

Broomfield Out Loud staff roundtable, Serr, Cheryl, 2.14.24 (1)

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David Allison 00:00

All right, everybody, thank you so much for joining me today. This is our staff Broomfield Out Loud recording session. We're going to do an oral history, kind of in a similar way to how we recorded all of our individuals who have been part of the project so far. So, I'd like to start by asking you all to introduce yourselves. Just say your names and, kind of your, kind of role in the project, maybe thus far, what are some of the things you've done as part of the project. And we'll start with Cheryl.

Cheryl 00:43

I am Cheryl German. My title is administrative analyst, and I do the operations side of things, so contracting, (inaudible) so that's primarily what I do.

David Allison 01:04

Yes.

Megan 01:05

I'm Megan, I'm the Arts and History Manager, and I guess for this project, kind of do the high level management of it, I guess is how I would describe that. And then, kind of, booking in when needed for the task stuff.

David Allison 01:29

Excellent, thank you. Serr?

01:30

I'm Serr. I'm the Arts and Programming Coordinator. I help oversee the marketing and communication, working with our communications team to design content, and ensuring that the public is aware of this program.

David Allison 01:48

Awesome, fantastic. So what are some of the, kind of, surprising things so far about this project, as we've started? We had a big kickoff in October, and then from there, you know, we started collecting

interviews, we've had a lot of meetings with partners who are planning for our next stages, that sort of thing. What are some things that come to mind, as far as the project, that's been surprising to you?

Serr 02:31

That's a great question. Awkward silence. Because I haven't been working the story side, I can't speak to that. But I am surprised by the people that I've seen come in, and how excited they are to tell their story. It's been a joy to also see, like, Rochelle, with the stories and her, her perspective on this. Our storytelling workshops, I was surprised by that number, but that was partially my fault, and it was at a weird time when we did that. So, I would say those are kind of the three that come up off of my head.

David Allison 03:27

Tell me a little bit about those, or more about those storytelling workshops and maybe, you know, even on the kickoff, we used the same kind of partner - Lighthouse Writers Workshop, right, for those?

Serr 03:41

Yeah.

David Allison 03:42

So what is that kind of experience, how is that, as far as like the connection to people who were there, and kind of, what that process looked like?

Serr 03:51

Anytime you work with a partner, it takes a minute to learn their communication style. And with Lighthouse Writers Workshop, from all my marketing perspective, it took a minute to kind of get the right description. And I think for the first workshop we just didn't have the right scription in terms of what we're presenting. And it wasn't until I spoke with Dino that I was like, we have something really cool here. Like, what you do, you are a nonfiction author here in Denver, and that's, that's a really cool way of presenting something cool that we're doing here. And, we just didn't capture that in that initial conversation with Lighthouse. And so it kind of brought me back to going, oh, yes, with each partner it takes a moment to figure out how to communicate with them, and get the information from them and the right information and asking the right questions, so that you can get that information so you can figure out what the program is.

David Allison 04:57

Yeah.

Serr 04:58

And so it just took us a minute to kind of get everything going. And unfortunately, the timing of that, that's kind of fourth quarter of the year. Everyone was just kind of really busy. And so it just took a minute for us to get there, but I'm glad that we did it. It just was one of those things that it took a minute for us to get on the right page (inaudible) program being really successful. But I enjoyed (inaudible) so .

...

David Allison 05:22

Yeah. Anyone else?

