

Choosing the right IGG provider

There are a number of important considerations involved in selecting a provider of investigative genetic genealogy. The following questions can help you get the information you need to know to make the right choice for your case.

Q: Who will actually be working on the IGG for the case? What kind of time can they commit to my case?

A: May include the number of IGGs assigned to the case, along with their credentials and years of experience. You may also want to ask about how many cases your IGGs are also responsible for, which can give you a sense of the bandwidth that will be available to your case. If there are a limited number of hours included in the price offered, that number should be disclosed up front. No organization can guarantee success before a case enters the lab pipeline due to the inherent nature of genetic genealogy. The time needed to get to a candidate for your case should always be offered as an estimate or a range, and many organizations may not be able to estimate the time needed at all because of the nature of IGG work. Finally, the organization should be able to articulate that some types of cases involving people of color, recent immigrants, and endogamous populations will very often take longer to resolve.

Q: How will you communicate status and progress on the case?

A: Should include a clearly defined schedule of reports as well as the kinds of information provided in reports, and how the reports will be delivered. Indications of race and ethnicity should be determined early in the research, and can be a key indicator of the difficulty of the case. Important milestones in the IGG research should be defined: targeting the most useful genetic relative and their likely relationships to the Doe, determination of most recent common ancestors (MRCAs) of the matches, delineation of the generations represented by the match group, and progress within the research to narrow the family tree.

Q: What is your policy for contacting DNA relatives during the genealogy?

A: Should include clear guidelines about how you and your IGG will communicate with your Doe's DNA relatives. It might be that the organization requires you to do all outreach, or they may plan to reach out to people without your direct oversight. During research, IGGs may locate people whose DNA could help move the identification process forward. An IGG organization should have a plan for contacting and working with potential relatives to support them through the process of DNA testing and upload to GEDmatch or FTDNA.

Q: How will you handle confidential information about the case? What about announcing the resolution of the case?

A: Should include an overview of how case data is managed within the organization, who has access, and how access is protected. May also include information about the organization's internal rules for disclosing case information. Should commit to never publish anything about your case without your direct approval.



Q: If the time commitment from the IGGs has run out, or we are dissatisfied with your organization, what are our options for taking our case to another IGG provider?

A: Should include reassurance that your case will not belong to the IGG organization and that they will work hard to earn your trust and work productively with you. Should also include an overview of the process to transfer your case to another provider and what information will be transferred. Some research notes and investigative records may be considered proprietary and not available to transfer, and it's important to know what would and would not transition along with the case. Family trees, research notes, match lists, case summaries, and data files are all examples of work product types to discuss.

Q: What kind of DNA testing will you use to investigate our case and why?

A: Should include specifics about the lab processes and output files that will be developed from your biological sample. Your IGG and/or the lab they use should be able to explain which type of testing is being employed (microarray vs WGS vs targeted sequencing), whether that technology is suitable for your sample (microarray may not work well for remains or very degraded samples), and whether it will provide all of the data required for performing IGG.

Q: What raw data files will you develop and make available to us? What happens to our sample after the lab processes it?

A: Should include the assertion that this is your case, and the data developed from your Doe's biological sample belongs to you. Upon request, the organization should provide the raw data (IDAT or FASTQ) and the DNA profile created for upload to GEDmatch Pro and FTDNA. Depending on the size and type of sample submitted, there may be residual biological material left over after a DNA file has been obtained. All remaining samples, remaining sequencing library, and DNA extract should be returned to your custody.

Q: What information will be provided at the conclusion of investigative genetic genealogy?

A: Should include a research overview along with charts and family trees that display the conclusions of the IGGs and explain how they were made. Some providers may include detailed information about genetic relatives, while others may choose to protect the identities of living DNA relatives not needed for the identification confirmation process. It's important to understand the privacy concerns and confidentiality requirements for final reports from the provider.

Finally, here are some additional steps you might consider when choosing a provider:

- ~ Ensure the quote for pricing includes specifics that matter to you
- ~ Review the contract and/or terms of service to ensure it complies with your agency's rules
- ~ Review publicly available information about the provider's cases
- ~ Connect with past and current clients to understand their experience

