

# HOW TO RESEARCH A PEOPLE GROUP

## Jenkins Research Library

This document is intended as a guide to how to get started in people group research. Each person will develop his or her own techniques and skills as the process unfolds.

**Introduction:** Researching a people group is not an easy task. It requires patience, imagination, creativity, and a lot of hard work. However, acquiring information about a people, learning about their “ways and folkways,” being able to see the world through their eyes is a basic, vital first step that must be taken in any missions effort. What follows is a description of the research process based on our work in the Jenkins Research Library. NOTE: There are many published guides on how to do research in specific fields; these are often quite helpful, and we recommend that you consult them whenever possible.

### Basic Steps:

- 1. Be sure you know the correct name (and all of the alternate names), and the location(s), for your people group.** The first thing the library staff consults is the list found at [PeopleGroups.org](http://PeopleGroups.org)\*, a web site created and maintained by the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board. This database is a comprehensive global list of people groups and is searchable by people group name, by country, by religion and by the Status of Global Evangelization. The database also provides links to other helpful Internet resources, such as the [Ethnologue](#), a comprehensive list of languages by country, and the [CIA World Factbook](#), which provides current information about countries. Other good sources for verifying people group names include some newly published [Ethnohistorical Dictionaries](#) for various geographical regions, and the ethnographic encyclopedias mentioned in the attached bibliography. **In all cases, you should take note of alternate people group names, languages, and/or dialects. Become familiar with all of the alternate names and use them in your research.**
- 2. Consult the standard reference works for overview articles on the people group.** A list of these reference works is included in the accompanying bibliography. Any of these articles will be helpful; consult as many of them as you can, however, because each one will contain somewhat different information. **Pay close attention to any references** cited at the end of these articles; they will be valuable leads to additional information.
- 3. Consult a standard reference work on the language of your people group.** A list of these reference works is included in the bibliography. This may help you to define the scope of your research, (e.g., do you really mean “Germanic-speaking people” which could include English, Scots, Scandinavian, German, and Dutch, or do you mean “German-speaking”? The difference is crucial both for you and for anyone who is assisting you in your research.) These reference sources may also further define some of the ethnic breakdowns relating to the language you are researching and may clue you in to some of the political overtones of language use, official and unofficial.

**\*The URL for this, and all other Internet resources mentioned in this [Guide](#), will be found in the attached [Bibliography for People Group Research, General Sources](#).**

4. **Look for book-length treatments or dissertations on your people group.** If someone else has already done years of research on this group, don't re-invent the wheel! These studies will not answer all of your questions, but they can provide valuable information, particularly about the culture, religious beliefs, lifestyles, family and village relationships, and many other elements that make up a worldview. Check with the Reference Staff at the library you are using to find out if they have subscriptions to databases such as **FirstSearch, Dissertation Abstracts, or Books in Print.** Resources available on the Internet include such services as **Amazon, the Library of Congress, Worldcat,** and the **Yale University Library.**
5. **Look for information "embedded" in more general resources.** In many cases, there are no book-length studies or dissertations on a people group. Information can still be found if you are persistent and creative. Check in general books on the country where your people group resides. The Area Handbooks/Country Studies published by the U.S. Government Printing Office contain information on the demography and ethnic groups in different countries. Look for books on the culture, religion, and history of the countries where your people live, and check the index of **each resource** under **all** of the language and people group names you have identified, as well as under such terms as "Population," "Ethnic Groups", and "Religion."
6. **Locate reliable, current statistics on your people group/country.** This can be done in a variety of ways. Good sources for statistics include the **CIA World Factbook** (in print or on the Internet), **Encyclopedia Britannica** (especially the current **Book of the Year**), **Statistical Abstract of the World, Europa World Year Book,** government statistical offices, the United Nations, the World Bank, and many other international organizations. Some of these will be available on the Internet; others must be used in print. Check your local library for resources; ask for assistance from the Reference staff.
7. **Arrange for database searches.** There are many different types of databases. Some provide statistics; some provide full-text articles or reports; and some provide a list of books or journal articles, which you then need to obtain in full-text from another source. Some of the most useful databases include **Religion Index, Anthropology Plus, Dialog** and the many news and current awareness databases available. Consult your local public or academic library for other available databases.
8. **Order or borrow copies of books, journal articles and reports that you have identified through database searches, in bibliographies or in other reference lists.** If possible, try to locate these in a local library or bookstore, or in an online service such as **Amazon.**
9. **Contact organizations which may have information in addition to what you have been able to obtain through published sources.** These organizations can include university research institutes, cultural and fraternal organizations, relief and development agencies, and professional and trade organizations. Information on how to reach these organizations can be found in reference works such as **International Research Centers Directory, Encyclopedia of Associations,** and on the Internet. When you contact the agency, ask for publication lists, newsletters, names of individuals who may be experts on your group. If the information seems relevant, try to get yourself on a mailing list for future information or publications they may produce.

10. **Organize your material and compile a list of the areas where you are lacking information.** Knowledgeable people and helpful resources can cross your path unexpectedly—you should always be ready with a list of information that you need so that you can take good advantage of any offers of assistance.
11. **Use one or more good Internet search engines and search for information on your people group name(s) frequently.** New information is added to the Internet every day. The Internet is helpful in locating sources of information, in networking and in providing some full-text documentation. Use care in evaluating these resources, however; **just because it is on the Internet does not mean that it is reliable information.**

## HELPFUL HINTS

1. **Be systematic.** Start by having all the alternate names for your people ready when you do your research; otherwise, you will have to repeat the research process for the additional names you find.
2. **Be organized.** Research can be expensive and time-consuming. Use your resources wisely. Have a plan. Know what you have done, and what still remains to be done.
3. **Be thorough.** Locating and verifying information is a painstaking process. Take the time to examine your sources carefully, to follow up on leads, and to think of alternate ways in which the information you need might be obtained.
4. **Document everything.** Keep good records of how and where you located your information. This is important because you may wish to do some of these research steps again, to get new information, and because you might need to give the source of your statistics or data. Good records will help you do it quickly and efficiently.
5. **Do not depend on the Internet as your main source of information.** While the Internet is a convenient and extremely helpful research tool, it should not be relied on as your major source of information. Our private estimate is that probably 75%-80% of the world's recorded knowledge is not yet on the Internet. If you rely on it too much, you will be missing out on some of the most scholarly, helpful sources that can assist you in your research. It is most helpful in identifying and/or indexing sources of useful information.
6. **Consult with local professional Reference Librarians whenever possible.** The information universe is vast, varied and sometimes confusing. Librarians can function as "information navigators," and they can be invaluable in directing you to information resources you may not be aware of. This can be especially true in doing research in countries outside of the United States, where you may be using resources in different languages, and relying on information produced in the local country.

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