How to Plan and Implement
a
State Oral History Project

A COMPONENT OF THE
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Sponsored by:
Office for Victims of Crime
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Introduction

Oral history is a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants about past events and ways of life. Oral history initiatives can capture the scope and breadth of key historical activities as well as lessons learned from past experiences. They can also offer an oral timeline from pioneers in a given field that focuses not only on the past, but also on the present and a vision for the future.

In 2002, as the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the victims’ rights movement was approaching, the OVC Oral History Project Partners recognized the need to document the rich history of the victims’ rights movement. In the past, longtime victim advocates attempted to capture the essence of the discipline’s history, both in public speeches and in writing. It was clear that many professionals and volunteers in the field—particularly those who had only been involved in the past decade—lacked a true or deep understanding of the struggles that were faced two and three decades ago, of the “power of the personal story” of crime victims and survivors who propelled victims’ rights and services onto the national agenda, and of the tremendous strides in both public policy and criminal and juvenile justice agency polices that changed the way victims are viewed and treated by our systems of justice as well as by our society as a whole. Compared to many other progressive social trends, the extent and pace of the crime victims’ movement are truly remarkable.

While designing the national Oral History Project, the Project Partners recognized that many advocates across the country are also interested in documenting their rich history on the State and local levels. This handbook addresses the key components of developing a State Oral History Project (SOHP). Any state that seeks to implement a SOHP should proceed with strong consideration of the project’s mission, goals, scope, and budget.

The Office for Victims of Crime Oral History Project

In 2002, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) awarded the Oral History Project Partners—Justice Solutions, National Organization for Victim Assistance, National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, and National Association of VOCA Administrators—a grant to document the rich history of the victims’ rights and services movement since its inception in 1972. The project partners accomplished this through research and personal interviews of leaders in our field.

The project had the following four goals:

1. To develop two OVC Special Reports that highlighted the historical importance of two events: the 30-year anniversary of the field and the 20-year anniversary of the publication of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime Final Report.


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A Retrospective of the 1982 President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime, authored by Justice Solutions consultants Anne Seymour and Melissa Hook, was also published by OVC in 2005. It can be accessed at the Oral History Project’s Web site at: http://vroh.uakron.edu/NCVRW_Step_5_TaskForce_2.php.

2. To provide initial documentation via digitalized video interviews of the past 30 years of the victims’ rights movement through interviews with key contributors to the movement’s overall success.

The OVC Oral History project conducted more than 65 videotaped interviews of pioneers in the field, with the videotapes guiding the development of all project deliverables. In addition, footage and audio from the interviews have been used in numerous OVC videotapes and DVDs to date.

3. To develop archives housed in a university setting (onsite digital video archive and hardcopy collection of historical documents) as well as on the Internet (online streaming video archive, complete with searchable interview transcripts).

The OVC Oral History Archives will be housed at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. The University of Akron was selected as the host university after a competitive application process and rigorous review conducted by Justice Solutions and the other project partners. In addition, an online OVC Oral History Archive is currently in development.

4. To develop a recommended format for states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia to develop their own individual oral histories.

This handbook is designed to fulfill goal number 4.

Developing a State Oral History Project

Developing a Clear Mission and Goals

In considering the development of a State Oral History Project (SOHP) to document the history and accomplishments of a specific state relevant to crime victims’ rights and services, it is important to consider the rationale for such a project. A SOHP can provide the following benefits:

- Provide historical context of the individuals and initiatives that contributed to the strength of the state’s victim assistance field today.

- Document tremendous strides in program, policy, and protocol development that benefit victims of crime, including state laws and constitutional amendments, collaborative efforts, and guidelines within and among agencies that facilitate the effective provision of victim services.

- Obtain subjective input from the state’s pioneers in the field, who can shed important light on the early days in the struggle for crime victims’ rights.
• Provide an archive for researchers, practitioners, and victims/survivors, among others, to promote greater understanding of the history of the field within the state, and the progress that has been made since the field’s inception.

Once a clear rationale is established, it can contribute to the development of a mission statement and goals.

Developing a Project Framework

While developing the framework for a SOHP, review the resources available to guide the development of an oral history initiative.

