

GROUNDSWELL: Oral History for Social Change

Keeping True to Our Politics: Power, Accountability & Ethics

*What practical and ethical challenges do we face in this work?
What strategies can we use to address them?*

Suggested Instructions:

1. Choose someone from your group to take on each of the following roles:
 - Facilitator – keep the conversation going and on topic, make sure everyone has a chance to participate, ask clarifying questions
 - Note Taker – jot down key ideas, questions, and themes
 - Recorder – set up and monitor audio-recording equipment to record discussion
 - Time Keeper – stay aware of the time and help facilitator/group pace the discussion
2. Read possible questions below.
3. Invite each group member to describe a specific challenge related to the questions below that they face in their own efforts to use oral history as a method to achieve social change or movement building.
4. Choose 1-2 challenges or themes from the list below to discuss in-depth. Imagine a possible outcome of your conversation as a menu of potential strategies or suggestions for people doing similar work.
5. You will have approximately 60 minutes for this activity.

Possible Questions

Accountability

- To what or whom are we accountable in our work?
- How do different funding structures, project designs, and research strategies hinder or facilitate our ability to be accountable to those we *want* to be accountable to?
- What strategies might we use to effectively balance demands when we are necessarily accountable to multiple institutions, individuals, or communities?
- How do we balance an emphasis on “product” with the importance of “process”?

Integrity

- How can we avoid the commodification of people’s stories, while effectively amplifying, honoring and learning from grassroots and community voices in struggles for social change?

Participation

- What models/strategies can we use to share “authority” and democratize the process of knowledge production, distribution and preservation in order to strengthen our organizing and movements?
- What’s worked? What hasn’t? Why?

Collaboration, equity and equality

- What are our philosophical, political, and practical approaches to power and difference in oral history movement work?
- What ought we keep in mind when negotiating relationships with project narrators, partners, etc.?
- What do successful partnerships look like in this work?