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LET THEM TELL YOU WHAT WILL WORK

How Oral History Can Improve Public Policies and Programs

For a while now, NASA had been using technologies like satellites, remote sensing and weather modeling to track the melting of the ice. Its researchers knew the Arctic was where climate change hit first and hardest, and they were relying on this research to help shape climate change policies worldwide. But there were limits to what the scientific data could tell them about the situation up there. It took some oral history with local reindeer herders to unlock the next phase of NASA's work.

They found that nomadic herders held vast traditional oral knowledge about pasture lands and migration routes. Once shared, it enabled NASA to map in much more detail the progress of climate change across the northern regions. NASA is calling it 'co-produced data' and using it to improve decision-making and policies around climate change. Recognising the narrators as 'equal partners', NASA describes their oral history contribution as being of 'worldwide impact'. The space agency has even drawn up its own ethical standards for gathering oral histories so that they can do more of these collaborations in the future (Maynard & Pogodaev, 2012 and Maynard et al. 2008).¹

Who This Book Is for

The use of oral history to improve public policies and programs is a growing, transdisciplinary practice that is set to keep expanding. So this book is designed to be equally helpful for two audiences:

- oral historians, either fledgling or experienced, who are open to finding new relevance and applications for their work; and

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- professionals in any discipline of the public or not-for-profit community sectors, who are new to oral history and want to learn to use it to improve their own field's policies and programs.

Whichever side you're coming from, and whatever your previous level of experience, the book includes a comprehensive *How To* section that will leave you fully equipped to use this *hidden gold* and do such a project yourself.

The field is wide. By 'public' we mean here any aspect of the state, governmental, non-profit, charity or community sectors, and any activity that's done for the public good, without the profit-making goals of the private sector. By 'policies or programs' we mean the services, projects and investments that the non-profit sectors provide. And you will see that nowadays the term *oral history* covers not only accounts of events from years or decades ago but also *contemporary* oral history, such as refugee teenagers' accounts of their experiences over the past six months while fleeing from war in their homeland. So don't be misled by the term *history*: the oral histories discussed here could just as easily be called oral 'testimonies', as they often express very recent experiences and current views.²

You will see that there are already many successful examples out there where the 'hidden gold' of contemporary oral history is being used to improve public policies and programs. But this is the first publication to

- define oral history for public policy as a distinct field, explaining exactly how it works;
- bring together a broad range of case studies from around the world;
- present several dozen examples from the author's own working practice, showing how and why they were effective;
- provide a complete and detailed methodology for doing oral history for public policies or programs, whether your background is in oral history, in public policy, or you're new to both; and
- situate the practice within a theoretical and socio-political framework.

This first chapter introduces you to the practice and shows why it's so valued by policy-makers. Chapter 2 shows how oral history for public policy relates to other types of oral history. Chapter 3 gives an exciting flyover of successful case studies from around the world in disciplines as diverse as medicine, agriculture and race relations. The four ensuing chapters—almost half the book—comprise the *How To* section, walking you through every detail of doing your own project, big or small. And in the final chapter we'll review all that you've learned, seeing how best to apply it to advance both your own career and your chosen discipline, whether that's in oral history or in public policy.

Before we embark on this journey together, I'll mention my qualifications for being your guide to this transdisciplinary subject. Raised in rural Ireland where oral culture remains central, I became a university lecturer on literature, then moved into social and political science. I've written two other books about oral

history, one on ecological agriculture and the other on refugees. Those books were also about oral history ‘for public policy’ because for the past two decades, I’ve worked on public policy—internationally, nationally and most of all at city and regional levels.³ Across my time with city government, I was responsible for an overall budget of £1.5 million for involving the public in shaping policy. And for over a decade, I was chief editor of a public policy magazine in Cambridge, England, communicating policy to the communities affected by it in over 40,000 copies per year.⁴ (I’ve spent most of my working life in Cambridge, first researching and teaching at its famous university and then working for political institutions based there and elsewhere: you’ll see the city emerge like a living character across this book’s many case studies.⁵)