The OVC Oral History Project used the many resources available from the Oral History Association (OHA). The OHA offers excellent guiding documents for establishing, implementing, and evaluating an oral history project. It is highly recommended that the content of a SOHP adhere to OHA guidelines, which are considered standards for oral historians. All OHA resources are available at the OHA Web site at http://www.dickinson.edu/oha/.

In addition, many of the resources developed for the OVC Oral History Project are referenced in this handbook (fully in the appendixes and highlighted throughout its text). Justice Solutions staff members are also available to provide limited guidance and consultation as needed and on request. Any request for technical assistance requiring a substantial commitment of staff time or organizational resources may be considered on a fee-for-services basis contingent on availability.

Key Planning and Implementation Issues

Determine Project Scope

There are a wide range of possibilities for the scope and overall structure of a SOHP. These include the following:

• Simple documentation through audiotaped or videotaped interviews.

• More extensive documentation that includes taped interviews, photographs, historical video and audio footage, and originals or copies of landmark documents such as copies of pioneering state laws.

• Development of centralized, physical SOHP archive to provide access to all the oral history documents and provision of opportunities for people to visit the site to conduct research.

• Development of online SOHP Archive that make video or audio interviews, written documents, and other resources available via the Internet.

The vision and volunteerism of its partners, the budget, and the practical reality of creating a centralized source for SOHP resources will determine the scope of any given project.

Once the scope of a SOHP has been determined, develop a project overview. See appendix A
for a sample project overview from the OVC Oral History Project.

**Partnership**

A project partnership that features collaboration among the key stakeholders in a state’s victim assistance field will contribute to a SOHP’s overall success. In general, early victim assistance initiatives engaged both community- and system-based professionals, and were driven in large part by “the power of the personal story” of crime victims and survivors.

Start with your state’s general victim assistance network or coalition, if one exists. Other key stakeholders may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Domestic violence coalitions.
- Sexual assault coalitions.
- Network of children’s advocacy centers.
- State office of Mothers Against Drunk Driving or chapters.
- State office of Parents of Murdered Children or chapters.
- State prosecutors association.
- State law enforcement association.
- Other allied justice associations that played an active role in the early development of the victim assistance field.
- Other professionals/individuals who have played a role in the history of the victim assistance field.

Co-partners in a SOHP should establish clear requirements for participation such as:

- Willingness to identify and provide contact information for key pioneers within each co-sponsor’s primary issue area.
- Ability to provide documentation of the early days and key events such as:
  - Copies of laws and policies.
  - Photographs.
  - Audiotape and videotape footage.
- Willingness to volunteer to contribute to the overall success of the project’s planning and implementation.

**Budget**

Just as the scope of a SOHP is driven by the budget, the budget addresses the project’s scope. Recognizing limitations in victim assistance-related funding, a SOHP may need to seek financial support from the following:

- Project partners.
- Private foundations within a state.
- Corporations and businesses within a state.
- Sources that can provide in-kind contributions (such as videotaping interviewees).
- A solicitation to the field that seeks small contributions to support the project.
With strong, collaborative partners and many volunteers, a SOHP can be achieved on a limited budget. Key costs related to project planning and implementation (many of which can be provided in-kind by project partners) include the following:

- Time associated with developing the SOHP mission, goals, and scope.
- Time and resources associated with written, mail, and telephone correspondence.
- Site to conduct filming or audiotaping.
- Filming or audiotaping (equipment, tapes, etc.)
- Tape transcription.
- Other documentation (such as writing summaries of interviews)
- Developing an onsite SOHP archive.
- Developing an online SOHP Archive (see the following section “Establishing SOHP Archives” for distinctions between onsite and online SOHP archives)

**Interviewees**

The most important asset of a SOHP is the individuals who are interviewed. Their insights, opinions, personal observations, and unique perspectives of a state’s victim assistance history are, without a doubt, the most important elements of a SOHP.

The scope of the SOHP and its budget determine the number of people who are interviewed. For the OVC Oral History Project, interviewees were identified by the cosponsors based on the following:

- Longevity in the field (some of the OVC interviewees began their victim assistance careers in the early 1970s).
- Early and significant contributions as pioneers in the field.
- Unique perspectives of the early days and willingness to be honest and forthcoming in their insights.
- Ability to use their historical perspectives to offer opinions about the growth and development of the field as well as a vision for the future.
- Diversity by specialization in the field, geography, gender, and culture.

