



# Growing a JGS: DEVELOPING MEETING TOPICS

Deborah Long, [Triangle Jewish Genealogical Society](#) (2015) Revised 2022

With today's technological advances, there is no shortage of exciting topics and speakers on Jewish genealogy and related subjects. Chances are, JGSes will have several teachers and techies in their groups, some willing to share their experiences and knowledge.

To mix things up a bit, you may want to try using Zoom or other meeting platforms and bring in experts from all over the country, or world. Some of your members like virtual meetings/speakers; others prefer having a "live" speaker with whom they can more personally interact.

Consider using YouTube video broadcasts about genealogy. The program, ["Who Do You Think You Are?"](#) often features research with a Jewish dimension (see note below).

You may also want to hold a "Share Your Success" session where members provide show-and-tell programs.

One-on-one tutoring clinics can be popular, too. Your chapter's more advanced researchers can individually help members who have hit brick walls.

If there are archives nearby you can invite archivists and conservators to speak about document preservation. You may be close to universities and colleges where historians may be a possible resource.

Some tips:

- Ask your members what meeting topics they are interested in. (See [Growing a JGS: Finding Speakers](#))
- Have your Board help you find speakers.
- Attend local genealogy meetings from other societies and find out who their great speakers are.
- Attend the IAIGS conference and look for speakers you can bring in on Zoom or in person.
- Invest in a portable LCD projector and a portable screen for your meetings. Learn how to hook the projector up to a laptop and any necessary attachments to have on hand. Learn how to access the Wi-Fi in the meeting room –get the password *before* the meeting starts!
- Vet your speakers—this is important. Make sure that your speakers know the location of your meeting, the time allotted, and the audience's needs and expectations. Find out where they have spoken before and if they were successful. Make sure that they bring handouts and preferably use PowerPoint with pictures.
- Offer an honorarium, at least to cover travel expenses and/or perhaps a gift certificate. You can always offer free membership in your group for one year.
- Advertise your meeting topics/speakers to your members and to others, such as local papers.
- Ask your members to RSVP so that if interest is low, you can cancel or postpone.
- Have an "evergreen" ready. An evergreen is a program that you could put on at a moment's notice in case your speaker becomes ill or is a no-show. Some episodes of "Who Do You Think You Are" (such as the one featuring [Lisa Kudrow going back to Belarus](#)) will be a good bet. It's 45 minutes long.

The Jewish Genealogy Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County maintains a robust list of past programs and speakers here: <https://www.jgscv.org/meetings-prior.html>

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Long Island maintains an extensive video library of programs here: <https://jgsli.org/youtube/>

Here are some general topics for your meetings:

- Using the various databases/tools in JewishGen, such as Viewmate, Jewish Family Finder
- General research sources and methodology for beginning genealogists (familysearch.org, for example)
- Research sources and Jewish history in your area
- Genealogical research in your area
- Taking a trip back to ancestral lands
- Sephardim
- Mizrahim
- Jewish immigration and migration
- Jewish surname adoption and naming patterns
- Names (naming patterns, meaning of first and last names, etc.)
- Translations (invite translators to come to a meeting)
- Heirlooms (members bring heirlooms and have antique appraiser talk about these pieces)
- Games (Jewish Genealogy World Records, Human Bingo: see ***Starting a JGS: Getting to Know Members***)
- Films which can be viewed ahead of time with perhaps the filmmaker or a panel at the meeting
- Holocaust research, genetics and DNA research
- Jewish history and culture
- The Jewish calendar
- Jewish music, theater, and food, especially as they apply to specific times and places in Jewish history
- Photographic and document preservation
- Technology and internet resources
- Computer training workshops
- Other training workshops (e.g., photo identification, document preservation)