

JGSGB Member Survey Spring 2009

JGSGB conducted a survey of current members in spring 2009. The primary purpose of the survey was to get feedback from members, both for planning future programs, and for the Society's operations in general. A secondary purpose was to "keep in touch," to promote a sense of connectedness through an active and interactive relationship with the members as customers or clients.

This report:

- Describes the process of how the survey was implemented,
- Describes in detail the responses
- Interprets the responses to arrive at some general conclusions, and
- Raises ideas about implications for policy and operations.

THE SURVEY PROCEDURE

The Board agreed, after a review of several drafts, on a set of survey questions to gauge:

1. Interest (strong, moderate, slight or no) in JGSGB providing eight particular services, and respondent could list other services not on the list.
2. Satisfaction (strongly, moderately, slightly or not) in the services provided in the past year or two.
3. Interest (strong, moderate, slight or no) in 14 particular categories of topics for future monthly programs, and respondent was asked to list countries of interest.
4. Level of expertise of members (beginner, advanced beginner, intermediate, advanced)
5. Attendance at the ten monthly meetings each year (none, 1 to 3, more than 3).
6. Degree of reasons (major, minor, not a factor for missing monthly meetings; respondent chose from five specific reasons, and could list other reasons.

The respondents also could write in any other comments or suggestions.

We chose to initiate the survey in March because by this date stragglers would have completed the January cycle of renewal.

The software service Survey Monkey was used to implement the survey. Emails were sent to members giving the link to the survey form for on-line completion and

submission. Printed copies of the survey were mailed, with pre-addressed stamped envelopes, to those few members who do not use email. Printed returns were manually entered into the Survey Monkey database. Two email reminders were sent out, with the final reminder stating the April 30, 2009 closing date for the survey.

The survey was offered to all 389 current members as of March 2009. 206 members, or 53%, completed the survey, a very impressive response. The response experience for individual survey questions was:

1. interest in future services: 199 with 34 written comments
2. Satisfaction with past services: 186.
3. Interest in categories of topics for future monthly programs: 195, with 159 respondents writing in one or more countries of interest.
4. Level of genealogical expertise: 200.
5. Frequency of attendance at monthly meetings: 196.
6. Reasons for missing monthly meetings: 169 with 85 written comments.
7. 67 respondents entered a written response to “any other comments or suggestions.”

SPECIFIC RESULTS: QUESTION BY QUESTION RESPONSES

This section describes in detail the responses to each survey question. [See Appendix](#) for the summary tables showing the precise responses for each question.

QUESTION 1: PLEASE INDICATE YOUR INTEREST IN JGSGB PROVIDING THESE TYPES OF SERVICES IN THE FUTURE?

What services are members most interested in?

If we focus on “strong interest” only, and look at the membership as a whole, the services can be grouped into three levels of interest:

- ❖ Between 2/3 and 3/4 of members have “strong interest” in
 - Lectures at monthly meetings
 - Mass-Pocha
 - New technologies (e.g. DNA, internet, software)
- ❖ Following close behind, over half of members have “strong interest” in
 - Notices of major news and events
 - Opportunities to network and exchange information
 - Access to our research materials.
- ❖ The smallest percentage of members (about 20%) has interest in Beginner Workshops.

If we combine the responses “strong interest” and “moderate interest” to use a more inclusive definition of “interest”, then

- ❖ Over 90 % of members have “strong interest” or “moderate interest” in each of the services listed, except for Beginner Workshops.
- ❖ But even for Beginner Workshops, half of members have “strong interest” or “moderate interest.”

Are the members with different levels of expertise interested in the same or different services?

If we focus first on “slight or no interest” only (equivalent to focusing on combining “strong interest” and “moderate interest”), the services can be grouped into three levels of interest:

- ❖ The level of expertise of the member makes no difference for any type of service, when “strong” OR “moderate interest” is combined, except for Beginner Workshops:
 - For most types of services, zero to 10% of each expertise group has “slight or no interest”(equivalent to 90% to 100% of each group having “strong” or “moderate” interest).
 - For Beginner Workshops, there is a huge variation in the percentage having “slight or no interest” as would be expected: Only 4% of Beginners vs. 36% of Advanced Beginners, 67% of Intermediates and 89% of Advanceds.
 - 68 % of Beginners have an interest in Beginner Workshops.
- ❖ If we distinguish between “strong interest” and “moderate interest” then we find more of a differentiation for the various services. We find the following patterns:
 - Fewer Beginners (56%) have “strong interest” in monthly lectures than the other levels of expertise (73% - 78%).
 - Fewer Beginners (41%) have “strong interest” in networking opportunities than the other levels of expertise (52% - 63%).
 - More Advanced Beginners (74%) have “strong interest” in guidance for advanced family research than the other levels of expertise (54%-64%).