Chapter 3 brings you colorful case studies from around the world, but most of the book’s ‘teaching and learning’ moments are down to earth examples from my own experience of using oral history for public policy, and most are at city and local levels. I feel this is important because they show you that whoever you are, wherever you are, once you’ve absorbed the techniques in this book you could start doing your own oral history for public policy right now. You’ll see that to influence public policies and programs, you don’t have to be elected as a politician, employed by government or on the staff of a campaigning organization. This book will show you that ‘hidden gold’ opportunities lie all around you in your immediate community. As one commentator has explained, ‘democratic governments can only move when they know that the move will be widely accepted. As a result, the directions of change often come from outside the parliamentary system [. . .] from people like us’ (Handy, 2015).

Addressing Concerns about Using Oral History to Improve Public Policies and Programs

Oral history for public policy is like traditional oral history except that it goes two steps further: after the interviews, it extracts narrators’ relevant insights, needs and recommendations, and it presents them to policy-makers in a convincing way. Some might feel this defiles a certain purity in oral history, which should remain archived in museums and libraries as a version of official history, not tampered with or ‘applied’ to anything. Others might feel it’s dangerous to ‘use’ oral history at all, because it could then be mis-used to serve the agendas of a particular group.

Rest assured that the chapters of this book are thoroughly girded with the ethical and professional restrictions that have to be observed around this kind of work. One of the purposes of the book is to provide these ethical guidelines so that the practice—which is already happening anyway all over the world—can be defined and taught to recognized professional standards that protect the interests of all concerned, especially those of the most vulnerable.

For oral historians who want to focus entirely on ‘pure’ oral history, that work still needs doing. But this book is for people who also feel drawn to help deliver applied, transdisciplinary projects for the public good. And we don’t need to

apologize for this: it is now a driving ethos for most funders, who require applications to demonstrate measurable engagement with, and impact on, the public good.

But the concern about narratives being misused to serve the interests of the powerful is a real one and has been a driver in my own working life. In this book you will see how the private sector—in market surveying, product design, advertising and lobbying—deploys formidable skills in interviewing, empathy and narrative to increase their profits. This book is about moving that powerful lobby aside and using oral history to build the resources of civil society so that the voices of the less powerful can take their place too at the decision-making table. I moved from pure academia to also working with policy when I saw how relatively easy it is to (a) get access to decision-makers, (b) have your voice heard by them and (c) influence them with convincing arguments, *once you know how* . . . This book shows you how to do that for and with your own oral history narrators.

A Methodology That Engages with the Socio-Political Context

In this time of fragile, volatile politics and economics, this book is not calling for any sort of utopia. Today, we are surrounded by at least four alarming currents, namely,

1. the widening inequalities between rich and poor;
2. governments' inability to resolve even current crises like those of the banking system, refugees, wars in the Middle East and climate change—not to mind the crises ahead;
3. a public increasingly alienated from the political process and distrustful of political leaders; and
4. populist movements rejecting the knowledge-base of elites, giving rise to a 'post-truth' society manipulated by vested-interest media, commerce and other forces (Flinders, 2016).

Manifestations of all this in the past year alone include Britain's 'Brexit' vote to leave the European Union, the campaign that carried President Donald Trump to the White House and the epoch-defining announcement to the press by Britain's minister for education that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' (Menon & Portes, 2016). So is this book about restoring the 'Vox Populi'—the voice of the people? If the voice of the people had to mean the 'post-truth' populism that produced the outcomes just mentioned, you might well feel like running a mile from it and bolting the doors of universities and parliaments behind you to seek refuge in unbiased, truthful research and the ideals of democracy. But it doesn't have to mean that.

The methodologies proposed here for involving community intelligence in decision-making do not empower or facilitate:

- mob rule, where the masses get to make decisions that are neither wise, ethical, sustainable nor good for the overall collective;

- the ‘post-truth society’, with its baying denial of expertise and any form of objective truth; and
- what’s called ‘NIMBYism’, where small, empowered lobbies from the public get to say ‘*Not In My Back Yard*’, foisting undesirable outcomes onto others’ back yards instead.

