



Growing a JGS: DEVELOPING A WEB PRESENCE

Deborah Long, [Triangle Jewish Genealogical Society](http://www.trianglejgs.org) (2015) Revised 2022

As intimidating as it sounds, developing a web presence or website does not require programming skills. There are many website builders that offer templates using tools already familiar to those who are modestly computer-literate.

Websites don't have to be elaborate either. A one-page website with announcements of meetings and contact information may be sufficient. But it is important to have a website since you will want to attract new members and maintain contact with standing members. It's also much easier to point your members to information on your website than to field questions and send out documents by email or snail mail.

To have a website, consider this analogy: you must find a location on the planet known as the World Wide Web. To get this location, you must reserve an address, called a URL (uniform resource locator). The address should be relatively short, easy to spell or pronounce, and reflect your society's name. For example, the JGS in Durham/Raleigh/Chapel Hill (known as "The Triangle") uses www.trianglejgs.org. The Jewish Genealogical Society of New York is <http://www.jgsny.org>. Getting a URL is a relatively small cost—usually under \$20 a year or so. See if your URL is available [here](#), but wait to reserve it until you have determined two other factors: your web host and your web builder.

It's possible that your society's location will be somewhat of a "sublease." For example, The Jewish Genealogy Society of Maryland's website can be found sharing Jewishgen's lot; for example, go here: <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgs-maryland>. That's because its JGS is being "hosted" by Jewishgen.

If your JGS cannot afford to pay for the hosting of its website (hosting is like hiring a lawn maintenance and security company for your URL), Jewishgen will host it for free. If there are disadvantages to this relationship, they are minor: your website will have to be relatively simple unless you know how to use website design tools or have a website building program. Also, your URL is really long! Go [here](#) for more information about being hosted by Jewishgen.

Having a private company host your website can run anywhere from \$50 a year and up, depending on what the hosting company provides. My experience has been that cheaper hosts often clutter your websites with advertising and don't let you have a lot of pages. More expensive ones, such as www.GoDaddy.com which TriangleJGS.org uses, generally do not.

[WIX](#) is another private hosting company worth checking out. You can see some of the capabilities of WIX on the Minnesota JGS at MNJGS.org.

We chose GoDaddy because this company was able to provide hosting and an online website building tool that was relatively easier to figure out. Building a website is like putting a home on a vacant lot (your URL). Companies like GoDaddy charge more per year because you are asking them to host *and* help you build your website. If you ever move your location to another host, your home cannot be moved with it. Anything on your website will disappear if you move to another host. It's like moving to another state—you can't take your house with you—at least not without some significant expense.

Some more tips:

- Some hosting services and website builders give discounts to nonprofits. For example, go to <http://www.dreamhost.com/>
- If you are adventurous, you can try [WordPress](#) as a free website builder. [IAJGS](#) uses it for its website.
- Make sure that at least one other member of your JGS knows your passwords and how to edit your website, just in case you aren't available to make necessary changes. If you can get a retired volunteer with tech experience, even better!
- Keep your website current and fresh. It's obvious when a website has a meeting from 2020 on it that the organization is not functioning up to speed.