



# Community Archives Center

at Tacoma Public Library

## Phase II Report

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# Tacoma Community Archives Center

## Phase II Report

### **Introduction**

This report describes the Phase II activities and outcomes of The Community Archives Center for Tacoma, a two-year IMLS National Leadership Project (LG-250126-OLS-21) being carried out by the Tacoma Public Library (TPL) with support from the University of Washington (UW). The overall purpose of the project is to bring community members and organizations together to carry out a fully participatory process to broaden participation and inclusion within cultural heritage collections. Phase II built upon the information gathered and relationships formed during [Phase I](#) to begin developing the Community Archives Center collection through collaboration with community partners. The goals of this phase were:

1. Host community events where the public could learn about the Community Archives Center and contribute to the collection
2. Partner with the community to collect, preserve, and make available content shared with the Community Archives Center through the library's [Northwest ORCA digital collections platform](#)
3. Identify and make available holdings already existing in the Tacoma Public Library's local history collections relevant to the goals of the Community Archives Center project

Section 1 of this report describes the major activities carried out in Phase II to achieve these goals, and also lists resources generated to support those activities. These resources can provide useful templates for other information institutions interested in implementing a community archive. Section 2 then describes lessons learned and recommendations from Phase II.

### **Section 1: Major Phase II Activities and Associated Resources**

Phase II was designed around community-centered collection building processes and increasing access and use of materials gathered for the project. The main goals were to build upon relationships developed during Phase I to begin creating a publicly accessible community archives collection. The Project Team aimed to increase awareness about the project and provide opportunities for community members to contribute to the Community Archives Center collection. These goals, as well as the vision for the Phase II activities, are detailed in the [project proposal](#). The Project Team carried out the following activities: Community Outreach, Community Events, Collection Building, and Identification and Access of Existing Materials.

## ***Community Outreach***

Community Archives Center staff hosted informational tables at several community events. They shared information about the CAC, connected with potential partners, and provided the opportunity for individuals to indicate their interest in participating in an oral history interview. The Community Archives Center was invited to some of these events by the organizers. At other events, CAC staff were part of a larger library presence. TPL's Outreach Librarian, who coordinates library-wide tabling activities, kept CAC staff posted on events that were of potential interest to the project. Events with CAC participation were selected based on staff availability and connections to the goals of the project. CAC staff tabled at the following events: Black History Month Celebration at the Peoples Community Center, Project Homeless Connect at St. Leo Parish, Sustainability Expo at the University of Washington-Tacoma, Salishan Outdoor Movie Night at the Salishan Family Investment Center, Salishan National Night Out at the Salishan Family Investment Center, East Side Farmers Market, and the Hilltop Street Fair.

Over the course of Phase II, Community Archives Center staff delivered presentations to several local organizations. These presentations were either held at special meetings or CAC staff were invited to attend scheduled group meetings as guest speakers. CAC staff introduced the goals of the Community Archives Center, demonstrated the Northwest ORCA database, and described options for organizations to partner on the project. Time was provided for Q&A and brainstorming with the organization about their ideas for possible collaborations. During Phase II, presentations were delivered to the People's Assembly, the Black Women's Caucus of Washington State, the Hilltop Library Planning Committee, and Radio Tacoma. Presentations were delivered to groups who expressed interest in the project but requested additional information be provided to their members.

## ***Community Events***

### ***African American Family History Event***

"A Proud Heritage African American Family History Event" was a full day of classes and educational opportunities focused on African American genealogical research organized by the Tacoma Family History Center. CAC staff offered three activities at the event: a digitization station for scanning family photos, an oral history recording booth, and filming of the event's storytelling contest. Content gathered at the event was made accessible through Northwest ORCA.

### ***Rally for Reproductive Rights***

After news leaked of Roe v. Wade being overturned by the Supreme Court, a "Rally for Reproductive Rights" was held in front of the US District Courthouse in Tacoma. CAC staff attended the event, asking for volunteers to be photographed with their rally signs

and to share their reasons for attending. Participants commented on the value of documenting the local response to this decision for users who may be investigating this topic or historical moment in the future. As maintaining individual release forms would have been difficult in the crowded outdoor environment, a group release form was developed that asked volunteers to indicate their understanding that their image and audio recording would be made publicly available through the Northwest ORCA database and other library channels. High winds and the loud surroundings negatively impacted the quality of the audio recordings. These recordings have been maintained as nearline preservation copies. For access in Northwest ORCA, CAC staff instead transcribed volunteer's responses and made them accessible as part of the item level metadata associated with that individual's photograph.

