



# NOK finders. Academy

*Hands on Experience in Forensic Genealogy*



Eligibility Guidelines  
& Application Packet

2024

## **NOKfinders Academy**

Congratulations on wanting to expand your skills in the field of forensic genealogy and contribute to the important work of unclaimed and missing person cases!

NOKfinders Academy provides an opportunity to build your skills through hands-on casework. This experiential learning model allows you to practice what you have already learned in other programs and training.

Members of NOKfinders Academy help bring closure to unclaimed and missing person cases. The cases are challenging, require persistence and hard work. The work is meaningful and your efforts will contribute to solving the social issue of unclaimed and missing person cases.

You will find more information in this packet. Take a look and we look forward to reviewing your application!

Sincerely,



Shannon Wood Byers  
CEO/Founder

# WELCOME



# ABOUT NOKFinders

**NOKfinders** is a low-profit, limited liability company (L3C) created to help aspiring forensic genealogists gain hands-on experience while contributing to the important work of solving unclaimed and missing person cases.

**NOKfinders has three goals:**

- Provide a platform for aspiring forensic genealogists to gain access to real cases to hone their skills and build experience through hands-on casework.
- Provide cost-effective research services to investigating agencies to find next of kin for unclaimed and missing person cases.
- Contribute to the important work of closing unclaimed and missing person cases.

# Academy



# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

## What is an Unclaimed Person?

When a person passes away and authorities cannot find next of kin or the family is unable or unwilling to take the remains, the person becomes unclaimed. Their identity (name and birthdate) is known. It is estimated that 1-3% of all deaths result in an unclaimed body. NOKfinders aims to tackle this social issue and use our skills in genealogy to find next of kin.

## Unclaimed vs. Unidentified

- An **unclaimed person's** identity is known. Their name, birthdate, and place of death are known.
- An **unidentified person's** identity is not known. DNA and genetic genealogy are used to help identify these people. The DNA Doe Project and other organizations focus on this type of case.

## How do we help Missing Person Cases?

We find next of kin in missing person cases and provide their contact info to the investigating agency who contacts the family for a DNA sample to have on file in the event decomposed remains are found. The DNA of the remains can be compared to make an identification.





# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

## **Reasons Why a Person May Be Unclaimed**

Each case is different. Some reasons a decedent may be unclaimed include:

- Financially a family may not be able to claim the remains. Funeral expenses and costs accumulated to store the remains create financial barriers.
- Personally a family may not be interested in claiming the person. Relationships are complex and there may be reasons for not wanting to claim the person.
- Authorities may not be able to identify next of kin. Some cases require 50 or more hours of research to identify next of kin. Most agencies are unable to provide the necessary time for each case.

## **Forensic Genealogy vs. Investigative Genetic Genealogy**

Forensic Genealogy and Investigative Genetic Genealogy are often confused.

- **Forensic Genealogy** is used to refer to cases with legal implications.
- **Investigative Genetic Genealogy** (aka Forensic Genetic Genealogy) describes cases where DNA is used in criminal investigations or to identify human remains.

# IS THE ACADEMY RIGHT FOR YOU?

## Is NOKfinders Academy Right for You?

If you answer yes to most of these questions, NOKfinders Academy might be right for you!

- Do you have training and education in genealogical research but need hands-on experience to build your skills?
- Are you able to write research reports with proper evaluation of evidence, analysis of information, and citation of sources?
- Are persistent and willing to take on challenging cases?
- Are you looking for flexibility and a program that can be done at your own pace?
- Do you want to connect with peers and learn from them?
- Do you find challenges exciting and fun?
- Do you want to contribute to meaningful work?



# WHAT TO EXPECT

NOKfinders works with investigating agencies to solve unclaimed and missing person cases. As an Academy member you will be assigned cases where you will use your skills and knowledge to find next of kin.

## **Training**

You will receive training in NOKfinders processes for accessing the database to view your cases and record your research. Templates are provided and must be used for your research report, family tree and research log. Once accepted into the Academy, members will receive training materials and access to an online community for support.

## **Expectations**

It is expected that you will have the ability to perform research, evaluate sources, transcribe records, analyze information, resolve conflicts, construct citations, and communicate in writing.

You must have access to any database or online resource necessary to perform research (ex. Ancestry.com, BeenVerified.com, Newspapers.com). You are responsible for any fees or subscriptions for these services. Fees for record retrievals will be covered by NOKfinders.

It is essential that you continue to learn and build on your experience through an education plan. Through the Academy your cases will be reviewed and you will receive feedback. In some situations, you may be directed to other trainings to gain skills. You will have access to a community of other Academy members where you can ask questions and get support.

