

Descriptive Metadata For Oral History: What is Important to Know?

1

Oral History = Value + Utility

Value

- First-hand stories help us understand the personal significance of life events
- Oral sources reveal the multiple "truths" that coexist in historical inquiry
- Individuals can speak for themselves without interpretive filters

Utility For the Library/Archive

- Demonstrate that community voice matters
- Teach the community about its diversity
- Cultivate a non-proprietary and sustainable resource in personal experience
- Invite a range of promotional, programming, collaborative, and creative opportunities

Transforming individual story into shared knowledge...

2

Why Not?

- Libraries/Archives are not prepared to deal with the complex package of oral history
- Challenges stem from two main sources
 - Gap between individuals who create and those who curate
 - Absence of metadata standard or guidelines for capturing data
- At best, institutions try to make oral histories fit within systems not designed for narrative.
 - Most interviews do not make it into a repository
 - Of the sound recordings that do make it into a repository, more than 40% are not cataloged (Heritage Health Index, 2005)

Inability to deal with this format has its cost...

Community groups surrounding repositories believe that an institutional donation makes material less accessible, like sending it into a

BLACK HOLE

3

Out of Darkness Comes Light

The **Colorado Voice Preserve**: An infrastructure built around oral history, placing the needs of that format at the center of all thinking. Cornerstone is **Maximum Accessibility...**

- An object must be discoverable
- The object's nature and content must be understandable
- The object must be available to a user
- The object must be usable

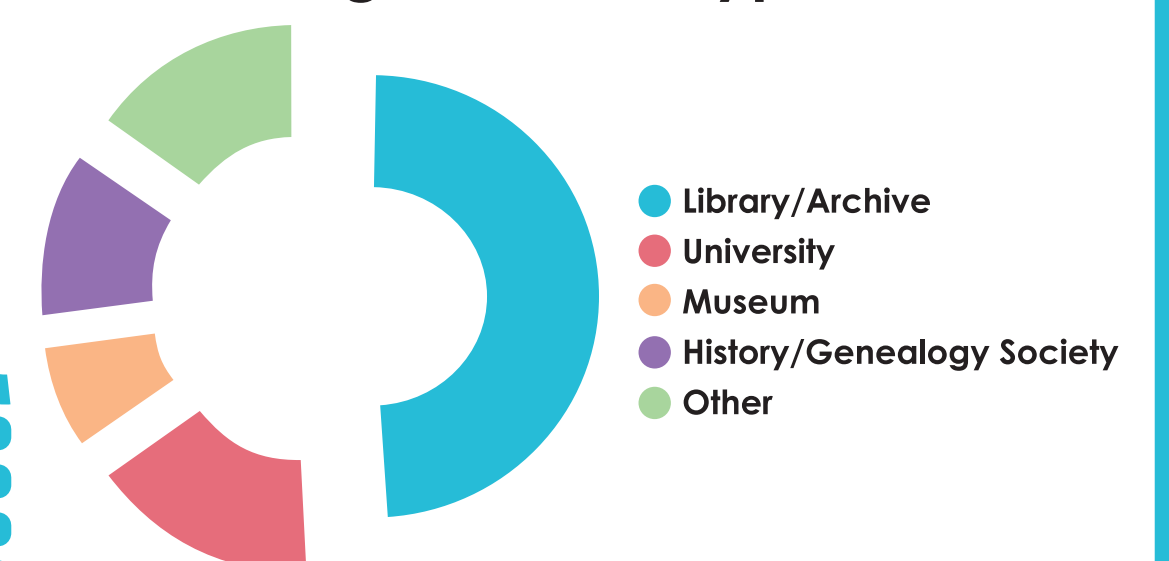
Preservation is meaningless if items being preserved can't be used...

4

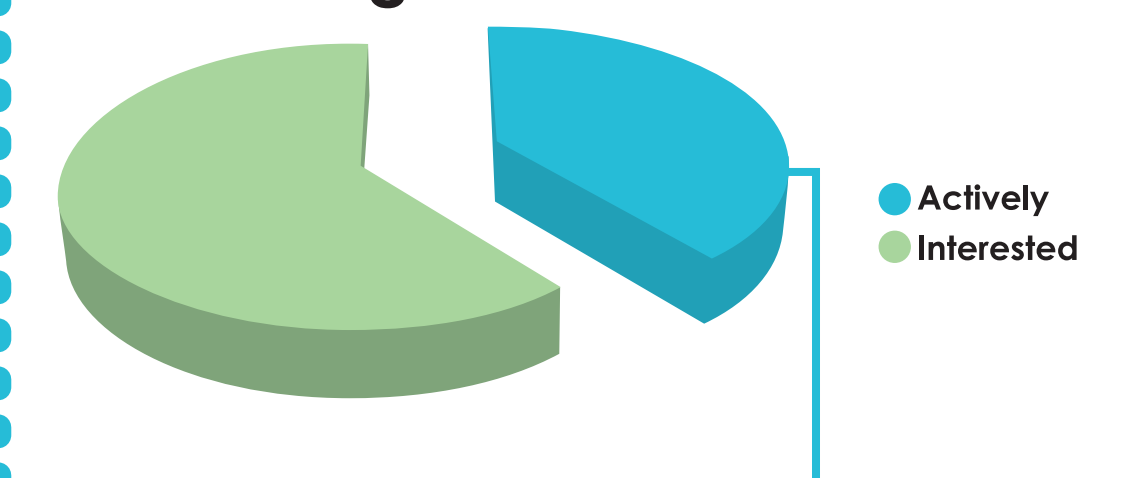
Oral Histories Are Made Accessible – How, or How Not?