The fact is that genuinely independent expertise and democratic decision-making will be even more important in the future, not less so. But the wake-up call that we must heed from the alarm bells of recent events is the need to *close* this chasm between expertise and political authority on the one hand and the world’s public, on the other—not to widen it further by running away. In its own enraged way, the public is rightly calling for dialogue and decision-making to be rebalanced in more egalitarian, round-table collaborations between power, knowledge and the people.

Avoiding mob rule, anti-intellectualism and ‘NIMBYism’ are routine challenges of the democratic process whenever experts consult with communities. As preparation for my own work as a local government official, I received extensive training in managing and screening out those distortions. But distortions exist on both sides: consultative processes must also rein in the superiority complex, vested interests and camouflaging jargon that can be wielded by elites. These are the challenges when bringing any stakeholders together for decision-making, but they’re not a reason not to do it. This book shows how oral history processes can help strengthen decision-making methodologies for the future and how you can contribute to this corrective, democratising movement.

Because, although they don’t use this term, the angered public is right that the ‘*helicopter*’ approach to problem-solving (where elites fly high above the masses, deciding what’s good for them and sending down pre-packaged solutions that were remotely designed elsewhere) is woefully inadequate for tackling the problems we face (Silk, 1996). One top decision-maker in a public organization I knew used to declare with pride: ‘*My job is to take the helicopter view*’. He thought this was a sign of his superior, synthesising intelligence and the purpose of his very high-paying job. But it’s not an up to date form of intelligence for solving twenty-first-century problems. (It’s actually the kind of twentieth-century thinking that got us into these problems in the first place.) In the decades ahead we face complex, multi-factorial, systemic, unpredictable problems, and to tackle them we need forms of intelligence that are collaborative, networked, embedded, synergistic and grounded. This book gives a methodology for helping to deliver that, with many inspiring examples of it having been done successfully.

Who Is Doing Oral History to Improve Public Policies and Programs?

You don’t have to be NASA to improve a public policy, service or program using oral history. You don’t even have to be an experienced oral historian. Let’s say you’re a regular visitor to a retirement home, visiting a relative. You get the feeling the residents would be happier—healthier even—if they had an organized

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social activity. So you interview them to find out which entertainments they enjoyed most in their earlier lives, and what version of those they might like to see organized weekly in their communal lounge. You present the findings and their suggestions to the manager, highlighting any added value this new policy might bring in terms of physical movement, more social interaction, moods enhanced by happy memories, improved sleep and so on. The manager provides the entertainments requested, and notes the benefits that result. Does that sound like a useful intervention? In Chapter 3, you will see how in the UK this simple template has been developed and extended into a clinically recognized treatment for dementia sufferers.

Across the book you'll see that in professions from law enforcement to town planning, oral history is already improving public programs in this way—by tailoring them to fit the target audience better, using local knowledge to shape solutions better adapted than those imposed from outside by professionals alone. In fact, to get a public policy or program approved and funded now in a Western democracy, you are pretty much expected to include such service-user input right from the design stage. This opens the door to lots of influence for communities and is a huge opportunity for those with oral history skills. Even if you're a total newcomer to the policy world, you don't need any prior experience with public policy or programs—you only need to find out as much as you can about the particular one you're working on. For instance, if a proposal for a new highway meant your home would be bulldozed to make way for it, you'd find out all you could about the proposal. That's the kind of detail you will need for doing oral history work on the policy—just that of an informed, interested party.

Note that oral history interviews can speak *in support* of a cause, calling for a certain policy or program to be implemented, or they may voice a protest vote, building an argument *against* a policy or program. They can be done by a policy 'insider' employed by policy-makers to improve their policy, or a policy 'outsider' who is from a campaigning charity, represents a community or is just a private individual, working unpaid. The size and cost of the oral history project can range from a budget the size of NASA's to a project run by one volunteer in a community hall. But external influencers can be big budget too: think of Greenpeace campaigns for the Amazon or the World Health Organization combatting female genital mutilation. Both have used oral histories to power up campaigns and help achieve their policy goals.

