**Guidelines for a Successful Oral History Interview, Spring 2017**

**Before the interview…**

* Get basic biographical information about the person you are interviewing, as well as a list of organizations, important events, and/or occupations that your collaborator anticipates mentioning. This way, you will recognize terms when they come up and the terms may help you prompt interesting recollections.
* Schedule and confirm the interview date and time
* Make sure you have the right equipment, that it’s working, and that you know how to use it.
* Clarify for yourself the goals of the interview.
* Remember to bring everything you need: the address and contact information of your collaborator, directions for how to get there, your audio equipment, your video or photographic equipment, two copies of your release form, a folder or bag for any materials on loan to you for the exhibit.

**At the interview…**

* Arrive ON TIME.
* Greet your collaborator and thank her or him again for participating in this project.
* Remind your collaborator what this project is and how we will be using the materials we are collecting, which include the interview, a photographic portrait, and any materials they wish to display in the exhibit. If your collaborator does not want a photo taken or does not want her or his actual name used, this is the best time for her or him to tell you.
* Ask the collaborator to sign the two copies of the release form, one for her or him and one for us. She or he should also initial any changes she or he wishes to make to the agreement and note whether we are to omit a photograph, actual names, or anything else. PLEASE MENTION THAT THE COLLABORATOR SHOULD NOT SHARE ANYTHING THAT COULD INCRIMINATE HERSELF/HIMSELF OR ANYONE ELSE BY NAME.
* Try to sit somewhere that is quiet so there is not a lot of ambient noise.
* Set up your equipment. The microphone on your equipment should be facing the interview subject, not you.
* Remind your collaborator that you expect the interview to take about an hour.
* Start recording and slate the interview. “Slating” means you should introduce yourself, introduce who you are interviewing (spell names if necessary), tell us the date, tell us that this is for “(Dis)Placed Urban Histories,” NYU Gallatin, Spring 2016.)
* Be prepared for the interview to sometimes touch on memories or stories that stir up emotions. You may want to have a tissue handy for this purpose.

**Interview structure….**

* LIFE HISTORY (15-20 minutes): Even though we are most interested in the collaborators’ thoughts and observations about neighborhood change, we want to know about *them* too.
  + “Tell me a little but about where you come from…” (family, geography, culture, etc.)
  + “Before we get to talking about neighborhood change, I’d like to hear a bit about you. Tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, what it was like.”
* You will always need to ask informational questions, but the majority of your prompts should be open-ended. Examples:
  + “What did you think about that?”
  + “That’s interesting. Tell me more…”
  + “Why do you think that happened?”
  + Describe…
  + “So what’s that like?”
  + “What I hear you saying is that…”
  + “Could you say any more about that?”
* You’ll also need to ask follow-up questions. Here are some good techniques:
  + “Had anything like that happened before?”
  + “Have you always felt that way?”
  + “What kinds of stories have you heard about this from others?”
  + “Where did you learn about this?”
  + “What would you like to see happen? What do you think will happen?”
  + “I want to come back to something you said a while ago….”
* Some questions that might be useful for this particular project are:
  + “When you tell someone where you are from, what do you tell her or him?”
  + “What was a typical day in the neighborhood like when you were 10, 20, 30, now?”
  + “Tell me about your community. Is your community the same as your neighborhood or different? In what ways?”
  + “Tell me where you go in the neighborhood now. Are these the same places you would go 10-20 years ago? ”
  + “Tell me about shopping for everyday things, like groceries or supplies, in the neighborhood. How is it the same as or different from how it was 10-20 years ago?”
  + “Is there anywhere in the neighborhood where you do NOT go and why?”
  + “If there were two things you could change about your neighborhood, what would they be?”
  + “What do you like/dislike about Melrose/the South Bronx today?”
  + “If you moved away from Melrose/the South Bronx, what would you miss most? Least?”
  + “In what ways would you say you are involved in or active in your neighborhood or community?”
* General guidelines:
  + Let the collaborator lead and you follow.
  + Allow for uncomfortable silences.
  + Show encouragement or listening by using non-verbal, rather than sound-based, cues. Non-verbal cues can include smiling, nodding, facial expressions. Cut back on audible laughing, uh-huhs, tapping the table, or creating extraneous sound. DO show openness by not folding your arms and by making good eye contact.
  + Don’t be afraid of contradictions in a story – sometimes that’s information you need to know.
  + Don’t get too stuck on dates and names.
  + Don’t worry if your questions aren’t phrased beautifully. Can always rephrase.

**When the interview is coming to the end…**

* The interview should not take longer than an hour, so as you are nearing that point and you feel you have what you need, notify your collaborator that you are coming to the end.
* Ask if there are any stories or details your collaborator would like to make sure to include before you end the interview.

**When the interview is over…**

* Stop recording.
* Thank your collaborator.
* Ask if she or he has any questions. If you don’t know the answers, write them down and ask me.
* **Find out the best way to share the interview with your collaborator. S/he may prefer only the transcript, only the recording, or both.** S/he may be computer savvy and able to use Dropbox, or not. We will be meeting with our collaborators again AFTER you conduct your interviews, so that may be a good time to share what you have.
* A few days later, call or send a follow-up thank-you e-mail or note.