

FAQs for individuals seeking Native American Tribal membership

Prepared by the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs

What are the benefits of becoming a member of a federally recognized Tribe?

In addition to variety of cultural and personal reasons to become a member of a Tribe, members of Tribes are eligible to access a range of federal, state, and local governmental resources, including education, health, and social services. For example, enrollment within a Tribe is used to determine eligibility for access to healthcare through Indian Health Services (IHS). An individual can have Tribal membership as well as state citizenship.

What are the Tribal membership requirements?

Each of the Tribes has its own right to determine the standards for becoming a member. There is not a uniform requirement for Tribal membership. To find out what the requirements are for a specific Tribe, you must contact that Tribe directly. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is no longer involved in Tribal membership.

What kinds of genealogical documentation do Tribes typically require?

When establishing descent from an Indian Tribe for membership and enrollment purposes, you must provide genealogical documentation that shows you are a descendant from an ancestor who was a member of a federally recognized Tribe.

The type of genealogical documentation required varies by Tribe, but below are some examples of criteria Tribes may use to determine membership. Keep in mind that these requirements may be used in combination as well.

- **Lineal descendency** can sometimes be determined by finding a relative whose name is listed on the Tribe's roll, which is a list of Tribal members from a given timeframe. For example, in lineal descendency, if your great grandmother is listed on a Tribal membership roll, you would be eligible for membership in that same Tribe because you can prove you are related to her.
- **Tribal residency** requires that the Tribal member live within, maintain a residence, or have an allotment among the Tribal lands. Some Tribes require that the enrolled parent or parents reside on the Tribal lands at the time of the applicant's birth.
- **Tribal blood quantum** describes individuals by the "blood" contributions of their parents. For instance, if your mother is half X Tribe and half Z Tribe, and your father is half Z Tribe and half non-Tribal, you would be $\frac{1}{4}$ X Tribe, $\frac{1}{2}$ Z Tribe, and $\frac{1}{4}$ non-Tribal. Blood quantum is sometimes used to refer to the proportion of Indian ancestry an individual has, rather than ancestry from any one Tribe.
- **Genetic testing** is one way to help determine descendency and blood quantum. Although there is not a genetic test to prove an individual has American Indian lineage, tests that evaluate possible biological relationships between individuals and current Tribal members. Types of genetic tests, done through DNA fingerprinting or blood tests, include: maternity and paternity tests, which is useful when the mother or father of a child is unknown; grandparentage testing, which can be used when a parent is unavailable for testing; siblingship and extended family testing, which have limited reliability but can sometimes be useful; and genetic ancestry testing, which is typically most useful when used in combination with other types of genetic tests.

What are some tips for researching my genealogy?

Start with what you know and work backwards. Begin with known information and try to make a “map” of relatives starting with yourself.

Write down everything about your ancestors, even if the information may not seem important initially. The most important information is ancestral names, dates of birth and death, marriages or divorces, and the places where ancestors were born, lived, married, and died. When you find records on a certain family name, and are not sure if this is really your family or not, copy it anyhow, you may be glad you did, and it will save you another trip. You can weed it out later.

Make a family tree. Two websites, <http://www.familyecho.com/> and <http://www.myheritage.com/page/make-a-family-tree-online>, can help you make a free family tree online. Many online genealogy search engines also have a place to make family trees.

Visit the local library for records as well as books and guides on how to do genealogical research.

Make notes beforehand when visiting a large repository such as a state archives, or to a distant library. This will help keep you focused.

How do I search for my ancestors?

There are several resources available for researching your genealogy. There are four main research steps:

1. **Identify and Record Your Ancestors**
2. **Build Your Own Family Tree**
3. **Search Indian and Census Records**
4. **Identify Your Tribe and Enrollment Process**

Additionally, online guides are available for helping you begin your search. Check out the following:

- FamilySearch has an American Indian (Native American) genealogy and family history research page. Guide to genealogy, history and records: census, church, allotment (land and property), military, and newspapers. Records may be searched by location (state or reservation) Tribe, agency, and reservation.
- Go back to the state and county where your family came from and search for these same records, no matter how good a source your local library is for genealogical records, there is no substitute for a visit such as this. They will have things you do not have locally.
 - https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/American_Indian_Genealogy
- The Indian Law Library provides information about Native American genealogy research tools, mostly those available on the Internet.
 - <http://www.narf.org/nill/resources/roots.htm>
- The Department of the Interior has compiled a guide to provide a general overview of questions related to genealogical research and Tribal enrollment.
 - <http://narf.org/nill/resources/enrollment.htm>
- The Native Languages of the Americas website identifies four groups of people who are interested in learning more about their genealogy.