### *Poetry Picnic*

"Poetry Picnic" in Tacoma's South Park was an afternoon of outdoor activities related to poetry hosted by Write253, a local literary arts and printmaking organization, and the Tacoma Public Library. CAC staff recorded oral stories with attendees at the event.

### *Black Lives Matter Mural Project*

Local artists Dionne Bonner, Kenya Adams, Gwen Jones, Charles Taylor, and Breeze were commissioned by the City of Tacoma to create a Black Lives Matter mural in downtown Tollefson Plaza. The project was a collaboration between the City's Human Rights Commission and the Tacoma Art Museum with support from the City of Tacoma, the Tacoma Arts Commission, and Tacoma Creates. According to the artists, the goal of the mural was to "encourage Tacoma residents to recognize the plight suffered by people of color to obtain equality while at the same time continuing to challenge us to persevere in unity toward racial justice." The mural was created over the course of summer 2022. CAC staff worked with the Tacoma Arts Commission to document the creation of the mural and community response. Short oral history interviews were gathered during community painting days. Images of various stages of the project, documentation of the creation process, and video footage of the dedication and public celebration are being preserved and made accessible in Northwest ORCA.

### *Salishan Story Fest*

During Phase I, the Project Team learned from the community that there was an interest in focusing on specific Tacoma neighborhoods. Two areas in particular were identified as places where the Project Team should devote attention: the Hilltop and the Eastside. Two of the most diverse neighborhoods in Tacoma, these areas were underrepresented in current local history holdings and currently underserved by the library system following the closure of two neighborhood branches in 2011 due to budget cuts. CAC staff organized an event in Salishan, an area of the Eastside, in August 2022 and an event is being planned in Hilltop for 2023.

“Salishan Story Fest” was held in the Family Investment Center situated within the Salishan neighborhood and managed by the Tacoma Housing Authority. Staff worked with the Tacoma Housing Authority and the Salishan Association to plan the four-hour event. Attendees were invited to participate in a variety of activities. A “digitization station” consisting of two laptops and two scanners was available for scanning photos, recipes, and other items brought in by community members. A digital map was available for people to share their place-based stories. Interactive prompts were posted on the wall where attendees could share their responses to questions like “What do you love about Salishan?” or “In what ways has Salishan changed?” Library Youth Services staff set up a “make your own comic book” station to provide kids a unique way to engage in storytelling. Two recording stations were set up to document short interviews. Three prompts were provided to interviewees including:

What does this neighborhood mean to you?

How has this neighborhood shaped you to be who you are?

Please share a story about your life in your neighborhood.

Based on the demographics of Salishan, the prompts were translated into Russian, Vietnamese, Spanish, Tagalog, Somali, Marshallese, Korean, and Chinese. Release forms were also translated into each language.

While these activities ran continuously over the course of the event, a series of presentations occurred in another room. Two previously created short documentary films about Salishan were screened. These films touched on the history of the area and interviewed people about their experience living in the neighborhood which provided attendees with some grounding for the other activities. After that, four individuals with connections to Salishan shared their stories in front of the audience.

The day concluded with a screening of films created by students enrolled in a summer film camp held in the nearby Eastside Community Center. Awards, handcrafted by the local FabLab makerspace, were distributed and attendees had the opportunity to ask the young filmmakers about their work. Incorporating the debut of these films into the event provided an audience for the students and expanded the theme of how stories are told and whose story is preserved.

*Community Event Resources:* [Content Gathered at the A Proud Heritage Event](#) | [Content Gathered at the Rally for Reproductive Rights](#) | [Content Gathered at the Poetry Picnic](#) | [Content from the Black Lives Matter Mural Project](#) | [Salishan Story Fest Press Release](#) | [One Story at a Time, the Tacoma Library Includes More Residents in Its Community Archives, KNKX](#) | [Celebrating an Underserved Neighborhood Through Story Fest, Archival Outlook](#) | [Content Gathered at Salishan Story Fest](#)

## ***Collection Building***

### *Collection Building with Organizations*

Direct outreach to organizations resulted in the development of new and emerging partnerships. Many organizations indicated an interest in depositing records, pursuing digitization efforts, or organizing oral history projects with their members. Following the participatory principles of the project design, CAC staff were intentional about following the lead of the community organization and allowing them to shape the direction of the partnership. Over the course of Phase II, the following collection-building activities resulted from these community organization partnerships:

#### *Tacoma Community House*

Founded in 1910, Tacoma Community House is a community-based service center for immigrants and refugees. Adult students enrolled in the 2022

English/Language Arts 3-4 classes at Tacoma Community House were invited to participate in short oral history interviews with CAC staff. A series of questions were developed and shared in advance with participants. These questions asked participants to discuss their journey to Tacoma, how their expectations of the United States may have differed from their experience, and their future plans. The questions were developed in consultation with Tacoma Community House staff and instructors. Because the project was embedded into English language classes, the interviews were recorded in English. Oral History Release Forms were translated into the most prevalent first languages of current students. The interviews, along with images of the students, were made available in Northwest ORCA.

Based on the success of the oral history project, CAC staff met with TCH staff to discuss the possibility of including the organization's operational records, photographs, and other materials in the Community Archives Center collection. It was determined that a distributed model would be implemented that would allow TCH to retain their records onsite but for the description of those records to be made available through the Community Archives Center database. CAC staff worked onsite at TCH to arrange and describe a selection of their historical records and digitize content with high research value and anticipated community interest.

#### *Tacoma-Pierce County Black Collective*

During Phase I, CAC Staff presented at a meeting of the Tacoma-Pierce County Black Collective to provide an overview of the project. Over the course of Phase II, staff stayed in touch with organization members who were producing a documentary about the history of the group. After the film's completion, Black Collective members expressed interest in working with the CAC to preserve and

provide access to extended interview footage gathered for the documentary project along with other materials produced by the collective including documentation related to Black History Month programming and education.

Group leaders expressed concern about content produced by the Collective being reused or reproduced without consent of the organization. CAC staff discussed several options with the group for making their content accessible through Northwest ORCA while still making sure reuse of the contributed materials was in line with the wishes of the organization. CAC staff worked with the group to craft a specific reproduction and use statement and to develop an application process that would allow a committee of the Black Collective to approve reuse. While collection-specific restrictions can present logistical challenges for archives staff, the Community Archives Center is organized around a community-centered, post-custodial model. It was important to recognize the concerns of the organization and to partner with them to develop a solution that would allow preservation and access while limiting the potential for their content to be reproduced and utilized without their involvement or consent.

### *Radio Tacoma*

Radio Tacoma is a volunteer-run, low-power FM radio station that airs programming created by the Tacoma community. Initial contact was made through a member of the library staff familiar with the station and their programs. CAC staff participated in a meeting between Radio Tacoma and library staff about possible library-wide partnerships. This conversation resulted in the identification of particular Radio Tacoma hosts who were interested in depositing their past programs with the Community Archives Center to make available through the Northwest ORCA database. This initial conversation led to a collection of the full past programming catalog of three Radio Tacoma shows. These shows provide representative pieces of evidence of Radio Tacoma's programs and relate to topics not currently well represented in local history collections, particularly marijuana legalization and climate change.

### *WILLO*

The Women's Intergenerational Living Legacy Organization (WILLO) was founded by Tacoma resident Seong Shin in 2012 with the goal of bringing together "women of all ages, races and cultures to share their life stories in order to inspire others in the community." WILLO began hosting public storytelling events in 2014. These events engaged local women in discussion about their stories. Some storytellers have included Rosa Franklin, the first Black woman to serve in the Washington State Senate, Ramona Bennett, Puyallup Tribal Leader and Fishing Rights Activist, and Karen Vialle, the first woman to serve as Mayor of Tacoma. Seong Shin and other WILLO organizers agreed to transfer the extensive library of born digital videos from these storytelling events to the Community Archives

Center to be made publicly available for current and future users. The connection to this organization emerged through word of mouth, prompting WILLO to reach out directly to the CAC.

#### *Hilltop Action Coalition*

The Hilltop Action Coalition is an organization focused on mobilizing and empowering individuals, families, businesses, and organizations in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma. Through conversations with the organization about a possible transfer of organizational records, the CAC partnered with HAC to preserve and provide access to the *Hilltop Action Journal*, a print and digital community newspaper published every other month. The CAC database now provides access to digital versions, including issues that were not circulated in print form during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as physical copies.

