

Will GEDCOM Be Replaced By XML?

While the technical syntax of XML differs from that used by GEDCOM, XML addresses the exact need for which GEDCOM was invented. Both were invented to provide a common format for moving data from one computer file system to another.

Both methodologies require a specific form by which computer systems can interpret the data. The GEDCOM 5.5 Standard is currently the form by which genealogical systems have been able to share their data. In order to share genealogical data in an XML format, a standard form will be required. An XML form is being defined and will be expressed using a Document Type Definition written specifically for sharing genealogical data in the XML format. Eventually it will be written in an XML Schema format using an extensible rule set to provide better editing and context control.

The following segments show the similarities and differences of traditional GEDCOM and the same data formatted in an XML form:

GEDCOM	XML
0 @I1@ INDI	<Individual ID="I1">
1 NAME Reed Monson/ALLEN/	<Name>ReedMonson<Surn>ALLEN</Surn></Name>
	>
1 BIRT	<Birth>
2 DATE 4 Nov 1913	<Date>4 Nov 1913</Date>
2 PLAC Cove, Utah	<Place>Cove, Utah</Place>
	</Birth>
	</Individual>

These examples show that either of the two methods can do the job. However, XML is rapidly becoming a world standard syntax used in transferring data and in presenting data in a non-proprietary user-oriented way. XML is an open Internet specification that is allowing every industry to use XML for transferring data by establishing their own common forms. Equally important is that the vendors in the software industry have shown support for XML by creating a rich set of software support tools. This means that developers will understand these tools which will become generic across applications and in most cases across platforms. This is not true when using the syntax used by traditional GEDCOM.

The Family and Church History Department supports the strategic value in using XML to accomplish the GEDCOM data sharing processes. An XML form (Document Type Definition) for genealogical data will soon be released, however, it will require a period of time for genealogical systems to phase out of the traditional GEDCOM environment into a total XML environment. We have planned a phased approach so that developers of applicable systems will be able to plan for this new environment.

The following documents are being offered to assist in the migration to a complete XML environment:

1. GEDCOM XML 6.0 Specifications defines a new XML form based on a new and more sophisticated genealogical data model than has been used in the past.
2. GEDCOM 5.6 Specifications is an update to the current GEDCOM specifications for addressing current and near term needs.
3. Chapter 3 of the GEDCOM 5.6 specifications contains an XML form intended to represent the current GEDCOM in an XML.

The plan is to release the GEDCOM XML 6.0 specifications and allow time for applications to be updated and ready to support this new XML data transfer form by the fall of 2002. In the meantime the XML format specified in GEDCOM 5.6 can be used as a temporary XML form designed specifically to represent GEDCOM 5.x data. A program that will convert GEDCOM 5.x data to-and-from XML will probably be able to meet needs of users requiring XML usage while waiting for applications to begin supporting the GEDCOM XML 6.0.

GEDCOM XML 6.0

The GEDCOM XML 6.0 specification is only an XML form for transferring genealogical database information. The GEDCOM XML 6.0 form is based on a model that is different than the model used for GEDCOM 5.x data transfer. (See the model diagram below).

The GEDCOM XML 6.0 model was designed to meet additional interests and requirements suggested by the genealogical community. It is still basically designed for recording researchers' or users' conclusions about his/her genealogical research, including citing the sources used as evidence.

GEDCOM 5.6

The XML form for GEDCOM 5.6 is not a long term option but a temporary specification written to make converting to-and-from XML straight forward and easy to write, thus providing a short term approach for those users wanting to prepare GEDCOM 5.x files for use in the Internet Web environment.

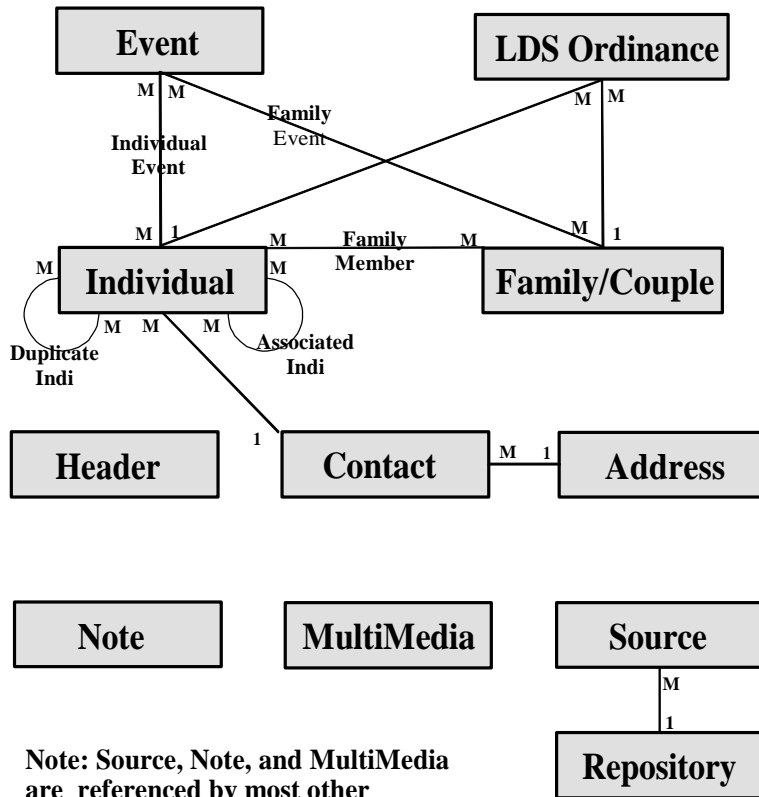
In addition GEDCOM 5.6 contains some updates that some applications will want to use. For instance, PAF 5.0 will require some 5.6 extensions in the place and name area for handling phonetic or romanized variation of some languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

Developers and Genealogists are Invited to Make Suggestions:

These documents are currently available in a draft form. Software developers and genealogists are invited to make suggestions for improvements which help them achieve both near and long term product objectives.

We encourage those who have provided valuable input used in developing the new genealogical data model as well as developers of genealogical software to request either or both of these specification documents by email to either allenjr@ldschurch.org or gedcom@gedcom.org.

GEDXML Data Model



Note: Source, Note, and MultiMedia are referenced by most other entities, so all the connections are not shown