



PROJECT PROPOSAL · BELLE HAVEN, MENLO PARK

Belle Haven Voices

An Elder Oral History Project

Prepared by Wonman Lee · September 2026 · wonmanlee+bellehavenvoices@gmail.com

Summary

Belle Haven Voices will record, preserve, and share the life stories of Belle Haven's elders before those stories are lost. Using StoryCorps' free DIY toolkit, local youth will interview neighborhood elders at the Belle Haven Library, bridging the generational gap while building a permanent record of the community's history. The collection will be presented to the City of Menlo Park, kept at the Menlo Park Public Library, and preserved at the Library of Congress through the StoryCorps Archive.

Need

Belle Haven's history is largely unwritten, and the people who lived it are aging. For generations, families of many backgrounds have made their homes here: people who came from the Jim Crow South, immigrants from Latin America, the Pacific Islands, Asia, and beyond, and residents whose roots go back to the neighborhood's earliest days. Many elders lived through hard chapters: redlining and other government-backed housing discrimination, blockbusting by real estate speculators, and later predatory and subprime lending that stripped many families of homes and savings in the foreclosure wave after 2007. Their lives also hold stories of work, faith, family, and neighbors looking out for one another. Together, these experiences explain how Belle Haven came to be the community it is today, yet they rarely appear in official records. Each year without action, more of them disappear.

Goals

1. Become an **official StoryCorps partner**, with a dedicated Belle Haven Voices collection in the StoryCorps Archive.
2. Record at least **40 conversations** with Belle Haven elders over 12 months.
3. Train at least **10 high school-age interviewers** from the neighborhood, giving young people a direct connection to the elders and history that shaped their community.
4. Present the collection to the **City of Menlo Park**, keep a copy at the **Menlo Park Public Library**, and preserve it at the **Library of Congress** through the StoryCorps Archive.
5. Host **two public listening events** that bring elders, youth, and families together.

Approach

We will follow the StoryCorps DIY model, a free set of guides covering planning, recruitment, interviewing, equipment, consent, archiving, and sharing. Youth interviewers will be trained in listening, interview technique, and respectful questioning, then paired with elders for recorded conversations at the **Belle Haven Library** in the Belle Haven Community Campus. Conversations may be held in English, Spanish, Tongan, Samoan, or any narrator's home language, with bilingual youth supporting interviews where possible. Conversations will be recorded with the free StoryCorps App and uploaded to a dedicated **Belle Haven Voices collection** in the StoryCorps Online Archive, whose recordings are preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The project will keep a local copy for the City and the Menlo Park Public Library. A formal StoryCorps partnership is our first goal, but the project does not depend on it: StoryCorps' DIY guides and app are free and open to the public.

Ethics and care. Participation is voluntary and narrator-led. Youth interviewers receive trauma-informed training and are always accompanied by an adult during recordings. Every adult who works with youth will complete a background check. Narrators review and approve how their stories are shared, and anyone may withdraw their recording. We will use StoryCorps' standard consent and release process, supplemented by project forms covering local preservation and, for youth interviewers under 18, parental consent. Stories will not be used for commercial, partisan, or campaign purposes.

Timeline

Phase	Months	Activities
Plan & partner	1–2	Form a community advisory circle of Belle Haven elders and residents, pursue StoryCorps partnership, confirm partners, recruit youth and elders, complete background checks, prepare consent forms, acquire equipment
Train	3	Youth interviewer workshops using StoryCorps DIY materials
Record	4–9	Conversations at Belle Haven Library; rolling transcription and translation
Share & preserve	10–12	Listening events, presentation to the City of Menlo Park, deposit at Menlo Park Public Library; recordings preserved through the StoryCorps Archive at the Library of Congress

Month 1 begins once a fiscal sponsor and initial funding are in place.

Partners (proposed)

StoryCorps, Belle Haven Library, Menlo Park Public Library, City of Menlo Park, local schools and youth programs, faith congregations, neighborhood associations, and longtime resident leaders.

Estimated Budget

Item	Estimate
Recording equipment (recorders, mics, headphones)	\$2,000
Youth interviewer stipends (10 × \$500)	\$5,000
Transcription and translation	\$5,000
Listening events and presentation materials	\$4,000
Outreach, printing, refreshments	\$1,500
Background checks for adult volunteers and staff	\$600
Fiscal sponsor administrative fee (10%)	\$1,810
Total	\$19,910

Funding Plan

Funds will be held and administered by a fiscal sponsor. We will seek grants from local and regional funders, such as Cal Humanities and the City of Menlo Park, alongside individual donations and in-kind support such as meeting space and equipment loans.

Success Measures

Number of stories recorded and preserved; number of youth trained; event attendance; and feedback from elders, youth, and families on whether the project honored their stories and strengthened connections across generations.