Did members suggest any other types of services, not on the list, that they wish to see provided?

34 members gave a free-form response. Some of these responses fall within the larger categories of the list. Although these individual comments do not necessarily reflect the complete membership, they are listed here because we asked for feedback in planning programs. Relevant comments are:

- ❖ Develop a network online for coordinating ordering and sharing of FHC films.
- ❖ Review of available software, comparative evaluation of internet research sources (2 respondents).
- ❖ Ask the Experts.
- ❖ Workshops where you bring your own computer to get help with your own software.
- ❖ “I’ll still need them till I plotz” (regarding beginner workshops).

- ❖ Providing steps on your website when you hit brick walls.
- ❖ More hands on workshops using family tree software
- ❖ Historical details of how our ancestors lived in the old country.
- ❖ Facilitate ways to network at the monthly meetings after the speaker (2).
- ❖ Someone who for a small fee could help one get started.
- ❖ Better access to research materials, guidance on how to use the wealth of materials (2).
- ❖ Hold meeting in metro-west.
- ❖ Hard practical information...agencies, people, guides etc you can contact.
- ❖ Ability to ask someone a question without the need to attend a meeting.
- ❖ Ways for people from out of town to access your programming...recordings, videotapes of lectures. Online lectures, transcripts, forums (2).
- ❖ Coordinate with Boston Jewish Film Festival.
- ❖ Have some lectures that are directed to more advanced members.
- ❖ A discussion list and viewmate like in Jewishgen.org.

QUESTION 2: HOW SATISFIED HAVE YOU BEEN WITH OUR VARIOUS SERVICES IN THE PAST YEAR OR TWO?

What services are members most satisfied with?

If we focus on “strongly satisfied” only (as opposed to “moderately satisfied”), and look at the membership as a whole, the services can be grouped into two levels of satisfaction:

- ❖ Between about 2/3 and ¾ of members are “strongly satisfied” with monthly lectures and Mass-Pocha.
- ❖ Between about ¼ and ½ of members are “strongly satisfied” for the other services listed: access to research materials, networking opportunities, beginner workshops, guidance for more advanced research, and new technologies.

If we look at the more inclusive definition of satisfaction, i.e. combining “strongly satisfied” with “moderately satisfied,” then

- ❖ About 90 % or greater of members are strongly satisfied in each of the services listed, except for Beginner Workshops.
- ❖ But even for Beginner Workshops, ¾ of members are “strongly interested” or “moderately interested.”

Do the members with different levels of expertise have the same or different levels of satisfaction with our services?

If we focus first on “slight or no interest” only, and look at the membership as a whole, the services can be grouped into three levels of interest:

- ❖ The level of expertise of the member makes no difference for every type of service, when “strongly satisfied” OR “moderately satisfied” is combined, for the following

services: monthly lectures, access to research materials, new technologies, notices of major news, and Mass-Pocha.

- ❖ More Advanceds (100%) are “strongly satisfied” OR “moderately satisfied” than the other groups (about 90%) about networking opportunities.
- ❖ As would be expected, more Beginners through Intermediates (about 80%) are “strongly satisfied” OR “moderately satisfied” with previous beginner workshops than Advanceds (50%).
- ❖ With respect to guidance for more family research, more Advanced Beginners (96%) are strongly satisfied” OR “moderately satisfied” than the other three levels of expertise (about 85%).

QUESTION 3: TO HELP US SELECT SUBJECT-MATTER FOR FUTURE MONTHLY PROGRAMS, PLEASE INDICATE YOUR INTEREST IN THE FOLLOWING TOPICS.

What subject-matters for monthly programs are members most interested in?

