

## Research Manual – US cases

### Assess the value of the estate!

1. Check for a scan of the petition! If the petition is already scanned, it might give us useful information not only on the value of the estate but also on the decedent's family. It might also list heirs already known to the court. If the petition is not yet scanned, check again regularly. Calculate early on if a case is economically feasible if heirs are already known.
2. Is there real estate? Find potential mortgages or foreclosures online.
3. Was the decedent living in a nursing home?
4. Are there any debts listed on the petition or is there any other indication that the value may decrease?
5. Download all relevant documents apart from the petition such as affidavit, list of interested parties/ heirs, note to consulate general etc.
6. **If it becomes apparent that the case is leading abroad, involve a correspondent/partner firm specialized in the area as early as possible. If the case – or a part of it – stays domestic, see the following steps.**

### Exhaust all research possibilities!

1. Request a NUMI if the initial research on the decedent does not yield any results (after ca. 30 minutes)! If there is a NUMI (= Numident file, from the Social Security Administration's computer database), we might receive information on the parents, the DOB and the POB of the decedent. If there is no NUMI (yet), try again about two weeks later and every two weeks after that unless the above information could be found online.
2. Do online research via all possible platforms and databases. The goal is to find current addresses (and possibly phone numbers) for all heirs. Contact located heirs as early as possible (see the following step)!
3. Involve the Berlin team early on unless the research is very easy and there are no open questions.
4. If any blank spots remain after all research possibilities have been exhausted online, try to clear these in contact with heirs (see the following step).
5. Think of additional research possibilities where neither online research nor heir contact provided us with current contact details or information on the fate of certain persons on the family tree. Contacting local parish offices, archives, contact persons or neighbours might help. If a person is deceased, procuring a copy of their DC or looking for possible probate files might help us find out if they had issue. If there is no obituary online, you should also check with local libraries. Websites of County Clerks, Court Clerks, County Registries or Secretaries of State can hold additional documents and indexes.
6. If the case comes in late, write an email to the Berlin team, mentioning open questions that should be solved first.

### Contact located heirs!

1. Send our paperwork to all heirs. If there are 15+ heirs on a case, calculate the potential heir shares and prioritize the heirs with the biggest shares. Adjust the offered fee depending on the value of the estate, number of heirs, and if there is competition or not. **Remember that each states works differently.**
2. Try to establish a contact with every single heir as early as possible, preferably via phone. Answer any questions that may arise. Try to clarify any family relations that our research has not been able to clarify yet.
3. If neither a current phone number nor a mailing address is known (or all attempts to establish contact have failed that way), use other possibly known ways to contact them (Facebook, LinkedIn, email addresses etc.)
4. If there are open questions, do not leave them, but keep revisiting the case and try to solve the tree completely. Involve the Berlin team if necessary.
5. Once an heir has signed the Agreement, send out a confirmation letter and a Family History Questionnaire. The information provided on the Questionnaire can be very helpful with further research and heir contact.

### Follow up with the heirs!

1. If certain heirs have not sent back their signed contracts within the first month, send out follow-up letters and/or attempt follow-up calls.
2. Send out a second round of follow-up letters after two months. Discuss whether the offer should be revised, or an attorney involved.
3. The last round of follow-up letters should be very explicit. Ask the heirs if they have representation and let them know that we will close our file if they have.