Ask selected interviewees to provide a one-page narrative biography that highlights their history in the field and major accomplishments. Requesting such a biography will ensure consistency and minimize the number of pages.

**Site and Scheduling**

Choose a centralized site(s) for conducting SOHP interviews that is accessible by public transportation and by persons with disabilities. Conducting the interviews in a centralized location minimizes costs associated with travel during filming. Ensure that the site is very quiet during taping to minimize background noise.

The OVC Oral History Project conducted videotaping of more than 65 individuals over a period of several days in different regions of the country to limit costs associated with travel because interviewees covered their own travel expenses. Facilitating a well-organized, tight schedule saves considerable time and resources and also allows interviewees to interact with each other.
between interviews. Interaction between interviewees provides the opportunity for them to remind themselves of historic events and in turn may lead to more comprehensive and thoughtful interviews.

Please see appendix B for a sample “Save the Date” announcement with information for interviewees and appendix C for a sample interviewee confirmation letter.

**Interview Process and Questions**

Determine the interview questions with the SOHP project partners. Questions should also be guided by the SOHP’s mission and goals. An oral history project’s primary purpose is to document historical perspectives. The OVC Oral History Project offered an opportunity for a diverse range of talent and sense of history to be brought to the forefront. The project also included interviewees’ comments on current events and their own vision for the future. Please see appendix D for OVC Oral History interviewee questions.

OHA guidelines indicate that it is essential to ask the exact same questions of all interviewees. Interviewers can follow the specific questions yet at the same time, feel free to probe the interviewee for additional information or specificity in their responses. SOHP coordinators should provide interviewees with the questions prior to taping.

In addition, it is helpful to provide interviewees with guidelines about how to dress for videotaped interviews (please see appendix E for suggested guidelines).

SOHPs can also provide interviewees with guidelines about items they may bring to augment the videotaping or audiotaping process such as photographs, video footage, or copies of key documents, all of which can be included in the taping process or included in the SOHP archives. Appendix F has guidelines related to what to bring.

**Technology**

In general, oral histories are documented through videotaping or audiotaping (and provide opportunities for contributors to also offer paper-based resources for an archive). Both options require technology and related resources for project completion.

SOHP coordinators who have the financial means may consider hiring a professional firm to conduct the taping. SOHP coordinators with limited resources may take advantage of existing, cost-effective technology and record the interviews themselves with a digital video camera or high-quality audio recorder. High powered personal computers and “off the shelf” audio and video editing software allow almost anyone to produce near professional quality video/audio end products, whether they be in the form of an on-site/online archive or merged into single DVD that can be mass produced and distributed to users. Such PC-based hardware and software give even amateur producers the power to create professionally polished products for a few thousand (or even a few hundred) dollars.

Interviewees should be advised in advance about the anticipated length of the interview, so they can organize their thoughts and ideas accordingly.

With either approach, the following are some helpful guidelines to consider:
For videotape interviews:

- Use the same (or a similar backdrop) for all interviewees to achieve a consistent look.
- Frame each interviewee from the same distance.
- Seek lighting that is similar for each interviewee to achieve a consistent look.
- Provide interviewees with questions prior to taping so that they may organize their thoughts for the interview.
- Provide written guidelines about what to bring.
- Ask interviewees on-camera to say and spell their names and affiliations.

For audiotape interviews:

- Conduct a sound check prior to conducting each interview.
- Ask interviewees on tape to say and spell their names and affiliations.
- Ask interviewees to bring materials that contribute to a companion hard copy collection, such as copies of laws, photographs, video footage, newsletter articles, and so on.

Establishing SOHP Archives

Depending on the budget, a SOHP coordinator can create archives of the information garnered through interviews. Archives can be housed in a physical location or online.

The key components included in a SOHP physical or online archive include the following:

- Documentation of the methodology of the project, including cosponsorship, mission, goals, and implementation process.
- Availability of video or audio footage of interviews.
- Availability of transcripts of video or audio footage of interviews.
- Photos and resumes of interviewees.
- Summaries of interviews that include documentation of key statements of the interviewee. See appendix G for a sample OVC Oral History Project interview summary.