Figure 1.1 shows how oral history can influence before, during or after a policy or program, at the stages of feasibility study, project design, midway progress report or retrospective review. Sometimes interviews can be just *hypothetical*—to test the feasibility of a potential future program. Or they may be done early on to feed into the *design stage* of a program. They can be done *mid-stream* to assess a program's progress and impact while there is still time to adjust it based on feedback. Or they can be done *retrospectively*, to uncover lessons for improving future programs. The NASA project brought in oral history midway. Understandably, the researchers had thought they could manage the science on their own. It was

	At the feasibility-study stage of the program	... or at the design stage	... or at the mid-stream stage	... or at the retrospective stage
Oral histories in favor of the program	√	√	√	√
Oral histories against the program	√	√	√	√
Oral histories done by a program 'insider'	√	√	√	√
Oral histories done by an 'outsider'	√	√	√	√

FIGURE 1.1 Stages when oral history can be influential, whether done by an 'insider' or 'outsider'

only once they waded into the complexities of the Arctic that they realized they needed locals' oral knowledge too.

Oral history could be done at just one of these phases or at all of them, with the same narrators or with different ones. Those you interview to assess the feasibility of a project might be different from those helping you judge the progress of the program midway, who must have hands-on experience of its impacts so far. To assess a program in retrospect, you might listen to different speakers rather than those who had helped you design the program: the latter might report more positively on a program they had helped to design, while others might have a dimmer view of it.

Why Oral History Should Be at the Policy Table

People who haven't worked in policy usually don't realize the importance of the session where a proposed policy is debated and then voted in or out. Of paramount importance is (a) who happens to turn up, (b) what they say and (c) the way they say it. I've noticed that the submissions that come closest in time to the actual moment of voting, and are the most emotive, impactful or concerning, tend to exert the most influence, often causing decision-makers to change their mind at the last minute.

And remember that, although national governments pass the laws that define the broad strokes of public policy, the majority of that policy is fleshed out and delivered by local government—elected locals sitting and voting in assemblies very near you. In Europe, this apparatus of local government is much more extensive than in the US, delivering a web of far-reaching public services and programs

deep into the community. But even in the US, it's recognized that a great deal of policy-making is at local level, not in national congress (Heffernan, 2015). To quote one teaching project at the Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics, Annenberg Public Policy Center in the US,

[d]id you know that the level of government that most affects you daily is much closer to home than the White House, the halls of Congress or even your state capitol building? Your local government—city council, county commissioners, etc.—is the level of governance responsible for establishing the speed limit on the streets in your town, setting rules for business, industrial and residential development, funding the public schools and ensuring there are adequate numbers of police and firefighters . . . These representatives live and work in your area and have a significant impact on your life every day. [. . .] Just as it is part of every representative's duty to act on behalf of or his or her constituents, it is also your duty to make sure your representatives are aware of problems and concerns that exist in your community and areas that are in need of improvements.

(Annenberg Classroom, 2009)

I was once employed to organize an international policy conference for the Swedish government, to tackle corruption in the international arms trade.⁶ They wanted to legislate to rein in the infamous corruption in parts of the arms trade, which does so much damage to the economies of developing countries. But when the conference convened in Stockholm, I was taken aback to see representatives from the world's major arms companies sitting there in person behind their name-plates at the conference table. I soon learned that these powerful corporations do not, if they can avoid it, let governments sit down to consider policy changes without the companies being present to drive the debate in their own favor. Mingling over drinks afterwards with the legal reps from the arms companies, they told me this was their job—traveling around the world to wherever the law or policy on arms sales was being discussed, to ensure their companies' interests were well defended in the final outcomes.

