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Creative Solutions Found to Allow Online Access to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Collection

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Title: **University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Program: Always Improving on Our Best Practices**[1]

By Leslie Joan McCartney

Abstract:

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Collection houses over 16,000 recordings. Thousands of these do not have gift and release agreements and of the thousands of agreements we do have, most were signed before the Internet and do not mention digital transfer or permission to place online. Over the past 13 years we have made a concerted effort to obtain up-to-date Gift and Release Agreements from narrators, or if deceased, their families, and License Agreements from organizations to place more of our material online. We have also worked with Indigenous communities with regard to culturally sensitive materials and have in place agreements of when and who can listen to this material and how. This paper discusses some of the best practices we have used and successes we have had.

[1] This article reiterates, in several places, but up-dates and expands upon issues raised in a similar article by the author. See McCartney (2023) for the original article. This article is also based on a presentation entitled Creative Solutions Found to Allow Online Access to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Collection given by the author at the IOHA XXII conference in Rio de Janeiro on 26 July, 2023.

Introduction

This practical article is aimed to assist oral historians, archivists and oral history community project leaders to consider alternative ways that may adapt to new best practices when making oral history recordings accessible. We, in the oral history program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, have implemented changes to our best practices, while continuing to keep in the forefront our efforts with the ethical care of the collection and maintaining relationships with donors. By using case studies, this article will discuss the innovative ways we have adopted to obtain gift and release agreements and secondly, highlight efforts that are different yet collaborative to curate the culturally sensitive materials in our collections with Alaska Native organizations. These new best practices help community leaders and members build and foster a sense of pride and cultural identity while helping them reacquaint themselves with their traditional cultural knowledge.

But before that, a little contextual information about the oral history program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

About Us

The Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives (APRCA) is nested within the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). APRCA's overall mission is to acquire, preserve, and provide access to materials that document the past and present of Alaska and the polar regions. To achieve this, the APRCA collection includes several components: books, rare books, periodicals, manuscripts, photographs, maps, films and oral histories. The oral history collection is the largest, and really the only oral history archival repository in the state of

Alaska. Since we are the only archive equipped to deal with audio and video recordings, it is not uncommon for other libraries in the state to refer patrons to us who wish to possibly donate recordings.

The Oral History Program at UAF was established in 1981 with a mission to collect, preserve and provide access to audio and video recordings that provide insight into Alaska's history and the people who have contributed to its heritage. The oral history collection is unique in that we take donations from individuals, radio stations, community organizations, and other institutions. We also conduct interviews ourselves. The main assessment criteria for inclusion into the collection is that the materials are in good condition and that they fit our mandate. This has meant the collection over the years has taken in more than just oral history interviews; our collection also includes radio programs, university speeches and public talks, seminars or workshops with Alaskan Native Elders, documentaries and more. This makes us more akin to a sound repository at times. And because UAF is a publicly funded institution, we are required to make all of our material available to the public, but there are exceptions to the rule, as will be discussed later in this paper.

The collection itself has over 16,000 recordings on a myriad of media; from radio production sized reels down to little three-inch reels and everything in between, cassettes, videos on various media, proprietary material, wire recordings, glass records to born digital audio and video. We believe the oldest recording in our collection is from November 22, 1942. It is a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio recording of the opening of the Alcan Highway at Soldier's Summit in the Yukon Territory. Again, not an oral history recording, but one that is significant to Alaska's history. Our intake of new materials happens on a weekly if not daily basis.

Old and New Gift and Release Agreements

In the over twenty years I have spent attending oral history conferences, workshops, meetings and conferring with colleagues and archivists, I have listened to discussion surrounding the issues of navigating relationships with narrators and other relevant community members, especially around the topic of gift and release agreements. I would recommend readers to review in depth David Olson's (2024) recent publication in The American Archivist. This is an excellent article that traces the evolution of the Release Form in America. Olson's starting point for the Release Form is 1948 with the founding of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University and he details developments in the form up to the present.[2] I am sure every archive has their own story about the ever evolving forms but what follows is how we, at the UAF Oral History Program, had adapted and integrated what we have learned from colleagues, from reading the applicable literature and from our own work, into our best practices, all with an eye of suiting our patrons while honoring oral history best practices, principles and ethics.

