



INSTITUTE OF PRAIRIE AND INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

Resource Guide for the Collection of Oral History in relation to the search for IRS Unmarked Burials

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The following document was prepared as a resource for Indigenous communities who wish to conduct oral history research to support their efforts to identify the unmarked burials of Indigenous children who attended Indian Residential Schools. This resource includes the following sections:

- Important Considerations— this section outlines the necessary steps to ensure that oral histories collected from IRS survivors can withstand cross examination in a legal context
- Draft Free and Informed Consent Form— this template will allow communities to ensure they are collecting oral history from IRS survivors in an ethical way
- Draft Interview Guide— this template will support communities in determining what oral history to collect

[Important Considerations](#)¹

When embarking on oral history research the following are necessary in order to ensure results can withstand cross examination in a legal context:

1. Support from an experienced and reputable lawyer (especially with respect to needs for affidavits).
2. Good quality audio recordings made of all interviews. Use a WAV file format at the highest sample rate available (e.g., 192 Hz or better). Olympus and Marantz make high

¹ Thank you to Peter Armitage for his input on this section.



quality recorders but for the best quality, use a recorder and plug in an external microphone. For external microphones, a Cardioid Mic from Audio-Technica or similar works well for a seated interview with a microphone stand.

3. Ability for the interviewee to be interviewed in their language of choice with quality interpretation available.
4. Transcription and close translation by qualified individuals. Transcripts should be time coded.
5. Biography of the interviewee. They may not be direct witnesses and so the question becomes how do they know what they know and who told them what? On what basis can we assign them authority (i.e., say that they are credible transmitters of the information).
6. Collection of significant life events to help assign dates (i.e., when their little brother was born or older sister was married).
7. Information should be collected via individual interviews and not through focus groups.
8. The person conducting the interview (the interviewer) should be a credible person free of obvious political motivation and supervised by a court credible social scientist (the Principal Investigator) who can certify methods and objectivity of the “research”. Interviewers and/or social scientist (Principal Investigator) should be prepared to testify.
9. Create secure data storage with redundancy (e.g., keep an additional copy at the lawyer’s office).
10. Include data validity checking protocols (e.g., cross checking across interviewees, follow-up interviews with supplementary questions to resolve problems of lack of consistency across interviews, etc.).
11. Ensure that sufficient metadata is collected. See Terry Tobias’ data quality standards.²
12. A robust methods statement on how the oral history evidence was shared by the interviewee and documented by the Principal Investigator.
13. All “data” recorded by the interviewers reviewed by the Principal Investigator.
14. Appropriate budget to ensure the ability to do all of the above listed.

² Tobias, T. 2009. Living Proof: the essential data-collection guide for indigenous use-and-occupancy map surveys. A joint publication of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and Ecotrust Canada, Vancouver.



Draft Free and Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

[Describe the project. For example, this project involves interviewing residential school survivors in efforts to locate unmarked burials of children who died while attending a residential school and/or while running away/fleeing a residential school.]

RESEARCHERS

[Introduce the researcher(s) working on the project including contact information for the Principal Investigator/lead researcher.]

YOUR PARTICIPATION

[Let participants know that their participation is voluntary and describe what they will be asked to do (i.e., partake in an interview with x number of questions that will take x number of minutes to complete) and how or if they will be compensated (e.g., cash honorarium). Let them know that they can refuse to answer any questions during the interview, without explanation. Also let them know that they can choose to stop the interview at any time and can ask that the information recorded be withdrawn and the information will be immediately destroyed.]

YOUR PRIVACY

[Explain who will have access to the interview results and how and where the information will be kept safe. Describe how people who will have access to the interview results are bound by a confidentiality agreement to honor strict rules of confidentiality. Explain how their name will not be attached to the information without their written permission and how instead a confidential PIN can be used.]

RISKS AND BENEFITS

[Describe the risk to the interview respondent such as emotional distress that the questions may cause. Provide them with toll free phone numbers to IRS support systems. Explain how the positive benefits include finding unmarked burials and the closure this can give to some families and awareness this will bring to non-Indigenous Canadians regarding the genocidal policies that Canada was built on].

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE USED

[Explain how the interview results will be used. For example, the information will be used to identify areas to be searched using remote sensing techniques such as Ground-penetrating Radar to identify unmarked burials].

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

[Explain how the researchers involved in this study will not use the information collected through the interview for their own professional or financial gains or purposes.]



CONSENT AND SIGNATURE

By signing this form, I agree that:

- The study has been explained to me YES NO
- The possible harms, discomforts and benefits (if any) of this study have been explained to me YES NO
- I understand that I have the right not to participate and the right to stop at any time YES NO
- I have the choice of not answering any specific question YES NO
- I am free now, and in the future, to ask any questions YES NO
- I have been told that my personal information will be kept confidential and protected YES NO
- All my questions were answered YES NO
- I hereby consent to participate in the study YES NO

Signature of Participant:

Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness:

Name _____ Date _____



Draft Interview Guide

Biographical Information-

- What is your full name (and maiden name)?
- Where were you born? What is your date of birth?
- What First Nation do you belong to?
- What Residential School(s) did you attend and for what years?
- [The following questions are designed to solicit personal information concerning the witness's circumstances and ability to recount what others have told him or her. Some interviewees may find these questions offensive.]
 - Can you briefly describe your career history?
 - Have you had any trauma/injuries or diseases that may impact your memory?

Direct Observations-

- Do you remember any children dying or disappearing? Can you remember their names, how old they were, where they were from, or any other information surrounding their death or disappearance? How old were you when this happened?
- Did you ever witness a child being buried or participate in the digging of a burial in which a child was later placed? Did the place where the child was buried have a marker at the time? How old were you when this happened?
- While attending residential school did you ever see anything leading you to believe there were unmarked burials in the area surrounding the school (i.e., coffin boards, bones/hair, piles of dirt)? Can you please describe where or mark it on a map? How old were you when this happened?

Oral History-

- Do you remember hearing about any children dying or disappearing? Were you told their names, how old they were, where they were from, or any other information surrounding their disappearance?
- Did you ever hear about a child being buried or about students participating in the digging of a burial in which a child was later placed? Did you hear if the place where the child was buried had a marker at the time?
- Have you heard stories from other people about the presence of burials in the area surrounding the school?
- Who did you hear it from? What relationship did you have with the person who told you? What year did they tell you? Is that person now deceased?
- [The following question is designed to collect information on the general reputation of the person from whom the witness learned of the event or story.]
 - Was the person that shared the information with you a well-respected elder?
- Did they directly observe it or did they hear it from someone else?
- Can you please describe where or mark it on a map?

