



Growing a JGS: REACHING YOUTH

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

Let's face it: genealogy is a perfect obsession for older adults. We generally have the time to devote several hours a day to intensely focused research. We are more likely to be interested in history, too, since now all of our belongings are antiques and anything from the 1960s or before is considered ancient history!

Nevertheless, if our societies are to survive, we need to attract younger generations to family history, to join our organizations and become actively involved over time. Here are some ideas:

1. School teachers who ask students to do research on their own families often get young people started on a genealogical quest. Why not **sponsor a contest** at a local school and award the best family research project a free membership in your society as well as a monetary award or family tree software program?
2. **Go to where the young people are (school or synagogue) and deliver an exciting program.** Your program should have an interesting angle—a Jewish mobster (Meyer Lansky), a celebrity (Leonard Nimoy), a strong woman (too many to name but Ruth Bader Ginsburg comes to mind). Set up a display table and when a young person goes by, ask him or her if they have ever wondered about their Jewish ancestry. Ask a young person if he or she knows the origin of their names.

Make sure you use social media. This is how some young people discover, share ideas, and generally, talk about what's exciting to them now. Many JGSes have a Facebook page which will reach a somewhat older group (it's free). YouTube videos are appealing to everyone—create one for your society. TikTok appeals to younger people; it is a short-form, video-sharing app that allows users to create and share 15-second videos. Instagram is also used by a wide range of ages.

Make it easy and affordable to join. My society only charges \$1 to students (of any age.) **Make it possible to join and pay online.** Make it as easy for people to act upon their impulse to join as possible.

3. **Bring a young person to your meetings.** Make sure he or she is introduced properly and engaged in conversation by the other members.
4. **Offer an interested younger member a significant role in your society** for doing something great with technology for your organization—organizing your library, managing Facebook, setting up websites or creating or editing videos on genealogy topics

Here are some additional ideas from Frank Werner of the Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County (JGSCV) in California:

THOUGHTS ON ATTRACTING YOUNGER GENERATIONS TO GENEALOGY

The pursuit of genealogy research is for the most part a pastime for seniors whereas younger generations seem to show little interest. This dichotomy can be detrimental to building future membership in our Society as well as denying the pleasure and benefits that genealogical studies provide in building family relationships and family pride. I believe it is incumbent on us (as) members of JGSCV to be concerned about attracting the interest of our children and grandchildren in order to promote and retain family memories so that they will not fade away.

With this in mind, I have introduced this topic and challenge to the Board of JGSCV with the objective of creating a program that will broaden the genealogical interest amongst our multi generations. While our children may well be too occupied with careers and varied social obligations to become involved, this cannot be an excuse with respect to our grandchildren. Our Society should accept an obligation to instill within our youngest generation the same thrill, passion and interest in the pursuit of family history that we possess. It is never too late to start this process, nor does it have to be overwhelming. So, get your thinking could kick off a meaningful program.

1. Devote one meeting a year for an intergenerational meeting that will capture the imagination of the membership's children and grandchildren through innovative programming. This might be volunteer presentations of a member with his/her child or grandchild offering a specific finding/family story, et al, in other words, a truly family project with JGSCV providing a platform for such a team.
 2. Invite a local religious school 's classes to one of our meetings and involve them in a program by offering a stage for presentations prepared through classroom studies that might be assisted by one of our members.
 3. Create a prize for a student contest in Jewish genealogy that is open to synagogue schools in the local areas.
 4. Offer a workshop for students at local schools.
 5. Have students develop new approaches to genealogical research via the various social media.
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