Every archive that houses an oral history collection struggles with the fact that many of the recordings, and especially the earliest of recordings, do not have gift and/or release agreements. If you are so fortunate to have that paperwork, chances are that the forms are inadequate for today's electronic world. Who could have imagined in the 1980s let alone in the 1940s and 1950s that the technology we have today in making recordings almost immediately available online, on a device that fits in your hand, would exist. With these older recordings, the chances of the narrator or interviewer still being alive to sign up-to-date forms is remote. Many archives have moved to put the materials online and ask for forgiveness later if challenged. This

[2] David Amel Olson is the Oral History Archivist for the Oral History Archives at Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

has created much discussion at oral history conferences and workshops in recent years. Dr. Kimberly Springer for example, in February 2022, spoke to this very subject in her talk entitled "Do the Dead Care About Releases? Death, Hagiography, and Access in Colombia's Oral History Archive" at a Columbia Oral History Master of Arts virtual workshop. The answer to her question is simply no, the dead do not care about release agreements. Springer went on to say that in cases of recordings in their collection that do not have accompanying releases, they tried for about one year to contact heirs, to prove their due diligence, but in the end, this method did not produce enough results. This raised for Springer, the question of to whom do collective memories belong, especially in regard to recordings of people who are now deceased. In the end Springer concluded that archives are not storage areas. Materials deposited in archives are there to be used. The materials are part of a collective memory of humankind and therefore should be accessible.

Many of the recordings found in the UAF Oral History Program do not have gift and release agreements, and, if by chance they do, they do not mention anything about digital preservation or transmission. This is hardly surprising given that release agreements were rarely thought of or used from the 1940s to the 1970s and sometimes even later. We tried to discover when release agreements first started to be used in our collection and found that it was in the early 1980s.[3] The first agreements were very simple and said "the recordings can be used for scholarly and education purposes." The forms were signed and dated by both the informant/narrator and interviewer, with both also listing their physical mailing addresses. The 1990s saw a revision of the form where both the narrator and interviewer agreed to "transfer[ed] to the University of Alaska Rasmuson Library my title, interest and copyright to the interviews

[3] This is based on a recording accessioned in 1983, UAF Oral History Program call number Oral History 83-02.

recorded with me on [date]. According to its policies, Rasmuson Library makes oral history recordings available to researchers, writers, scholars, and the interested public." As before, both parties signed and dated the agreement and their physical addresses were included.

Another decade rolled in and in the early 2000s the agreement forms were again updated; this time it reflected the emerging digital era. These agreements read:

> I [name] of [mailing address], transfer to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library my title, interest, and copyright to the audio/video recordings conducted on [date]. I understand that the Rasmuson Library makes oral history recordings available to researchers, writers, scholars, students and the interested public. I agree that the Rasmuson Library may make these recordings electronically accessible via local area networks or the Internet for circulation and preservation purposes. I agree not to hold the University of Alaska Fairbanks liable for unauthorized use of these recordings by third parties. This release does not restrict the undersigned from retelling their stories to others or otherwise reusing the verbal information they have shared with the UAF Oral History Program. In addition to the signatures and addresses as collected before, now the Oral History Manager also signed and dated the agreement.

Another update to the agreement form came in 2013. Up until this time, the agreements created by faculty and staff. In 2013, the new agreements were created with the assistance of the UAF legal department. Our current agreement reads:

> Thank you for your generous contribution of knowledge to the Oral History Archives. We welcome the opportunity to have the audio/video recording made with (name) on (date). The Oral History Archives agrees to preserve your recording and make it available to the public.
>
> In consideration of the role of the Archives in preserving and making your recording available, we ask you to agree to the following:
>
> I, (name of narrator), transfer and convey to the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Rasmuson Library my title, interest, and copyright, if any, to the recording.

