

Genealogy Partnerships and Virtual Programming: An Arizona Success Story

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Abstract

Since 2021, the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records (LAPR) and the Arizona Genealogical Advisory Board (AzGAB) have partnered to host an annual, virtual Arizona Genealogy Day. The purpose of this event is to support the genealogical education needs of Arizonans and the general public and to highlight the genealogical records and resources available within our agency's collections and throughout the state. The event serves as a scalable, sustainable model for other libraries and genealogical societies that seek to use technologies to virtually connect with new audiences without geographic restrictions and to build partnerships.

Keywords

Genealogy Partnerships, Digital library, Virtual Programming

LAPR (azlibrary.gov) is a division of the office of Arizona's Secretary of State, and it was founded as the State Library in 1915. LAPR is mandated by statute to collect, preserve, and provide access to materials relating to law, political science, economics, and sociology and to subjects pertaining to the theory and practice of government, genealogy, and Arizona history. AzGAB (azgab.org) is an incorporated nonprofit society whose mission (azgab.org/cpage.php?pt=52) is to promote genealogy and history by addressing the educational needs and interests of the Arizona genealogical community and the general public through cooperation with, and support of, member societies and individuals[1].

The Idea

LAPR and AzGAB began strategic conversations in 2020 to determine how our organizations could partner to bring the Arizona genealogical community together and better address their needs. At the same time, LAPR—like many other libraries and organizations—had recently pivoted to virtual programming

opportunities due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic[2]. The shared goal of genealogical education and the rise of virtual programming laid the foundation for some creative planning. As we brainstormed, the idea of a jointly hosted speaker series sparked our interest and quickly evolved into the concept of a daylong virtual event. A committee was formed, and planning began in earnest[3]. On March 20, 2021, the first Arizona Genealogy Day—a free, annual, virtual event—launched. We just hosted our fifth annual virtual event on March 29, 2025.

The Goals

The purpose of this event was and is to support the genealogical education needs of Arizonans and the general public and to highlight the genealogical records and resources available within LAPR's collections and throughout the state. Arizona Genealogy Day has helped us overcome historical challenges and achieve goals and objectives in five areas (Figure 1).

Goal #1—Strengthen Partnerships

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many

organizations strove to create virtual spaces that still fostered strong connections with patrons and stakeholders. With this in mind, our plans for Arizona Genealogy Day included innovative ways to encourage networking, communication, and crowdsourced knowledge-sharing to strengthen our partnerships and build connections among attendees, libraries, and genealogical societies. This event has highlighted both LAPR and AzGAB's commitment to working collaboratively with the genealogical community, as well as our shared desire to support genealogical education in Arizona and beyond. The strengths of each organization were essential to the event's initial and ongoing success. The planning committee included members from both organizations, and their resources and skills complemented each other well.



Figure 1. Arizona Genealogy Day goals

Finding and creating a partnership like we did with AzGAB is possible for any library—not just a state library. There are numerous genealogical societies to consider, many of which will likely value what your organization has to offer. The bigger challenge will be ensuring that both you and your potential partner have the bandwidth to host such an event. The good news is that you can adapt the scope and length of this type of event to suit your needs.

Goal #2—Highlight Local Resources

There is no one organization or collection that can meet a genealogy researcher's every need. Relevant records and resources are found in a variety of repositories across each state, the country, and the world. One of our goals for Arizona Genealogy Day is to highlight the resources found in, and sometimes outside of, Arizona. We invite organizations to submit a slide or image that will be shown on a repeating downtime slideshow between sessions on event day. This slideshow is also converted to a PDF and emailed to registrants afterward for reference. Amplifying libraries, archives, museums, genealogical societies, other state agencies, and more educates researchers on the many sources that may be relevant to them.

Goal #3—Highlight Our Resources

In that same repeating downtime slideshow mentioned earlier, we include several slides to explain what resources LAPR and AzGAB offer to those who are interested in genealogy. For LAPR's resources, we showcase our website, physical and digital collections, social media, and libguides. One or more planning committee members drop links to LAPR and AzGAB resources into the chat throughout the day, so attendees can easily connect to our online content[4,5].

We consistently strive to increase the visibility of the genealogical resources in our agency. To support this goal during Arizona Genealogy Day, we reserve one session each year for a presentation that highlights the resources in the State of Arizona Research Library and/or the Arizona State Archives. Topics covered the last 5 years include the following:

- ♦ AMPLify Your Genealogy Research with the Arizona Memory Project
- ♦ Genealogy Gems in Government

Documents

- ♦ Arizona Genealogy 101
- ♦ Finding Your Family in Historical Newspapers
- ♦ City Directories: Step in the Right Direction

Goal #4—Preserve Arizona, Provide Access

The event also supports LAPR's current strategic directions (azlibrary.gov/about), including its mission of "Preserving Arizona, Providing Access" to empower all Arizonans now and in the future; expanding our impact through grants, E-rate support, and partnerships; making informed decisions to provide stewardship and service to Arizona; and growing leaders and innovators who embrace changes that lead to superior service.