## **What You Will Gain**

Through your experience in NOKfinders Academy you will gain extensive hands-on forensic genealogy practice. The skills you gain will position you to enter the professional field as an employee, contractor or business owner. If you enjoy the work, you can also continue to work on cases with NOKfinders.





# WHAT TO EXPECT

NOKfinders Academy will **provide you the opportunity** to:

- work on real-life cases
- contribute to meaningful work finding next of kin for decedents and missing persons
- build experience and become more efficient in your research
- work on a variety of cases
- gain credibility in the field by building a portfolio of completed cases

NOKfinders Academy **will support you** by:

- providing feedback on your research to help you gain confidence in your skills
- providing access to a private online community group where you can ask questions of Academy members to help develop your skills through a supportive community
- providing cases for you to work on
- providing updates on the cases you have solved so you know the outcome with the families
- allowing you to pass on a difficult case. If you are unable to solve a case, you can submit your partial research and other researchers (more experienced or with areas of specialty) can pick up the case. This allows you to move onto a case that you can solve. It also allows the more advanced researchers to tackle more challenging cases.
- providing a supportive and understanding culture. Life happens and we aim to be flexible and accommodating. You set the pace!





# ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible to apply for the Academy, you must have training and experience in genealogical research that includes:

One of the following:

- Certificate in Genealogical Research from Boston University
- Completion of ProGen Study Group
- Degree in family history
- University of New Haven Graduate Certificate in Forensic Genetic Genealogy
- Ramapo College Investigative Genetic Genealogy Certificate Program
- Other comparable experience or training

Plus 40 hours of professional development. Examples include:

- Documented self-led study
- NGS courses
- Webinars
- Week-long institute course (SLIG, GRIP, IGHR, Gen-Fed, MAAGI, etc.)

Your application requires a writing sample that demonstrates your ability to perform research and communicate it effectively in writing. It is expected that you will have the ability to perform research, evaluate sources, transcribe records, analyze information, resolve conflicts, construct citations, and communicate in writing.

An education plan that describes how you will continue to grow your skills in the field of genealogy is required. The Academy provides experiential learning where you can practice what you have learned and become proficient.



# APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply to the Academy, please visit <https://nokfinders.com> to complete the application. You will need to provide the following as part of your application:

- **Resume** - Genealogists come from a variety of industries and experience. In addition to your non-genealogy background, please include your genealogy education and experience on your resume.
- **Cover Letter** - In your cover letter, tell us about your future genealogy plans. Are you pursuing this as a profession? Are you interested in the mission of NOKfinders and want to contribute to cases and still maintain your 'day' job? What excites you about forensic genealogy? No right or wrong answers, we just want to know about you!
- **Writing sample** - Please share a research report or other writing that shows your ability to follow genealogical standards. Your writing may show your ability to perform research, evaluate sources, transcribe records, analyze information, resolve conflicts, construct citations, and communicate in writing. The work must be your own. Review of your writing sample by others is acceptable.
- **Education Plan** - NOKfinders Academy provides hands-on experience. It is expected you will continue to develop your skills through other training. Webinars, classes, institutes, self-study, reading, etc. are all acceptable forms of education. Please provide your plan for the next 3 years. This can be a spreadsheet or table. Need ideas for your plan? Visit <https://bcgcertification.org/learning/education/>

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Can I work with local medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement to work on unclaimed and missing person cases?**

Yes, absolutely! If you have relationships with local agencies who need help with Unclaimed Person Cases you can help them. NOKfinders is best for people who want to build their experience on cases while NOKfinders handles the interactions with the investigating agency. If you choose to work with agencies on your own, you are not permitted to use NOKfinders name, templates, or resources.

## **If I work on cases outside of the NOKfinders Academy, can I use the templates?**

No, the templates and materials provided to NOKfinders Academy participants are only for use with NOKfinders cases.

## **Why does NOKfinders not offer workshops or instruction?**

There are many educational opportunities for all levels in the field of genealogy. NOKfinders is filling a need for hands-on experience. Your mentor will help answer case specific questions and you will gain experience through the variety of cases.

## **Does NOKfinders work with DNA?**

No, Unclaimed Person Cases do not require DNA because the identity of the individual is known. We do identify next of kin and provide this information for authorities to obtain DNA samples to compare to remains in missing person cases.

## **Will I be required to contact next of kin for the cases I am assigned?**

No, this may vary depending on the agency and will be handled by NOKfinders administration.

## **What is the cost to become a NOKfinders Academy member?**

There is currently no fee to access cases, receive feedback and participate in a community of supportive genealogists.

NOKFINDERS ACADEMY



# NOK finders.

CLOSURE FOR UNCLAIMED  
PERSON CASES

Please contact us with any questions

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