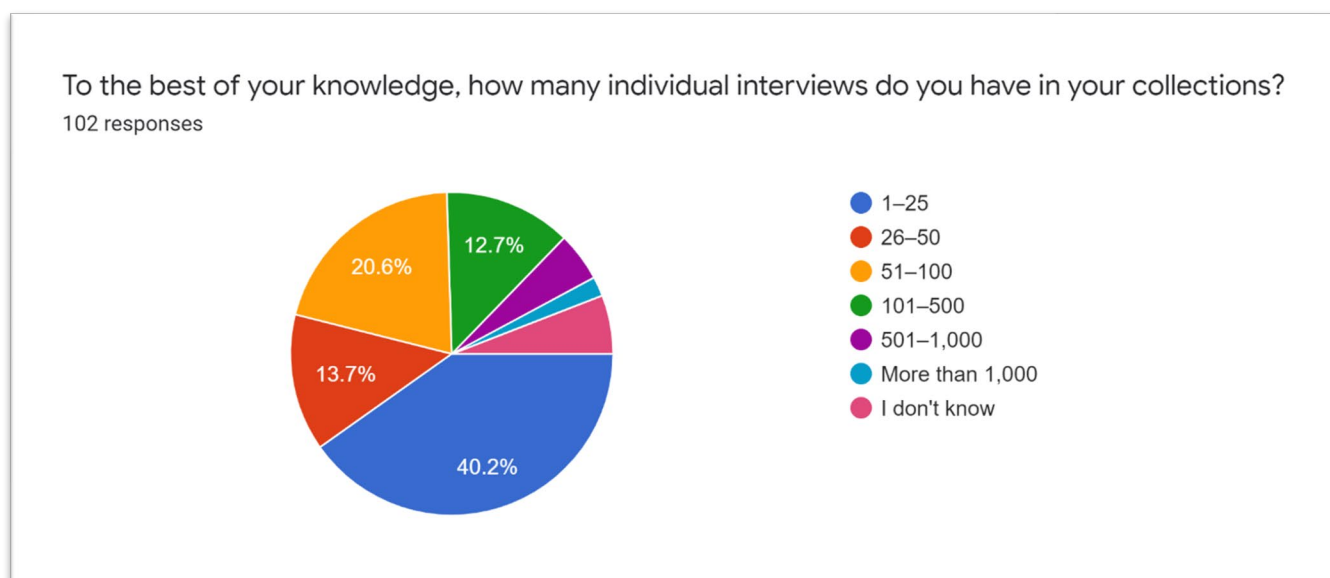
101 responses



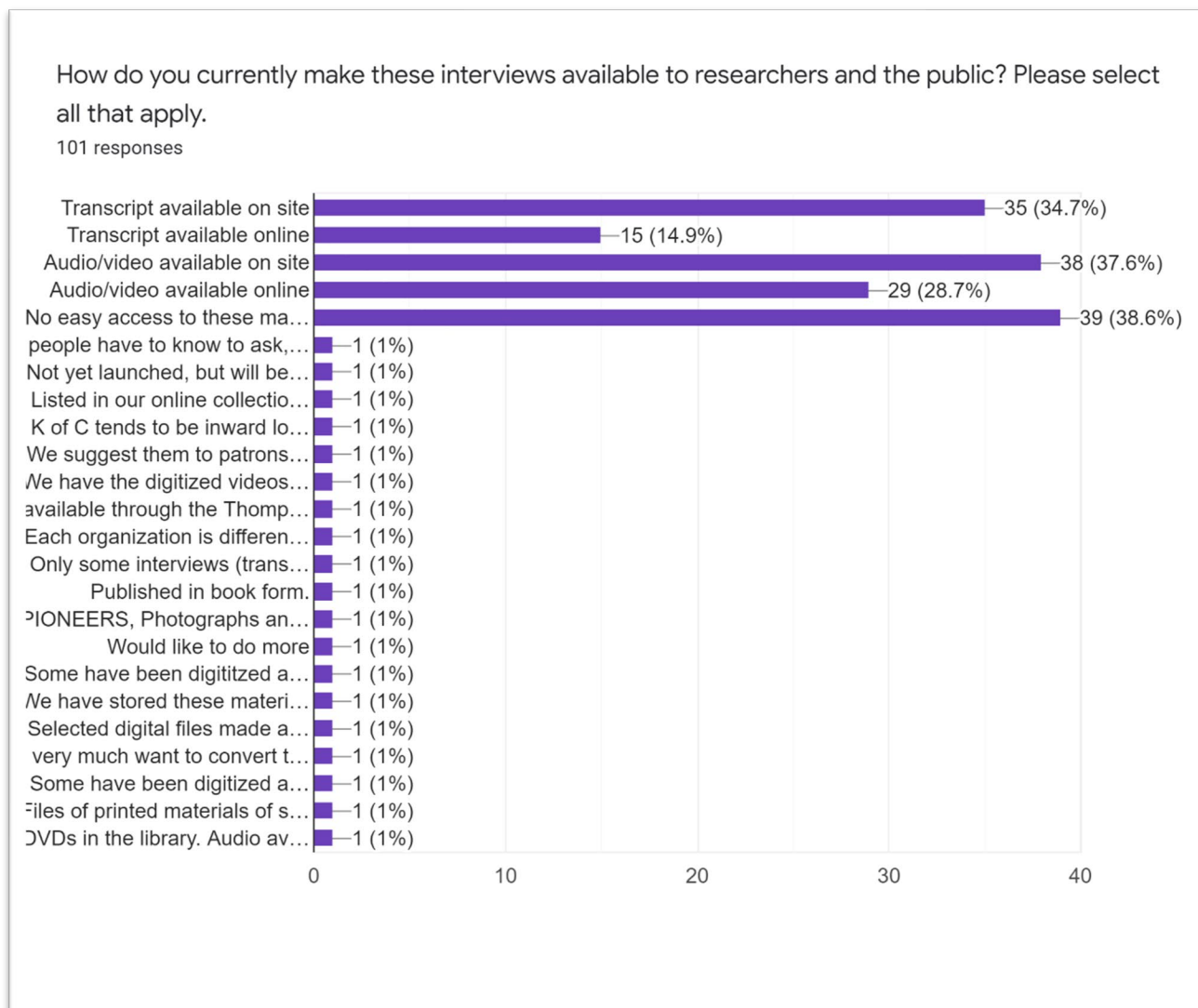
The following chart demonstrates that more than half of the respondents have some transcribed oral histories in their collections.



The chart below regarding how many individual interviews participating institutions have in their oral history collection is interesting, but really requires some calculations due to the ranges respondents were given to select from. Based on the responses to the survey the total number of oral histories in Connecticut, based on the information provided by the 117 participating institutions, is as few as 7,424 individual oral histories and as many as 17,625.



