



# Sustaining a JGS: RETAINING MEMBERS

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

For anyone involved in running a genealogical society, a constant concern is not only finding new members but also keeping the ones you have. If our societies are to thrive, we need to nurture the members we have. Here are things to avoid:

1. **Sending out newsletters or journals with little content and sending out paper content.** Instead, use social media and your website to keep in constant touch with members. Avoid simply repeating material found on other genealogy sites or in other popular newsletters.
2. **Hoarding money.** Don't be proud of a huge treasury. Put your funds to good use: adding books to the society's library, paying for the digitization and online availability of records for your geographic area, paying speakers for their services rather than expecting them to donate their time with no honorarium or travel expenses. (Our society also uses funds for holiday parties and small gifts.)
3. **Gearing meetings and conferences to beginners and having the same speakers over and over.** Don't think that you must fill every minute of the meeting/ day. Genealogists enjoy the opportunity to visit socially with fellow genealogists - to share stories, research successes and frustrations.
4. **Having out-of-date websites.** Websites that aren't updated indicate that a society isn't well organized or current. Keep fresh content on your website. Having "members only" content is an incentive for people to join your society. Make sure your web site indicates the city, town, county and state in which you are located. Your website also needs to provide a method for contacting officers.
5. **Recycling stale leadership.** Some societies have been recycling the same board members over and over for years. They may risk losing members because they operate from "we've always done it this way" rather than seeking new and innovative ideas.
6. **Using old ideas.** Think outside the box. Learn about new technologies. Offer recorded webinars, live Zoom sessions, and podcasts. Remember that out-of-town and out-of-state members are entitled to a level of membership services, too.
7. **Making it difficult to become a new member or renew membership.** There are a couple of approaches to encourage membership. If your tracking systems can support it, you may want to consider initiating the 12 months of membership from the point a member joins. Alternatively, if all memberships expire at the end of the year, you may want to allow several months of free membership for those that initiate or renew membership in the last quarter of the prior year. For example, a membership taken out in October would go through to the end of the following year. Make it easy for your members to join online.

Here are some ideas to embrace:

1. Stay in touch with once or twice a month communication. Short emails and Facebook postings as well as meeting reminders are useful.
2. Have members willing to act as welcomers and greeters at meetings. Use name tags. Introduce newcomers and guests at meetings.

3. Have prizes or thank you gifts for people who volunteer. Write thank you notes/emails. Make phone calls. In the age of high tech, high touch is often appreciated.
4. Make meetings dynamic and fast moving. Have light snacks available when and where possible.
5. Survey your membership from time to time to find out what they like and what they don't.