The biggest difference between onsite and online systems is their inherent accessibility. By definition, the on-site system requires a user to physically visit the archive site to use both the video archive and the physical hard copy collection. A person must travel to the archive site, which may limit the number of individuals who access the site. If the archive is available online,
it becomes available to virtually anyone with Internet access.

Onsite archive systems can be as simple as a cataloged collection of tapes that users can access through a VCR by using an index keyed to the tape counter number on the VCR or as sophisticated as an all-digital collection stored on a computer hard drive with a user-friendly interface (similar to the onsite system available at the Akron University Library). Obviously an online system requires that all video files be transferred from tape to digital format, which can then be streamed or downloaded across the Internet. Such a system requires the development of at least a minimal Web site to allow users to access video files.

Although recent advances in hardware and software make it possible for amateurs to create basic Web sites complete with attached video files, the technical challenges involved may justify using the services of a skilled Web developer, particularly for larger sites with many or lengthy video/audio files.

Also, an online system may involve considerable resources for Web site hosting, although this wholly depends on the size of the site, and more importantly, the number and size of the video files attached. It is strongly advised that those interested in developing an online system fully investigate the technical issues and potential cost associated with creation and hosting of such a site before beginning actual development.
Sample Template

[This is a sample of a project overview of a State Oral History Project. This overview should be personalized to your project, including project partners and goals. Following this template is the project overview that was actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

THE [STATE]
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OVERVIEW

The [State] Oral History Project Partners—[list project partners here]—seek to document the rich history of the victims’ rights and services movement in [State]. This will be accomplished through research and personal interviews of leaders in our field.

The project has the following goals:

1. [List project goals here]

All project activities will be conducted in accordance with the professional standards and guidelines of the Oral History Association.

Interview subjects selected by the project team will participate in [amount of time]-minute structured interviews, which will be videotaped, transcribed, and archived for future research and reference.

The historical perspectives of the victims’ rights and services field offered through this project will provide significant insights into the genesis, growth, successes, and challenges of the field; and provide opportunities for research and reference by practitioners, academicians, public policymakers, journalists, and others in the future. [Insert additional information on the uses of your SOHP here.]
The OVC Oral History Project Partners—Justice Solutions, National Organization for Victim Assistance, National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, and National Association of VOCA Administrators—seek to document the rich history of the victims’ rights and services movement since its inception in 1972. This will be accomplished through research and personal interviews of leaders in our field.

The Project has the following four goals:

1. To develop two OVC Special Reports that highlight the historical importance of two events: the 30-year anniversary of the field and the 20-year anniversary of the publication of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime Final Report.

2. To provide initial documentation via videotape of the past 30 years of the victims’ rights movement through interviews with key contributors to the movement’s overall success.

3. To develop archives housed in a university setting (videotaped and paper-based), as well as on the Internet (digital tape and electronic versions of transcripts).

4. To develop a recommended format for states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia to develop their own individual oral history.

All project activities will be conducted in accordance with the professional standards and guidelines of the Oral History Association.

Eighty interview subjects selected by the project team (with approval by OVC) will participate in structured 90-minute interviews that will be videotaped, transcribed, and archived for future research and reference. The transcripts from all Oral History Project interviews will contribute to both Phase I and II of this project.

The historical perspectives of the victims’ rights and services field offered through this project will provide significant insights into the genesis, growth, successes, and challenges of the field, and provide written and video databases for research and reference by practitioners, academicians, public policymakers, journalists, and others in the future. In addition to being archived, these perspectives may be incorporated into publications, videotapes, and other resources sponsored by the Office for Victims of Crime or the project’s cosponsoring organizations in the future.
Sample Template

[This is a sample “Save the Date” announcement alerting interviewees of a State Oral History Project of upcoming taping dates. This announcement should be personalized to your project, including details on dates, times, and location of upcoming taping sessions. Following this template is the “Save the Date” announcement that was actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

SAVE THE DATE!

[STATE] ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SPONSORED BY:
[List Project Sponsors]

Videotaping for the [State] Oral History Project will take place in [City, State] from [Date] to [Date]. The location will be at [location].