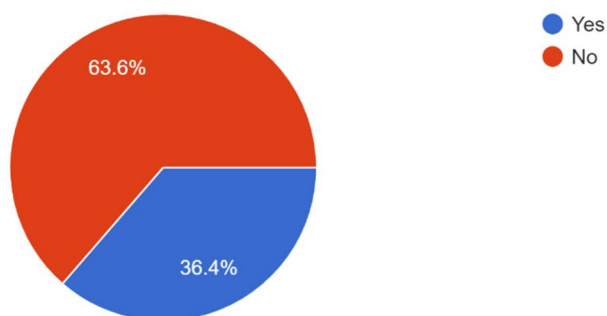
There is no universal method in use to make individual oral histories available to researchers and others, as detailed by the survey responses below.



Although there is not much digitization of oral history collections taking place currently among the participating institutions, there is interest in making individual interviews more accessible.

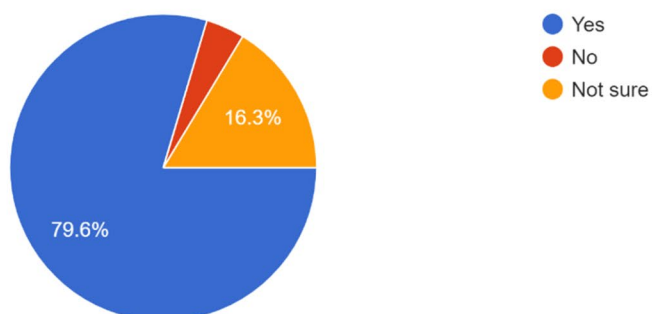
Are you currently working to digitize any of these materials that are not already in digital form?