Arizona Genealogy Day furthers LAPR's mission of Preserving Arizona, Providing Access by increasing attendees' knowledge of available resources, expanding access to information, and, wherever possible, making recordings of the day's sessions available. Our partnership with AzGAB enhances our capacity and extends our impact. Feedback from event attendees informs future planning and helps us identify new opportunities to better serve our patrons across Arizona. Finally, the event allows staff members to lead at both state and national levels, discover and model innovative outreach practices, and positively enhance the attendee experience.

Goal #5—Build a Tradition

Back in 2021, we didn't know what to expect in terms of attendance or interest, but we knew as soon as the event ended that we had momentum and support from the community. We knew we could achieve even more success the next year and were excited to see year-over-year growth and improvement. There is no shortage of national, regional, and local genealogy events, in person and virtual. Our

goal was to create an annual event that would draw attention to Arizona's unique history, culture, and genealogical resources, and we succeeded. Our most recent Arizona Genealogy Day had a record-breaking turnout. Many attendees sign up to receive future event updates and then return to join Arizona Genealogy Day year after year.

Evaluating Our Success

We evaluate the success of our event every year using quantitative and qualitative methods. The response to Arizona Genealogy Day has been overwhelmingly positive, and we have seen exciting growth in event attendance, online engagement, outreach opportunities for our staff, and geographical reach[6].

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data is culled from our registration software and platform reports and supports positive growth in all but one event year. Our platform webinar license restricts us to 1,000 logged-on participants, so we emphasized watch parties in 2024 and 2025. As a result, our attendance numbers shown in the charts are estimates. We are unable to ascertain if all watch party hosts completed the post-event user survey and reported attendance numbers.

There are many different ways attendees can engage with us online. They can visit our website pages, the Arizona Memory Project (azmemory.azlibrary.gov), and our libguides (azsos.libguides.com), especially our guide on Arizona Genealogy Resources (azsos.libguides.com/azgenealogy).

Additionally, they can ask questions via our online reference form, as well as visit and/or subscribe to our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@stateofarizonaresearchlibr266) to check out previous or current recordings on our Genealogy playlist (youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXW8MyF43pvor

ePqyy0HKpd7pd9LZ6rXI). Although we cannot always draw a direct correlation between our event and our online engagement data, in some cases, we do see direct evidence of our added visibility and increased number of users as a result of Arizona Genealogy Day. Let's look at three examples.

The first example is libguide usage. We have seen increased usage of our Arizona Genealogy Resources libguide, which is measured by number of views. We promote this resource heavily during Arizona Genealogy Day and during other genealogy outreach events, so the combination of efforts has resulted in an increasing number of views each month, with nearly 48,000 total lifetime page views at the end of March 2025.

A second example of our success relates to our State of Arizona Research Library YouTube channel. We record each session of Arizona Genealogy Day and, depending on contractual terms, provide public or unlisted links to all event registrants. The public links are available in our Genealogy playlist without restriction. The unlisted links are available for a limited 2-week period to accommodate those who were unable to attend live or those who want to rewatch any sessions. We encourage registrants to subscribe to our YouTube channel to be notified when any new publicly available content is added.

The third example concerns outreach opportunities. We have noticed an increase in both in-person and virtual outreach opportunities as a result of Arizona Genealogy Day events. LAPR staffers have been invited to speak at libraries, genealogical societies, and retirement communities. We have also been invited to participate in local, special events. These groups typically ask for a repeat of a session we presented at Genealogy Day to

highlight our own resources, such as Arizona Genealogy 101 or Genealogy Gems in Government Documents, or a customized presentation.

Qualitative and Other Data

We ask attendees to complete an online survey after each event in order to obtain quantitative, qualitative, and other data. Attendees have been positively impacted by this event, as evident in their freeform survey responses. One survey question asks how far they virtually traveled by providing their city/state/country. Not everyone completes the survey, but the responses we do receive help us better understand our reach. The national and international reach of our event, as documented on our heat maps, provides compelling evidence in support of the value of virtual programming. Topics presented at Arizona Genealogy Day appeal to those both inside and outside of Arizona, and our virtual event provides unprecedented access compared to the reach of an in-person event in Arizona.

Conclusion

Arizona Genealogy Day is a model for positive partnerships between a state agency and a genealogical society. It also demonstrates the benefits of virtual programming to educate and reach new audiences with genealogical interests. The benefits to our agency, our partner, and our attendees are manifold. Arizona Genealogy Day is a highlight for genealogical researchers both inside and outside of Arizona, and the event has contributed to Arizona's growing reputation as a hotbed for genealogical research.

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