I once attended the European Nutrition Conference, a large event where academic nutrition scientists pool findings and develop policy proposals. But I was surprised to see it was officially sponsored and thoroughly branded by—have you guessed it?—Coca-Cola and McDonald's.⁷ At either of those conferences, well-crafted oral history submissions would have had a significant impact. In both cases, there were compelling, even shocking, narratives that could have been told in the public interest.⁸ As well as hearing from the arms companies, we could have heard first-hand testimonies that I later wrote about, gathered from Indigenous women sold into prostitution as a result of arms trade corruption in Mexico (Hoffman-Buckley, 2002). And we should have heard the accounts gathered from survivors who had lost limbs to machetes in the conflict over arms sales in the Niger delta (Hoffman-Buckley, 2002).

At the nutrition conference we could have been shown the moving footage where celebrity chef and nutrition campaigner Jamie Oliver does interviews in the homes of parents who feed their obese kids junk food (Seacrest, 2010). There's a poignant real-life moment where a single mother, after hearing some good-humored home truths from Oliver, sobs in his arms: 'I'm killing my daughter, aren't I? *'Fraid you are, darling!'* the Cockney says, agreeing amiably before they get down to working together on a healthier diet.

Oral history would have been welcomed and influential at that arms-trade conference organized by the Swedish government. In its absence they had no oral evidence to hand—there were no other strong voices present—except the arms companies' well-rehearsed presentations. Sitting around that table in Stockholm, with the North Sea frozen solid against the quays outside, I saw *by its absence* the power of oral history for public policy. The next day I stopped doing purely academic work on policy and started gathering oral histories for it.

Logistically, oral history is well suited to the task in at least six ways. First, one constraint for communities has always been that, in the actual moments when policy is being debated and decided, there is not enough time, physical space or financial resources for a whole community to troop in and share their views with policy-makers. Second, communities are diverse places with a rainbow of different, nuanced perspectives on any single issue: one voice cannot express them all. Third, an oral history submission can include testimonies from a range of people whose local knowledge could really improve the policy, but who would never themselves submit written contributions or declarations to policy-makers. Fourth, even if they did, a document they prepared themselves wouldn't have the same focus, insight, depth and relevance as the testimony drawn from them by your skilful interviewing (a craft you'll learn in this book). Fifth, you will be the strategic intermediary between the 'raw' interviews and the final submission to influence decision-makers. From the oral archive you have gathered, you will select the most relevant extracts and present them in the order and formats most likely to influence policy-makers (you'll master this art in Chapter 7).

Last, communities don't have those professional communicators that the private sector employ as lobbyists. But the good news is that no one expects—or even wants—community statements to be slick and well honed like those of arms-company lawyers. If they were, they would lose their credibility. The recognized power of oral testimonies is that—like the junk-food mother sobbing at the realization of what she was doing—they come from the community, from first-hand grassroots experience and from the heart. You don't need to dress them up, disguise them or put a PR spin on them. They tell it like it is, which is what they are at the policy table to do, and why they are valued.

Why Oral History Is of Strategic Value for Policy-Makers

Across this book, dozens of examples will show you the various types of value that policy-makers get from oral histories. For instance, four forms of knowledge that

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oral history speakers have in abundance are of huge material and strategic value to policy-makers, if only they could access them. These are

1. first-hand, end-user experience of the local setting that the policy or program will go into;
2. embedded, self-taught informal expertise that locals have already improvised to solve local problems;
3. local knowledge of hidden obstacles that will limit or prevent the success of the policy or program; and
4. a long-term view of the local needs and the programs addressing them, back into the past and forward into the future.

These four forms of embedded knowledge are what policy-makers tend to lack, no matter how strong their qualifications, professional experience or commitment to the issues. Without a bridge or mediator like oral history, they have no way of tapping into these perspectives in their target community. By contrast, the private sector invests huge sums to access this sort of information in their target customer group before launching a product, but public bodies don't have the wealth to do such intensive research. This is where oral history can be of real service and material value, acting as a conduit between decision-makers and the elusive information that they need from communities.