99 responses



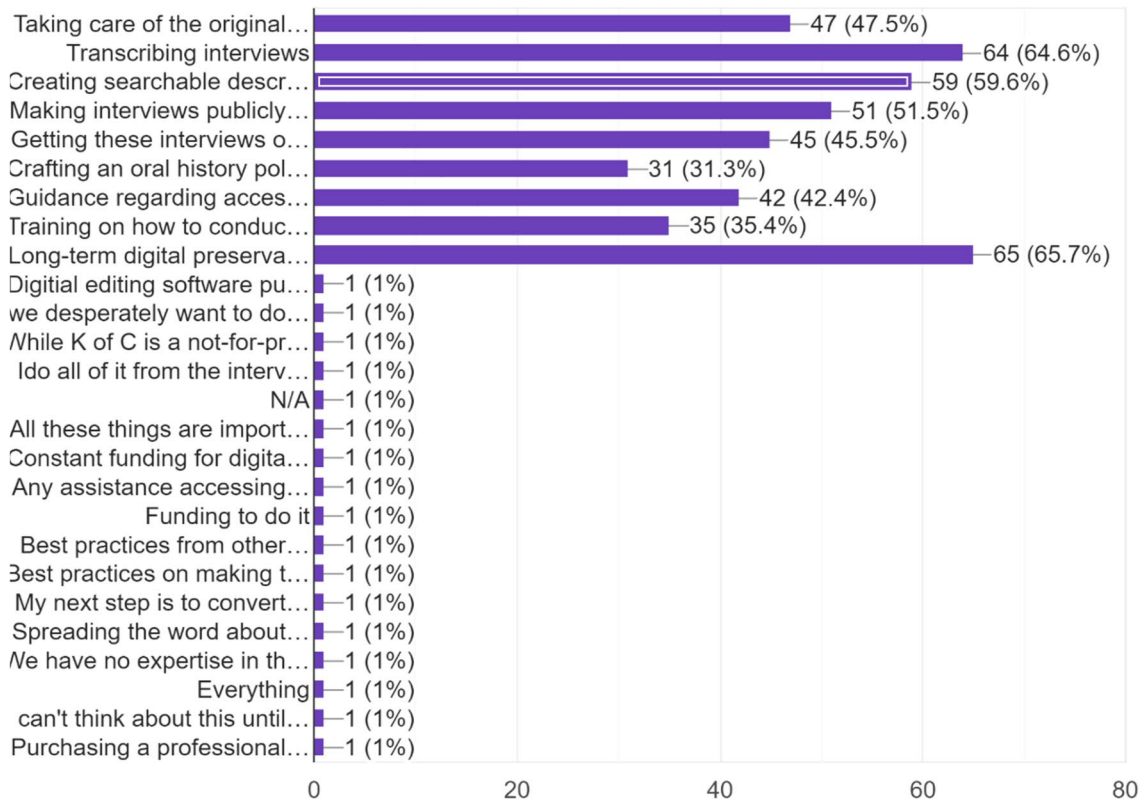
Are you interested in transcribing, digitizing, or otherwise making these interviews more accessible to the public?

