



DNA for your ONS: A Recruiting Road Map

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The essential element of a DNA project is recruiting participants. Without participants, you will miss the exciting and interesting discoveries you can make with DNA.

Your Tree

The first two participants typically come from your tree. If you are male with the registered surname, the first participant is easy, since it is you. Then you just need to find a distant direct line male in your family tree. Ideally, they connect to the tree as far back as possible.

If you are female, or a male and researching a surname different than your own, then reviewing your family tree and past contacts is usually helpful in identifying the two males to contact. It is also helpful if you can find the two tests for your tree.

If you select persons with whom you've had contact or a relationship, that often makes the recruiting process easier.

If you need to approach males with whom you've never made contact, it helps to structure your correspondence to focus on your one-name study and what you have discovered from your research, and then lead into DNA and how they can help. Also cover how they will make discoveries about their family tree, their surname, and their distant origin.

Participants Needed

Once you've lined up the two participants for your tree, you are ready to move on to testing other trees for your registered surname(s). The approach you take will depend on a variety of factors:

- The population of the surname
- Whether or not you have constructed trees, and if so, how far are you in the process
- Your comfort level at different forms of contact

- The number of contacts you've made relating to your one-name study
- Your desire to raise donations to fund testing, making it usually easier to recruit participants
- If you know of any trees with limited or only one surviving male
- The speed at which you want your DNA project to grow
- Any existing communication vehicles, such as a newsletter, blog, social media presence, mailing list and so forth
- The time you have available

One effective approach is to make an announcement about the project – including the benefits of participating, as well as mentioning your need to raise donations – in any established communication vehicles, such as a newsletter for your ONS. This approach will typically skim off the prime prospects and turn them into participants.

The frequency of your surname and the readership of your communication vehicle will determine the quantity of participants. If you are recruiting in a pool of 300 name bearers, you will have a far different number of initial participants as compared to the Guild member recruiting in a pool of 5,000 name bearers. The same impact can be found by the size of the audience of your communication vehicle. Do you have 200 subscribers to your newsletter, or 2,000?

If you are studying a rare or low-frequency surname with a limited population, it may take more time to recruit representatives from each tree, since you have a limited prospect pool. On the other hand, you will be able to reach the point where most trees will have been tested more quickly, and get to the stage of drawing conclusions about the surname faster than a Guild member dealing with a population of 30,000 with the surname.

So the size of the population of your surname has both an upside and a downside.

Once you do your general announcement, set a schedule to revisit the DNA project via the communications vehicle(s) you are using. Your first communication is a general announcement. After this, future communication will be more effective if they focus on any discoveries made to date. You can then continue the discovery theme in each communication, coupled with a call for participants.

After the general announcement, it is time to focus on those trees with just one, or a limited number of males surviving. Any delay on these trees could result in being unable to ever test them, when there are no more surviving males. Raising donations may help you in recruiting males from these trees to test.

Going Forward

After you have taken care of the trees with one or limited surviving males, then you move on to the rest of the population of your surname.

If you have established contacts with persons in trees in your one-name study, they will be ideal contacts for recruiting, since you have established trust and rapport.

Once you have completed recruiting among your established contacts, then move on to the other trees for your registered surname.

If you have constructed most or all of the trees, you may want to take a targeted approach, and go tree by tree, to find one or two distant males, depending on the situation, and have them test.

If you don't have many trees constructed, or you have a surname with a larger current population, another approach is preferable. With this approach, your goal is to get the message out about the project to the population of your surname and encourage others to test,

and keep doing this on an ongoing basis, changing the message periodically, and using multiple communication vehicles.

Be sure to focus on the discoveries they can make. It is also helpful to use some tool to keep track of your progress in testing for your surname, such as marking off on the 1851 UK census households that are represented by a participant. For other countries, select an equivalent tool.

Which method you use to recruit participants – targeted or general, or even a combination of the two methods – depends on a variety of factors, such as whether trees are constructed, the frequency of your surname, the stage of your one-name study, and whether you have had past contacts with persons with your ONS surname.

More important than the approach is to keep recruiting.

Persistence and Patience

Recruiting is an ongoing process which requires persistence and patience.

The longest it's taken for me to get an answer from a letter is five years.

The longest it has taken for me to get an answer to an email is eight years.

Luckily, these are rare occurrences.

Much can happen during recruiting, and also after the testers have their test kit. Life events can distract the participant from the mission. Whether illness, family crisis, divorce, job loss – the list is endless – participants with the best intentions can get overwhelmed by life and not respond to contacts.

Persistence and patience are key. If you have an interested prospect or participant, it is helpful to wait out the problem. Most times the situation will get back on track. If you paid for the test kit, your investment is protected. At any time you can get a free replacement test kit.

Of course, you can also run into the situation where they get their test kit, and now have concerns. You will need to find out what they are and help them with the issue. A typical issue is privacy, and that is easy to overcome by explaining how matching works, what a participant can see, and what the general public can see. A simple explanation in most cases is sufficient to resolve their concern.

Patience and persistence pay off when the participant gets his result and is excited to have matches, discovers his

distant origin, and is proud to have contributed to the knowledge about the surname. You might even have developed a contact who can then help you recruit others.

Discoveries for Your One-Name Study

DNA provides an opportunity to make discoveries about the surnames in your one-name study. DNA provides information not in the paper records, and often leads to surprises. The subject matter is easy to learn, and not as difficult as some of the records we deal with in our research.

You can proceed at your own speed, and spend as much or as little time as you want. After a few participants, it all gets easier.

Want to Get Started?

When you are ready to add DNA to your one-name study, the DNA Advisor is here to help, including setting up your project with proven marketing material. Simply write: DNA@one-name.org. You will receive a completely setup project that you can modify, along with an easy-to-follow 20-step "Getting Started" email and a sample recruiting email and letter. ■