Megan 05:32

Sorry, we're (inaudible) tools in the background here. I think something surprising to me was how difficult it has been to describe the project. We knew that the scope was really large, we knew that the scale was really up to us, but we also wanted the scope and scale to be kind of determined by participation in the project. And so it was like this cart, horse, chicken, egg, like do people participate because we determine the scope of the project, or do we determine the scope based on who participates? And so I think that has been a challenge. And I think that, like I, I didn't really have much concern about people wanting to talk about their stories. I think people generally really like to talk about themselves and don't get a lot of opportunity to do that. But, we got a, but I was, you know, how do you talk to somebody about, you know, getting a lot of the feedback of like, oh, this is attached to an oral history project, or a museum project, I'm not someone that I see in that space, like my story would never be on the wall at this museum that I go to on a daily basis. And the kind of the point of the project is to not, kind of not have those voices. And so I think that it's, it's just interesting to see how people, whether they associate their story or not with something that feels worthy of something as serious as being recorded, which is really not that big of a deal; people are recording themselves all the time - emails, text messages, TikTok, whatever, that, for some reason that feels accessible, but like a microphone, and like, a museum person feels too serious, like I don't know how to describe that. But so it's just been interesting, just convincing people that like, yes, we can, and we will, and people have, but I still think there's, I don't know, just an interesting human aspect to it. And how much people, like, feel like they have to give a right answer. I'm still laughing about some of the youth ones that we've had where it really feels like a college interview, and that is not the intention. But they've been, I mean, they've been conditioned to, you know, feel like they have to present themselves a certain way and, nobody wants to come off as messy, and it's just so funny. So like, what version of them are we actually getting too, which is kind of fun. And I would imagine, and I don't know this because I haven't been in all the interviews, but I think the more age and experience people have, the less they care about feeling like you're giving the right answer, and so there's probably something in there worth exploring, but it's kind of outside of the scope of the project. I thought that's been really interesting as people are like, wait, what? What are you doing? And they want more structure. And we've kind of kept the structure out of it on purpose, and they really struggle.

Cheryl 08:47

I guess I was surprised by how many people, when we contacted them about participating, were just really honored that we would even talk to them, that, that we were interested in their story and we wanted to ask them to become a part of our Broomfield history. So, that's exciting in a good way that, that they would actually speak, and I think that (inaudible) location, so . . .

David Allison 09:27

Yeah, so I'll just add on to that, briefly. And, I'm David Allison, the History Coordinator for the City and County of Broomfield, and as part of, kind of, that push to get people to know about the project and understand what it's about and, you know, communicate with them, we definitely had kind of like the general call out with a Google form that people could contribute to, and put their name in the hat, and that sort of thing. But what I found was so interesting is the folks who kind of caught the vision or who

were able to reach out individually or personally and say like, hey, we'd really love to talk to you. That really bore some amazing fruit. And sometimes it's like, I've interviewed somebody now who's like a, a third-hand individual who, like I talked to one person who said, oh you need to talk to this person who then says, oh you need to talk to this person. So like there's this trickle down effect, where people are like, oh this is an interesting project, I can be a part of it, this is something that, they want to hear my voice and hear what the story that I have to say and, or that I have to tell, and, and that's been really (inaudible).

Serr 10:40

Have you gotten any pushback, like why does the government want our story?

David Allison 10:46

No, nobody said that yet. No, I think people are, you know, most folks kind of generally understand, especially when I hand them a permission form and say like, okay, this is so that we can have this added to the history collection and the archives, and so that, you know, people can go online and search and find, and often I'll try to explain in brief, you know, we have all sorts of oral histories in our collection already, but a lot of those were recorded in the 90s and, you know, they reflect people that lived in Broomfield in the, you know, 30s and 40s, 1930s, and 1940s. And then they'll say, oh okay, now I understand, that kind of makes sense, you know, why, why you would want that, and why it's important to have that kind of record. Some people will have that touchstone of like, Story, Story Core, you know .

. . .

Megan 11:37

Mmm-hmm. Yeah.

David Allison 11:38

. . . . Story Core is something that a lot of people understand and know about. And so they'll say, oh yeah, this is like a Story Core kind of interview. So yeah, a little bit. . So that's, but it's been fun to talk to people. And just from my experience, what's been maybe most surprising is kind of a feeling of gratefulness that I've felt, and it's been growing over the course of time as I've done more interviews, that people feel comfortable enough, and, you know, ready to share that story enough with me and share things that are challenging and hard in their lives. As Megan said, not necessarily the youth, but often it'll be the older folks that will share things that are difficult or that they're struggling with, or that they have struggled with. And then they'll also share, you know, their hopes for the future and their joys, and the things that really get them inspired. And to be able to share those things and to hear those things with people and to communicate with them about it and listen to their story, just really is a privilege. And it's been, you know, a humbling experience to be able to have these conversations with folks. And all different types of people, too, which is what I think makes this so interesting and unique is that we're, we didn't put out a call for just a certain type of person, or a certain type of story, or a certain era of time, or anything like that, which often is what happens. The last project we did like this was specifically around COVID-19, so it had a very, you know, kind of laser focus on one type of topic, and this is very broad. But yet the stories are so unique and individual and quirky sometimes, which is a word my daughter hates but I'll say it anyway. And, you know, just really insightful, too. Thoughtful people, which is, which is fun to hear. What else about the project? In general, I know you mentioned,

