



# Sustaining a JGS: BUILDING LEADERSHIP

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In [Sustaining a JGS: Building Longevity](#) we provided some approaches to build a sustainable organization. Ultimately, we need to engage members to form that next group of leaders.

## Engaging Members

Engaging members happens on many levels. We build a foundation by being accessible and inviting. When a new member joins, our secretary reaches out to them with the password to our member page, but also with a warm welcome. We invite their input regarding programs and invite them to reach out if they have questions. We also tell them about some resources on our website that might be helpful.

Periodically we do surveys using Google Forms to solicit their input. We find that the best response comes when we follow up on a specific meeting. Then we try to be responsive to suggestions. Those who offer suggestions are often people who may have an interest in greater personal involvement.

So how do we move to that next step of building a pipeline of new volunteers and future board members? We decided to start with our members who attend most frequently. We tag our mailing list on Mailchimp with RSVPs so we can easily determine active attendees. We invited several of our most engaged members for a focus group discussion. Some also were involved with other genealogy groups so brought an outside perspective that we hoped would be helpful. We reviewed the history of the JGS and posed some of the questions we have been wrestling with as an organization – programming, balance between on-line and in-person, creating a sense of community, partnering with other organizations and genealogy groups and expanding the range of projects. We also reviewed the resources available on our website.

We learned that even engaged members were not always aware of the range of what was available and were quite interested in what they learned. Several things came out of the meeting. One person expressed interest in evaluating doing a newsletter and we firmed up a commitment with a new prospective board member. We also received several suggestions for building community and were invited to participate with a local temple that was developing a genealogy group for members. The more we can build interest in genealogy the better. We believe there are ways we can work together with such groups and serve somewhat different needs.

This was just a first step but yielded positive results in building more engagement for prospective volunteers and board members. One takeaway – block out enough time for this discussion, especially if getting to know each other is also part of the agenda.

## **Engaging Board Members**

We've made a commitment to meeting regularly, sharing information and making sure that each board member has the tools and support to do their tasks. We also try to give our board members exposure to new responsibilities. Our Vice President often manages the meeting when the President cannot. Several people have acted as moderators or fielded questions for our speaker. Several board members have also served as presenters and have an appreciation for what it feels like to be in that role, which helps inform their support of a speaker. By developing the range of skills on our existing board, we prepare members to step up to different or additional responsibilities.