

IGG INVESTIGATIVE GENETIC GENEALOGY Accreditation Board

The non-profit Investigative Genetic Genealogy Accreditation Board (IGGAB) was founded in 2022 to provide standards and an accreditation exam for IGG practitioners. Our seven-member governing board has met weekly since that time, coordinating with dozens of IGG stakeholders. With their input, we have crafted professional standards and a code of ethics (hereafter, the “standards”) for IGG. Those standards balance the need for proficiency among IGG practitioners and the trust of investigating agencies and the public with the importance of allowing IGG to be used widely as a tool to help secure justice.

We offered our first standards draft for public comment in April 2023 and officially published the standards in December 2023. After additional feedback and conversations with stakeholders, we published our first quarterly revision in April 2024, which included a clarification to the standard of proof for IGG. Parallel to that effort, we recruited dozens of subject matter experts from IGG, genealogy, law enforcement, forensic science, and ethics research, to develop hundreds of questions for our accreditation exam. Beta testing of the exam begins this week, and the exam will be offered to the public beginning in the fall. Individuals who pass the exam and agree to abide by our standards will become Accredited Investigative Genetic Genealogists (AIGGs).

We continue to welcome feedback from IGG stakeholders as we spearhead the effort to professionalize this still-developing field. Even where we face disagreement, our policy is to engage criticism in good faith and seriously consider all ideas brought to us. Recently, the National Technology and Validation Implementation Collaborative (NTVIC) published a public letter that noted areas of IGGAB’s standards that could be improved. While we do not agree with every point made in the letter, several of the points raised are valuable and address areas that IGGAB is actively working to improve. We appreciate NTVIC’s attention to these areas. Continued, good-faith engagement between IGG stakeholders is the best way to ensure IGG remains a powerful tool for helping to secure justice.

While our standards and accreditation exam have been our primary focus in the past year, we have also developed a series of best practices for IGG. We distinguish best practices from our standards, as the former are guidelines while the latter are binding on any IGG practitioner who wishes to be accredited by IGGAB. Each best practice will be published on our website as they are finalized. As a preview of what’s to come, some of the areas addressed by our best practices include:

- Computer and data security. While our standards dictate top-level requirements for IGG practitioners, our best practices provide more detailed guidelines for practice and policy. A few examples are the use of VPNs, separate logins and browser profiles for all IGG work, and completion of all IGG work in non-public settings. Our best practices maintain that storing data in secure, cloud-based systems such as Google Drive is best for data security, and that privatized, unsearchable trees built on web-based platforms are a more secure way to build trees than using desktop software.

- Review of leads produced through IGG. Our best practices recommend that IGG practitioners have procedures in place for review of leads by another practitioner. This is sufficient to ensure leads are of high confidence and prevent a waste of resources on the part of the investigating agency (e.g., recommending unnecessary reference testing).
- Written policies and documentation. Again, while our standards provide high-level requirements in this area, our best practices provide example policies that IGG practitioners might adopt for all areas of IGG work, including security, communication, report writing, and other areas. We also recommend documentation that goes beyond what our standards require.

Other best practices will be released as they are developed, and we welcome feedback from all stakeholders. Importantly, over time and as the field develops, we may adopt some of our best practices as standards. One of our founding principles is that IGG is a field that requires self-regulation so that the regulatory framework can be nimble in response to frequent changes in the field.

Along with best practices, we have made decisions about some requirements for accreditation that have not yet been made public. We are happy to offer a summary of some of those items here.

- Educational requirements for accreditation. In recognition of the IGG pioneers who built the field and are largely self-taught (or learned the field through informal mentorship), we will offer the accreditation exam in its first year to the public without an educational requirement. Beginning in the second year, we will require applicants to provide evidence of their IGG education. This may come in the form of IGG-specific programs or a combination of other educational tracks, including self-study, mentorship, and attendance at conferences.
- Continuing education. AIGGs will be required to demonstrate a course of ongoing education to retain their accreditation. This continuing education can take many forms, from documented review of journal articles and books to attendance at conferences and participation in discussion groups. Documentation of continuing education will be submitted yearly and subject to audit.
- Re-accreditation. With a rapidly developing field such as IGG, re-accreditation is necessary to ensure continued competency. Every two years, AIGGs will be required to take a re-accreditation exam that tests their knowledge of new developments in the field.
- Disciplinary committee: IGGAB will convene a disciplinary committee that reviews accusations of standard violations by AIGGs. The committee will be drawn from volunteer AIGGs and members of our governing and advisory boards. The process will be similar, but not identical, to the disciplinary process for attorneys, where a written accusation results in an initial investigation, which, if deemed credible, will be followed up by a hearing. Disciplinary actions will be tiered according to the severity of the violation.

More details about these policies will be released soon. New policies may also be adopted based on feedback from stakeholders and as deemed necessary by IGGAB.

The wide success of IGG in its short history, and the failure of all legal challenges to its use, demonstrate that IGG is an effective and reliable method. IGGAB's accreditation exam and standards help ensure that public trust in the field remains high and investigating agencies have a vetted repository of proficient and ethical IGG practitioners to rely on. Our approach balances the need for regulation with the need to retain a wide spectrum of IGG practitioners operating in various capacities—as independent contractors working from home, sworn and non-sworn law enforcement, within research institutions, and inside forensic labs.

We appreciate NTVIC's—and all IGG stakeholders'—continued engagement with IGGAB as we implement our accreditation process.