> I also agree to hold the University of Alaska Fairbanks harmless for how it makes the recordings available and how it preserves them. I further acknowledge that I have been informed of the following:
>
> - The Oral History Program makes recordings available to researchers, writers, scholars, students, and the interested public.
> - The Library may make this recording electronically accessible via local area networks, the Internet, or other electronic means for access and preservation purposes.
> - While the Library only intends to make the recordings available for educational and/or non-commercial purposes, by signing this form I release the Library and the University from liability in cases where individuals who access a recording might violate these conditions.
>
> Please be assured that we will do all that we can to inform users of these conditions and thereby minimize the potential for misuse. **None of the abovementioned conditions restricts you from re-telling and/or recording again any of the information you gave on this recording.**
>
> I have read and accepted both the terms of the Oral History Gift and Release agreement as well as the Interview Restrictions provided.

The agreement is signed and dated by the narrator, interviewer along with their contact details, which now includes an email address if applicable. The Collection Manager also signs and dates the document and there is a section that asks if the recording is also going to be archived in other instructions and if the answer is yes, name and contact details are required.

It is clear from the above examples, and also in the examples that Olson (2024) provides in his article, that agreements have become lengthier and more complex over the years. With the explosion of AI technology in the past year, we are beginning to ponder if it is tine again to review and possibly update our agreements with the inclusion of an AI component. At this point we have no clear idea of what this might look like if we were to do this, but we are watching to see how colleagues in the field are also reacting to the new techology, and if they will be incorporating AI into their future agreements or not.

But these agreements do not fit for all over our recordings. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper many recordings in our collection are from radio stations, or they are recorded speeches at the university by visiting scholars and University presidents, or were gifted to us from an organization. These would fall into Springer's collective memory but we wanted to avoid any future trouble to the university, or radio station, or community organization in future if we made the recordings electronically available, so we asked for the advice on what to do from UAF legal department. The solution offer to us by them was a license agreement, which reads as follows:

> The University of Alaska and the University of Alaska Fairbanks hereby grant a perpetual, non- exclusive, royalty free, paid-up, worldwide license to the Rasmuson Library for use of the University of Alaska oral history audio recordings created between January 1, 1940 and December 31, 1999 that are currently held by the Rasmuson Library in its oral history collection. The Rasmuson Library is expressly authorized to make these recordings available through its Oral History Program to researchers, writers, scholars, students, and the interested public for access and preservation purposes through any means available, including but not limited to electronic means and the Internet. The recordings shall be available only for education and/or non-commercial purposes.

The agreement was signed by both the University of Alaska president and chancellor. At the start of each decade, we are having the president and chancellor sign a new agreement to cover that decade. The signing of these agreements has helped us make hundreds of recordings in our collection now available to researchers and the public.

We then approached radio stations around the state requesting that they also sign a similar license agreement for the recordings they had given us over the years. Not a single station refused; they all gladly signed an agreement again freeing up hundreds of recordings. We then approached organizations such as the Pioneers of Alaska and the Tanana Yukon Historical

Society; both organizations had given us substantial cassette collections over the years. Again, they gladly signed again making it possible for us to link their recordings directly into our library catalog. We drew up short PowerPoint slides and/or manuals and gave them to the organizations to help their members locate the recordings online and easy instructions on how they could listen to them directly online. But despite these efforts, several thousand recordings were still without agreements to allow to make them digitally available to preserve and to access.

