

Veterans Oral History Project

The Veterans Oral History Project (VHP or the “Project”) unites diverse communities around a common purpose: collect, preserve and make accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war. VHP fulfills its mission through a nationwide network of volunteer interviewers using guidelines provided by the Project. Veterans’ narratives, historic data, press resources and information on the Veterans History Project can be found at www.loc.gov/vets.

The Project collects first-hand accounts of U.S. veterans from the following wars:

- World War I (1914-1920)
- World War II (1939-1946)
- Korean War (1950-1955)
- Vietnam War (1961-1975)
- Persian Gulf War (1990-1995)
- Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts (2001-present)

In addition, those U.S. citizen civilians who were actively involved in supporting war efforts (such as war industry workers, USO workers, flight instructors, medical volunteers, etc.) are also invited to share their stories.

Type of service: individual volunteering, group volunteering

Difficulty level: moderate

Special skills: none

Resources:

- Digital audio or video equipment
- Microphone
- Interviewee release form (all required forms are available in the VHP Field Kit at www.loc.gov/vets/kitmenu.html)
- Biographical data form

Project instructions:

VHP relies on volunteers throughout the nation to collect veterans’ stories on behalf of the Library of Congress. Volunteers record and submit first-person narratives by wartime veterans.

Step 1: Register for the Program

Volunteers should go to the VHP website to register and learn more about the project www.loc.gov/vets.

Step 2: Recruit Volunteers

Contact others and ask who would be interested in joining or helping with this project. Talk to your friends and family, members of organizations you are active at and tell them the benefits of such a project and secure their buy-in.

Maximize your volunteers’ skills and interests and put them to work. Identify people to can fill the following roles:

- Identify veterans
- Help secure space for interview
- Help lead interviews
- Lead reflection and recognition efforts with the volunteers

Step 3: Recruit Interview Subjects

Generally, volunteer interviewers identify and locate veterans based on:

- a. Community knowledge or word-of-mouth (in which case neighbors and friends identify someone as a veteran)
- b. Contacting a local veterans organization

In both cases, interview subjects are self-identified veterans (either by what they have communicated publicly or by institutional affiliations)

Step 4: Conduct Interviews

Interviews have taken place in a myriad of locations across the country: homes, schools, offices, television studios, organizational headquarters, Congressional offices, outdoors and indoors. Based on best practices in the field of oral history and anecdotal experience, interviews are best when conducted in a quiet, well-lit room and avoid noise from: (a) fluorescent lights, (b) chiming clocks, (c) heating and cooling systems, (d) ringing telephones and televisions, (e) other conversations.

Step 5: Obtain a Release Form

VHP requires a release form in order for the oral history to be a part of the public archive. The VHP legal release allows the interviewee to retain copyright, but clearly states that the interviewee content may be viewed by researchers and members of the public in perpetuity.

This release serves to ensure that the veterans are fully knowledgeable about the accessibility of their interview content. Individual stories are voluntarily submitted to the Veterans History Project and are placed in the Library's permanent collections as they are received.

Step 6: Submit Interview Material

Send in the materials according to the VHP guidance. Two copies of the interview are required (one for you, one for the veteran) and a copy of any other items you are submitting. (VHP is unable to make copies of any items once you have submitted them.)

Make sure you fill out all the forms marked REQUIRED. (Additional copies of the forms may be printed from the VHP website.) Guidance on the Audio and Video Recording log are found on the VHP website.

Please send original materials and forms to the Library of Congress via a commercial delivery service such as UPS, FedEx or DHL. (Expedited delivery is not a requirement.)

Additional Project Tips

The Veterans History Project provides training workshops free of charge to Congressional offices, organizations and communities that wish to participate in the Project. VHP-affiliated oral historians and folklorists contracted through the American Folklore Society conduct the training workshops and provide an overview of the VHP process, guidelines, as well as a Field Kit.

To coordinate a training workshop, VHP requires:

- Four to six weeks advance notice
- Address for the training location
- Twenty-five or more potential volunteer interviewers (and a commitment from each to record at least one interview)
- Date and time for a training session
- Name and contact information for an onsite coordinator and point-of-contact for the VHP trainer

Additional Resources

- VHP General Information www.loc.gov/vets
- VHP Field Kit www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/fieldkit-2008.pdf



- HandsOn Network www.handsonnetwork.org
- Community Blueprint www.the-communityblueprint.org