

National Geographic and IBM launch genographic project

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The five-year genographic project allows individuals to trace their own migratory history.

The National Geographic Society and IBM are planning a landmark genetic anthropology research project - to assemble one of the world's largest DNA collections. The goal is to map how earth originally was populated.

The genographic project, an innovative five-year research partnership, will use sophisticated laboratory and computer analysis of DNA contributed by hundreds of thousands of people, including indigenous peoples as well as the general public. Led by national geographic explorer-in-residence, Spencer Wells, a team of international scientists and IBM researchers will collect genetic samples, analyze results and report on the genetic roots of modern humans.

With funding from the Waitt family foundation, the scientists will establish 10 centers around the world and will study over 100,000 DNA samples. "Our DNA carries a story that is shared by everyone. Over the next five years we will decipher that story, which is now in danger of being lost as people migrate and mix to a greater extent," Wells said.

The genographic project has three core components:

Field research – Wells and a consortium of scientists from prominent international institutions will conduct the field and laboratory research. An international advisory board will oversee the selection of indigenous populations for testing as well as adhering to strict sampling and research protocols.

Public participation and awareness campaign – The public can take part by purchasing a participation kit and submitting their own cheek swab samples, allowing them to track the overall progress of the project as well as learn their own migratory history.

Genographic legacy project – The proceeds from the sale of the genographic participation kits will help fund future field research and a legacy project.