98 responses



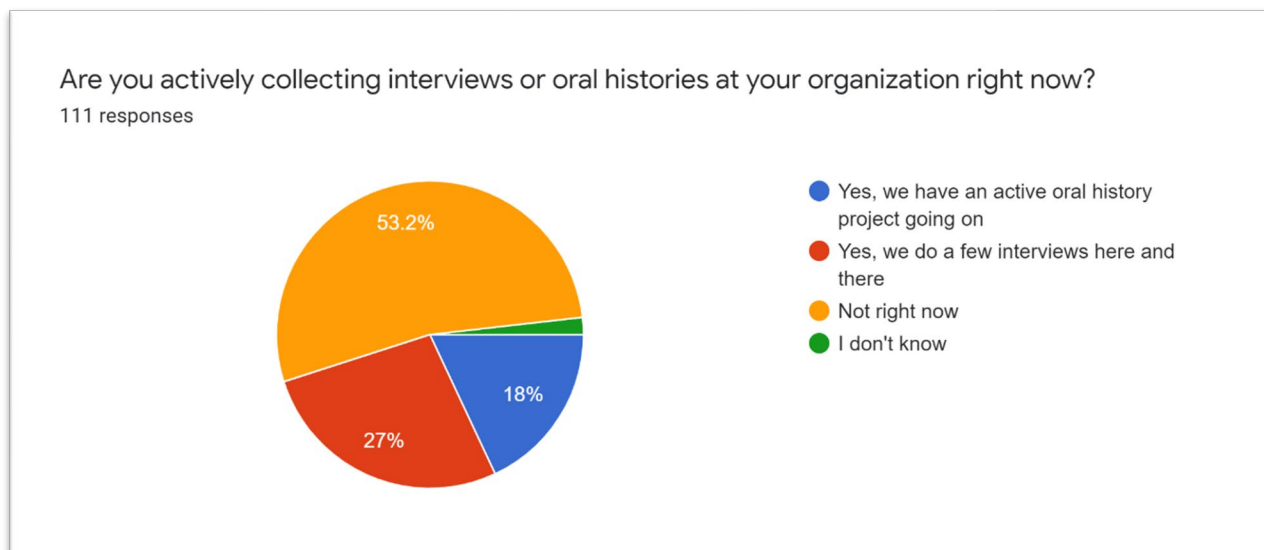
What sort of support or help do you feel you need around these materials? Please choose all that apply.

99 responses

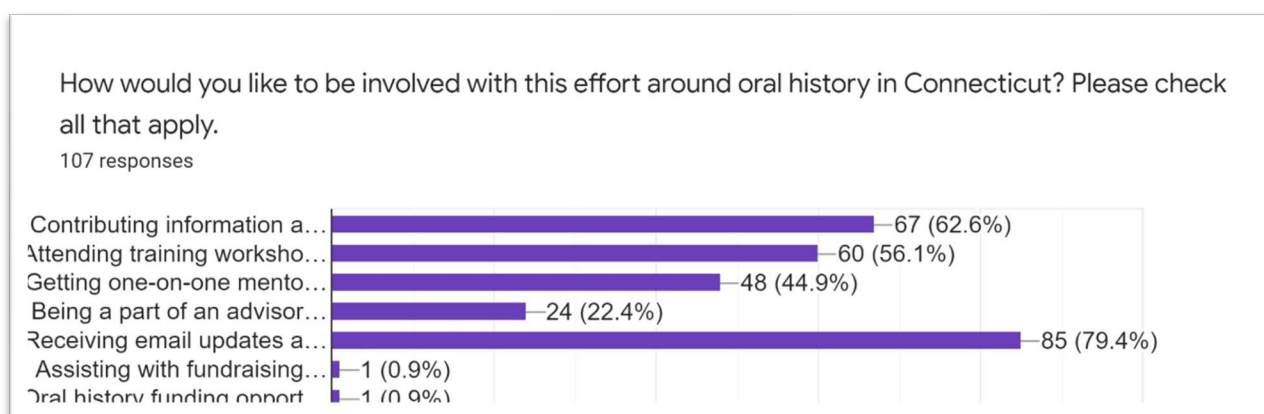


There is wide interest in the many forms of support that were offered in the survey, although developing oral history policies or learning how to conduct an oral history project received less interest than other options.

Currently, very few of the respondents are actively collection oral histories as seen by the following chart.



Fortunately, there is interest in being involved with oral history outreach.



Information on the participants, the scope of their oral history collections and any support materials they have is included in the appendix.

Appendix 1: To the best of your knowledge, what themes, subjects, time periods, or collecting projects do these interviews cover? (Just give us a general sense.)