- Visit <http://www.native-languages.org/genealogy.htm> for steps on how to begin researching your genealogy.
- The four groups are:
 - You are already a Tribal member or belong to an American Indian community.
 - One or both of your parents were Indian but you don't know who they were or what Tribe you came from because of adoption, boarding school issues, or a custody battle.
 - Your parent or grandparent belonged to an Indian Tribe, but you were not raised in their culture and now they have passed on.
 - Your grandparent was part Indian but not a Tribal member, or there is a family tradition that you have Indian blood, or you are researching your family's genealogy and have just discovered an Indian ancestor you want to know more about.

Where can I find genealogical information?

Information regarding lineage can be found in a number of places. Start close to home, and then look at local, state, and federal level records. Also check out online databases and search engines. Hiring a researcher is also an option.

Look at home

Start your genealogical research with yourself and find information about your closest relatives first. Valuable information can be found in your home. Look for information in newspaper clippings, birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, diaries and journals, scrapbooks, backs of pictures, and family books. Please refer to the attached genealogy checklist for possible sources of information located right in your house.

Consider contacting other relatives, who may have information about family history.

Look at local and state records

Go back to the state and county where your family came from and search for these same records, no matter how good a source your local library is for genealogical records, there is no substitute for a visit such as this. They will have things you do not have locally.

Be sure to begin your research in current, rather than historic records. If you are currently not a member of a Tribe, start your research with non-Indian records, like those maintained by state and local governments, churches, schools, and libraries. Start looking at records in the places that you think your closest ancestors resided. Civic records at places like county courthouses may have information regarding deeds, wills, or land.

You could also write to the Bureau of Vital Statistics, usually in the state capitol, to request copies of birth, death and marriage certificates, or divorce decrees. Include the name of the individual, date and place of birth, and your relationship to that person. Note that state governments did not gather these kinds of records until about the 1900s, so searches in state records for ancestors who were born or died before that time may be limited.

Look at federal records

The National Archives in Washington, D.C is a good place to start for individuals trying to identify with their ancestors since the census has been taken every ten years since 1790.

- The general National Archives website is www.nara.gov.
- A list of resources from the National Archives specifically pertaining to Native Americans can be found at <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/native-americans.html>.
- The National Archives contains military and service related records, passenger arrival records, and other useful documents.
- Most of these records are arranged by Tribe.
- The National Archives has census catalogs online, and you can find microfilm roll numbers to later purchase from the National Archives or locate at one of the seventeen National Archives' regional branches.
 - For a complete list of regional offices, visit <http://www.archives.gov/locations/>.
 - The regional branch in Fort Worth, Texas, has most of the records relating to the Five Civilized Tribes.
 - The National Archives at Denver is located at 17101 Huron Street, Broomfield, CO 80023, and the phone number is 303-604-4740.
- The National Archives sells and rents various rolls of microfilm and other genealogical materials, and the phone number for rental and sales requests is 1-800-234-8861.
- Before you search the National Archives, it is helpful to know the following information:
 - Name of ancestor for whom you are searching
 - Name of the person's federally recognized Tribe
 - Approximately when the person lived
 - What state or territory the person lived in

The Dawes Rolls lists people accepted between 1898 and 1914 by the Dawes Commission as members of five Indian Tribes, which are the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole Tribes. There is not information about any of the other Tribes.

- The Rolls can be searched to discover the enrollee's name, sex, blood degree, and census card number. The census card may provide additional genealogical information, and may also contain references to earlier rolls, such as the 1880 Cherokee census. A census card was generally accompanied by an "application jacket". The jackets then sometimes contain valuable supporting documentation, such as birth and death affidavits, marriage licenses, and correspondence.
- Before you use the Dawes Rolls, it is helpful to know:
 - Name of ancestor for whom you are searching
 - Name of the person's federally recognized Tribe
- Visit <http://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/dawes/intro.html> for more detailed information about how to search the Dawes Rolls and what kind of information is available.
- There are three locations to access the Dawes Rolls:
 - National Archives & Records Administration
Southwest Region
P.O. Box 6216, Fort Worth, TX 76115
Phone: 817-334-5621

Email: archives@ftworth.nara.gov

URL: www.nara.gov

- Oklahoma Historical Society
Archives and Manuscripts Division
2100 Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105
Phone: 405-521-2491
- Tulsa City-County Library
400 Civic Center, Tulsa, OK 74103
Phone: 918-596-7977
Collection: www.tulsalibrary.org/collections/genealogy/roll-text.htm

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is rarely involved in enrollment and membership and does not conduct genealogical research.