If we focus on the less inclusive definition of interest--i.e. on “strong interest” only-- and look at the membership as a whole, the desired subject-matters can be grouped into four levels of interest:

- ❖ Between 80% and 90% of members have “strong interest” in newly available genealogical resources and tools, country-specific research, and eastern European history and culture.
- ❖ About ½ of members have “strong interest” in improving research skills by review of basic resources, and organizing genealogical materials.
- ❖ About 1/3 of members have “strong interest” in language and translation resources, travel to ancestral homelands, holocaust research, Boston Jewish history, resources in Israel, films, success stories, and sharing research results.
- ❖ Only 15% of members have “strong interest” in Sephardic programs.

If we focus on the more inclusive definition of interest –i.e. combining “strong interest” and “moderate interest”-- then the subject-matters can be grouped into are three levels of desirability:

- ❖ Over 90% of members have “strong interest” or “moderate interest” in newly available genealogical resources and tools, country-specific research, and eastern European history and culture, and improving research skills.
- ❖ Only 52% of members have “strong interest” or “moderate interest” in Sephardic programs
- ❖ Between 70% and 90% e have “strong interest” or “moderate interest” in the remaining subject-matters.

Are the members with different levels of expertise interested in the same or different subject-matters for monthly programs?

If we focus first on the softer differentiation between “interest” and “no interest”, and also consider the different categories of expertise, then the subject-matters can be grouped into three levels of desirability or interest:

- ❖ As might be expected, the lower the level of expertise, the greater the interest in programs to improve research skills and organize materials.
 - Almost 30% of Advanceds have slight or no interest in improving research skills.
 - Over 15% of Intermediates and Advanceds have slight or no interest in organizing materials.
- ❖ The lower the expertise, the lower the interest in sharing research results.
 - Almost 50% of Beginners have slight or no interest in sharing.
 - Less than 20% of Advanceds have slight or no interest in sharing.
 - The greater the expertise, the less interest in research resources in Israel 10% of Advanced had slight or no interest in Israel resources, compared to about ¼ for the other levels of expertise.
- ❖ With respect to Holocaust research, about 25% of Advanced Beginners and Intermediates had little or no interest, compared to 5% to 10% for Beginners and Advanceds.
- ❖ The level of expertise of the member makes no difference for desired subject-matter, when “strong” OR “moderate interest” is combined, for the other subject matters.

If we focus on the stricter definition of “interest”—i.e. look at “strong interest” alone--then there are some patterns that differ from combining “strong interest” with “moderate interest”, but nothing significant, except for:

- ❖ More Advanceds (53%) have strong interest in travel to ancestral homelands than the other categories (32%-38%).
- ❖ More Advanceds (96%) have strong interest in new resources and tools than the other categories (81%-91%).
- ❖ More Beginners (91%) have strong interest in improving research skills than the other categories (33%-77%).

Is there a difference in subject-matter of interest depending on level of attendance at monthly meetings?

- ❖ Generally not. The two exceptions are:
 - 47% of those attending 3 or more monthly programs have a strong interest in films, compared to 22% of those who attend no meetings, and 25% of those who attend 1-3 meetings.
 - 44% of those frequent attendees have a strong interest in personal success stories, compare with 17% of non-attendees and 30% of less-frequent attendees.

What are the countries of interest to attendees (attendees were asked to use modern name)?

159 of the 206 respondents answered this question, naming 27 separate locations (using the present-day country names).

The top ten countries are: Poland 46%, Ukraine 42%, Lithuania 38%, Belarus (28%), Russia 17%, Germany 15%, Latvia 13%, Hungary 8%, Romania 8%, and Austria 7%. See the [tale with graphic](#) for the complete list of countries. The percentages total more than 100% because respondents could name more than one country.

QUESTION 4: HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR LEVEL OF GENEALOGICAL EXPERTISE?

How do the numbers of beginners compare to the number of experts?

The largest category of our membership self-identifies their level of expertise at Intermediates, at 42%. The other categories are Advanced Beginners at 31%, Beginners at 14%, and Advanceds at 12%.

QUESTION 5: HOW MANY OF OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS DO YOU ATTEND EACH YEAR?

What is the attendance record for monthly meetings?

43% of our members attend 1 to 3 meetings per year. This is the largest category. 36% attend more than 3 meetings per year, and 21% do not attend any meetings.

Are beginners or experts more likely to attend meetings?

- ❖ A greater percentage of Beginners (37%) are likely to attend no meetings than the other categories. The higher the level of expertise, the less likely the members are to not come to a single meeting.
- ❖ The percentage of members who attend one to three meetings is not affected by level of expertise.
- ❖ Beginners are less likely (22%) to attend more than three meetings than the other levels (38%-44%).

