

Why Form a Jewish Genealogical Society?

How to Start a JGS

How the IAJGS Can Help



Prepared by: IAJGS Membership Development Committee

Why Form a Jewish Genealogical Society?

Today, there are a large number of Internet-based resources available to those researching Jewish genealogy. You can access hundreds of websites to search for records, lists, and published family trees. Taking it to the next level, you can also join mailing lists and blogs where topics of interest to Jewish genealogists are discussed. You can “listen in” or actively participate in the cyber conversation.

While a cyber conversation is typically short lived, joining a society is ongoing and lasting. Society members participate in an ongoing community of fellow researchers and build relationships with mentors in a collaborative and supportive environment.

The Internet is a great enabler, easing access to databases and expertise. However, nothing replaces going on a journey with like-minded people. Reap the rewards of pursuing genealogical research as part of a local society.

As a society, your members will interact in multiple ways that enrich their Jewish genealogy research experience and elevate the knowledge of Jewish family history within your community:

- **Learn** – Most societies hold monthly educational programs addressing topics of special interest to Jewish genealogists including: census, city directories, immigration & naturalization, military records, vital records, researching foreign records, Internet search, organization, using family tree software, how to interview, history of Jews in various geographies, using JewishGen databases, and much more. Many societies also hold annual workshops for beginning genealogists and refreshers for advanced genealogists. Some societies will also allow special time to meet with and ask questions of a panel of mavens. Many societies have a library of excellent Jewish genealogical books. Societies provide all these resources to people who are searching and discovering their Jewish roots – some not initially knowing that they had Jewish ancestors. Learning is enriched in a society.
- **Share** – Many societies will assign a mentor to each new member. Many societies publish a newsletter filled with articles sharing the latest Jewish genealogical research methods, records sources, tools, and case studies. Many societies will also allocate time for members to share success stories including how they broke through a brick wall and made a hard-found discovery. Not everyone can appreciate the challenging road travelled to such success stories as fellow society members can. Sharing is enriched in a society.
- **Contribute** – Many societies take on community projects to make available their local Jewish history to researchers from afar. Recording cemetery photos and data, transcribing Yizkor plaques, indexing obituaries from local Jewish newspapers are only some of the projects societies undertake. Contributing back to other Jewish genealogy researchers is enriched in a society.

Help your community of researchers start the journey with like-minded people.

Form a Jewish Genealogical Society.

Contact the [IAJGS](#) for more information on [how to begin a JGS](#).

How to Start a Jewish Genealogical Society

There are only a few basic steps to starting a Jewish Genealogical Society (JGS):

1. Find Members

- List people you know with similar interests, their phone numbers and emails:
 - Anyone willing to become part of the founding committee?
 - Anyone willing to have a meeting in their home?
 - Anyone willing to add a name to the list?
 - Anyone have attended/plan to attend the IAJGS conference?
- Post a notice on the JewishGen discussion list asking for folks who are interested in your area.

2. Contact Local Resources

- Contact local synagogues, community centers and historical societies to see if there is any interest or a current group. If you find an interested person, ask them if you can hold small meetings there.
- Make a list of local and national resources for new members:
 - Local historical society
 - Local library
 - Nearest Jewish Museum
 - National archives
 - Non-Jewish historical or genealogical organizations
- Consider a possible meeting place.
- Consider a possible structure for your Jewish genealogical group:
 - A society (JGS)
 - A special interest group (SIG) within a larger genealogical society
 - A special interest group (SIG) within an historical society
 - A virtual organization (V-JGS or V-SIG)

3. Work with the IAJGS

- Look over the IAJGS website: www.iajgs.org:
 - Get a mentor from the IAJGS membership society. Contact vice president of IAJGS at vicepresident@iajgs.org to request a mentor.
 - Review www.iajgs.org/members/Reasons_to_Belong_to_IAJGS.pdf
 - Review the Organizational Material documents at www.iajgs.org/resources.html
- Look at the list of Jewish Genealogical Societies at www.iajgs.org/members/members.html:

How the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies Can Help

What is the IAJGS?

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) is an organization of organizations formed in 1988 to provide a common voice for issues of significance to its members, to advance our genealogical avocation, and to coordinate items such as the annual International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. More than 70 national and local Jewish genealogical societies worldwide are members - representing more than 10,000 researchers from 14 countries.

Benefits of Joining the IAJGS for New & Existing Societies

- **Society Tool-Kit** – The IAJGS provides organizational materials on a variety of topics including: [programming](#), [conference planning](#), [marketing and promotion](#), [creating a local JGS](#), [membership retention](#), [template for membership brochure](#), and more.
- **Communication** – The IAJGS provides a leadership digest where one can interact with and be kept informed by other JGS leaders on a variety of society topics. The IAJGS holds bird-of-a-feather discussions at the annual conference for society topics such as newsletters, webmasters, and programming.
- **Leadership** – The IAJGS routinely provides organizational assistance to leaders of new societies and opportunities to network with other society leaders.
- **Recognition** – The IAJGS presents annual achievement awards recognizing excellence in various aspects of Jewish genealogy.
- **Advocacy** – The IAJGS has established a Public Records Access Monitoring Committee to share information about any new legislation and any threat it may pose to genealogical researchers have in access to the records they need to be successful in searching out their Jewish ancestry.
- **Other Services** – The IAJGS is currently piloting a program to make webinar technology available to member societies.

Membership Criteria & Costs

Any non-profit organization whose principal purpose is to promote Jewish genealogy shall be eligible for Regular Membership in the IAJGS if it meets the following criteria:

1. Has at least ten dues-paying members.
2. Holds regular meetings at least quarterly; or conducts meaningful ongoing activities relating to Jewish genealogy at least four times a year; or publishes a newsletter, journal or any electronic form of publication at least two times a year; or convenes and electronic discussion group; or undertakes other significant Jewish genealogical research projects.
3. Adheres to the objectives of these [Bylaws](#).
4. Pays its annual IAJGS membership fees.

The annual cost for IAJGS membership is USD \$.50 per member in your society (or per member in your Jewish special interest group (SIG) if formed as a SIG within a society) with a minimum fee of USD \$18.