Local Area Discussion Groups: Mass Spectrometry in Your Region

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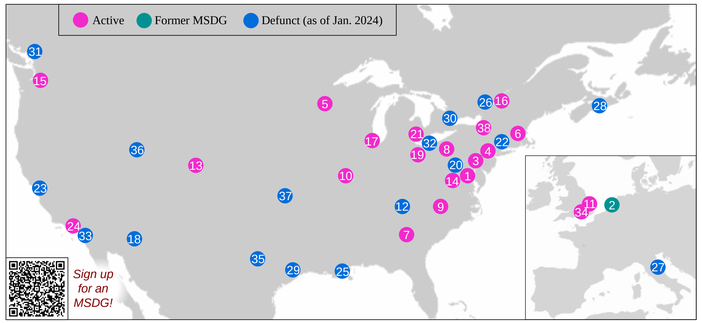
for the ASMS History Committee

WHAT IS A DISCUSSION GROUP? …and where can I find one?

A mass spectrometry discussion group (MSDG) is explicitly a **local** organization that is not affiliated with ASMS, while a national mass spectrometry society represents an entire country. The regional MSDGs might variously be named a "society", "interest group", or "user group", but they function the same: as a nearby place for scientists to talk about their work. Discussion groups generally meet multiple times per year with only a few speakers at any particular meeting, featuring longer research presentations than found at a national meeting or conference.

There have been MSDGs in **over 35 cities** in the past 60 years, including 20 groups that are currently active, four outside North America, many formed in the same cities at different times (Syracuse, Ottawa, Seattle, Ann Arbor, etc.), three currently affiliated with other scientific societies or government groups as parent organizations, and one that became a national society.



1. Washington-Baltimore MSDG
2. Dutch Society for MS
3. Delaware Valley MSDG
4. North Jersey MSDG
5. MinnMass Discussion Group
6. Greater Boston MSDG
7. Atlanta Athens MSDG
8. Pittsburgh MSDG
9. Triangle Area MSDG
10. Midwest MSDG
11. London Biological MSDG
12. East Tennessee MSDG
13. Colorado Biological MS Society
14. NIH Proteomics Interest Group
15. Pacific Northwest MSDG
16. Montreal MSDG
17. Chicago MSDG
18. Arizona MSDG
19. Central Ohio MSDG
20. NCI-Frederick MSDG
21. Michigan MSDG
22. Connecticut MSDG
23. Bay Area MSDG
24. Los Angeles Metropolitan MSDG
25. Louisiana MSDG
26. Ottawa MSDG
27. Urbino MSDG
28. Atlantic Canada MSDG
29. Southeast Texas MSDG
30. Toronto MSDG
31. British Columbia MSDG
32. Northeast Ohio MSDG
33. Southern California MSDG
34. London Proteomics Disc. Group
35. Austin MSDG
36. Intermountain MSDG
37. Oklahoma MSDG
38. New York MSDG

Early Group Foundings

Government scientists in the DC region Joseph D'Amico (FDA), Henry Fales (NIH), Henry Rosenstock (NIST), and Fred Saalfeld (NRL) started the Washington MSDG in approximately **1962**, which later expanded to include meetings hosted by Catherine Fenselau in Baltimore. In 1964 Piet van der Haak and Henk Hofman at the University of Amsterdam began an MSDG with 38 members from Dutch universities, which in 1992 became the Dutch Society for Mass Spectrometry (NVMS). Groups formed in Delaware, New Jersey, and Toronto in the 1970s, and more followed in the 80s in the US and Canada. By 1990 there were at least 23 active groups.

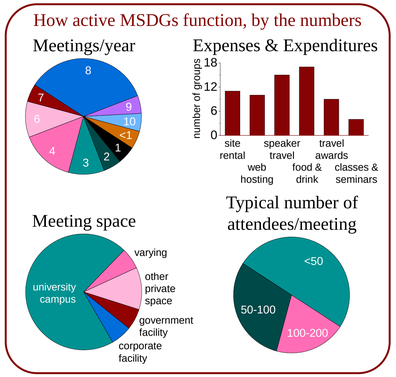
MSDG STRUCTURE

The logistics of putting a speaker in front of an audience include the availability of meeting space and event promotion. MSDGs may be legally independent or supported by a university or parent society, but 85% of groups are funded by **corporate sponsors**. Funds may also support other services for students and the membership at large.

79% of active groups serve a membership **radius** within 60 mile/100 km. Of those groups, 40% serve a membership traveling within a single city or metro area to attend meetings.

42% of MSDGs host at least one regular **joint meeting** with other scientific groups or include presentations from students and postdocs.

47% of MSDGs regularly give **travel awards** for students to attend and present at ASMS.



