



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 24

2002

Set I Strategies for Societies

Putting Your Best Foot Forward: How Small Societies Get Noticed

by Jana Sloan Broglin

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

This paper discusses some ideas in getting your society noticed: writing an interesting newsletter, conducting productive meetings, preserving a good image, and hosting an effective website.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect. The FGS office no longer reprints the SSS papers, and has phased out paper copies of the SSS papers altogether.

There is no charge for any of the SSS papers and no limit to the number of copies you may download.

You may obtain SSS papers via download from www.fgs.org



Society Strategies

FEDERATION OF GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES

P.O. Box 200940 • AUSTIN, TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 24

Published 2002

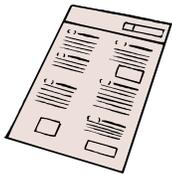
The FGS *Society Strategies Series* consists of papers which offer suggestions and instructions for innovative and effective management for genealogical and historical societies. The Federation holds a copyright to this material. A list of sets and ordering information appears at the end.

Set I Strategies for Societies Put Your Best Foot Forward: How Small Societies Get Noticed by Jana Sloan Broglin

INTRODUCTION

“You only have one chance to make a good impression.” Remember hearing that phrase? Apply that thought to a genealogical society. What do potential members think about your society? What do they see when looking at the newsletter for the first time? How do they view the society after attending their first meeting? What image is gleaned when they visit the society’s Web site?

THE NEWSLETTER



The newsletter might be the first time someone “meets” your society. It should be thoughtfully designed so as to be pleasing to the eye. Headlines should capture the reader’s attention. Articles should be interesting and informative and the author’s name clearly stated. Features, columns, or sections that appear regularly could include some biographical information about the writer. The content needs to be informative and useful and should address issues of importance to the reader.

Many small societies publish stunning newsletters. They know that the time and effort required to create great pages is often not much more than what is expended on plain ones. Here are some easy changes that could turn a satisfactory society newsletter into an award-winning publication:

- Have an attractive banner stating the name of the newsletter, the name of the society and its location, and the volume and issue numbers.
- Have a footer on each page that gives the newsletter name, volume and issue numbers, and page number.
- Add a table of contents to draw the reader into the rest of the newsletter.
- Include helpful information on the same page in each issue (this page is usually called the masthead): editor’s name and how to contact, the names of associates (who help with proofing or mailing), and publishing deadlines.

Put Your Best Foot Forward: How Small Societies Get Noticed

- Publish details about the society: the area served, the meeting dates and location, the workshop or seminar date (as soon as it is known) and dues and instructions for joining. If the society has a library tell where it is located.
- Show officers' names and contact information, the society address, and the Web site address if applicable.
 - Don't forget to include a list of the society's publications, prices, and the address for purchasing the items.

Society members who do not live in the area depend on the society newsletter to furnish information. Ideas for items to be published may be announcements of indexes or transcripts the society or others have published, a discussion of helpful Web sites for those with internet access, articles about families by society members, pioneer obituaries, pedigree charts, additions to the society library, program schedule for the year, and new member listings with name, address, e-mail address.

Two more popular features are listings of surnames being researched by members and queries. Even with the advent of the Internet, surnames and queries should be included.

Articles about the county or area served by the society are also needed in the newsletter. If your society does not have a quarterly, consider previously unpublished records, be they court, or diaries. Keep in mind, however, that most readers and repositories consider newsletters to contain current information. They tend not to retain newsletters as they would a quarterly or semi-annual magazine.

Do consider the appearance of the newsletter. Is the type used easy-to-read? Do format and layout reflect care and an eye for detail? Do graphics enhance the appearance of the newsletter? Are grammar, spelling, and

terminology accurate and consistent throughout the newsletter?

MEETINGS

Meetings are another way to impress a prospective member. Speakers are not necessary at all meetings, but it is a great way to inform the members and guests about genealogical and historical research.

Some meetings may be geared to only genealogists. These meetings may stress methodology, teaching how to find information. Methodology lectures can include (but are not limited to) probate records, land records, organizing genealogical material, citing sources, abstracting records, using the federal population census, military records, genealogical computer software, and newspaper research.

Other meetings may be broader based to appeal to the general public. These topics may include tours of the historical society, photo preservation, family-owned businesses, trains, post offices, historical costumes, history of different religious denominations found in the area, Civil War or other re-enactors, cemetery preservation, and the variety of architecture found in the towns and cities within the area.

Even when informal, meetings should be handled professionally. Each attendee should receive a printed agenda when they arrive. This tells them what to expect and identifies officers and speakers. Announcements that do not require public mention may be printed on the back of the agenda. Name tags for members and specially marked "Hello" tags for the guests are a nice touch.

Guests should be made to feel comfortable so that they want to return. Attendees should be greeted when entering the meeting. An official recognition from the podium of the guests with a "tell us what families you are searching" will make the guest feel welcome and may establish

Put Your Best Foot Forward: How Small Societies Get Noticed

contact with society members researching the same families.

