

### Objectives:

- To acknowledge the harmful stereotypes that exist in the field that are limiting the scope of younger generation interest.
- To learn more about the research and work that younger generations are doing in studying the everyday person of the past.
- To gain a few tools to better speak about family history to younger generations and find a space to work together on common interests.
- To learn about and plan to implement fun and creative ways to discover history and personal stories with younger generations, and to understand the value of learning through play.

**What are we really saying when we say, “younger people have no interest in genealogy”? It is important for us to ask ourselves these questions every time we think this, we want to share a story, or plan to start a project in collaboration with younger generations.**

- What is our definition of younger generations? What is our definition of interest? What do we *really* mean when we say this? Do we feel like we are lacking support from our family for our interest? Are we worried about who keeps the “stuff” over the stories they tell? Are we accounting for the number of people in older generations who are not interested in genealogy when we say this?
- Are we finding ways to relate our content to their interests, style of learning and discovery? If not, why? What can we do better?
- How are younger generations defining genealogy, family history, family, culture, and community?
- How are younger generations sharing ideas and asking for help?
- How can we expand our understanding of traditional ways of involvement in genealogy to be more inclusive of how younger generations explore and share their personal stories?
- Are we ready to toss tradition and move forward with different forward-thinking goals.

**“If you don’t know your audience, it shows.” - Elee Wood, Museum Professional**

The way we access and share information is constantly changing. Our genealogy focused organizations and societies center around finding access to information. Most organizations can and need to do better about storytelling. Think about our own work and the work of some genealogy focused organizations and societies we know. How are we *actually* sharing these stories? Does most of our work still live solely in digital trees and records in organized binders? Would someone be able to find, read, and be inspired by one of the juiciest stories we have found? Would they have to be able to piece it together from multiple sources?

***Are we changing enough with the times?***

Over the generations genealogy has certainly become more digital friendly with Twitter threads, YouTube channels, blogs, and online courses and chat forums. Move past the stereotype that younger generations are automatically interested in anything with technology. Tik Tok, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook users do not

gain followers and posts do not go viral on content that is not relatable or relevant. What we choose to focus on and how we deliver that information often matters more than our choice of media delivery.

If we want to be relevant and our societies to survive, we must plan to be ahead of trends in and outside of what our industry is doing. Are we ready to have this conversation? Each family, each organization, each community are different from one another, and approaches to bridge this gap should be equally unique.

**The first step is to always listen, ask questions, understand, and think forward.**

**What are some values of Millennials and Generation Z, and how do they apply to history and preservation?  
How can we use this information to be more inclusive to younger generations?**

- Pay attention to where Millennial and Generation Z cohorts are voting with their money and their voices. What topics are important to these generational cohorts? PEW Research Center studies, and other reputable studies and articles, can be informative to generational values on several topics. These studies can require a bit of reading between the lines if we cannot interview large test groups.
  - Remember that just because some younger people love the same thing does not mean that the people around us will like the same things - ex: technology, social media, etc., ... Get to know the reasons why the young people in our lives love what they love, and make sure we do the same for the younger people in our organizations and societies.
- Pay attention to what some of the youngest professional genealogists are researching, writing, and promoting on their social media. Follow these professionals. Tag and interact with them on their social platforms so they see your support and you can work together on future projects.
- How do the values of these two younger cohorts differ with the values of Generation X and Baby Boomers? How are they the same?
- Feel confident with placing younger individuals on your boards, hiring them to share their expertise with your group, and hiring them for project and client-based research and projects. This is a direct investment into the future of the field.
- Utilize the information and expertise younger generations bring to the table. Invest in them. Organize a task force of individuals to explore tough questions, try different ideas, programs and events on different days and times. Allow yourself to just focus on this newer audience without needing to stay at the status quo.

**What are some subjects that younger generation historians are exploring and how do they share that work?  
Where are they building additional knowledge?**

Professional genealogists and archivists interested in local, public, community, and microhistories are not as rare as we think they are. Think back to the original prompt of what we are really saying when we say that "younger people are interested in genealogy."

**We know that young professionals in this field are out there, so what are we doing to exclude ourselves from them, and vice versa? Where are we not looking?**

- Are younger generations not interested in the same educational tools and formats as we are? Are we inherently or unconsciously creating barriers for younger professionals to learn and teach with us? Have we asked younger generations interested in genealogy, history, and research why our organizations might not be appealing? Are we okay with making some foundational changes?
- Have our barriers and blogs, online classes, social media networks and platforms pushed younger generations into not seeing the value of our genealogy focused organizations and societies? How do we utilize these in our work and think forward on how genealogy focused organizations and societies can be valuable in the future?
- Students and graduates of History, Public History, Museum Studies, Library, and Information Science programs learn at a collegiate and graduate level the research, critical thinking, and delivery tools that can take other people many years to build. These individuals are often the ones filling our research requests. Why are these individuals excluded from our understanding of research professionals? How can we help to expand the future of the field of individual and community studies?
- Are we looking at the trends of historic sites and museums on who are highlighting new parts of their collections and interpreting new stories? Who are the professionals doing that work? How can we work with them, or be inspired by them, for our own projects and future collaborations?
- The general population of Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z who are interested in learning more about history through technology, museums, and other cultural programming want a broader and more balanced perspective of historical truth, and how those events impact the world they live in today.

**How can we shape these values and topics to gather interest in our own research, societies, or organizations?**

- Reflect on how we define the terms of “younger people have no interest in genealogy.” Often this phrase comes from a feeling of lack of support in our interests or a sense of fear that our work will not carry on in memory or with physical items. Identify our root concerns, and work to find solutions for this in the best interest of everyone around us.
- Review the above questions and reach out to the younger professionals in the genealogy community and those outside of the genealogy community who are interested in history. Ask a lot of questions, listen, understand, and move forward in change and common understanding that the field, how we research, and how we share our work has drastically changed from year to year.
- Find common interests, or interests where local or regional history, family history, and memories can overlap with the interests of others. Explore new research together, travel, create and play through these formats and ideas.

**One great, meaningful, and memorable family story means more to many than a pedigree chart.**