



HSIRB Oral History Guidance

The Oral History Association defines oral history “as a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.” As such, the purpose of an oral history is to help explain the past through unique individual testimonies which are not anonymous. Oral histories differ from qualitative research in that techniques used in qualitative research such as language coding, comparative analysis, and generalization of knowledge are not utilized. <https://oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>

Because oral histories normally are not seeking to add to the “generalizable” body of knowledge, they do not fall under HSIRB review because they are “deemed not to be research” as explicitly enumerated in 45 CFR Part 46.102 paragraph (l) subsection (1). It is expected that activities related to oral history conform to established professional ethics and to the Principles and Best Practices of the Oral History Association (<https://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>).

There may be instances where an Investigator’s oral history project does include aspects of Human Subjects Research activities and thereby falls under the purview of the HSIRB. An Investigator or research team can submit an Oral History protocol via Cayuse IRB to determine and verify if the project does or does not meet the definition of Human Subjects Research. The CSUB HSIRB expects the Investigator will do their due diligence to ensure compliance with federal & state regulations and CSUB HSIRB policy. Additionally, student led oral history projects must be conducted with faculty guidance.

For assistance with submission of a Cayuse IRB protocol, contact Gwen Parnell, Research Compliance Analyst at gparnell@csub.edu.

If you have any questions about oral history, please contact the Director of the CSUB Historical Research Center.

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