

This generic **framework for the collection and preservation of Student-Led Oral Histories of Local Officials** was developed as part of a civic education initiative to encourage students to engage with their community and learn about the different areas of local government. Kansas has more than 4000 units of local government, from city councils, county commissions to school boards, drainage districts, townships, rural water districts, etc. All have some form of governance that impacts local communities and their residents. Leadership may be appointed or elected.

This framework is adaptable for grade levels, from elementary, middle school and high school. It also plays a role in the [classroom-based assessments](#) which the Kansas Department of Education requires.¹ The CBA is given in grade levels 04, 07 and either 10, 11, or 12 for the 2023-2024 school year.

Different interviewers, using their own creativity, style and interests, may choose to modify the suggested interview questions to fit the specific individual being interviewed. However, the interviewer should remember the **goal with all the interviews** is to

- contribute to a better understanding of the many levels of local government in Kansas and its democratic processes;
- meet and engage local leaders involved in governance of local communities and institutions;
- supplement the documentary record;
- provide insight to the human dimension of the policy making process.

General Considerations:

1. WHO SHOULD BE INTERVIEWED? Each proposed interviewee should be thoroughly researched and selected by the class by using compelling questions such as these:
 - a. What is the greatest impact of person or position (City, County, School Board or other governing boards) on my community?
 - b. What are the qualities of an effective government leader in a democracy?
 - c. Why is diversity important in government?
 - d. What is my role in government?

¹ The Kansas Social Studies Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) is a tool designed to measure student understanding of the five History, Government, and Social Studies (HGSS) standards and four associated benchmarks that support the discipline-specific application of content in authentic situations. The CBA is based on the fourth benchmark outlined in the HGSS standards document . It allows Kansas school districts, classroom teachers, and students the opportunity to develop their own assessment that best supports local decisions concerning content, sources, and products . The Kansas Oral History Project provides several compelling questions, frameworks, a multi-disciplinary crosswalk, and instructional activities for use by classroom teachers to prepare learners for the state-level CBA .

It is important to do background research on the interviewee and on the historical period as well as history and characteristics of the culture your interview subject represents. This research will allow the student to develop a list of topics and questions to use in the interview. Sources could include newspaper articles, a previous oral history interview ([see KOHP's collections](#)), internet searches, historical societies.

2. WHO SHOULD DO THE INTERVIEW? Each interview should be conducted by a trained student interviewer to ensure consistency and quality. Training should cover how to follow up on a point made by the interviewee. One resource is "[How to conduct an oral history interview](#)" by Kimberly Houston. This link is based on recommendations from the Oral History Association's Best Practices and covers preparation, interviewing technics as well as how to preserve and provide access to the interview. Younger students may be paired with an older student and work as a team; or two students may work as a team.
3. WHERE SHOULD THE INTERVIEW TAKE PLACE? Interviews should be conducted in a quiet and comfortable place, conducive to dialogue **without interruption**. The location could be the office of the interviewee, or a public library, or a quiet area in the school where the students are located. It could also take place in the classroom so all students could observe, take notes and comment on their observations at the conclusion of the interview.
4. HOW SHOULD THE INTERVIEW BE RECORDED? Interviews should be **video-recorded if possible**, with an audio recording for backup or the soundtrack digitized for transcription.

Most smart phones have cameras that are suitable for recording an interview. A tripod or some way to stabilize the camera is essential to ensure a good quality. Some schools have video cameras that can be utilized. Consider asking one of the local camera shops or TV stations to assist with the video recording and subsequent editing. Another strategy is to ask high school students to work with lower grade students on recording and editing the videos.

5. IS IT NECESSARY TO TRANSCRIBE THE INTERVIEW? KOHP has all of its interviews professionally transcribed but professional transcriptions of student-led interviews may not be possible. Technology can help. Search the internet (Google) for "*how to transcribe an audio recording*" and you will find numerous options, such as [Reddit.com](#) and others. All interviews are transcribed "as spoken" with editing only for correcting misspellings, missing or incomplete names, or removing extraneous comments of the interviewer.

6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. **Interview Length** will vary from 15-60 minutes. There is no set standard. **All interviewers and interviewees must complete and sign a Project Release Form** or Informed Consent to be interviewed.

Interview Content:

The Interview Template below is a standard format for all the interviews.

- A. Each interview begins with an **Introduction of Student-Led Oral History Project and the Interviewee**. Use this outline as a guide to the Introduction:

Interviewer: "Good Morning. Today is [insert date] and we are in [tell where you are doing the interview]. My name is [insert name] and I am [a student at xxx school.] The other members of my team are [insert names.] This student-led interview of a local government official is part of our school's civic education initiative that encourages our students to engage with members of the community.

Today we are interviewing [insert name of local official]. [He or She] is currently serving as [insert title of office] and was elected to that office in [insert year]. [add more if you wish.]

Welcome Mr. [name]

- B. **Interview Questions** generally have several parts:

- background,
- entry into politics,
- policy accomplishments,
- career path after leaving public office.

Here are some examples of questions which could be asked.

BACKGROUND: Tell us something about your life before entering politics. Are you a native Kansan? Had your family been involved in politics before you ran for office? When did you develop an interest in politics? Early in life, or later? Did you have a mentor in politics? Who did you admire in local, state, or national politics while growing up? Did you have any reservations about running for office? What was your motivation for running for _____ [office] _____? Why this particular office?

It is important to listen to the response to see if the interviewee makes a statement or comment that the interviewer should ask a follow up question or ask for clarification.

ENTRY INTO POLITICS: Tell me about your first political campaign. Why do you think you were successful? If not successful in the campaign, what did you learn that helped you in the future.

POLICY and LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The interviewer will be responsible for becoming familiar with the office holder's policy record. What does your local unit of government do? What are (were) your accomplishments while in office? What were your goals?

The interviewer should probe the legislator's answers for a better understanding of how policy was created, who participated and with what result. If the interviewee collaborates with others, what role did each person play.

CAREER PATH POST-LEGISLATIVE: This section provides an opportunity to follow the person through the rest of their career and find out the impact service in the _____ had on that person's life.

- a. As you look back at your time in public office, of what are you most proud?
- b. Why did you leave?
- c. What changes did you notice during your service (e.g., how it worked, how it worked with the other branches of government, how it organized and conducted its work)?
- d. How do you think the policies you worked on during your time look today?