The [State] Oral History Project seeks to document the rich and diverse history of the field of victim rights and services in [State]. We have attached a project overview for your review, along with a list of the project’s structured questions and suggestions on what to wear to the interview. If you have additional topics specific to your area of leadership in the victims’ movement that you would like to discuss, please send them to [Contact person’s name] at [Contact person’s phone number / e-mail address].

Please save these dates, and expect additional information from [Contact person’s name] regarding the interview schedule in the next week or so.

We appreciate your interest in this important project, and hope that your schedule will permit you to participate in a videotaped interview in [City].

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact [Contact person’s name] at [Contact person’s phone number / e-mail address].

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

[Contact person’s name]
[Contact person’s title, organization]

ENCLOSURES: Project Overview
Interview Questions
Suggestions for What to Wear
SAVE THE DATE!

OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SPONSORED BY:
Justice Solutions
National Organization for Victim Assistance
National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards
National Association of VOCA Administrators

The final phase of videotaping for the Office for Victims of Crime Oral History Project will take place in Sacramento, California, from Monday, February 24 to Wednesday, February 25, 2003. The location, which is to be announced, will be in downtown Sacramento.

The OVC Oral History Project seeks to document the rich and diverse history of the field of victim rights and services in America. We have attached a project overview for your review, along with a list of the project's structured questions and suggestions on what to wear to the interview. If you have additional topics specific to your area of leadership in the victims’ movement that you would like to discuss, please send them to Project Director Anne Seymour via e-mail at annesey@erols.com.

Please save these dates, and expect additional information from Diane Alexander, Director, Justice Solutions regarding the interview schedule in the next week or so.

We appreciate your interest in this important project, and hope that your schedule will permit you to participate in a videotaped interview in Sacramento.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Ms. Alexander at (202) 628–8550, Extension 117.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

ANNE SEYMOUR
Director, OVC Oral History Project

ENCLOSURES: Project Overview
Interview Questions
Suggestions for What to Wear
Sample Template

[This is a sample letter confirming participation in a State Oral History Project. This letter should
be personalized to your project, including interviewee’s name, taping information, and contact
information for a project representative. Following this template is the letter of confirmation that
was actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

Sample Letter Confirming Participation
in the [State] Oral History Project

Dear [Interviewee name]:

Thank you for confirming your participation in the [State] Oral History Project, sponsored by
[project partners]. Your interview will contribute significantly to an oral history of our field that
can be accessed by victim advocates, researchers, academicians, public policymakers, and
others interested in the birth and history of the movement in [State].

Your [amount of time]-minute interview is scheduled for [day, date, hour to hour]. Please plan on
arriving approximately 20 minutes before your interview time. All interviews will be conducted at
[location]. Directions to [location], along with information about parking, are attached.

The interview questions were provided to you in our earlier communication. If you have any
questions about these, or would like to add questions specific to your area of involvement or
expertise, please contact [Contact person’s name] at [Contact person’s phone number/e-mail
address]. I have also attached some recommended guidelines for what to wear to your
interview.

Please let me know if there is anything we can do to further facilitate your participation and
comfort during the [State] Oral History Project taping. You can reach me at [Contact person’s
phone number/e-mail address].

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

[Contact person’s name]
[Contact person’s title, organization]

Enclosures:  [Location] Directions/Parking
What to Wear and What to Bring guidelines
Dear :

Thank you for confirming your participation in the Office for Victims of Crime Oral History Project, sponsored by Justice Solutions, the National Organization for Victim Assistance, the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, and the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators. Your interview will contribute significantly to an oral history of our field, which can be accessed by victim advocates, researchers, academicians, public policymakers, and others interested in the birth and history of our movement.

Your 90-minute interview is scheduled for (day, date, from time to time). Please plan on arriving approximately 20 minutes before your interview time. All interviews will be conducted at the office of Justice Solutions, 720 7th Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC. Directions to Justice Solutions via driving or Metro, along with information about parking and entering our secure building, are attached to this e-mail.

The interview questions were provided to you in our earlier communication. If you have any questions about these, or would like to add questions specific to your area of involvement or expertise, please contact Project Director Anne Seymour at (202) 547–1732 or via e-mail at annesey@erols.com. I have also attached to this e-mail some recommended guidelines for what to wear to your interview.

Because so many esteemed elders of the field will be coming in for the interviews (as well as for the NOVA Board meeting), it is likely that Justice Solutions will host a social event on Saturday evening. Details will be provided as plans are confirmed, but do mark your calendar!