1. First-Hand, End-User Experience

The community will have end-user knowledge, whether in the past or future, of both the setting the policy is going into and the policy itself. They have either experienced previous layers of policy in that setting, or will live with the effects of this next round into the future. The relationship of professionals and policy-makers to their own policies is more remote: they design it drawing on professional information but won't live its effects day to day once implemented. And the higher their rank, the more removed they tend to be from the effects of a policy. Oral history for public policy can at least re-establish radio contact between this policy 'helicopter' and the target communities below. You'll see a stirring example in the case studies, when a wheelchair user from the housing projects confronted politicians with the personal impacts of a fee they were about to introduce for stairlifts. You'll see the effect it had when the cushioning distance between decision-maker and impacts was pulled away.

'Will it work? Will the target community cooperate and accept it? How will I look if it all goes wrong?' These are the kinds of questions decision-makers ask themselves before they approve a policy. Once, a municipal bike scheme was introduced in the flat, wealthy city of Cambridge, England, where I worked for government and where cycling is extremely popular. Most unexpectedly, all 300 municipal bikes were stolen . . . *on the very first day!* (The Guardian, 2007). Now, the Cambridge

population seem a studious, law-abiding lot. But the authorities hadn't listened quite closely enough to the local knowledge of their target audience beforehand.

Cambridge cyclists had one piece of practical experience that the politicians didn't. The politicians hadn't noticed that, though well-off, Cambridge cyclists ride battered, old, second-hand bikes. If you visit, you'll see them piled carelessly along the picturesque streets. The reason is that, cycling being so very popular there, gangs from poorer parts of the country sweep in every few weeks in lorries to steal every decent bike in sight. On arriving to live in the city, I had three stolen in a month before acquiring this local knowledge.⁹

Remember that policy-makers—who are usually elected politicians—are not normally experts in the field they're making policy for. The democratic process—'government by the people for the people'—is about ordinary people getting elected by their peers to make public decisions. That's why a nation's minister for health is not typically a senior doctor, and the minister for the environment is not usually a climate-change engineer. They are dependent on the advice and submissions put in front of them to help them make their policy decisions.

2. Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is so valuable a commodity as to be a buzzword. Locals' knowledge of those bike-stealing lorries would have saved Cambridge politicians a lot of expense and embarrassment. Like the cyclists using bikes too old to steal, this *hidden gold* improvises home-grown solutions to ground-level snags and obstacles that may not be visible from the professional's 'helicopter view'. In this book you'll see lots of examples of local knowledge collaborations that prevented public programs from failing. It might be environmental knowledge, like how the land will react at different moments, or cultural knowledge like a local superstition or taboo that will prevent a program from 'taking'.

Bikes missing from Cambridge may not seem like a big problem, so let's take a bigger one: when people refuse to use condoms in communities at high risk of spreading HIV, such as among promiscuous gay men or in parts of traditional Africa. Only the community members themselves on the ground know the real reasons why, and what approaches would convince them to behave differently. In these serious situations, there is no other way to a solution except to find it out *from them* by really listening to them.¹⁰

3. Hidden Obstacles

The hidden obstacles to a policy or program are like rocks and currents invisible under a fast-flowing river that local people know how to navigate. They also know where the hidden resources lie—the people, situations, networks and local solutions that will 'make things work', facilitating a way round difficulties. The topographical metaphors have real importance here. Unlike the 'helicopter view', locals and service users navigate through the ground-level environment,

improvising ways round its hidden obstacles and into its hidden resources. They hold a functional, interactive ‘mapping’ that lies below the radar of officials. A well-targeted oral history can pinpoint in advance the parts of a program that will be ill suited to the task on the ground or that the grassroots won’t cooperate with, so adjustments can be made to ensure there’s a policy ‘fit’.

Without this ‘fit’, public programs fail and cause four big losses—financial, reputational, loss of time and loss of trust in the policy-makers. The private sector never risks such losses. Before launching a product they invest elaborate budgets to listen in depth to the needs of their target audience, through market surveying, customer profiling, focus groups, customer journey-mapping and so on.