Serr, kind of some of the other pieces involved. And Rochelle, who's also on our staff, Rochelle Remaly, has done a number of the transcriptions, so that's another piece that's happening right now, which is, all of these recordings go through the next step of being transcribed by AI software. And then a human being has to go in and look at that transcription and correct all the mistakes, and there are often many, many mistakes. And so that work takes, takes quite a bit of time and effort. But I've, I've also found that interesting. We've had both volunteers as well as staff members like Rochelle doing that work, and just seeing how people, as they read through and transcribe those interviews will often say, oh I want to keep doing this. Like I will sometimes give volunteers the option like, oh do you want to do this work of, you know, whatever collections job, or do you want to do more transcriptions? And every single time they've said, I'd like to do more transcriptions. Who's an interesting one that I should, I should look at, you know, and I think that's telling that stories connect us as human beings. Stories make us understand each other in a deeper way, have empathy for one another, and I think that's where the value lies in what we're doing.

Serr 15:07

Yes, in fact, like Rochelle, who was scheduled to work (inaudible) and she's like, it's like reading a good book. It's like, I'm almost done, and so I didn't even finish. So I was like oh okay, you can stay as long as you want. (Inaudible) no, I want to finish this. I was like, cool.

David Allison 15:32

That's wonderful. And I think as you, you know, see also the breadth of just experiences, and this community, you know, which Broomfield is what, 75,000 people, so there's a lot of people in this community, and we've recorded almost 60 interviews at this point. So it's a small percentage of the people in Broomfield, but still you can see this giant breadth of how people experience this place, and what they've done while they're here, you know, contributions they've made, things they've done, people they've met, all of those things are just really fascinating to hear about. Yeah.

Cheryl 16:13

I think I really appreciated the impact the project was going to have the pilot at the Refuge with Lori's story, and how that came together with artwork. And then with the Lighthouse Writers Workshop doing a piece with the audience, and just bringing it all together for everyone, really just showed how much you can really do so much with the community.

David Allison 16:40

Right. Right. Yeah, that was, that was a really neat moment too, because it was intended and designed and planned this way, which was, you know, part of the process that we went through, which is, let's kind of do the project in miniature . . .

Cheryl:

Mmm-hmm.

David Allison:

. . . with one of the early oral histories that we have. And so we took that recording from Lorie Lane that Marrry Dormish from the Refuge recorded and you know, had it transcribed and that whole process, and then shared it with an artist, Christina Maldonado Bad Hand, and she created an animatic, which is just a really beautiful, kind of depiction of Lori's story, and some of the challenges that she's had in her life and being, you know, unhoused in Broomfield and some of those things that are just really hard, but then also the, kind of, seed of hope and the things she's doing now that are exciting and supportive of other people in the community. And, you know, being able to see that and hear both from Lori as well as from the artist about its impact, I think was just really a special time and said to us, I think all of us, yeah, this is really valuable.

Megan: 18:02

Yeah, I think there's definitely been moments. I don't know about you guys, but I felt like, and I don't know, it's probably a product of a lot of things, right, it's not, no project lives in a vacuum, you know, we all have things going on, work stuff or whatever, but there's been moments where I'm like, why? Why did we take this on? Like, this is such a good project, but also like it's so massive, and it's so, you know, it's, it's, there is no, okay, here's the plan, now, let's just do it. It's, every single step is like, okay we need to rethink this, and now that we know this, what comes next. And that's been part of, I think the challenge of describing the project is, people want like a whole plan. And then you're like, well you know, stage two, we don't know what it looks like until stage one is finished. We have no idea what stage three looks like until stage two is finished, which also means stage one has to be completed. And so we knew that we were kind of setting ourselves up for this uncertainty, which I think is part of the fun of the project, but also, like, there are moments where you're like, what are we doing? Are we doing this right? Is this, is this the way that we should go about it? And there's also a risk too, that at any point the future phases are impacted by, like, we had no idea this was gonna happen now, right? Which I don't think really has happened yet. And there's no right time, I think, to do these kinds of things. But I know with all of the things with the team too, it's been a challenge to feel like we're on top of everything all the time. It's so easy, I think, when it's done to be like, we did it, we had all the right answers, and that's what you do, right? You spin it to say these were the successes, here's the lessons, and it was all fine. But like during, it's like life. During, you're like, why would anyone want to know what I'm thinking right now? Because I will tell you, like, the amount of times I have taken tasks for this project and moved them to tomorrow, or next week, or like, I don't even know how to approach that. But then every time I actually dig into it, it's like, oh yeah, yeah, you know, one, two, three, here we go. But I think, also, kind of staying true to the spirit of the project from the beginning, and kind of the original partner, which was Dr. McCurdy and his vision, and how much, really, trust that he's given to us with his vision on doing the project on this scale and not just with a certain group of people. And so there's some responsibility, I think with that, that you know, feels like we won't know until the end whether or not we've achieved what we wanted to do, but . . .