For Friday and Monday interviews, please call (202) 628–9329, ext. 117 for your telephone contact to the Justice Solutions office and staff. For Saturday and Sunday interviews, your contact number is (202) 487–7329.

Please let me know if there is anything we can do to further facilitate your participation and comfort during the Oral History Project taping. You can reach me at (202) 628–9329, ext. 117, or via e-mail at dalexander@justicesolutions.org.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

DIANE ALEXANDER
Director, Justice Solutions

Enclosures: Justice Solutions Directions/Parking/Access to Offices
What to Wear and What to Bring Guidelines
Sample Template
[This is a sample list of questions to be used in interviews for a State Oral History Project. This list should be personalized to your project and include all questions to be asked during the interviews. Following this template is the list of questions actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR [STATE] ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEWEES

- [List interview questions here. Use the questions from the OVC Oral History Project or develop questions with the SOHP’s project partners.]
**GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR OVC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEWEES**

- Why/How did you first get involved in the crime victims’ movement?
- Describe the field of victims’ rights and services 30 years ago (or when you/your agency entered the field), including the context of the era.
- In your pioneering area(s) of victim assistance*, what was the greatest challenge you and your colleagues faced in effecting change?
- What were the secrets, tactics, and strategies you employed that were successful?
- What were the failures?
- What do you perceive to be the **one greatest accomplishment** that has promoted victims’ rights and needs?
- What is needed **today** to continue the growth and professionalism of our field? What’s missing?
- What advice can you give to professionals and volunteers who have joined our field in the past 10 years?
- What vision do you have for the future of our field?
- What is your greatest fear?

*Pioneering areas will be determined by project team members with input from interviewees. This will be a significant area of emphasis in the interviews.
Sample Template

[This is a sample list of suggestions for on-camera interviews for a State Oral History Project. This list should be personalized to your project, including any specific suggestions related to your project. Following this template is the list of appearance suggestions actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

[STATE] ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
SUGGESTIONS FOR ON-CAMERA INTERVIEWS

• [List appearance suggestions here. Use the suggestions from the OVC Oral History Project, or develop suggestions with the SOHP’s Project Partners.]
SUGGESTIONS FOR ON-CAMERA INTERVIEWS*

- Dress appropriately for the mood you want to convey. How you look will have an impact on how you are perceived. Some people feel that wearing pastel colors will make them look younger, but this may not be the image you want to portray, especially if you're speaking as an expert on a topic.

- Lean toward conservative and away from trendy—the Oral History video footage will be viewed years from now.

- Wear clothes that are comfortable. If you feel too stiff in your clothes, it will affect how you express yourself.

- Wear clothes that can accommodate a lavaliere microphone clipped to your chest area.

- Color of clothing:
  - Solid colors work best—deep red, navy blue, or dark cream, for example.
  - White is a difficult color to videotape because it makes the camera lights bounce back, so no white shirts or dresses, please. Light blue dress shirts work best for men.
  - Try to avoid wearing all black, as it can be difficult for the camera to pick up the color.
  - No plaids or busy patterns because they can cause “strobing.”
  - Narrow stripes and patterns on neckties often look like they are “vibrating” when shown on tape—solid colors work best.
  - Avoid shiny or glossy fabrics that can reflect light back to the camera.

- Avoid too much jewelry, or jewelry that dangles and makes noise. Jewelry reflects light and noisy jewelry will be picked up by the microphone.

- Wear contacts rather than eye glasses (if available), the reflection off eye glasses make them very difficult to light.

- Keep your hair swept back from your face. Use hairspray or hair gel to protect your style from the heat of the cameras.

- Men and women should wear makeup, since it reduces the glare of the camera lights.
  - Women should do their own makeup, and bring a makeup kit for touch ups, if desired.
  - Women should avoid vivid red lipstick or lip gloss and stick to softer tones.

- Men should shave prior to taping to avoid the appearance of “a five-o’clock shadow.”

Sample Template

[This is a sample list of suggested items interviewees may bring to their interview as a part of a State Oral History Project. This list should be personalized to your project, including any specific suggestions related to your project. Following this template is the list of suggested items actually used in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive.]

