



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

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Set I Strategies for Societies

A First Families Project

by Margery Graham

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

A First Families Program is always a great idea for a society. It enhances the society's visibility and offers families a sense of regional history and involvement.

The FGS address on page 1 is incorrect.

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A FIRST FAMILIES PROJECT

by Margery Graham

What is a First Families Project?

A First Families project is a method of gathering genealogical and historical information about a particular area within a specified time frame. The purpose of the project may be fund raising and/or community service.

How to Begin

A First Families project may be based on an event such as a bicentennial or other anniversary of the pioneer settlement of your city, county or state, or in honor of a special person. Develop a theme from this event or person to create interest and excitement in the project. The response will be rewarding. Decide upon the longevity of the project. Is this a one time event or an ongoing program?

Design an application form. The form should include the applicants' name, address and line of ascent from themselves to their ancestor. A place for the applicant's signature and the date should be provided on the form. Be sure to include your address in a prominent place so the applicant knows where to send the application.

Place the applications in convenient locations,

in local libraries and historical societies. Ask if you may put the applications in a tray in an easy to find location. Identify the tray with a display header and keep the tray full. Easy access is important to the applicant. Give the librarians the name and telephone number of the contact person for the project. They can then refer potential applicants to the proper person.

Instructions and Rules

Instructions are needed to help the applicant provide the necessary information. Prepare clear and simple instructions that include specific requirements. Choose a deadline date for accepting applications. Packages must be postmarked by that date. Those postmarked after that date may be held for the following year or returned to the applicant, whichever they choose.

Some frequently asked questions include:

- *How does a person qualify for your First Families project?* The response may be "anyone who is a direct descendant of a pioneer who settled in Anywhere City/County/Territory/State by December 31, 1850 (or whatever date is appropriate to

your area) may submit an application.”

- *May the applicant submit more than one ancestor on the application?* Yes. As an added incentive, tell the applicant that more than one ancestor may be claimed on each application and that the fee will cover all ancestors if submitted together.
- *Does the applicant have to live in your city or state to apply?* No.
- *Does the applicant have to be a member of your genealogy society to apply?* No. The society can consider this project as an excellent way to obtain new members.
- *What is the deadline for submitting the application?* It is wise to allow plenty of time – ten months or more – so that the applicant will submit a thorough family history.

Additional Guidelines

As your society plans its First Families Project, consider the following elements used by other successful groups:

1. Ask the applicant to submit a five-generation chart supplied by you. A copy of their own chart may also be acceptable, but if you plan to compile or publish the charts, it is more attractive if they are consistent. The applicant should be #1 on the chart.
2. The instructions, application form and pedigree chart should be stapled together to ensure the applicant has a complete set of guidelines.
3. Decide what documentation you will accept from the applicant. The minimum may be a

birth and marriage record for each generation. Vital records (birth, marriage, and death), courthouse records (deeds, probate), other government records, church and school records, censuses, bible records, and newspaper clippings are preferred. If you want a photocopy of a marriage record and will not accept a xerox copy of a marriage record index, say so.

If a marriage record cannot be found, will you accept a copy of the census that shows a man and woman as husband and wife?

4. A short list of acceptable primary and secondary sources should be included with the instructions. Remember, not all applicants will be genealogists. A large percentage will be family historians. They may not understand the difference between primary and secondary sources.
5. Request a fee to be submitted with the application. The amount will be based on anticipated costs and desired profits. Be sure the applicant understands exactly how to make out the check or money order. You may also want to ask for a self-addressed, stamped envelope. This could be used to notify the person that their application has or has not been accepted. You may need to contact an out of town applicant to request further documentation.

Filing and Retrieval

Arrange a filing system to record the applicant's name, address, telephone number if provided, amount of check with the check number and date, whether a society member or non-member, the number of applications received in their package and the date you received the envelope. The post office has been known to lose packages.

In case an applicant writes to you asking whether or not you received their package, you can quickly check your file for an answer.

Review the applications as soon as possible upon arrival. The applicant is anxious to know if he/she has been accepted. If not accepted, they will want to know what they must do to be accepted.

Offer specific answers. You may have to tell them exactly how to obtain a needed record.

Be aware that a person may submit an application that is missing documentation or contains inaccurate research. Notify the person and explain to them exactly what is needed to fulfill the requirements. Do this in time for them to meet the deadline. If they disagree, it is then their decision whether or not they wish to continue. Return the application and fee promptly.

Award Recognition

What is the applicant's reward for participating in your project? A certificate with their name and their ancestor's name is an ideal reward. (A portion of the applicant's fee will cover this cost.) If more than one ancestor is approved, a certificate for each ancestor should be awarded. The certificates can be produced on a home computer and the names added by a society member adept at calligraphy.

Let the applicants know what you are going to do with their family history. If you are planning to write a new county history, tell them. They will be proud to participate in this endeavor.

Maybe you are planning to microfilm the family histories and place the film in your society's genealogy library as a resource. Or you may want to compile a First Families surname book that could be sold. The monies derived from the sales would help support the project. Be sure the applicant is aware of your goals.

If applicants ask why they should participate in your project, you might tell them that you will be placing their histories in a permanent repository for future generations. If they are the last of their family, they may consider this an ideal situation. Sometimes an applicant has no one to whom he or she can leave the family history and do not want their hard work just thrown away, so will gladly give it to you. Compliment them on their decision.

Toot Your Horn!

Advertise your project. Make announcements in your society's publication on a regular basis. Local newspapers are always seeking interesting articles. Prepare and send a news release to your newspapers and other genealogy quarterlies. Local, state and national genealogy societies have journals that will print your news release at no cost. Try genealogy columns in other newspapers. Contact the local television station. They have community calendars and may accept your release. Television stations also have local news segments. Arrange an interview with the host/hostess.

Choose the appropriate time to award the certificates. This could be done as part of a society meeting, but make it a special event. A luncheon or dinner to coincide with the meeting and a special presentation of the certificates will make your finale an event to

remember. Send invitations to the accepted applicants with an RSVP. This will give them an opportunity to purchase tickets for themselves and their friends. Be sure that your society historian is also there to record the event and take suitable photographs.

You may want to invite a local celebrity to award the certificates or give a talk. Ask the mayor to proclaim a First Families Day. This proclamation could be read at your celebration.

To add another exciting feature, you might want to award prizes to the oldest living descendant of a pioneer ancestor; the youngest descendant of a pioneer ancestor; the applicant who submits the most ancestors; the applicant whose ancestor arrived in the area at the earliest date. After reading the submitted family histories, you'll be inspired to create other categories.

Let First Families recipients know that they are the most important part of the project. For those applicants who cannot attend your award ceremony, mail the certificates soon after the awards are presented. Include a short letter thanking them for participating in your project. Tell them what you plan to do with their family histories.

Such a project will prove very rewarding to your society, and not only in terms of fund raising. People are very proud of their ancestors and their applications will enhance the story of your community's history. The publicity generated by this project may result in spin-off projects by other community groups, such as the renovation of a cemetery. An added benefit to this undertaking may be that many applicants will join your society and become involved in other activities.

We hope you find the ideas in this Paper useful. It is from a Series of six individual sets.

- SET I. STRATEGIES FOR SOCIETIES
- SET II. STRATEGIES FOR PRESIDENTS
- SET III. STRATEGIES FOR VICE-PRESIDENTS
- SET IV. STRATEGIES FOR TREASURERS
- SET V. STRATEGIES FOR SECRETARIES
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