

## ***Thinking Outside the Collection Box: How to Serve Genealogists Now***

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### **Objectives:**

- To learn techniques for helping genealogists, even if your library does not have a dedicated genealogy/local history collection.
- To get some ideas for genealogical programming that can be implemented quickly.

### **Overview of Genealogy and What Genealogists Do**

- Definitions of Genealogy and Family History

Genealogy is the study of the vital events in a family that establishes linkages between generations. Family history is a more in-depth expression of genealogy that explains the how and why of ancestors' lives.

- Sources: Artifacts, Documents and Interviews

Researchers use both a paper trail and non-paper artifacts like hope chests, samplers and grave markers as sources of information. Interviewing relatives can yield information which should be verified with other sources before it is accepted as fact.

- Research Approaches

Genealogy can be done using linear (documenting only direct descent) and cluster (documenting direct and indirect descent including collateral ancestors) approaches.

- Recording Information in Paper and Digital Formats

Researchers can record their information on a variety of standard forms which are stored in either binders or file folders. They also can record it digitally in a variety of different genealogy software programs and online family trees.

- How-to Genealogy Information

Information providers should identify one or two basic genealogy titles which researchers could check out if possible. Providing multiple copies of one or two titles is better than one copy each of ten titles.

## Resources

1. Family group sheets, pedigree charts, research checklists and research logs can all be found online for free.
2. Online trees can be built on a variety of websites, some subscription and some free. Some examples are Family Tree at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), Rootsweb, [www.werelate.org](http://www.werelate.org), Geni.com, and Ancestry.com.
3. Useful photo sharing and digital history websites include Historypin, Twile, Storylava, Pinterest, Flickr and Clio.
4. Information on how to organize genealogical research can be found in books such as *Organize Your Genealogy: Strategies and Solutions for Every Researcher* by Drew Smith, on YouTube, and in genealogical blogs.
5. Beginning how-to genealogy books can be found on WorldCat and a selected bibliography of such titles is in Appendix A of *Fostering Family History Services: A Guide for Librarians, Archivists and Volunteers*.

## Getting Them Started

- Orientation of New Researchers

Give or sell researchers FGS and pedigree charts and instructions for filling them out. Offer a basic how-to book, links to online

information, and refer them to other institutions where they can find information, both nearby and in other localities.

- Helpful Stuff your Library Probably Already Has

Historical information, such as encyclopedias, books in the 973s and 910s, and periodicals such as *American Heritage* will provide background and context. WPA guides to states and cities are well researched and written. Biographical series such as the various *Who's Who in ...*, city and phone directories, vertical files and school yearbooks all yield nuggets for genealogists.

- The LDS and their FHLs

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or LDS Church, has an interest in genealogy built into their faith. Their website [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) has a catalog of their genealogical library's holdings, as well as a platform for online trees, and digitized and indexed records that are all free for anyone to use. They also have a series of Family History Centers, or FHLs, around the world where researchers can get free guidance.

- Locating Records in Other Localities

Because researchers need to find information in a variety of localities, prepare to make referrals to many other institutions.

## Resources

1. The website FamilySearch and the LDS network of Family History Centers have lots of information and research assistance.
2. Locate sources of historical and biographical information in your institution, including encyclopedias, *American Heritage* magazine, history and travel books, especially WPA guides. BGMI is a useful index.
3. City directories, phone books, vertical files, and school yearbooks are helpful.

4. Consult *Guide to Reference in Genealogy and Biography* to identify more good titles in your collection.
5. Consult Ancestry's Red Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., to find government offices which have needed documents such as vital records. It's available in a wiki format:  
[http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/wiki/index.php?title=Red\\_Book:\\_American\\_State,\\_County,\\_and\\_Town\\_Sources](http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/wiki/index.php?title=Red_Book:_American_State,_County,_and_Town_Sources)

## Online Information

Researchers can find some, but not all, the information they need online. The major categories of helpful genealogical websites include

- Subscription Websites

Individuals and institutions must pay to access some sites, the most famous of which is Ancestry.com. Institutional subscriptions offer a different level of access than do individual ones. Subscription websites contain a mix of indexing of records and some actual digitized records.

- Institutional Websites

A variety of institutions sponsor websites that have information and research aids for genealogists including heritage societies and libraries with large genealogical collections.

- Volunteer and User-Input Websites

Both groups of volunteers and individuals sponsor websites containing information and research aids.

- Cyndi's List and Linkpendium

These are the two best websites that help researchers locate genealogical websites by subject and/or geographic location.

## Resources

1. Ancestry.com, FindMyPast.com, and My Heritage are examples of subscription genealogy databases, but there are others. Subscription databases of digitized newspapers such as Genealogybank.com are also useful.
2. FamilySearch, the DAR website, and the websites of the Newberry and Allen County Public Libraries are all free institutional websites.
3. USGenweb, Genealogy Trails, Rootsweb are examples of user-input and volunteer websites.
4. A few individuals have put together stellar websites with free information such as Tom Tryniski, Stephen Morse, and Joe Beine.
5. Consult the websites Cyndi's List and Linkpendium to find more genealogical information online.

### **Programming Ideas and a Lagniappe (a little something extra)**

Programming helps attract researchers to your institution and allows you to teach many at the same time--über reference.

- “How to Grow Your Family Tree”

This program is a basic how-to overview of research which some institutions offer on a regular basis.

- The “Spotlight on...” Program

This program highlights the use of one resource or finding aid in an in-depth fashion.

- “The Story of My Life”

Children can be encouraged to write down their family information in this program.

- “Ask Granny”™

Senior citizens are the focus of this program, and a planning kit is free for the asking.

- Reaching Out to Ethnic Groups

Identify an ethnic and/or religious group in your area and design a program around their research needs.

## **Resources**

1. Network with members of local genealogical, historical and heritage societies in order to collaborate on programming.
2. Materials for the program Ask Granny are free and can be requested by emailing: [Ask.granny.us@gmail.com](mailto:Ask.granny.us@gmail.com).
3. Keep abreast of the field and get advice from others by consulting the genealib (Librarians Serving Genealogists) listserv, Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter, the Adventures in Genealogy Education blog, and by attending the free Genealogy Day for Librarians events held before every ALA, FGS and NGS conference.