

# Educational Preparation for Certification



# BCG

BOARD FOR CERTIFICATION  
OF GENEALOGISTS®

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# Educational Preparation

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*Success in almost every field is built upon four cornerstones: specialized education, practical experience, a desire to excel, and a determination to do a superior job of every task. The successful applicant for certification exhibits these traits.*

Curiosity about the rewards of certification indicates desire and determination. Those considering certification also tend to possess a measurable amount of experience. This leaflet emphasizes the first of the four cornerstones—educational preparation.

*No specific program of education is required for a successful application.* Yet candidates who pursue one or more of the suggestions in this leaflet—whether by self-education or a formal program—typically submit applications exhibiting deeper knowledge and stronger skills.

## Formal Education

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Many superb programs exist nationwide. The following spotlights programs whose quality instruction has endured. Most offer “certificates of completion,” but their programs and certificates are not to be confused with actual certification.

## Guided Study

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### **AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL STUDIES**

National Genealogical Society (NGS), Arlington, VA. Students pursue lessons at their own pace. NGS offers thorough instruction and hands-on experience with major resources and records analysis. Online mini-courses are available.

### **INDEPENDENT STUDY (VARIOUS PROGRAMS)**

Specialized courses centering upon research concepts, geographical areas or ethnic groups are available through many institutions and private vendors in the United States and internationally, including Boston University, MA; Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; and Excelsior College, Albany, NY; the National Institute for Genealogical Studies in partnership with the University of Toronto, Canada; the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland; and the University of Tasmania, Australia.

## STUDY GROUPS

Students follow specific schedules as they study genealogical methods and resources in organized study groups. Examples include the ProGen Study Groups (focusing on *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers and Librarians*, edited by Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL), and Gen Proof Study Groups (focusing on *Mastering Genealogical Proof*, by Thomas W. Jones, CG, CGL).

## SEMINARS AND WEBINARS

BCG sponsors lectures by BCG associates through its webinar series and through the Skillbuilding Track at the annual National Genealogical Society Family History Conference. In addition, local and state societies, organizations, and genealogy companies nationwide sponsor lectures and one- and two-day seminars taught by BCG associates either in-person or as webinars.

# Institutes

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**GENEALOGICAL INSTITUTE ON FEDERAL RECORDS (GEN-FED)**, Washington, D.C. An intense five-day program held each July at the National Archives focusing on NARA holdings. Limited enrollment. Co-sponsored by BCG.

**INSTITUTE OF GENEALOGY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH (IGHR)**, Georgia Genealogical Society, Athens, GA. A five-day program held each summer on the University of Georgia campus, with 10 to 12 courses, including beginning, intermediate, advanced, and specialized topics that vary annually. Limited enrollment.

**GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF PITTSBURGH (GRIP)**, LaRoche College, Pittsburgh, PA. A five-day program held twice each summer on the LaRoche campus with numerous courses on topics that vary annually. Limited enrollment.

**SALT LAKE INSTITUTE OF GENEALOGY (SLIG)**, Salt Lake City, UT. A five-day program held each January with 10 to 12 courses on topics that vary annually. Limited enrollment.

Other ongoing focused institutes include the Midwest African American Genealogical Institute at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, IN, each

summer; and the British Institute of the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History in Salt Lake City, UT, each fall.

## Major Conferences

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**FEDERATION OF GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES (FGS) ANNUAL CONFERENCE.** Held in late summer or early fall at various sites nationwide since 1978, the FGS conference offers multiple tracks of widely varied instruction over a four-day span.

**NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY (NGS) ANNUAL FAMILY HISTORY CONFERENCE.** Held in late spring or early summer at various sites nationwide since 1981, the NGS conference offers multiple tracks of instruction in genealogy, history, technology, and genetics over four days.

**ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGISTS (APG), PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE.** Held annually, the PMC focuses on the practical facets of professional genealogical endeavors. APG, a membership organization, publishes a quarterly periodical that is essential reading for progressive genealogists.

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES (IAJGS) CONFERENCE.** Held annually, the IAJGS conference rotates between the United States and an international location, and offers multiple tracks of widely varied instruction over five days.

## Study Major Journals

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Serious genealogists learn new methodology and resources by reading well-crafted, well-documented essays or case studies of difficult problems that were resolved. Shorter essays may be found in BCG's newsletter, *OnBoard*. Longer essays and case studies may be found in:

- *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*
- *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*
- *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*
- *The American Genealogist*
- *The Genealogist*

# Study Major Guide Books

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The personal libraries of successful applicants include major guides to sources, methods, and repositories—and successful applicants have absorbed the contents of these works! Knowledge gleaned from guides such as those below is evident in all phases of a well-prepared certification application.

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*Genealogy Standards*. Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry.com, 2014.

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Cyberspace to Artifacts*. 3d ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2015.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown, editor. *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2001.

## Special Focus Areas

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### **RESEARCH**

Family history is an immensely complex subject. Most serious genealogists develop specialties, usually based on locality, ethnicity, subject, or time period. Successful applicants demonstrate thorough knowledge of the holdings, customary content, and evidentiary value of records and other types of evidence within that specialty. They demonstrate the ability to collect data from each source accurately, thoroughly, efficiently, and to cite sources fully.

### **ANALYSIS AND CORRELATION OF EVIDENCE**

A sound understanding of evidence analysis principles is important to excellence in genealogy. Evidence ranges widely in quality, credibility and even form (such as DNA test results). Successful applicants know the strengths and shortcomings of all significant sources and types of evidence in their areas of special interest.

## COMPILATION

The ability to report research results in a professional manner is a vital skill, whether the project is simple or complex and whether the work is done on a personal or commissioned basis. Successful applicants have studied a variety of professional reports and well-crafted essays in scholarly genealogical journals. Many attend instructional lectures and writing workshops in genealogical forums. Above all, they put the principles they learn from those resources into practice on a daily basis.

## Do You Wonder...?

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- How to better prepare for a successful application?
- How to strengthen your knowledge of records?
- Where to learn the latest research methodology?
- What educational programs help prepare for certification?
- If specific academic degrees are necessary?
- What guidebooks offer sound advice?
- What qualities successful applicants typically display?

## BOARD FOR CERTIFICATION OF GENEALOGISTS

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