21st century
Washington, Connecticut history 1700s - present day
History of North Guilford late 19th-early 20th century; overview of our Native American artifacts
Coast Guard History, Women in the Military, Coast Guard Academy History
town history, state prison history
These are student projects covering a variety of topics.
History of Mitchell College, COVID experiences.
Burlington, Connecticut, history and town life
Local Newtown History spanning the early-mid 20th Century
Life in Stamford from 1930s to present; immigration to Stamford
Personal memories of James Merrill from 1960s-90s
World War II, Ridgefield history
Knights of Columbus development, approximately 1920-1975
Local farming, fishing, industry, one room schools, artists and art colonies, what life was like in the area in the early 1900s.
One room schools, Gilbert & Bennett Mfg. Co. and other local industries of the 1800s and 1900s, ways of life (recreation, childhood) in the early 1900s, life during the world wars, well-known local people and "characters," roads and local landmarks, local farming history, local businesses (farm stands, dairies, general stores)
History of our town (Avon, CT), Moving from the City to Suburbs, and some family histories
Mostly these cover the history of the University of Hartford and it's schools. More recently interviews also include the impact of COVID-19 on the University experience. Another subject covered in the collection is women's education.
History of South Windsor and nearby towns, 20th-21st centuries
Electric Boat during the 1960s
W. Eben Burr Oral History Project:1958-2005 -family background, childhood memories of Fairfield, stories related to section of town in which interviewees lived; Hungarian Archive Project: 1956 experiences in Hungary, immigrant experience, Hungarian experience in Fairfield and Bridgeport, CT.
history of Salisbury from 1880 to 2021 government, organizations, volunteers and pd. employees
Personal interactions with Theodate Pope Riddle (and her husband and foster sons), the children's Christmas parties she gave at Hill-Stead in the 1920s, servant culture at the Farmington estate, the landscape/garden, etc.
Some were conducted in the 80s by OWL (they have the tapes) we have transcripts only, all topics having to do w/ Litchfield history; some by an intern re WWII; some re: modern architecture

1900-1960
Early 20th C town events & personalities, WWI & WWII recollections, politics and business practice
Local citizens, 2000-2019
mostly farming and/or recollections of 20th century Lebanon, WWII recollections, high school sports teams
Most of the oral histories we have in our small archival collection cover the 1955 flood and how it affected life in Torrington, Winsted, Colebrook and the surrounding area
history of Waterford, ct; 1940s-1950s
Local History, Veteran Experiences
Focus is on memories of living in our small town.
Most oral recordings are connected to a 1970s state funded oral history project with senior citizens ages 65-90 at that time. Most of our video histories were recorded prior to 2013 with seniors of similar ages to the audio recordings above. 1890s through present
They are collections of local history orgs
Textile industry in Rockville, Rural life in Vernon, Rockville Hospital, Personal memories, Life in the early to mid 20th century
Mostly family stories and mostly from the 1940s forward
Hartford specific, social, political, cultural - 20th and 21st century recordings, 19th century manuscripts
children's literature - authors and illustrators, African politics, Black artists/authors/journalists/musicians/singers, ethnic communities of Connecticut, Holocaust survivors, military servicemembers, CT business and labor history, CT politics, etc
mid-1900s to present
Oral Histories of long-time Easton residents - all done within the last year
life in Windsor, CT
G. Fox employment, 9/11, West Indian community in Hartford, Puerto Rican community in Hartford, various communities Lynne Williamson worked with in her tenure as director of CCHAP (collection being processed so unsure of details), Vietnam conflict
Life in town
Life in Farmington/Unionville in the 1900s.
1700s - 1970s with concentration on Colonial history in Ledyard/North Groton.
Most are interviews with mill workers covering 1920-1985, conducted in the 1990s.
1930s to present
Collins Company Employees, residents of Collinsville, CT
Influence and history of the Barnum Museum in their life.
1926 to present
World War II
immigration, community, 1920s to 1960s
2016-Present artmaking, art promotion, exhibitions, readings, panel discussions, etc.