A famous example was Proctor & Gamble’s (P&G) twice-launched air freshener Febreze. Accustomed to annual profits of US\$35 billion, P&G was shocked when the new product flopped. So it redoubled its efforts to listen to the customer to find (a) the hidden obstacle preventing housewives from buying it and (b) the hidden solution that would get Febreze flying off the shelves. The result was a marketing triumph that’s a widely-published case study in the business press. P&G knew that the infamous ‘helicopter view’ by executives from afar would never give them those missing clues. So they hired anthropologists to be a ‘fly on the wall’ inside housewives’ homes on cleaning day (Starr, 2015 and Sunderland & Denny, 2007). The experts observed the women’s cleaning routines in minute detail, following them from room to room, tracking and measuring every movement, word and gesture until they had a Eureka moment while rewatching their own video footage. That moment showed them how Febreze—once re-marketed from a different angle—would *fit* like a suddenly ‘necessary’ accompaniment to the woman’s cleaning routine, acting like a ‘reward’ that enhanced her experience of housework. Febreze has poured revenue into the P&G coffers ever since (Duhigg, 2012 and Cohan, 2012).

This criterion of ‘fit’ is important for everyone—public or private sector, program designer or service consumer. Web designers map your clicking patterns to tailor websites that fit your navigation style. Amazon shadows your browsing to offer you tailored products. Medicine tailors drugs to your genetic makeup and even, if you have cancer, to the genes of your specific tumor. We all have to tailor products and services today to save money by avoiding waste. In a world economic crisis with no end in sight, public funding is no longer available for near misses or extravagant programs that are under-used. With complex, multi-factorial problems looming for twenty-first-century society, we must ensure that solutions fit before launching them.

4. The Long-Term View

Oral history speakers have often lived on-site for decades with the problems addressed by a proposed policy or program, as well as with layers of ‘prequel’ policies that have been tried before. They often have an especially vivid memory of policies that have failed, and why. Public policies and programs are almost

always being layered on top of previous policies that affected the setting positively or negatively. The strengths and weaknesses of previous policies are strewn like debris all over the terrain this latest policy is going into, affecting its implementation. By contrast, the involvement of professionals and decision-makers with a policy or program is usually shorter. A professional works on implementing a specific program for a few months or years and is then given another program to deliver, or moves to a different job. Timescales for decision-makers' involvement tend to be even shorter. Decision-making is a fairly short-term task: they are handed bundles of decisions to study, weigh up and decide on, for instance, *'this week'* or *'at next month's committee meeting'*. They receive as much background information as they can digest but must make their mind up based on the evidence in front of them—quite a partial, 'blinded' view compared to the full immersion over time experienced by the target community, who will live with the impacts of that policy far into their own futures.

Figure 1.2 summarizes this chapter's introduction to the ways that oral history can improve public policy. The foreground shows four primary assets it can reap from the community (first-hand experience, local knowledge, hidden obstacles and long-term overview). The background shows resulting improvements in policies that are tailored to fit, avoid waste, manage hidden obstacles and secure buy-in from their target communities.