[Check online databases and search engines](#)

- The Denver Public Library is a great clearinghouse for genealogical research - <http://history.denverlibrary.org/research/genealogy.html>
- Heritage Quest - www.heritagequestonline.com/
 - Index to records available on CD ROM plus magazines, books and software.
- Fold3 (formally Footnote)
 - Search over 412 million documents to add to your family tree.
 - <http://go.fold3.com/genealogyrecords/>
- Ancestry - <http://www.ancestry.com/>
 - Please note there is unlimited free access to AncestryPlus from all NARA locations.
- FamilyHistory - <http://familyhistory.com/>
- FamilySearch - <https://familysearch.org/>
- Native American Heritage Genealogy - www.nativeamericanheritage.com
- Access Genealogy - www.accessgenealogy.com
 - Link specific to Native Americans: <http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/>
- RootsWeb - www.rootsweb.com
- Indians of Canada - www.inac.gc.ca
- Genealogy.com - http://genealogy.com/index_n.html
- Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and museums (ATALM) - www.atalm.org
- The USGenWeb Project - <http://usgenweb.org/>
 - This Project is non-commercial and fully committed to free genealogy access for everyone.
- Kindred Konnection
 - <http://ww1.kindredkonnektion.com/>
- GeneaNet - <http://www.geneanet.org/?lang=en>
- Online Native American Indian Genealogy Records and Databases - <http://www.genealogybranches.com/nativeamericans.html>
 - Includes links to Dawes Commission records and indexes for individual Tribes

Hire a researcher

Researchers can also contact genealogical organizations, historical societies, and other private institutions. Go to <http://expertgenealogy.com/pro/> to find a list of independent companies and individuals who provide genealogy related research services.

How can I learn about how to research genealogy?

Classes are occasionally offered to assist individuals in genealogical research.

- **The History Colorado Center** (located at 1200 Broadway in Denver) occasionally offers classes for genealogists of all experience levels who want to learn how History Colorado's collections can benefit their research.
 - **Cost:** \$4 members, \$5 nonmembers
 - **Reservations:** Required. Tickets can be purchased by calling 303-866-2394. Visit <http://www.historycolorado.org/adult-visitors/library-programs> for more information
- **The Colorado Genealogical Society** offers research guidance, classes, and seminars.
 - Visit <http://www.cogensoc.us/> or email info@cogensoc.us for more information
 - The website also has many links to helpful research sites.
 - The Society also processes research requests. For more information, visit <http://www.cogensoc.us/cgsresearch.html>
- **The National Archives at Broomfield** offers training and workshops a few times a year.
 - To get on the e-mail list to be notified when new workshops are added, please send an e-mail to denver.archives@nara.gov
 - Visit <http://www.archives.gov/denver/news/workshops.html> or call (303) 604-4740 for more information
- **Colorado Genealogy & LDS Family History Centers** offer help. Family roots are important to many Colorado residents today, but few know how to use the many resources at their disposal to create an efficient and accurate family tree. These research centers are branches of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and are operated by the Colorado LDS Church. The facilities are open to the general public as well, and most of the research and resources are available at no charge.
 - If you have any questions or comments about family history centers, please send a message to tfhc@archives.com.
 - For a list of centers across the state, visit: <http://www.archives.com/genealogy/records-colorado.html>

How do I apply for enrollment in a Tribe?

After you have completed your genealogical research, documented your ancestry, and determined the Tribe with which your ancestor was affiliated, you are ready to contact the Tribe directly to obtain the criteria for membership. Do not contact the BIA to enroll for membership as the BIA does not have jurisdiction to do so.

How do I locate the Tribe I may have Indian ancestry from?

The Tribal Leaders Directory that is published by the Bureau of Indian Affairs lists all 566 federally recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives. Obtain the list online at www.doi.gov/leaders.pdf or call 202-208-3710.