

UI Labor Center receives NEH \$195,000 grant to increase access to the Iowa Labor History Oral Project

The University of Iowa Labor Center has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) \$195,000 grant award to transcribe and index interviews from the [Iowa Labor History Oral Project \(ILHOP\)](#), an over forty-year-old statewide oral history collaboration that has to date produced over 1,200 audio interviews with Iowa workers. The result will be a broadly accessible collection, searchable via a comprehensive, expandable ILHOP Digital Index.

Fully transcribing and indexing ILHOP interviews is critical to realizing the rich potential of this enormous collection, which serves as a critical primary source for the history of Iowa and the Midwest. The interviews document the origins and evolution of the modern labor movement and the history of workplaces, industries, and communities across the state from the 1890s to the present. Capturing stories of people's everyday lives, ILHOP interviews contain a wide range of information not found in other sources. The collection illuminates how choices and actions of workers and their labor unions intersected with numerous issues of national and international concern—ranging from key test cases of twentieth-century legal reforms, struggles of marginalized groups to gain equality, and experiences of successive generations of immigrant workers from across the globe.

ILHOP's broad research and teaching value is evident in the hundreds of scholarly books and articles citing the collection, and the tens of thousands of people reached by Labor Center education programming. Last year, the collection served as the basis for a traveling exhibit in the [UI Mobile Museum](#), drawing over 35,000 visitors. Future plans include a redeveloped exhibit and incorporation of ILHOP materials into a statewide collection of K-12 teaching materials being developed by the Iowa Museum Association in collaboration with the University of Northern Iowa and Simpson College.



A visitor to the 2017 ILHOP traveling exhibit listens to an interview recording.

ILHOP's significance has been recognized and enhanced by numerous awards, including grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. This spring, the project was honored by the American Library Association with the [2018 John Sessions Memorial Award](#). Presently, funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission is supporting a joint project from the UI Libraries and the State Historical Society of Iowa to digitize the collection, making all existing ILHOP transcripts and audio files available through the [Iowa Digital Library](#). The NEH Indexing grant will build on this work, setting the stage for future growth, dissemination, and comprehensive access to one of the most important resources in twentieth-century Midwestern history.

The NEH project will be coordinated by Labor Center Director Jennifer Sherer and ILHOP Oral Historian John McKerley, along with staff of the UI Libraries and long-time project partners at the State Historical Society of Iowa and Iowa Federation of Labor. For more information, contact the Labor Center at 319-335-4144 or labor-center@uiowa.edu.