[State] Oral History Project
SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT TO BRING

Sponsored by
[Project Partners]

While you are the most valuable resource for the [State] Oral History Project interview, you may wish to bring additional resources that illustrate key points and issues you plan to address in your interview. These can include, but are not limited to the following:

- Photographs.
- Books.
- Key documents representative of the field (i.e., Final Report of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime, 1982).
- News clippings.

Prior to your interview, please let the interviewers and production team know if you have any props so that they can be smoothly incorporated into your interview.
While you are the most valuable resource for your OVC Oral History Project interview, you may wish to bring additional resources that illustrate key points and issues you plan to address in your interview. These can include, but are not limited to the following:

- Photographs.
- Books.
- Key documents representative of the field (i.e., *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime*, 1982).
- News clippings.

Prior to your interview, please let the interviewers and production team know if you have any props so that they can be smoothly incorporated into your interview.
Sample Template

[This is a sample interview summary to be created for all interviews as part of a State Oral History Project. The summary should be personalized to your project, including specific interviewee information and a summary of all interview questions. Following this template is an actual interview summary developed in conjunction with the development of the Akron Archive. Click here for this and other Examples of Interview Summaries on this Site ]

[STATE] ORAL HISTORY PROJECT SUMMARY

INTERVIEW SUMMARY *

Interviewee: [Name]  Date of Interview: [Date]
[City, State of interviewee] Location: [City, State]

Interviewer: [Name]  Author of Summary: [Name]
[Interviewer’s organization]  [Author’s organization]

[Interviewee’s name]
[Title, Organization]

[Write a brief overview of the interviewee’s involvement in the victims’ rights movement, and highlight the interviewee’s main successes.]

Initial Involvement in the Crime Victims’ Movement

[Write a brief summary of why and how the interviewee became involved in the victims’ rights movement.]

[When the interviewee makes an especially poignant statement, turn that statement into a “pull quote.” Place the pull quote in a box, such as this, and put the box in the relevant section of the summary. Each interview summary should contain approximately two pull quotes.]

What Was the Field Like?

[Write a brief summary of what the interviewee says the victims’ field was like when he or she became involved in the field.]

The Greatest Challenge

[Write a brief summary of what the interviewee says were the greatest challenges he or she has encountered while working to help victims.]

Successful Strategies
[Write a brief summary of what the interviewee says were some successful strategies that he or she implemented to help victims.]

**Failures**

[Write a brief summary of any failures that the interviewee identifies.]

**Greatest Accomplishment**

[Write a brief summary of the greatest accomplishment that the interviewee identifies.]

**Continuing the Field’s Growth and Professionalism**

[Write a brief summary of what the interviewee identifies will contribute to the field’s growth and professionalism.]

**Vision for the Future**

[Write a brief summary of the interviewee’s vision for the victims’ field.]

**Greatest Fear**

[Write a brief summary of the interviewee’s greatest fear for the field.]

* This interview summary is based on the questions asked during the OVC Oral History Project. If your SOHP’s Project Partners develop different questions, adjust the summary categories accordingly.
Sharon English’s career began by working with juvenile offenders but, by 1978, she had seen enough victims of those offenders to shift her work to trying to help their victims. Her work then focused on victim assistance in the juvenile corrections system, including developing offender accountability programs and the Nation’s first “Impact of Crime on Victims Program. She is also the survivor of the murder of her mother Chloe.

Initial Involvement in the Crime Victims’ Movement

Sharon English was a parole agent with the California Youth Authority when she first became involved in the victims’ movement. She had been doing a great deal of work with one 16-year-old parolee when, one day, she went to his home to tell him about a job she had found for him. When she arrived, she found his 14-year-old girlfriend sitting on the curb, badly beaten.

English remembers asking herself, “What am I doing?” At that same time, awareness about domestic violence was growing. Shortly after this revelation, English began monitoring state funding for nonprofit organizations that were working on delinquency prevention and community corrections. Through a series of challenging conversations with a local judge, crime victims and her supervisor, James Rowland (the “father of the victim impact statement”), English began developing the California Youth Authority’s victim services program.