1. Hispanic Women of New London County, interviewed in 1987-88. Their stories date back to 1950s in Connecticut and Puerto Rico. 2. I may have some VSH of composer Charles Frink, late 1990-2000.
Late 20th century, artwork on the grounds
WWII, Stamford Police, local stories
Exhibitions, events, and Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art history
1940's to 1960's
town recollections is one set from 1974 & city to suburb is another set from 1990s
2006-2021 Themes and subjects are: 1) Work and workers 2) Collaborating and Collaborations and 3) American Mural Project's development.
Growing up in Ellington CT, 1930's Done through grant with Hall Memorial Library
Public history focus of Waterbury. Brass workers, neighborhood and every day life, history of the Jewish and African American population. Focus on work, family, immigration/migration.
Oliver LaPlace, fisherman, hunter, River guide, c. 1980
20th century; 19th century--hearsay reminisces; arts community; biographical about people in town; World War 2; Town in the 1950s; UN and Ruth Steinkraus Cohen; Individual artists; local politicians;
no oral histories here
Stories of the Swift Factory and life in the north end of Hartford towards the end of the 20th century/start of the 21st century
Interviews with museum founder, early trustees, Beecher/Stowe descendants, niece of Stowe's maid, Stowe House ribbon-cutting in 1968. Period covered 1960-1975.
general maritime history, yachting, fishing, boat design
The first collection of 110 oral history interviews, conducted between 1998 and 2006, reside on cassette tapes and appear in transcribed form in my book "The ItalianAmerican Experience in New Haven," (SUNY Press, 2006) a history of the city through the stories and images of elderly Italian Americans
The second collection of 105 oral history interviews, conducted between 2008 and 2014, are on cassette tapes and appear in transcribed form in my book, "Farms, Factories And Families: Italian American Women Of Connecticut," from elderly Italian American women from many cities and towns in the state who tell their life experiences and the history of their towns for the first time.
early days of the museum, riding trolley cars while they were a mode of public transportation
We have twain family recordings and then of scholars/events on related topic
History Chip - historychip.com - is open to anyone worldwide to submit true stories
Playhouse history
Veterans' history, modern languages, LGBTQ history
Coventry early 20th century, one room schools, the lives of children early 20th century
Opening of the museum; building of Conny the Whale; covers 1920-1970s
Life in Easton, childhood memories, autobiography, historic events and guest speakers.
Local history collected from older residents
RAILROADS and RAILROADING - emphasis on Western Connecticut and nearby areas
Growing up in Chester, life in Chester, special events, schools. 1920 to 1980's?

We conducted oral history interviews with people who had been displaced from a primarily Black neighborhood during urban renewal. We are also interviewing people for a film on the history of the LGBTQ community in New London. (Not sure if that would qualify as oral history.)
Danbury and Danburians
CT Veteran experiences, WWII - Afghanistan.
1960 - 2020
Institutional history (1966-present); Ridgefield people ca. 1890s-1930s
Butler-McCook House history, Palmer-Warner House history of the collections and family of Frederic Palmer.
1950 on (but information in them can be earlier)
late 19th - late 20th century, local history
Genealogy, memories of the town in 20th century, important local figures
1980-2021
Interviews were conducted during the 1980's and feature prominent members of the community, many of which worked for local city departments. Most interviewees are questioned about their childhoods growing up in Bristol, CT, and their careers in the city as adults.
1950's
Local history from 1920's to 2000(?)
1. Dr. Willard Uphaus, 1979-1983 2. Paul Hodel, 1973-1990 3. Mothers' Group, 1989-present
Historical interviews with prominent CT Baptists, recorded 1991-2003.
Some are about their lives growing up in New Haven; growing up in an ethnic neighborhood.
1990 to present. SPDC projects led by Artistic Director Sonia Plumb and SPDC collaborators and/or dance artists.
Many WW2 veterans and some from other times of war and peace.
The history of Night Fall, Night Fall's artistry, Artist profiles, Night Fall in the community
Jewish community in Hartford and region; Holocaust survivors; military experience; Soviet Jews; farming in Connecticut; leadership; growing up in Hartford; early 20th-c to present
various subjects
life in Weston, the school systems, living here during WWII, manufacturing, family history, road construction and general recollections going back to about 1878
General stories
caribbean culture

Appendix 2: What other information do you have, if any, about these interviews? This could include finding aids, biographical sketches of interviewees, photographs, artifacts, etc. (Again, just give us a general sense.)