#### *Franklin Pierce High School Ethnic Studies Classes*

Through a connection with a project partner, two local high school teachers were put into contact with the Community Archives Center regarding oral history interviews created by students in their Ethnic Studies courses. Students had conducted interviews with their family members, neighbors, and other community members each semester but the projects had never been preserved and made accessible. Students in both the fall and spring semesters of the 2021-2022 academic year had the option of sharing their interviews with the Community Archives Center. Release forms were developed in consultation with the teachers. A Student Work Release Form was to be signed by the student or their guardian to allow their class project to be shared publicly through the CAC database. Another form was signed by the person being interviewed. Some students also took photos of the interviewee and prepared transcripts of their interviews which were also incorporated into the online collection.

#### *Collection Building with Individuals*

CAC staff worked with three individuals during Phase II who contributed their materials to the Community Archives Center collection. Local filmmaker Paul Jackson shared a collection of born digital videos which include short documentaries, interviews with local individuals, and recordings of community events. Justi Pfutzenreuter, a local researcher and filmmaker, contributed her research files on the Salishan neighborhood along with her film *Narratives of Salishan*.

Local speaker, author, and musician Charles Carson donated his papers over the course of Phase II. Carson shared a collection of documents and photographs related to his life in the Eastside of Tacoma, including his relationship with Puyallup activist Ramona Bennett, his experience of violence and juvenile incarceration, and his nationally-recognized work to support local underserved youth. Much of this content has



been digitized and made available in Northwest ORCA. The Charles Carson Papers have also been used in several classes and educational programs.

### *Oral History Interviews*

An oral history interview program was established by CAC staff during Phase II. Community members had expressed interest in sharing spoken stories as part of the project during Phase I. The oral history program has become a popular way for people to contribute to the project. The format of the interview (audio or video) has varied depending on interview location, interviewee preference, and staff/equipment availability. Interviews have been conducted in library meeting spaces, the library's Digital Media Lab recording studio, at community events, or at another location requested by the individual being interviewed. Participants either expressed interest in being interviewed at an outreach event, were connected to the CAC through a partner organization, or were contacted directly and invited to participate. The program focused on recording stories from individuals who identify with underrepresented populations in Tacoma. Oral history interviews collected so far include:

[Isadore Wallace](#)

[Juanita Olivas](#)

[Ramona Bennett, former Puyallup Tribal Council Member and Activist](#)

[Cynthia Tucker, President of the Tacoma Association of Colored Women's Clubs](#)

[Reverend Bob Penton](#)

[Jamika Scott](#)

[Bernice Morehead of the Bethlehem Baptist Church and Shelter](#)

[Shondea Chapman](#)

[Kyle Jolibois](#)

[Melissa Knot](#)

[Lorenzo Cervantes, Prevention Director of the Pierce County AIDS Foundation](#)

[Chace Hunter, Director of the AIDS Housing Association of Tacoma](#)

[Janice Kampbell of the Guadalupe Land Trust](#)

[Anita Latch](#)

[Regyna Frazier](#)

[Deborah Ranniger](#)

*Collection Building Resources:* [Tacoma Community House Oral History Project](#) | [Radio Tacoma Programs](#) | [WILLO Records](#) | [Hilltop Action Journal](#) | [Franklin Pierce High School Oral History Interviews](#) | [Paul Jackson Born Digital Videos](#) | [Justi Pfitzenreuter Salishan Research Files](#) | [Charles Carson Papers](#) | [Community Archives Center Oral History Project](#)

## ***Identification and Access of Existing Materials***

The goal of the Community Archives Center to identify and mitigate gaps and silences existing in the local history collections, especially around marginalized or underserved communities, is shared by the Northwest Room, the main archives and special collections unit of the Tacoma Public Library. During Phase II, CAC interns assisted the Northwest Room with processing and digitization projects that supported this goal. This included:

- Digitization and description of specific images from the *Tacoma News Tribune* Photograph Files including images of the [Puyallup Tribe](#), [Salishan](#), [Hilltop](#), [Vietnamese refugees](#), and various [protests, strikes and demonstrations](#). Images were selected for digitization based on how they addressed topical or representational gaps in the Northwest Room's existing digital collections.
- Arrangement, description, and select digitization of local periodicals like the [Northwest Dispatch](#), [The Tacoma Facts](#), [Tacoma Indian News](#), [Northwest Indian News](#), [Northwest Asian Weekly](#), [Asian American Alliance News](#), [Jewish Transcript](#), and [The Voter](#).
- Arrangement, description, and digitization of the papers of local activists [Sallie Shawl](#) and [Arthur J. Miller](#).
- Arrangement and description of materials related to the [1990 Puyallup Tribe Land Claims Settlement](#).

These materials are now available to the public and have been utilized in Community Archives Center programs.

