



## Annual Report to Members for 2019

5 March 2020

In 2019, FHISO exited its extended organisational period. Originally organized with bylaws and internal structures which assumed a large number of active members, FHISO leadership quickly realized that they had mistaken expressions of support for the mission of FHISO for expressions of support in the work of FHISO and that the structure needed to be scaled back to match a smaller core group of contributing participants. That period of scaling back and reorganising was called the extended organisational period, during which the board had authority to appoint (rather than elect) its membership and to change the bylaws without full membership approval. During this time the FHISO board chose not to request annual membership renewals, instead funding FHISO activities primarily through the voluntary donations of a small number of its members.

Exiting the extended organisational period was always our goal to make FHISO's governance more democratic and less board-centered, but it involved a variety of steps, some of which were undertaken in previous years. In 2019, we

- Completed revisions to our bylaws to permit a flexible board size and to define the process for conducting elections; see <https://fhiso.org/by-laws>.
- Solicited membership renewals to transition from donor-supported to full member-owned operation.
- Requested nominations for board positions in preparation for our first election of the FHISO board. As the number of nominations was equal to the number of board positions, per our bylaws we declared all nominees elected without a vote.
- Held our first Annual General Meeting (via online video conferencing software) to introduce the new board, report on FHISO activity, and field questions and suggestions from the membership.
- Resolved various legal status concerns that had been left unfinished during FHISO's organisation and obtained recognition of 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt status in accordance with United States law.<sup>a</sup>
- Removed the articles from the bylaws which had granted extended organisational status.

FHISO also made some progress on the technical aspects of its mission as well.

Our ongoing work on the Extended Legacy Format, an extensible standard with full backwards compatibility to GEDCOM 5.5.1, was moved forward by a recognition of the benefits of some internal redesign; we did not release a new public draft in 2019, but anticipate doing so in 2020.

We also worked with representatives of FamilySearch Inc. and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to help secure the public release of GEDCOM 5.5.1. Released as a review draft on 2 October 1999, it was accompanied by a copyright restriction including the clause "It must not be used for programming of genealogical software while in draft." As we were intending to release a compatible standard, and in interest of getting legal permission from the owners of the standard for the many existing software products that implemented this draft, we requested either explicit permission to

have software implement the draft or a removal of draft status, and obtained the latter goal on 15 November 2019. See <http://gedcom.info> for the non-draft release.

FHISO also established several other contacts with family history software providers and related organisations, which we are optimistic will yield results we can announce in the coming year.

In 2020, we look forward to our second board elections, second annual general meeting, and to the release of public drafts of the standards our technical working group are drafting. Thank you all for your support and membership as we work together toward to bring together individuals, organisations and companies of all sizes to collaborate on open standards, supporting documentation and services on the digital representation, processing and exchange of data by genealogists and family historians worldwide.