Cheryl: 20:57

I guess I kind of feel that responsibility with the National Endowment for the Arts, for the grant . . .

Megan:

Yeah.

Cheryl:

. . . that we have going with this project, as well. I've learned a lot more about Federal stuff than I ever intended to learn.

Megan:21:12

Yeah, and it's such an interesting like operational piece when we talk about, you know, there is very much like a social justice / equity / empathy goal to the project. And then obviously, the Federal guidelines are built with those things in mind, but also it creates more barriers in a way, just the, the sheer amount of work that it takes to comply with regulations, I think. Being government workers, I think we understand it on some level, but also there's some of the contractual stuff that makes it really difficult to just invite anyone to be at the table. And it is a tough thing/ And we haven't run into it quite yet, I don't think, because the storytellers so far have just been part of the project, but once we start doing contracts, it's difficult, and the permissions, and the best practices, and the standard, which are all really important. There are a lot of people that will hear those words and be like, oh forget it, you know, I don't want to deal with that, or whatever. So, it is interesting.

Cheryl"

Mmm-hmm.

Megan:

It's great to get the grant, but also, it's a lot of work.

David Allison: 22:29

Yeah, it makes for, definitely high stakes, but it also says like, hey this, that, you know, a Federal granting organization has said, this is a valuable project, and we see the potential, so it does kind of heighten that sense of like, yeah, we need to do this well because people are expecting it to be done well. And, and so it, it raises the stakes. But it's good to have high stakes in a project. If we were just you know, playing around in the potato patch, it would be a little bit less fun, I think.

Megan:

Mmm-hmm.

David Allison:

I don't think that's actually an expression, but thanks.

Serr 23:16

We're really ambitious. We take the low ball and then we roll it downhill, then realize that, okay, this is huge, (inaudible) kind of come down, and when it's flat, and then we take the pieces again, and we roll it up a hill, and make it a little more controllable and understand the scope a little better. We were like, oh we need to, like, film this thing. And we need to (inaudible) after we've gotten a better idea of what, what is the scope we're able to be like, okay this is doable. So that's just been (inaudible) with a project that (inaudible). So, it's been an ambition, definitely.

David Allison 24:14

Absolutely. Most of the oral history interviews that I've done, I will kind of, as the conversation winds down, I'll ask a question like, well what did we miss? What haven't we talked about? And to Serr's point, this is, in some ways, this recording is some of that documentation that we thought we might at one point do on film. So, maybe there's some other things that we need to, you know, pitch into the hopper at this moment, and if so, now's a good time. Is there anything else we've missed that we haven't discussed so far about Broomfield Out Loud or the process?

Megan: 25:00

I think I just want to give some kind of like awareness to, I honestly don't remember the moment where this project kind of became an idea. But I do remember when we decided to go after the grant, and that obviously grant applications help you hone, and they're kind of a wish and a dream, right? A very well-written, very detailed wish and a dream with a budget. But we submitted that, gosh, June '22?

Cheryl: 25:42

Yeah.

??? 25:43

Yeah. And then we didn't find out until April '23. And then we launched the project in October '23. And that was a significant amount of time. And it's just so interesting - the waiting. We waited, what, like six months? seven months? for, to hear whether we got the grant. And I remember going back to our partners and being like, hey we got the grant, and they were like, what grant?

Serr:

Yeah.

Megan:

I forgot, like that's good news! Now what? You know, because we just were like, a lot of activity, and then a lot of waiting. And then having it actually happen is great, but it's hard to remember it being, but like, we've been in it for so long. And then we have people that are coming, and they're like, what is this? Oh yeah, right.

