

## WiLS Ideas to Action Project Report

Door County Library

Project Title: Door County Speaks

### Background

Door County Speaks is an initiative to place a pre-assembled, circulating kit of oral history equipment and resources in each of the Door County Library's eight branch libraries. In 2019, we were fortunate to have our project jointly supported by the WiLS Ideas to Action program and the NFLS Library Improvement & Innovation Grant. With crucial professional support from WiLS, we created a community resource of lasting value.

### Project Development

Door County Speaks began as a response to community needs: Door County has a high concentration of historical organizations, many of which asked our library for advice in starting oral history projects. The expense of buying equipment and the time required to learn oral history skills were preventing the public from saving community memories. Our team set out to make that process simpler.

Engaging a wider community of practice was key to overcoming the many challenges of this project. Library staff exhaustively researched and tested oral history equipment, consulted experts on oral history research for best practices, and boiled down technical jargon into easily understood explainers. Our materials were vetted, both internally and with expert help from WiLS, and continue to be revised through public input. The end result is a kit of physical and digital resources with applications well beyond local historical projects.

### Project Outcomes

We presented our project to the community during our annual Door County Reads event in January 2020. The response to our initial presentations was overwhelmingly positive, both from historical organizations and the general public. The physical release of our kits to library branches followed in March of 2020. Our intention was to conduct a "soft release" to field test the kits with historical groups before a full-scale rollout event in May.

The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted our project plan. Our kits had only been available for two weeks when our library was forced to shut down, ending all project activity for over two months. COVID has also strained the resources of historical groups and made collecting oral history of any kind difficult.

With the return of library service, we are dramatically reevaluating the Door County Speaks program. We will continue to support and update our physical kits, with modified circulation to comply with quarantining procedures. We are also in the process of developing a digital component to the program, called Voices From Today. This program extension will focus on collecting short, candid oral histories, entirely through our website. Our goal remains the same as it was before COVID-19: to make oral history easier for our community.

### Advice for Future Grantees

The last year has been a constant learning process for our Door County Speaks team, but two key takeaways spring to mind. First, never hesitate to reach out to other library professionals, community partners and academic experts for advice. Second, in uncertain times, stay flexible and focused on the core needs which your project is meant to address.

View our oral history manual and other materials at: <http://doorcountylibrary.org/genealogy>

For questions and additional resources, contact us at: [dcspeaks@doorcountylibrary.org](mailto:dcspeaks@doorcountylibrary.org)