QUESTION 6: WHAT ARE YOUR REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING THE MONTHLY MEETINGS?

Why do members miss monthly meetings?

- ❖ If we look at the membership as a whole, and focus on major factors alone:

- almost 50% of all members point to lack of time.
 - Time of meeting is the reason given by almost 25% of members.
 - Non-relevancy of programs is given by about 20%, and
 - inconvenient location and difficulty traveling account are each reasons given by 13%.
- ❖ For over 80% of members, difficulty traveling is “not a factor.” For 2/3 of members inconvenient location is not a factor. For almost half members, inconvenient time is not a factor, nor is non relevant programs.

Are the reasons different for beginners vs. experts?

- ❖ Experts are more likely (40%) to identify non-relevancy of program as a cause than the other groups (8%-28%).
- ❖ Beginners are more likely (29%) to cite difficulty travelling than Advanceds (5%).
- ❖ There is no meaningful difference for the other factors: lack of time, location and time of meeting.

What if we compare members who don't attend meetings vs. members who do attend?

- ❖ For the members who attend none of the meetings, the major factor they cite is lack of time (48% cite lack of time) but this is similar the percentage of people who attend 1-3 or more than 3 meetings. Therefore, all members suffer lack of time, but this does not distinguish between attendees and non-attendees.
- ❖ Similarly, non-relevancy of program does not distinguish attendees from non-attendees. This is a surprising result, unless you consider attendance as a surrogate for overall commitment to JGSGB, in which case the active members come to meetings because of their commitment regardless of program.
- ❖ Of the persons attending 3 or more meetings, 81% are strongly satisfied, compared to 53% of those attending 1-3 meetings.
- ❖ 33% of non-attendees are satisfied with the monthly lectures, so presumably they think the topic is good but they do not attend for the other reasons.
- ❖ What does distinguish attendees from non-attendees is difficulty travelling, inconvenient location, and to a lesser extent inconvenient time of meeting. (But note that this does not mean necessarily that there is a better set of locations and times. The anecdotal evidence from written comments indicates otherwise.)
 - 38% of non-attendees cite “difficulty travelling” compared to 4% to 7% of attendees.
 - 35% of non-attendees cite “inconvenient location” compared to 4%-14% of attendees.

- 35% of non-attendees cite “inconvenient time of meeting” compared to 16%-27% of attendees.

85 respondents added written comments. Several comments simply amplified on the stated reasons in the fixed responses. Some members note they live out of state permanently or part of the year. Some examples:

- “Age. I don’t travel anymore.” Several comments noted health.
- Meeting too long. Takes up a valuable Sunday afternoon.
- Other programs scheduled for same time. Several comments noted time conflicts.
- “Although the meeting time is sometimes not convenient, I wouldn’t want it rescheduled to another time.”
- “Lacking in motivation which I hope to correct.”
- “Cannot drive in darkness”
- “Over the years, fewer and fewer of the papers and presentations seem as compelling.”
- “Forgetfulness.”
- “Need an email reminder the week before”
- “I don’t have a car” Person attended in Brookline years ago because accessible to transit.
- “...I have young children and this is prime family time. A first thing in the morning or evening meeting would be much easier.”

QUESTION 7: ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS?

68 persons answered this question. Many of these comments praised the Society, regretted their lack of time to be involved, and expressed appreciation for asking feedback.

Some examples:

- “I believe in the importance of supporting JGSGB but cannot take an active role.”
- “Some speakers have not prepared thoroughly in advance of their preparation.”
- “More hands on genealogical resources. We could bring our computers....”
- “Post summaries of talks on web.”
- “There should be more opportunity to meet and know one another...the name tags are good.”
- “I think that more experienced people are looking for more meaningful time spent with other experienced people exploring how to get around brick walls.”
- “...where is your research material located.”
- “I feel that you are providing a very important and useful service-but not always for me. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to provide material and programs that are of interest to all genealogists.”