David Allison 26:34

Yeah, I remember how hard that waiting process was too, because we recognized that were we to receive the grant, that, you know, most of our work in the next, you know, in the following year, year and a half, would be related to the project, right? And so, trying to work out what our, what our programs and projects looked like, kind of in the interim before we had the award announcement, it was, was definitely a challenge.

Serr 27:07

And correct me if I'm wrong, we were also waiting for your grant (inaudible).

Cheryl:

That's right.

Megan: 27:11

It was the same timeline.

??? 27:13

It's the same timeline.

Serr 27:16

Yeah, so we were like waiting on two big projects. One being (inaudible) plan both of those almost simultaneously.

Cheryl: 27:25

And rescope . . .

Serr 27:26

And rescope.

Cheryl: 27:30

. . . for Broomfield Out Loud because we only received half the funding we requested.

Megan: 27:34

Yeah.

Cheryl: 27:35

But that was huge.

Serr:

Mmm-hmm.

David Allison 27:37

Yeah, the key partners on some of those pieces changed.

Serr: 27:39

Yeah.

Cheryl:

Mmm-hmm.

Serr 27:44

And I had started this (inaudible) the difficulty of working with partners. One partner I do want to acknowledge that has really been amazing through this whole thing is Communications.

Cheryl: 27:58

Oh, yes.

Serr 27:59

Right from day one they were like, cool, we're excited. (Inaudible). So, they've been, they've been awesome. (Inaudible).

Megan 28:14

It's interesting too, because I feel like a lot of our conversations with Communications is such a good example of how there are so many people with such good ideas and such great intentions working in government spaces, but, how often those things actually happen? You know what I mean? It's like it's, and it's not that it's the people aren't doing good work. They are. But there's such potential, I think, that gets lost in the everyday work. And this project is a good example of that. But I just think about, you know, when we meet with problems, and some of the ideas we have, we just all have to sit around and be like, well wouldn't that be nice if we could really do that, but we just know that we can't. You know, like Melanie in particular has such amazing engagement ideas, but who has capacity for any of that? And so it's hard, it's a lot of like, kind of grieving this vision, that it just isn't possible. And like, what would it look like if, I think, local government workers actually had the space to say, wow, what an interesting idea, let's make room for that, right? And it's not really a choice. It's not, it's not a judgment choice. It's just, it's busy, you know?

David Allison 29:42

Yeah.

Megan: 29:42

So, I struggle with that sometimes. It's like, you know, where are we letting go of things that we should really be pursuing, both in the project and generally, that really could have that impact on the community. But also the just day-to-day responsibilities are so intense that, you know, where, how, where is the story there, too, that I think there's a lot of stereotypes about government workers, or I know we get tired of hearing about capacity issues. But, I mean, it's true everywhere. I don't think it's just government. But the potential impact I think, that sometimes we have to let go of is painful, so . . .

Cheryl: 30:27

I know we had to let go of some things. And we're just like, oh, that would have been so good.

Megan: 30:32

Mmm-hmm. And there'll be more with the project, for sure.

Cheryl: 30:38

Absolutely. This project has so much potential.

Megan: 30:39

It could have been, it could be anything. I think that's been like the fun part, and the really hard part is like, it's almost just been a decision-making exercise from the beginning. Like, how do we even decide what we do, when we know we could do, or should do whatever . . . anything, but we can't manage it? And what's not really worth doing, if we can't do it well?

Cheryl:
Right.

Megan:
You know

Serr: 31:03
We're only on phase one.

David Allion 31:10
Yes, we are nearing the end of phase one, which is why, yeah, this recording at this particular moment in time will be interesting because we can look back on it, you know, once we're in phase four for example, and say like, oh, man, we didn't even know what you're getting into. Or we'll say, we were so smart back then.

Megan: 31:28
We don't even know (inaudible). We have an idea of what it's supposed to be, but it's very fuzzy. Maybe we should do this at the end of each phase.

Cheryl: 31:40
That's what I was thinking. That'd be interesting.

??? 31:46
Yeah,.

Cheryl:
To have this conversation about what's happened in the phase and what changed.

David Allison
Yeah, and you know what, all we'll need to do is just look at the transcription of this recording, and basically we'll have our report for (inaudible).

Megan:
Oh thank you.

David Allison: Well thank you all for taking some time today to chat about the project. Really appreciate each of you, and it's fun to be on this journey with you as individuals. As I look at each of your faces, I appreciate you each, so thank you.

End of staff meeting.