



Sustaining a JGS: FINDING VOLUNTEERS

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

Many JGS members are retired, but that doesn't mean they aren't busy! Many of us are engaged in time-consuming hobbies (such as genealogy!) and civic and social groups. Some of us are still working full-time. For many JGSes, finding volunteers is the biggest challenge of keeping their society robust and vibrant.

If you define the task that you need help with and detail the amount of time required to finish the task, you will find more willing individuals. At least at first, keep the volunteer's task simple and one-dimensional. The task should not take a long time nor be complex. Just as important, don't wait for people to volunteer—*ask them!* People love to be asked.

Your Board members are a good place to start asking for volunteers. You are likely to need help with:

- Meeting room clean up and lock up
- Refreshments and cleanup
- Maintaining a lending library
- Membership recruitment
- Recordkeeping
- Meeting attendance (nametags, giving out handouts)
- Meeting publicity and reminders
- Newsletter and blog articles/items
- Outreach programs
- Posting on Facebook
- Local genealogy projects such as cemetery indexing
- Website management
- Editing meeting videos
- Sending emails with meeting announcements
- Programming
- Zoom facilitators

...just to name a few items

Here are some more tips:

1. Have sign-up sheets at your meetings, in your publications, and online. Announce the need for volunteers. Don't run the risk of anyone thinking..." someone else will do it." If people see that help is still needed, they are more likely to do their part. Online sign-ups let everyone see that everybody else is "chipping in" to get the job done.

2. The more you keep people updated and informed about your JGS' activities, the more they'll feel like a part of the team. The more people feel like part of a team, the more they will be willing to give their time. If you are organizing a big event, such as a local genealogy meeting where you need help with staffing, try this free organizing tool (free for up to 1000 members!): <http://www.signupgenius.com/>

3. Take every opportunity to promote the benefits of volunteering. It's not just about giving, but also receiving. Volunteering can be a way for people of a shared interest to meet, get to know each other, stay informed and connect on a social level. It is easier to contribute to the greater good when you feel a sense of belonging.

4. Never underestimate the value of planning. Think through your needs and create a master list of jobs and assign the right number of volunteers for each one. (Of course, with an online sign-up sheet it's easy to make any necessary additions or changes as things arise.) If applicable, note which duties work best based on a person's skills, strengths, qualities, interests, abilities, and resources.
5. Lots of communication and detailing is key to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Give each volunteer as much information as you can upfront. Include your cause, when and where the event is going to be, what they might need to bring, your contact information, what they are expected to experience and any other necessary information.
6. Create a motivating environment by encouraging new ideas and considering any suggestions. Mutual respect, the ability to listen, and exchanging ideas form the foundation of a successful volunteer sign-up. Answer any questions promptly, and make sure all volunteers have a full understanding of their responsibilities and exactly what they are expected to do. Be willing to discuss any possibilities.
7. Delegate most of the duties so you can welcome and direct the volunteers when they arrive and provide an orientation if needed. Have a clear entrance and exit strategy and make sure there is enough work for everyone to do. There is nothing worse than volunteers just standing around feeling useless. Successful delegation helps create a positive volunteering experience.
8. Some tasks require additional training, particularly such functions as website updates and email software. Be sure to create training tools such as slides with screenshots to help volunteers become comfortable with their responsibilities and make sure that you maintain a review function initially.
9. Provide plenty of thanks and recognition to your volunteers. Keep in touch and encourage their return. Let them know that you appreciate their involvement. Put a SuperStar award in your newsletter and online as a way of saying thank you or give a genealogy book as a gift. Provide any feedback on the results of their efforts.