

Introducing the Joint Academic Microbiology Seminars (JAMS) Incorporated

What is JAMS Inc.?

JAMS Inc is a not for profit association dedicated to community building for microbiologists. JAMS organises inclusive, informal gatherings of microbiologists to disseminate knowledge, foster networks and nurture careers. The first JAMS event was held in November 2009 in Sydney, Australia. The organisers simply sought to bring microbiologists together on a regular basis to share ideas. What started as a small gathering in space made available by the Australian Museum, has grown into an international platform for academic microbiology networking and professional development. The ten-year history of JAMS has highlighted aspects of academic interaction that are woven into the association's operations. The key principals are inclusion and pursuit of knowledge and we've found this works best with short and frequent meetings in a social atmosphere. In contrast to traditional professional societies JAMS does not charge membership fees.

JAMS Inc started as an Association registered in New South Wales (NSW), Australia with the Office of Fair Trading under the Associations Incorporation Act, 2009. JAMS Inc was first registered on 20 December 2012 by Mike Manefield (Director) and Federico Lauro (Secretary) under Australian Business Number 13507684491 and Incorporation Number INC1200473. JAMS Inc operates under the model constitution (without modification) prepared by NSW Fair Trading.

How can you get involved?

If you're lucky enough to have a JAMS node already in operation in your location (check www.jams.org.au) all you have to do is find out when and where the next meeting will be and attend. JAMS was founded as a fee- and registration-free association to maximise engagement and minimise administrative workload.

If JAMS hasn't reached you yet and you think there is an appetite locally to meet in a relaxed atmosphere and 'talk shop', why not start a JAMS node.

What are the benefits of being involved?

JAMS welcomes all levels of engagement. From turning up to listen to talks once or twice a year to being a regular attendee or part of the local organising committee JAMS thrives on the willingness of people to contribute to the enrichment of their community. This of course comes with the social and professional benefits (ideas exchange and networking) of being part of that community but also offers opportunities to develop professional skills and gain recognition for your contributions. All of this is free.

So how do you start a JAMS node?

JAMS organises informal and slightly more formal meetings, in free or cheap venues, with minimal fuss and minimal risk to organizers. There are some essential ingredients that go into establishing a JAMS node. A good committee, a trustworthy reputation and an affordable venue are the essential starters. If you are the first node in a country you will likely need to incorporate JAMS. As a non-profit organization this should be a straightforward process and usually provides tax benefits that can be highlighted to potential sponsors (see funding section below).

The committee. The first essential ingredient a budding JAMS node needs is a local organising committee. Talk to like-minded colleagues about establishing a committee. Send an email to call for volunteers. Reach out across institutional boundaries. Be inclusive. The committee can be as big or small as you like. The more people you have willing to help out, the less work there is for everyone. The standard committee structure will start with a Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The Chair takes

responsibility for operating the node. The Secretary takes responsibility for the speaking schedule and manages communications. The Treasurer takes responsibility for financial interactions. Actions can be delegated to ensure workload is evenly distributed. Roles for social media, venue liaison, sponsorship etc can be added to the committee as the committee sees fit. Anyone can host the gatherings (introduce speakers, thank sponsors, thank venue etc). The point of the committee is to minimise individual workload and to ensure all the balls stay in the air. It also looks very nice on a curriculum vitae. The committee meets as often as required. Likely more often during the establishment phase and then quarterly once you've reached cruising altitude. A succession plan for roles on the committee (3 year maximum terms) is also recommended. Keep it simple and don't make unnecessary work for anyone. Being busy is different from being successful. The Chair is responsible for the committee.

The venue. The second essential ingredient is a suitable venue. Ideally the venue is located where most people can conveniently attend. Public transport should make the venue easily accessible. JAMS nodes have not traditionally had to pay for the venue. Developing a strong relationship with a venue that is happy to host you for free is a big win. The benefit to the venue is more clientele, more exposure and increased catering sales. They are lucky to host a JAMS node. Venues are preferably neutral. Rather than meeting at a specific University where some attendees are more at home than others, consider a museum, café or hotel. This will also foster a social atmosphere. JAMS is equally social and professional. That's why people keep coming back. The secretary is responsible for the venue.

The funding. The third essential ingredient is funding. If the venue is free, then all you need funding for is catering. Each node handles this in their own unique way. Some cover all catering. Some cover food but not drinks. Some pay for food and drinks on an individual basis. JAMS nodes seek local academic and commercial sponsorship to cover catering costs. If you decide not to cater, you don't need to worry about sponsorship. Providing free food has always been a reliable means of bringing people together and it doesn't cost that much. With the growing international awareness of JAMS amongst institutions and biological science related companies the argument to support the community through sponsorship and engagement grows ever more convincing. Sponsors can contribute different sums and be rewarded accordingly with logo displays, trade displays, short commercial presentation opportunities or anything else you think they might appreciate. There are some excluded sponsor categories: weapon makers, adult-content industries, hunting enterprises, mining and O&G companies unless they can show that they actively pursue sustainability and responsible practices. The Treasurer is responsible for the funding. A JAMS node can establish an independent bank account or have funds managed centrally.

Communications. The fourth essential ingredient is good communication. To date JAMS nodes have used the JAMS website (www.jams.org.au), email, Facebook and Twitter to communicate. Your JAMS node can be added to the JAMS website where you can keep your event information, speaker lists and any other relevant posting (job or scholarship opportunities, other related events etc) up to date. This website also manages sign up to email lists. The email list is used to notify potential attendees of upcoming JAMS events. The secretary is responsible for communications.

The speakers. The fifth and final ingredient to running a successful JAMS node is a well-balanced speaker line up. Use the collective professional network of the committee to draft a list of potential speakers. Invite members of your community to volunteer. Be inclusive of all career stages, genders and ethnicities. JAMS events are excellent opportunities for students and early career researchers to share their work and get feedback. This is an important aspect of the JAMS professional development platform. Awesome speakers make for awesome JAMS events so don't be afraid to reach out to internationally renowned microbiologists and local talent alike. JAMS events are typically 2 hours in duration on a monthly basis with three speakers per gathering (2 speakers x 15 mins, break x 45 mins, 1 speaker x 45 mins). This format is open to adaptation depending on demand. Once every two or three months. Four or five speakers. It's up to you. The secretary is responsible for the speakers.

So, what are you waiting for?

To get more information or to have your questions answered reach out to anyone you know affiliated with JAMS or fill out the 'Contact Us' form on the website. There is plenty of support and we've found the world is full of people happy to help build the community.