We are fortunate in Alaska; the state may be geographically large but the population is less than other states. Save from just a few larger centers, most Alaskan communities are small both in population density and in geographical size. These factors have a positive outcome for us, people have extensive and robust kinship ties; within a particular community people are going to know other people or be related to them. The same could be said about the Oral History Program at UAF; we are small but we are strongly connected to many of the Alaska communities and we maintain a rapport with all who donate materials to us as well as to the patrons who request use of materials in our collection. At times we act as detectives: a patron requests a recording, there is no gift and release agreement or if there is, it is one that does not include electronic use. So, we reach out to a known family member or community member requesting that permission be granted. Yes, this is a laborious and at times, a time-consuming exercise and sometimes we are not successful in our search. But, many times we are rewarded and the agreements are signed thus granting us permission to make materials accessible. We have used this type of searching method historically to obtain release agreements for our recordings when planning to use them in one of our Project Jukeboxes. Project Jukebox was originally developed in 1988 using Hypercard. It was the first digital access point to oral histories in the Oral History Program's collection at UAF. Over the years the delivery platform has changed but it was, and

continues to be, a way to integrate oral history recordings and associated archival materials such as film, photographs, maps, and text with recordings. In the case of putting recordings on Project Jukebox, great care was taken to locate narrators or their surviving family members and obtain their consent to publish the interviews online. Very few declined but if they did, their interviews, although they still remained in the overall collection, they did not become part of a Project Jukebox. Given the work involved in this sleuthing, it was not reasonable to assume, with such a small staff, that we could devote the same efforts to locate every narrator and interviewer and obtain release agreements for the remaining thousands of recordings in the collection. Coupled with this dilemma was the fact that technology had now evolved to the point with our Library Catalog that we could link recordings and transcripts directly into the library catalog record for easy patron access and patrons were now expecting to find everything online.

I was fortunate enough to be able to attend John Neuenschwander's workshop at the Oral History Association's forty-sixth annual meeting in 2012 entitled 'Oral History and Law.' Himself an oral historian and jurist, Neuenschwander had published the second edition of his *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* only a few years prior. During the workshop, Judge Neuenschwander discussed a scenario of what he would do if a plaintiff (and interviewee or the heirs of an interviewee) brought a case before him where a researcher, scholar, or some other individual used an oral history interview that did not have a gift and release agreement or other legal documents that laid out ownership and use conditions. His decision would rest on to what extent the researcher, scholar or other interested individual tried, in good faith, to contact the narrator or next of kin to obtain permissions, or whether the archive housing the material did the same. He determined that if a researcher, scholar or other individual had tried in good faith to make contact with the interviewee, or relied on the archive's due diligence to do the same, and

they could prove it with a document trail of actions, then he would not rule in favor of the plaintiff (the person bringing the suit), but in favor of the defendant who had tried their best but could not locate the narrator or next of kin. This was a lightbulb moment for us. A new procedure was born. We set up a spreadsheet to track and document our attempts to find narrators/interviewees. Relying on the communities' inter-connectedness, we decided to make three attempts to try to locate narrators or next of kin using our own known connections in the communities, through social media, google searches, telephone directories and obituaries. We would document each attempt with dates and results and after three attempts we would consider placing the recording online. Should anyone in the future ask that it be removed, we would. We implemented this new procedure, placed several recordings on-line and waited. This new best practice gave us positive results in ways we never dreamed. We quickly had several patrons contact us saying that they just found their grandmother, or great-grandmother, or grandfather or great-grandfather's recording online. They didn't know it even existed and they were so happy to perhaps have heard their relatives' voices for the first time. One patron called me, in tears, to say that she had spent the morning listening to grandmother. Her grandmother had passed away before she was born and this was the first time she had heard her voice. All of the patrons who contacted us were thrilled and wanted to know if we had more recordings by other family members and if they could also have copies. We make digital copies free to family and/or community members and when we have asked if they would sign a release agreement, none refused. If we have recordings by other family or community members, we ask them to help us contact them and again, this proved to be beneficial to all involved and more recordings were released. This new best practice has been very successful for us and our hope is that this success inspires other organizations, archivists and oral historians to adopt similar practices.

Collaborative Curation of Culturally Sensitive Alaska Native Recordings

Since its founding, the UAF Oral History Program has always been sensitive and sought advise from members of the Alaska Native communities on the ethical care and use of their recordings placed in our trust, especially those that may contain culturally sensitive materials. Four from our many examples will be illustrated here. Details have been kept vague in some sections so that materials, people or groups cannot be specifically identified as per our agreements with them.