Interviewee biographies, photographs, documents and other artifacts
Some of these were used in the preparation of Voices from North Guilford (text)
Biographical Sketches, Photographs
Very little. I just know that we have vhs tapes of people talking about the "old days" and 2 interviews I specifically did a few years ago.
The students have photos as well as a product analyzing these interviews.
Metadata files for most
possible photographs of those interviewed
Each of the three volumes of transcripts contains an index
Some are accompanied by digitized photographs, documents, and artifacts
We started the Oral Histories project this year and so far have completed about 9-10. They will be launched on our website in the spring of 2022.
photographs and short bios
Digital copies are available in DAM. Descriptive and administrative information created and made searchable; no finding aid exists as such.
The interviews are well connected in with the rest of our collections. We often have photos of those interviewed, or of the subjects they are discussing. We have finding aids and often have biographical sketches or saved newspaper articles providing such information on those interviewed.
We have a finding aid and inventory on ArchivesSpace (CAO). We do not have bio sketches. We have photos of some of those interviewed.
Some interviews have photos of the subject.
Finding aids
Interviews are listed on our website. Most have biographical information; some have photographs. Some interviewees have donated papers.
I did these interviews in 2014 through a CT Humanities grant to the Groton Public Library. We ran out of money for transcription, but I completed it myself during the pandemic. I have give all of the material to the library -- CDs with audio files, photos and searchable Word documents, plus printouts of the transcriptions. To the best of my knowledge, the library is making them available through the local history room there. I also have copies of everything on my own computer.
Biographical sketches, brief finding aids.
photos, genealogy records
Brief biographical sketches about many of the participants, Word/Excel findings aids, minimal photographs and two drawings (by one of the foster sons) to illustrate what the farm complex and kitchen interior had looked like during the heyday
They are not described in any of our databases. We may have other materials relating to some of them, but they would have to be described and linked to creator/subject records to determine that.

Nothing
Some interviewees were well known in town; we have some artifacts related to some of them.
Some photographs
unknown
Lots of rich biographical detail with some photos of interviewees. Interviews conducted under the guidance of a historian who had students do this as a class project. Interviewees signed release forms and everything
just either the cassettes or the transcriptions; sometimes both and sometimes just one
Photographs
Some interviewees donate photos, artifacts, and biographical sketches.
We have short bios and photos for many of them. There are self-bios that are part of the oral history recordings.
A few of the interviews have attached photographs
Don't know, most were just left with us by someone who did the interviews as a hobby.
All of the above
finding aids, biographical information, artifacts
photos, a few artifacts
None
Brief descriptions, photos and bios for a few
Some finding aids. Probably some photos and artifacts related to the people interviewed for CCHAP but since the collection is currently being processed we don't know yet exactly what those connections are.
I don't know much. I know we have some cassettes, without much information attached to them. Neither I nor any staff have attempted to listen to them.
We have a listing of the interviewees/interviewers with main topics. I believe that the Farmington Room at the Farmington library has copies of all these interviews.
None that I know of.
Some have biographical sketches and photographs.
biographical sketches of interviewees
Varies from individual to individual as the programs continues to develop.
All of the above
Newspaper articles (The Day, Providence Journal). Photographs of each subject, framed with transcripts of interviews. Some program notes of exhibits.
Photos and news clippings about the late American sculptor David Hayes
Bios, photos, artifacts and finding aids
We have inventories of our audiovisual materials
Photos, videos
We have some transcripts, some permission forms signed and photos of some interviewees.

photographs, sections of the mural on display or to be installed, written documentation, and articles featuring collaboratiive projects.
There are control files for collections/individual interviews, transcripts, collected materials like newspaper clippings and photographs.
Photographs, artifacts, biographical material
biographical sketches; photographs;
na
photographs
Biographical information and some personal collections of interviewees, including photographs and artifacts.
Many of the oral histories in the collection have supporting materials/related artifacts in the general collection. There is a published Oral History Collections guide from 1992.
I have portraits of many of these oral historians as well as many archival photographs from family albums that illustrate their stories -- many appear in both books.
we (may) have some information on 16mm film, I'm in the process of having them digitized
honestly unsure
These stories are fully searchable. Some have photos included. We are just now adding audio submissions even though we have some video already.
They are not fully organized. We did a film for a fundraiser last year and made use of old footage but it's not all in a form that is easy to sift.
For the veterans history project, we have a database with supplemental materials, including photographs and documents related to the oral history interview. For the other collections, we have basic catalog records for the interviews.
Notes, biographical information, picture
photos, newspaper articles, personal notes
Photographs, scrapbooks
Some photographs and movies related to the oral histories.
We have _substantial_ slide collections for several of the persons interviewed.
Photos for only some interviewees
We have photos and real estate appraisal forms of some of the homes from which the subjects were displaced.
Finding aids
Written questionnaire, some photographs/papers.
articles.pictures
One set of tapes/interviews is associated with identifying subjects of a collection of early 20th century photographs.
Finding aids, photographs, collections
Some biographical information and photographs
finding aids for the full collection, photographs and biographies of interviewees for select interviews.