Results from March 2012 Assessment in Colorado
235 Respondents

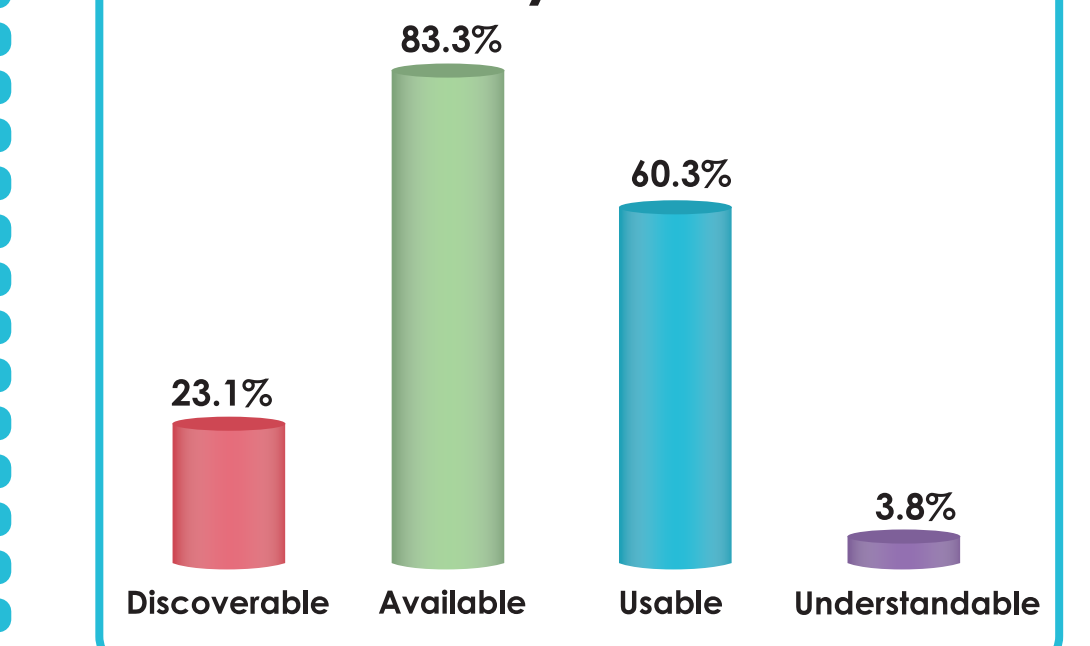
Organization Type



Working With Oral Histories



Accessibility of Interviews



- **Discoverable** = existence is made known, is exposed, can be found
- **Available** = can be reached; unrestricted
- **Usable** = reformatted; presented in contemporary formats
- **Understandable** = content described; nature, worth, quality can be grasped

Greatest opportunity in the area of Understandability...

5

Descriptive Metadata: What's It All ABOUT?

- Descriptive Metadata tackles the "aboutness" of an interview – tells something important about the interview's content, nature, or personality.
- Descriptive Metadata largely has been left to the discretion of collecting agencies.
 - **What do we need to know about a person, to understand his/her story?**
 - **What do we need to know about the setting of an interview?**
 - **What about the experience of shared creation between interviewer and narrator?**

The path forward...

6

Linked Futures

Oral History Core

1. Bring together "expert" perspectives associated with the creation, curation, and use of oral-history
2. Define oral history
3. Respond to the question "What is Important to Know"?
4. Determine essential elements, at minimal and optimal levels
5. Develop templates for capturing the data
6. Decide on best schema for carrying, cataloging, and sharing the information

Linked Open Data

If you think about things like oral histories, or archives, those are very much related to people, and to places, and to time periods. And those are great links... I can't think of anything that doesn't really link well. Although, of course, when you get to things like sound... you're going to have to have good metadata.

–Karen Coyle ("Libraries and Linked Data: Looking to the Future," July 19, 2012, WebEx)

7

Reality is Imagination that has Become consensus

When enough people commit to the same picture, we will have a reality where individual story **CAN** become shared knowledge.

colorado
voicepreserve