## **Section 2: Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Many of the core lessons learned during Phase II were similar to those discovered in Phase I and the Project Team noted how these lessons were realized across different types of project activities. These lessons were captured continuously throughout the project in the form of team reflections recorded during bi-weekly team meetings. These lessons will be particularly useful for the project toolkit, since they provide important guidance for other libraries wanting to create a community archive. Lessons learned include: the importance of networking, broad versus focused community participation, building trust with the community, and developing sustainable, equitable, and actionable partnerships.

***The importance of networking.*** At the start of the project, CAC staff established an email address and contact form for the Community Archives Center. A phone number and voicemail were also made available for individuals to contact the CAC. This contact information was distributed to community members at outreach events and through other

channels, but has been underutilized. Even when individuals chose to sign up and provide their contact information to indicate their interest in participating in the oral history program, there was a low response rate when CAC staff followed up. Cold calls or emails to organizations have typically been unsuccessful. By far, the most effective way to build community participation has been through networking and word of mouth. Individuals who have participated in the oral history program have connected others to CAC staff. When presentations have been delivered to organizations, members of those groups have become involved with the project. Outreach to organizations has been much more effective when there is a relationship developed with a direct contact or when the organization learns about the project through a member or related group. This is similar to what the project team saw in Phase 1, outreach and engagement was more successful when there was an internal champion within a partner organization.

***Broad versus focused community participation.*** Over the course of Phase I and Phase II, the Project Team had many conversations around how to encourage broad community participation while also specifically focusing on communities within Tacoma who have been historically underrepresented in local history collections. Based on community feedback in Phase I and investigation of current collection gaps, the Team continued to pursue programs and partnerships with targeted populations and geographic areas. While this approach allows the Team to build the collection in a way that addresses archival silences, it does limit participation. For example, Salishan Story Fest was promoted as an event specifically focused on that area. As a neighborhood currently underserved by the library, it was important for the Community Archives Center to make a clear commitment to working in this specific neighborhood. There was a good deal of attention on social media and other promotional channels in advance of the event, but this enthusiasm and support across Tacoma did not translate to broad, community-wide attendance. CAC staff heard feedback that many people who were interested in the event were uncertain about attending if they personally were not residents or did not have connections to Salishan. While Salishan is located on the Eastside of Tacoma, even participation of Eastside residents outside of Salishan was limited. In Phase III, the Project Team will be hosting a similar event in the Hilltop neighborhood. The marketing strategy for this event will still focus on Hilltop residents while making it clear that other Tacoma residents are invited to the event to learn more about the area and why it is a specific focus for the project.

***Building trust with the community.*** Partnerships take a long time to develop and building each relationship requires creating trust over time, especially in underserved communities. In developing these relationships, community members wanted to vet the

project by inquiring about intentions and goals to determine whether involvement would be positive for the particular community or organization. In planning Salishan Story Fest, local Pastor Tony Martin scheduled a meeting with CAC staff to learn more about the purpose of the event and the library's commitment to the Eastside community. The questions that he had included: Will the CAC be a consistent part of the community? Will this event be repeated in the neighborhood next year? What will be given to folks who attend and what will be taken from them? How will this event impact participants from the neighborhood? How will sharing their stories through our online database support participant's voices and preserve their histories? CAC staff learned the importance of responding to potential community concerns, the desire for sustained involvement, and the value of clearly communicating the goals and impact of the project and how they align with the community. Particularly in areas currently underserved by the library, there is a need to restore trust and services in an active and ongoing way.

***Developing sustainable, equitable, and actionable partnerships.*** Following the co-design work of Phase I, CAC Staff has avoided being prescriptive about what project partnerships and community involvement would look like. The approach in organization presentations has been to provide an overview and examples of how an organization might be involved with the project but to allow the group to submit their own ideas and vision for partnership. While making space for this type of brainstorming and co-development is important, the Project Team has found that organizations may find this approach to be too nebulous and to put too much pressure on groups that may already be spread thin. Envisioning participation in the project can be difficult to define for individuals and organizations. Similarly, the idea of community archives can be challenging to communicate. CAC staff have adapted talking points and language over the course of Phase II to make the project's goals more clear and to more effectively communicate the potential impact of participation. For example, language used in presentations or meetings with potential partners has productively shifted to focus on how material collected as part of this project may be used in the future and the importance of ensuring that stories that are truly representative of Tacoma continue to be accessible. CAC staff have sought to be more clear about the intent and potential impact of the overall project and how individual and organizational participation fits into the broader scope of the project.