- “Have you tried breaking into small groups for programs, with topics indicated in advance...?”
- More ask the experts, especially including translations. Make research material resources available in the hour before the lecture starts...Make research materials available at other times.”
- “Have you ever tried a mentoring process for new members?”
- “Would like a short period of one to one time to help with dead end research.”
- “We need to keep the personal aspects of people’s research within any program highly relevant to the topic and limited. I find some people given a microphone just want to drone on about their own research. This is deadly.”
- I’d like a program on publishing results of research...appealing to all age groups...books, video, DVD and other formats.”
- “...I really appreciate being able to obtain CD’s of the programs...”
- “Come to Worcester once in a while...do something with Clark U. Center for Holocaust Studies...National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst.”
- “Post meeting schedule including topics a year in advance if possible. This would help long-range planning.”
- “How about a lecture on techniques for interviewing family members...”

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS: INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The survey responses by themselves provide interesting information, but their value is in the insight for operational decisions of the Society. This section interprets and generalizes from the survey responses.

- There is a high level of satisfaction with the services offered by the Society.
 - Over 88 % of the respondents (range: 88% to 99%) were “moderately satisfied” or “strongly satisfied” for 7 of the 8 services listed.
 - 77% of the respondents were satisfied with the remaining one.
 - Many open-ended comments express high praise, and none expressed significant dissatisfaction.
 - Over 1/3 of the membership attended 3 or more of the ten monthly meetings in a year.
- There is room for improvement.
 - For 5 of the 8 services offered, less than 50% (range: 28% - 43% of the respondents are “strongly satisfied.”
 - For the remaining 3, less than 75% of the respondents (range: 63% - 74%) are “strongly satisfied.”
 - 20% of the respondents attended none of the monthly meetings, and the plurality (43%) attended between 1 and 3 meetings.

- 22% of the respondents indicate that “don’t find programs relevant” is a major reason for missing meetings.
- For the content of future monthly programs:
 - The strongest interest is in country-specific research, European Jewish history and culture, and newly available genealogical resources and tools.
 - About 70% or greater of the respondents have “strong interest” or “moderate interest” in 13 of the 14 subject-matters listed, but almost 50% have “slight or no interest” in Sephardic research, history and culture.
- The members have a wide range of expertise.
 - The largest category is intermediates, with approximately 40% of the membership.
 - The second largest category is advanced beginners, with roughly 30%.
 - The remainder of the membership is evenly split between beginners and advanced experts.
- The most popular reason given for not attending monthly meetings is “lack of time”, reported by almost half the respondents.
- Several written comments asked the Society to provide services that it already provides.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND OPERATIONS

- For any decisions, take into account that the Society is not comprised of a single homogeneous group of people.
 - For example, beginner workshops are not popular when looked at from the membership as a whole. But they are popular among beginners, who are a minority, but a sizeable minority. In addition, today’s beginners are tomorrow’s intermediates and potentially renewing members.
 - The survey did not ask for demographic information, but it appears that the membership is senior-heavy. There is a significant minority of members who have difficulty traveling. One respondent stated he would not drive in the dark (hence, late meetings would be a problem).
- For planning future programs, focus on country-specific research, history and culture, and new tools, but do not neglect other areas.
- The apparent age distribution of members may partially explain the not insignificant annual turnover (the percentage of members who do not renew) --15% to 20%,
 - The implication is the importance of generating fresh membership. New membership generation has been successful because membership has been constant over the last five years.

- To address lack of time, think of ways that members could remain active and feel committed to the Society without attending monthly meetings. E.g. schedule on-line help sessions?
- To address difficulty traveling and inconvenient location, think about carpooling, car pickup from nearby transit stops, and transit accessibility of meeting locations.
- To address inconvenient time of meeting, think about other activities for different groups of members at different times of the week. E.g. scheduling a help session on a weeknight, scheduling access time to the research library on a weeknight?
- Think of ways to publicize (i.e. remind people of) the many services that the Society offers. What is obvious to active Board members may not be obvious to casual members.
 - Have a monthly “Did you know...” e-newsletter (or just an email notice) that would remind people of a different service each issue: e.g. buddy/mentor system.
 - Have larger more visible and colorful signs marking the resource tables at the monthly meetings.
 - Review the web site to see if any modifications would address this.
 - Review Mass-Pocha to decide whether to include more newsletter-like features, reminding members of different services. E.g. a “How to Use Your JGSGB” column or a “Did you know...” column.
- Think of how to make access to research materials more convenient.
- Think of how to make networking and interacting with members more successful.
- Brainstorm if there’s a need to retain current members (i.e. lower turnover) or draw in more new members.