Defunct Groups

Like anything else, MSDGs change and sometimes die out. The most recent version of the Connecticut MSDG lasted only a few years, but even the metropolitan Bay Area and Toronto MSDGs became dormant after nearly 40 years of regular meetings. Local groups closely tied to a single person or research group are prone to falling apart when that organizer/P.I. moves or retires – although rotating leadership is no guarantee of **longevity**. Some members have been able to re-form a group after a break, perhaps with a reduced number of meetings, or to make an occasional trip to a different group. Once the website is gone, meeting records may only exist in member memories.

CTMSDG 2014-2016 — 1980-2016

ARIZONA MASS SPEC DISCUSSION GROUP 2008-2014

Internet discussion groups have been connecting far-flung scientists for decades. The first dedicated to MS was the Usenet group **sci.techniques.mass-spec**, which was active from 1995-2010 under a pair of moderators that approved each of over 5,000 topics. Like physical MSDGs, the group was a forum for problem-solving, job posts, sales resources, and general inquiry. Posts are archived on the web by founder David Bostwick and in a Google group, a trove of familiar names, students passing through the field, and companies that no longer exist in the same form. Today, those who live too far from an MSDG to attend meetings can access ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Twitter, Bluesky, and Reddit r/massspectrometry, plus streaming videos and podcasts. However, like Usenet those platforms are subject to change.

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From: "A.L. McCormack"
<alm7203@u.washington.edu>
Subject: Anybody out there?
Date: 12 Jun 1995 19:44:31 GMT
Organization: UW

Is anybody out there?

I am getting ready to do H-D
exchange of a protein followed
by micro-LC-ESI.  Anyone have
any general hints or
suggestions?

Thanks.

Ashley L. McCormack, PhD
UW
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– the first post to sci.techniques.mass-spec

WHAT MAKES A DISCUSSION GROUP LAST?

There are two essential parts to every MSDG: the membership and the volunteer leaders.

A group must maintain a critical mass of **members** who can attend on a regular basis. Universities and metro areas with diverse labs and a local speaker pool are most likely to sustain a group, but members have to contend with commutes, meetings after business hours, family obligations, and everything else that fills up the life of a busy scientist. Encouragement from P.I.s and group leaders makes a large impact on a meeting of fewer than fifty! Regular central meeting locations are also helpful.

> From its beginning, the objectives of this discussion group have emphasized networking, problem solving and continuing education.
>
> – Catherine Fenselau, History of the WBMSDG Prepared by a Second Generation Participant

The **volunteer leadership** must attend meetings more regularly than other members, in addition to the responsibilities of planning a program, wrangling traveling speakers, contacting members, managing group finances and member services, and recruiting new leaders. They do this without the prestige that comes from election in a national society.

> The regional discussion groups are a critical venue for the membership of ASMS as they provide a regular touchpoint to stay tuned into the science…I consider the discussion group not only as a place to network, but to learn more of this fascinating field of science.
>
> – Brad Barrett, vendor representative

Member mailing lists require only the time to send messages (far shorter now that no one has to print flyers or stuff envelopes). MSDG websites are important but cost money and effort to maintain, as do other services like refreshments and travel awards. **Sponsorship** is vital. Vendor representatives are a common sight at meetings and often recognized at "vendor nights", even for groups supported by member dues, parent societies, or universities.

The future of MSDGs: New and Lasting Communities

The initial barrier to creation or re-invigoration of an MSDG is low, if someone is willing to organize meetings and a few regulars are able to attend. A small, independent group can gather members and corporate sponsors, growing into a legal nonprofit that manages a budget. Since 2013 ASMS has offered travel awards for assistant professors to be speakers, and other scientific societies are also often willing to collaborate in or sponsor meetings. **New groups** continue to form – the Central Ohio MSDG (2015), Los Angeles Metro MSDG (2017), and London Proteomics DG (2019) – and **legacy groups** endure. Members of defunct MSDGs have also joined in symposia in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver held for over a decade under the Canadian Forum for Analytical and Bioanalytical Sciences.

Meetings of the London Proteomics Discussion Group (left), Los Angeles Metro MSDG (center), and Central Ohio MSDG (right).

Thank you to the MSDG and ASMS representatives who contributed data to this poster.

wbmsdg.org · Delaware Valley science.widener.edu/svb/msdg/ · njacs.org/topical-groups/mass-spectrometry · minnmass.org · gbmsdg.org · aamsdg.emory.edu · http://www.ssp-pgh.org/msdg/ · tamsgroup.org · lbmsdg.org · msr.dom.wustl.edu/midwest-mass-spectrometry-discussion-group/ · Proteomics Interest Group (ProtIG) proteome.nih.gov · cbmss.org · pacmass.org · bruotolo@umich.edu · mmsdg.iric.ca/ · cmsdg.org · u.osu.edu/msdg/ · lamms.org · londonproteomics.co.uk · newyorkms.org