

# **OPERATION ANCESTOR SEARCH**

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

*Q. I'd really like to start the OAS program here. But I'm already up to my ears with other SAR programs and commitments. I just don't have the time to devote to it and do it right!*

A. Find someone else who is as committed to the program as you are to get it up and running. Mentor that member and provide as much support and assistance as you possibly can until such a time when you can re-establish some of your own priorities and commitments.

*Q. I've heard that for the OAS program to be successful, it requires a major time commitment by at least 10 members! I really like the program, but I don't know anyone who can devote that kind of time to it!*

A. Each program and each facility is totally different. With the support that OAS has from the FamilySearch Family History Centers and consultants, as well as from FGS member societies, as long as you have a strong and committed volunteer leader, you can develop the program with as few as 2-3 people. Obviously, the more the better! Your goal should always be to have one-on-one individual training sessions. But typically, once the program gets up and running, other members will volunteer.

*Q. I'll be glad to help out occasionally with the program, but I can't commit to anything on a regular basis!*

A. Whatever amount of time you can devote is entirely up to you! Depending on your program's schedule of training sessions, commit to a schedule that works for you. Whatever your schedule, please be sure to be there when you say you will!

*Q. Our local VA does not have a computer lab or wireless internet access throughout the facility. We have to log into the VA network to access the internet.*

A. Obviously, that's a problem if you don't have computer access, since many of our resources are online database programs (e.g., Ancestry.com, Fold3.com and Newspapers.com.) Some older VA centers do not have accessible Wi-Fi throughout the facility and it's not practical to log into the system network. It's also not practical to use expensive data minutes on your cell phone plan. You should make every effort to find an area such as a computer lab, library, classroom or other meeting area that has a number of computers available with internet access. The instructors and many of the patient participants will bring their own laptops to the training sessions, but you still need internet access.

*Q. I know a little bit about genealogy, but I don't consider myself a "qualified" genealogist who can help teach it to others, much less "train" other people to teach it to others.*

A. Everyone involved with the program – volunteers and participants alike – will be at a different level of genealogical expertise. We're talking about BASIC GENEALOGY 101 for starters! This involves an overview of what family history and genealogy research is all about. All participants will start out working on their own four-generation pedigree charts with the volunteers helping them on an individual one-on-one basis. When they complete the basic information, they'll move on to more "advanced" research. OAS also can provide the resources to increase levels of genealogical expertise and train the volunteers.

*Q. I'd like to start the program at a nearby military hospital or VA Medical Center, but I don't know anyone there. How do you go about approaching someone to get permission to conduct a program like OAS?*

A. If you don't have a contact yourself at a facility, perhaps a fellow compatriot in your local chapter or state society does. Or even the OAS National Committee! This may be a retired military officer who knows the chain of command personally, a veteran who has been a patient or who receives services at a VA hospital, a state or local veterans committee chairman or member who has volunteered previously at the facility, etc.

*Q. The closest military hospital or VA Medical Center is an hour and a half away. I can't travel that far on a regular basis to donate my time!*

A. That's why the OAS program was never intended to be a one-man show! If you don't have the personal commitment yourself, or several other compatriots (some of whom may live closer to the facility than you!) among whom you may possibly rotate visits and share driving responsibilities, then that facility probably will not work for you. That's also one of the main reasons we have a collaborative partnership with FamilySearch and FGS to assist our own SAR members. OAS also maintains a database of those who are willing to offer their research time and expertise on an as needed basis.

*Q. Would I be responsible for setting up and coordinating all the free Ancestry subscriptions?*

A. The OAS national committee typically maintains our relationship with Ancestry.com and various other donors and sponsors. The National Committee receives donated products and dispenses them to local chapters as needed. Generally, local chapters receive blocks of 25 Ancestry accounts for starters. When participants sign up, the first thing they will do at their opening session will be to change their username and password. Since the accounts are issued to the OAS program itself, and not to the facility, the SAR chairman will maintain the accounts and issue them to all new participants as they join the program.

*Q. I consider myself pretty computer savvy, but will I be involved with any technical installation or set-up issues at the facilities where we're conducting the program?*

A. Logging into Ancestry.com and its related databases and changing participants' usernames and passwords is about as "technical" as it gets!

*Q. My chapter used to have a Veterans Committee, but it no longer does. No one has replaced him and no one else wants to go through the VAVS committee process. All the VAVS wants from us anyway is our money and personal toiletries. No one wants to fight that bureaucracy!*

A. There's no doubt that the VA Voluntary Services committee structure is another level of bureaucracy that's built into an already bureaucratic organization! But as long as we focus on our long-range goal of providing a service that benefits the wounded warriors and veteran patient population that we're trying to reach with the OAS program, and by sharing a small piece of what the NSSAR is all about, we hopefully can look beyond the short-term inconveniences and potential obstacles of gaining access to a VA facility and complying with the VAVS policies and procedures. An alternative is to focus on the military hospitals with their WTU battalions and Soldier and Family Assistance Centers (SFACs,) as well as some of their accompanying Fisher Houses (many of which also are attached to VA facilities.)