some photographs and archival information
Catalog, biographical sketches, photographs, artifacts, VHS tapes, audio tapes, texts
Because our oral history collection features prominent community members, several individual's photographs can be found in our collections. Some biographical sketches are available in our collection of The Bristol Press as well.
no information at the moment
I don't know
Autobiography and some papers of Dr. Uphaus and related interviews and writing by friends; large archive of peace work done by Paul Hodel and the Nuclear Freeze Campaign; Notebook of some materials from Mothers' Group.
Varies: some biographical sketches, some photographs.
photographs, artifacts...
Photos and videos primarily. Marketing materials. Reports.
Most of the above.
Some video and photographs
Finding aid to whole collection; some photographs and family papers; some abstracts
The few interviews we have were not well organized
We have some bios, photos and videos of the interviewees
None
photographs and artifacts

Appendix 3: List of Participating Institutions

Central Connecticut State University
West Haven High School
Trinity College
Gunn Historical Museum
Dudley Farm Museum/The Dudley Foundation
East Hartford Public Library
Prudence Crandall Museum
US Coast Guard Academy
Connecticut IB Academy / East Hartford Public Schools
Easy Lyme Public Library
Daniel Hand High School
Mitchell College Library
Burlington Public Library
Newtown Historical Society
The Ferguson Library
Norwich Historical Society
James Merrill House/SVIA
Ridgefield Historical Society
Knights of Columbus
Lyme Public Hall and Local History Archives
Wilton History Room
Avon Library
University of Hartford
Friends of Wood Memorial Library & Museum
Independent Researcher
Fairfield Museum and History Center
town historian for Salisbury, Ct.
Hill Stead Museum
Litchfield Historical Society
Preston Historical Society
Madison Historical Society

Colchester Historical Society
Lebanon Historical Society Museum
Northwestern Conn Community College
Waterford Public Library
Farmington Libraries
Warren CT Historical Society
Thompson Historical Society Inc
Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College
The Vernon Historical Society
Enfield Historical Society
Hartford Public Library
University of Connecticut
Killingworth Historical Society
Easton Public Library
Windsor Historical Society
Connecticut Historical Society
Booth & Dimock Memorial Library
Farmington Historical Society
Putnam Public Library
Ledyard Historical Society
Windham Textile and History Museum
Congregation Beth Israel
Canton Historical Museum
Barnum Museum
Putnam Elms
Garde Arts Center
Greater Middletown Military Museum
Playhouse Theatre Group, Inc.
Greenwich Historical Society
Ely Center of Contemporary Art
Master Teaching Artist in Theater, Ct Office of the Arts
David Hayes Sculpture Fields
Stamford History Center

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Harrybrooke Park & Harden House Museum
Avon Historical Society
American Mural Project
Ellington Historical Society
Mattatuck Museum
Connecticut River Museum
Westport Museum from History & Culture
Lyman Allyn Art Museum
Community Solutions
Harriet Beecher Stowe Center
Klein Memorial Auditorium Foundation, Inc.
Mystic Seaport Museum
Portland Library
independent researcher and author/oral historian
The Shore Line Trolley Museum
The Mark Twain House & Museum
History Chip
Westport Country Playhouse
Elihu Burritt Library, Central Connecticut State University
Coventry Historical Society
CT Democracy Center at Connecticut's Old State HOuse
Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council
NPS
The Children's Museum
Historical Society of Easton
Colchester Historical Society
Danbury Railway Museum - Library/Archives
Chester Historical Society
New London Landmarks, Inc.
WCSU Archive
Central Connecticut State University Veteran's History Project
HADDAM SHAD MUSEUM

Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center
Connecticut Landmarks
Guilford Keeping Society
Noank Historical Society
Stonington Historical Society
East Haddam Historical Society & Museum
Bristol Public Library
Orange Historical Society
The Milford Historical Society
CCSU
Historical Committee of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut
Southington Public Library
Ethnic Heritage Center
Sonia Plumb Dance Company
Stratford Veterans Museum Inc
Night Fall
(No Name Provided)
Harwinton Historical Society
Weston Historical Society
Baobab Tree Studios, Inc
West Indian Social Club of Hartford, Inc