Glass Records

We have in our collection four acetate glass lacquered discs that was transferred to our department from the UAF archives when they began to process the Dorothy Jean Ray Papers after she passed away in 2007. Ms. Ray was a noted ethnographer of Native Alaskans.[4] The records were clearly marked Aleut (Attu). We found this odd as this was not Ms. Ray's area of study. The papers in her collection offered no clue as to what these records were or why she had them. Playing an acetate disc actually destroys them and it did not appear that these records had ever been played. Funding was found to send three of the discs (one is badly damaged) to the Northeast Document Conservation Center to be digitized using IRENE technology. Without actually physically touching the record, IRENE's high magnification cameras photograph a 'line-scan' and then software then reads and translates the image back into sound. When the digitized audio was returned to us along with the records, it was determined that the speakers were speaking, and singing, in Unangam Tunuu, a language in the Aleut language family also

[4] Some of Ray's notable books include: *A Legacy of Arctic Art* (1996); *Aleut and Eskimo Art: Tradition and Innovation in South Alaska* (1981); *Artists of the Tundra and the Sea* (1980); *Eskimo Art: Tradition and Innovation in North Alaska* (1977); *Eskimo Masks: Art and Ceremony* (1967); *Ethnohistory in the Arctic: The Bering Strait Eskimo* (1983); *The Eskimos of the Bering Strait 1650-1898* (1975).

known as Unangan, Unangas, Unangax̂ and Aleut. It is the heritage language of the Unangax̂ (Aleut) people who live in the Aleutian Islands, Pribilof Islands and Commander Islands in Alaska. The voices on all of the recordings are those of the same two people: a man and a seemingly very young woman whose voice was distinctively high pitched. We asked Mr. Moses Dirks, a native speaker and teacher of the Unangam Tunuu, along with UAF Linguistics Professor Anna Berge, who specializes in Unangam Tunuu, to listen to the recordings for us and verify what the contents of the records were. They confirmed that the language spoken and sung was indeed the Attuan dialect of the Unangam Tunuu language. The songs they were singing were common folk songs and it did not appear that anything culturally sensitive was being sung or spoken about. The speakers at one point identified themselves and Mr. Dirks had personally known them. They had passed away but did have children living. I contacted one of the children and visited with him and his wife, giving them a copy of the digitized audio. The son had not known of the existence of the recordings and welled up with tears when the audio was played. His father had died many years ago and he had never heard his father ever sing. In discussing what we could do with the audio, I explained we could make it public through the library server, or to patrons who requested it, we could send it to them electronically. This visibly upset the son; his parents had experienced very tragic and difficult lives. He did not allow them to continue to be hurt, or the memory of them harmed, as they had now passed away, by the recordings possibly being misused. He would agree only to the recordings being preserved in our archive if we did not make them available on the Internet or give copies to others. Interested people could only listen to the audio in our offices and could not make copies for patrons. I agreed. A few years went by and I was contacted by a film company that wanted to possibly use the audio in a film they were making that had involved the singers on the records. The producer insisted I reach out

to the family for permission. I did but the son was firm, no. I have not contacted the son again when other similar requests have come to explain to those who contact us that we must comply with the family's wishes. When one producer was in Alaska, he did come into our offices to listen to the recordings but again I was obligated to inform him of the family's wishes. To end this story, we did however discover the mystery as to why Dorothy Jean had this recording. The records had been made by her husband, anthropologist Verne Ray, when he met the people in Seattle after they had been released from a Japanese Prison Camp at the end of WWII.