LOOKING GOOD

One way in which prospective members evaluate an organization is by the demeanor and dress of the officers. Officers gathered in a circle for official business is fine during pre-meeting moments. But doing so as attendees are entering the room can make folks feel they are intruding. Instead, officers should speak briefly to everyone in a warm and friendly manner to create a favorable first impression.

The dress code need not be formal. “Business casual” is probably the most appropriate. In some settings, jeans are fine as long as they are considered “dress jeans” and not the ones used for gardening. Dressy sweatshirts and sweaters can look nice, too, but slogans such as “This Group Rocks” may be viewed as unbecoming and not in accord with the mission of the organization.

Some of the “don’t wears” include extremely tight stretchy pants, rubber “flip-flops,” cut-offs, bandannas, and anything that is stained or dirty. Of course, exceptions might be made if the meeting follows clean-up day at the cemetery or courthouse attic!

THE WEB SITE



Web sites are another “best foot forward” a prospective member might see. Folks surf the Web for sites with ties to ancestral homelands. What makes a society’s site eye-catching?

What content would make a future member want to join a society?

A site should be easy to navigate. Even the Internet novice should be able to find information on a Web site. Instructions of any kind should be kept simple and clear.

Properly designed and placed navigation buttons or links should be used to help browsers find exactly what they seek. Local societies may have links to archival centers, historical societies, surrounding county societies, and also libraries.

Content should be carefully considered. Organizations find their Web site is a wonderful place to publicize society events, projects, publications for sale, queries, and general information about the area, whether it is a county or city.

Guest books and “hit counters” are also a helpful tool on the site. Guest books can allow “surfers” to comment about the site and ask questions regarding the society.

Make sure that information is kept current. Sites that list meeting dates and speaker subjects must be up-to-date. It does not reflect well on a society to have old contact information or news about publications that are no longer available.

Societies can take advantage of a free Internet listing at Society Hall, a Web site sponsored by FGS and Ancestry.com. Society Hall lists members and non-member societies and indexes them by name and geographic area. This can be a substitute for society that does not have its own Web site yet, or can serve as a link to a society’s existing site.

PUBLICITY

Another society “best foot” is publicity. Are television, radio stations, and print media being used to announce society activities? Here are some ways to increase the possibility of your project, meeting, or event being publicized in print or on a local radio or television network.

- Ask the media’s news or local events director for tips on what kinds of announcements get printed or aired.
- Ask what form they prefer to receive these items in: as a story, as bullets on a single

Put Your Best Foot Forward: How Small Societies Get Noticed

page, or as a single paragraph with photographs.

- Determine the most suitable method for submission: e-mail, regular mail, or delivered in person.
- Study what does get accepted, you will soon recognize the styles and angles that almost guarantee your news will reach the public.
- Be sure all submissions carry the full society name, address, time, date, and place of meetings, names of officers or key volunteers who reside in the area, and contact people who can be reached day or evening.
- Send news items, called "press releases," to all area media: including those officed in adjacent counties as well as nearby towns.
- Invite the local cable channel to send a reporter and a camera crew to a special meeting or seminar. They are most likely to do this if the theme or presentation is about area history or local people.

SUMMARY

Newsletters, meetings, officers, Web sites, and publicity should be designed to make a good impression. Remember, there may be only one chance to put your best foot forward!

NOTES

Some other titles in the *Society Strategies Series* that address issues in this Paper are:

"Editing and Proofreading Society Publications," by Kay Haviland Freilich. I:22 in the *Society Strategies Series* (FGS: Austin, TX, 2000).

"Leadership Styles," by Marsha Hoffman Rising. II:3 in the *Society Strategies Series* (FGS: Austin TX, rev. 1999).

"Planning and Conducting Meetings," by Betty R. Kaufman. II:2 in the *Society Strategies Series* (FGS: Austin TX, 1999).

"The Society Newsletter," by Sandra H. Luebking. I:3 in the *Society Strategies Series* (FGS: Austin TX, rev 1999).

About the Author

Jana Sloan Broglin is the FGS delegate from the Ohio Genealogical Society and a trustee of OGS. She has served as conference chair and bylaws review chair for OGS. She is the author of "Multi-Track Programs," VI:3, in the *Society Strategies Series* (FGS: Austin TX, 2000).

FGS SOCIETY STRATEGIES SERIES

SET	I.	STRATEGIES FOR SOCIETIES
SET	II.	STRATEGIES FOR PRESIDENTS
SET	III.	STRATEGIES FOR VICE-PRESIDENTS
SET	IV.	STRATEGIES FOR TREASURERS
SET	V.	STRATEGIES FOR SECRETARIES
SET	VI.	STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAM CHAIRPERSONS
SET	VII.	STRATEGIES FOR LIBRARIANS
SET	VIII.	STRATEGIES FOR EDITORS

Shop at our online store at <http://www.fgs.org> or for a list of available titles and a price sheet, send your name and address to: FGS-Publications, P.O. Box 200940, Austin, Texas 78720-0940.