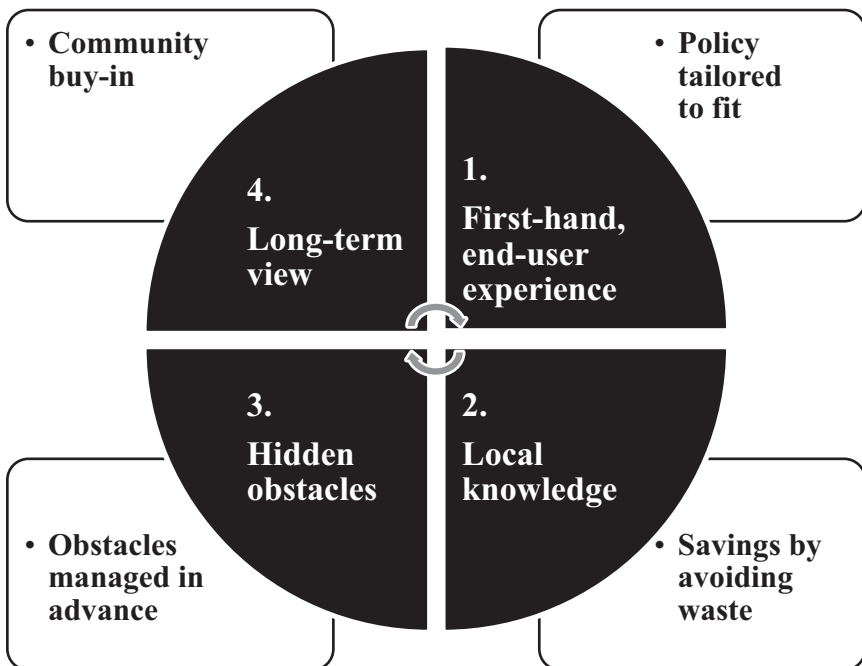


FIGURE 1.2 The eight gains from using oral history to improve policies and programs

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Oral history is now stepping up for these collaborations in creative ways that will have near-limitless applications. It's good news for the public interest, making it heard alongside the commercial lobbyists. And it's good news for any oral historians interested in new, well-funded and socially relevant applications for oral history, on a career-path with a growing future ahead.

Concluding Tip—When a policy or program affecting the public is being designed, the target audience knows best what they need. Whether you're a policy insider or outsider, use their local knowledge and hidden expertise to help tailor and future-proof any policies or services that matter to you.

Notes

1. See their brief online video *Knowledge Co-Production between NASA and Reindeer Herders across the Arctic* (Maynard & Pogodaev, 2012), summarizing their publication 'Sami Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and NASA Remote Sensing Technologies—Working Together for Adaptation Strategies' (Maynard et al., 2012).
2. For instance, the mission statement of Panos—an organization using oral history to improve foreign aid policy—uses the term *oral testimony* interchangeably with *oral history* (Panos, 2012). In Chapter 3, you'll see their amusing case study from a Zimbabwean tomato field.
3. The kind of international work I used to do on policy included my publication 'Anti-Corruption Initiatives and Human Rights—The Potentials', which became a syllabus text for the law degree at Sweden's Lund University after appearing in the international volume *Human Rights and Good Governance* (Hoffman-Buckley, 2002). A national example was the training I used to give for the UK government to policy-makers around the country, using positive practice models of my own that had been commended by government (UK Government Homes & Communities Agency, 2010).
4. The magazine was ranked by the government's Audit Commission, which inspects the quality of public services in Britain, as '*the best we have seen*'.
5. All the views expressed in this book are my own, not those of any of my employers, past or present.
6. 'Tackling Corruption in the Official Arms Trade', a conference hosted by the Swedish Foreign Office with Transparency International, Stockholm, February 2000.
7. A few months later, the alleged influence of fast-food corporations on academic nutrition research and government food policy was investigated by *The Times* (Moustrous, 2015) and in a peer-reviewed article in the *British Medical Journal*, the UK's leading academic journal of medical science (Gornall, 2015).
8. In Chapter 7 you'll see a fascinating, effective piece of oral history for public policy that was presented by a nutrition professor at this conference.
9. Too late, alas, for the municipal bikes, this local knowledge is now official knowledge. Press reports now reveal that 2,000 cycles are stolen in Cambridge annually, with an estimated value of over £1,000,000 (*Cambridge News*, 2016).
10. Examples of such oral history work are *Shattered Dreams?—An Oral History of the South African AIDS Epidemic* (Oppenheimer & Bayer, 2007), *White Nights and Ascending Shadows—An Oral History of the San Francisco AIDS Epidemic* (Heim Shepard, 1997) and *The ACTUP Oral History Project* (ACTUP, 2015).

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