Spring Dance[5]

Everyone has 'problem' collections and the UAF Oral History Program has their fair share of them. Despite my attempts to learn other languages, I am completely monolingual, as is the staff that works with me. When recordings in our collection are in an Alaska Native language, we rely on language speakers to help us learn how to curate the materials in a way that is culturally appropriate and ethical. One such collection I am calling is the Spring Dance. Some of the recordings we have were made as part of a larger radio program made decades ago. The overall collection has over 300 recordings in ten different Alaska Native languages, including English. Without anyone to assist us learning about what was on the Spring Dance recordings, we kept them 'restricted' meaning they were not available to the public. That is until a speaker of the language contacted us wanting to listen to them in hopes of relearning and revitalizing the songs that go with the dance and its larger ceremony. We asked him if he would take all the recordings back to his community, let Elders listen to them and then tell us how we should best curate them.

[5] This is not the real name of the dance; I have tried to keep the identify of this dance vague as requested by the community.

He agreed. It took many months for us to hear back from him but when we did, he came back with four lists. The first list detailed what recordings we could make available to the public. They could be listened to at any time and digital copies could be given to patrons. On the second list were recordings that could only be listened to in our office and only in a particular month of the year. This was because these songs were traditionally only allowed to be sung and heard in that particular month. List three pointed to recordings that could be listened to in our office, in only a particular month of year, and that patrons first had to gain permission from the Tribal Council if they wanted copies. The final and forth list were of recordings that needed patrons first to gain the permission of the Tribal Council to listen to in our offices. The onus would be on the patron to seek permission and we mutually agreed on a form that patrons could use to make the request and once granted and signed by the Tribal Council, we could process the request to the specifications detailed in the permission form. We were happy with this solution and so was the Tribal Council so it has been implemented. To date we have never had a patron who has gone through this process but the procedure is there and ready for anyone who wishes to access the recordings on lists three and four. This case study gave us the knowledge on how to be the stewards for this culturally sensitive material and more importantly, it gave this community recordings that helped them relearn and revitalize a culturally important tradition that had been almost lost.

Aqqaluk Trust

We have in our collection 2,377 recordings that we made between 1974 and 1981 that were made as part of the Spirit Program. These were public meetings where Iñupiaq Elders' recorded their

memories of family life in small towns above the Arctic Circle in Alaska.[6] Many of the Elders described essential Indigenous survival skills such as hunting techniques, clothing production and food preparation traditions and recorded long-established, orally transmitted moral maxims and principles of Iñupiaq ethical behavior. The Spirit Program was funded by NANA Regional Corporation Inc. and therefore they were the rightful owner of the recordings.[7] At some point in time, the recordings became part of the holdings of the Aqqaluk Trust.[8] The Aqqaluk Trust has no way to make these recordings accessible and we worked with them to catalog the recordings as best we could in our library catalog with a long-term vision of linking the recordings and transcripts directly into the catalog. Most of the recordings are in Iñupiaq and at some point, someone, with the most beautiful penmanship, wrote out on yellow paper, in Iñupiaq, what was on many of the recordings. Over a period of several years, we worked with Aqqaluk Trust and with NANA Regional Corporation Inc. to put everything in place so we could link them within the library catalog. They signed a Letter of Transmittal for Organizations with us naming the UAF Rasmuson Library as the custodian of the physical digital files without any divestment from NANA in the materials themselves. The agreement gives us permission to make the recordings available to students, scholars and members of the general public with direct online access. After the agreement was signed, new members of the board at Aqqaluk Trust became concerned over what the contains of the Iñupiaq might be and asked us if we would refrain from

[6] The Iñupiaq are a group of Indigenous Alaska Natives whose traditional territory spans northeast pf Norton Sound on the Bering Sea to the northernmost part of the Canada/United States border.
[7] NANA is a for-profit Alaska Native Corporation that was formed as a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), passed by the U.S.A. Congress in 1971.
[8] The Robert Aqqaluk Newlin, Sr. Memorial Trust is named after one of NANA's most influential leaders. Born in Noorvik Alaska, Robert was elected as NANA's first President when the corporation opened for business in 1972. Robert held several positions in the corporation over the years. He recognized that in order to survive in a changing world, young people needed a strong cultural identity but that they also needed to be educated so as to be prepared for careers and jobs. In the early 1980s he helped lead efforts in developing Iñupiaq Ilitaqsiat values. When he passed away in in 1989, the Robert Aqqaluk Newlin, Sr. Memorial Trust, known as Aqqaluk Trust was formed to honor his legacy. Aqqaluk Trust strives to growing future leaders through education, cultural connection and Iñupiaq Ilitaqsiat values. Their mission is "empowering the Inupiat through Language, Culture and Education."