And she looked at me and she said, ‘So, you’re with the Youth Authority.’ And I said, ‘Oh, yes, I am.’ And she said, ‘Well, I’d like to know something about the Youth Authority. ... I’d like to find out where an offender is ... a drunk driver killed my son. And I would like to know where he is and how he’s doing. I’d like to know what his program is.’ And I said, ‘Well, we can’t release information to the general public because these are juvenile offenders.’ And she said, ‘I am not the general public. I am the mother of a dead little boy’.
What Was the Field Like?

English describes the field 30 years ago with one word: “sparse.” In the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a large activist movement following the civil rights, women’s rights and anti-war movements. An outgrowth of the women’s movement was the focus on domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. However, at that time there were very few, if any, services available to these victims. English recalls meeting several women who were starting some of the very first programs in California, and possibly the United States. She remembers, “Back then, there were a handful of programs trying to handle thousands of victims.”

“...there was a lot of momentum among people. We had a lot of crime victims willing to speak out.... At the same time a number of people were elected to office at the Presidential level and the Governor’s level who said, ‘we are interested in this issue and we’re gonna’ put some people in place to make things happen.’ Now if those things had not come together.... none of this would have happened.”

The Greatest Challenge

English considers training professionals who work in the criminal justice system about crime victims’ issues, the greatest challenge. For the most part, they are well trained about offenders’ rights and issues; yet never really learn anything about victims. English remembers being told, “don’t even read the files because you don’t want to be prejudiced about this offender.” So the challenge was getting people to think from the victim’s perspective and the impact of the crime on them. It took time and the involvement of victims who were willing to come into the institutions and talk about their experiences with the offenders. Eventually, the young men would begin to talk about the victimization in their families, and what started as an educational model became a broader treatment model.

Successful Strategies

English’s secret strategy was based on the old saying; “You don’t want the camels outside your tent. Bring the camels into the tent.” Following this idea, English worked hard to bring all interested parties to the table, especially crime victims. Bringing victims to the table and giving them a role in setting policy also allowed them to voice their concerns directly to officials. They no longer felt they needed to picket the parole board or speak to the press about how the system didn’t care. Not only did they have an avenue to voice their concerns, they knew that they were being heard. A Victim Advisory Council for the California Youth Authority was formed as a result of the initial meetings.
Failures

English believes two areas still need attention. The first is ensuring that everyone who works with crime victims receives training early in their careers and on an ongoing basis. As she sees it, “We just assume because we’re advocates and we feel so strongly about things that everybody else gets it. Well, they don’t.” English believes that the training is not just for advocates, but also for everyone in the justice system, no matter how minimal their contact with victims. The second issue relates to preparing and mentoring advocates to do this work and to keep the momentum moving forward. She realizes that so much of the early work in the movement was “built on the personalities of the people driving the issue.” English wonders what happens when they retire or die, “Who takes the lead then?”

Greatest Accomplishment

English calls our greatest accomplishment “the power of the personal story.” English admires the strength that crime victims show in coming forward to tell share their personal experiences and to tell us what needs to be done. She says, “Without the victims’ voices, we would not be doing much and we wouldn’t know what to do. So I really think it’s a tribute to the strength of crime victims, who want to get something done, to see if there’s a way to make the world a better place.”

Continuing the Field’s Growth and Professionalism

English hopes that people will view crime victim assistance as a profession and a career choice. While she encourages the development of professional degrees, she doesn’t want the field to leave behind the crime victims who want to serve. She wants to “continue to work on a way to involve them, to not cut them out of... whatever we develop.”

Vision for the Future

English has a vision of the future involving often-neglected areas—religious diversity and post-conviction services. She feels strongly that “We have neglected to understand other people and their belief systems, and that we often offend them because we don’t understand their belief systems.” English would also like the field to find a better way to provide services through the appeals process and death penalty cases. Finally, she would encourage all service providers to not be “pigeon-holed as the victim person”—to look for opportunities to be seen as someone other than the one who has suffered.

Greatest Fear

English’s greatest fear for the field is complacency. English knows first-hand that the passion people feel for this work is what keeps the victim assistance field moving forward. English feels that if the passion for the work is lost, this work might become “routine.” She also recognizes that a commitment must be made to find the resources needed to serve crime victims.
There has to be an institutional shift... in terms of public policy. And that crime victims are not just a little exit on the freeway, that they are part of the main traffic on the justice road... and that they should not be just singled out.