putting anything online until they formed an Iñupiaq speaking working group who would go over the transcripts and recordings, and once they selected ones they deemed were suitable for public distribution, they would give us a list. If they discovered recordings that they did not want to be made public, we would work out an agreement with them similar to the one we had made with a Tribal Council about the Spring Dance discussed above. We agreed. Patience is needed when working with many communities in the north. Board and staff members come and go, projects get put on hold when other issues arise and take precedence in a community. It has been a few years now and we continue to wait to hear from Aqqaluk Trust, touching base with them a few times a year to see what progress is being made. One day this project will be completed and it will be done so to the level of ethical care the organization requests from us.

Future Projects

I am often asked in presentations and in classrooms about the ethical care of Indigenous recordings in our collection and frequently cite the above examples of how we work with communities to steward their culturally sensitive recordings in a way that honors, respects and keeps the intended wishes of those who made the recordings in the forefront. By speaking about this in public forums, I am then contacted by researchers who are thinking of archiving their project recordings with us. This is an opportunity to discuss in advance of a project, what they want to see done with their materials and what we need in order to archive them. These conversations sometimes happen over the course of several months or years. One such new project began a few years ago. The researchers had initially contacted me when they were considering submitting a funding application for the project. We reviewed all the necessary details and then I did not hear anything from them again. This is not usual, projects change or do

not get funded and I get so many of these requests I do not keep track of them. Fast forward about five years when the group contacts me again saying they have recordings for us to archive. Sadly, the project team had changed and my advice had not been shared with the new team. There were many problems with the collection. To name just a few, the recordings were not in a format we could archive, there was personal information on the recordings (the recorder had been left on when people were asked their banking information so they could be paid an honorary for example) and many of the Gift and Release agreements were incomplete or were not completed correctly. I was unable to take the materials into our collection. This was a good learning experience for them to learn what was required to achieve archival recordings and a good opportunity for us to educate these researchers on the best practices of conducting and archiving oral history recordings. Moving forward, a new phase of the project is to be conducted in the near future, dependent of course on funding, and we have met again to discuss best practices for conducting the interviews and what is needed to be achieved in order to archive the recordings with us. This particular project will likely contain culturally sensitive materials so we have already discussed that there may be a need for a unique agreement about access to some of the materials. The researcher is currently discussing this with the narrators and community and we will take their concerns into consideration when drawing up the agreements that will be used in this project. I also offer to meet with the narrators/community to discuss how they want us to curate culturally sensitive materials. I also offer to provide free training courses in interviewing techniques and best practices. I feel that by offering this, the team will be better prepared to conduct their interviews, be well versed on what is required in order to archive them and we in turn benefit from being able to access good quality recordings with the applicable supporting documents being in order.

Conclusion

By using examples and case studies from the Oral History Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the aim of this article was to assist oral historians, archivists and oral history community project leaders to consider alternative ways that may adapt to new best practices when making oral history recordings accessible. I urge practitioners to be creative in their thinking and approach to making archival holdings usable through accessible online means. Documenting a digital or paper trail of due diligence in attempts to seek out narrators or their families is a good sound practice. Getting creative agreements with organizations or communities regarding the ethical use of culturally sensitive materials can be time consuming but, in the end, agreements can be made that reflect the wishes and use of the archived materials by others. Further, sharing your own experiences by writing an article or speaking at a conference that traces the evolution of best practice, such as Olson and this article do, helps others in the field think more broadly and creatively about what they can do to provide ethical accessibility to their archival holdings.

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