



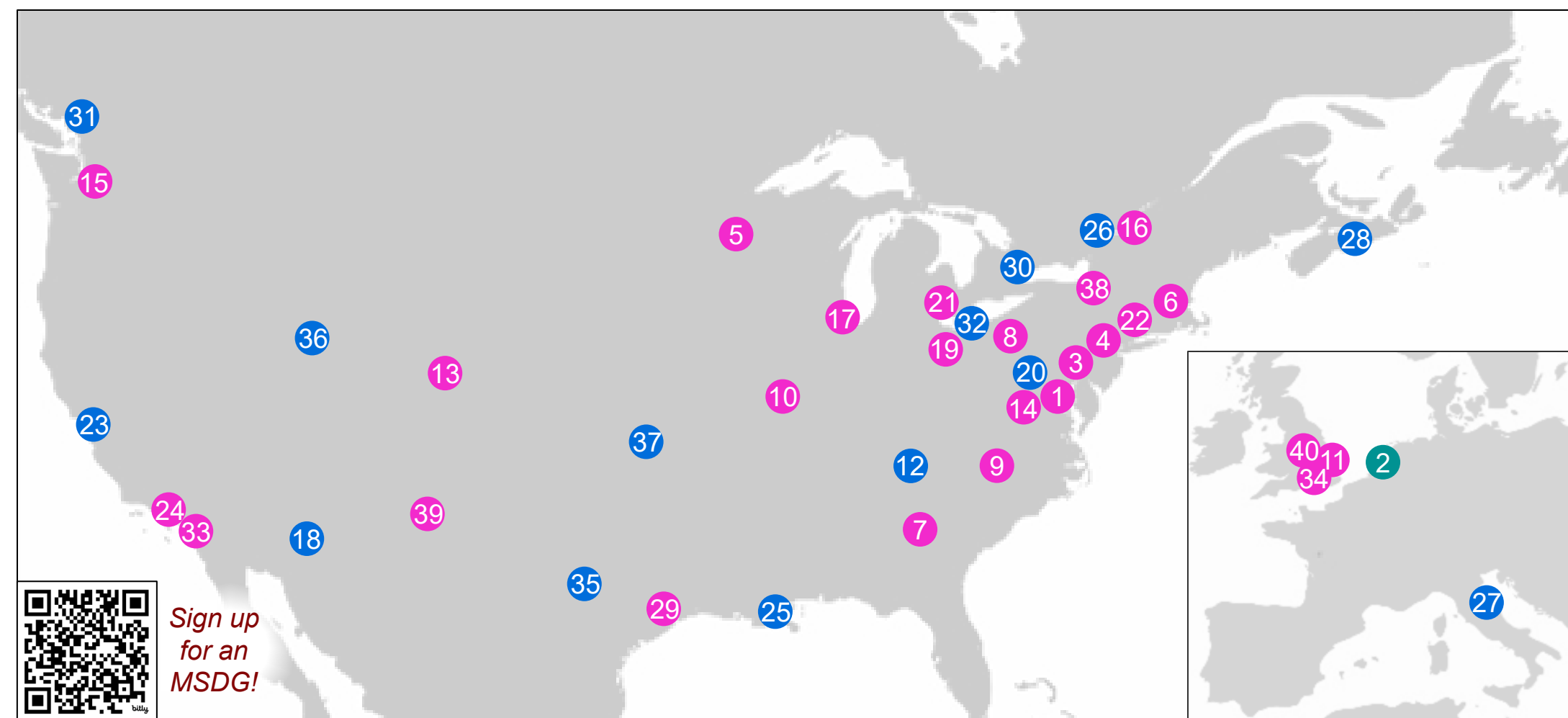
Local Area Discussion Groups: Mass Spectrometry in Your Region

G. Asher Newsome
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.

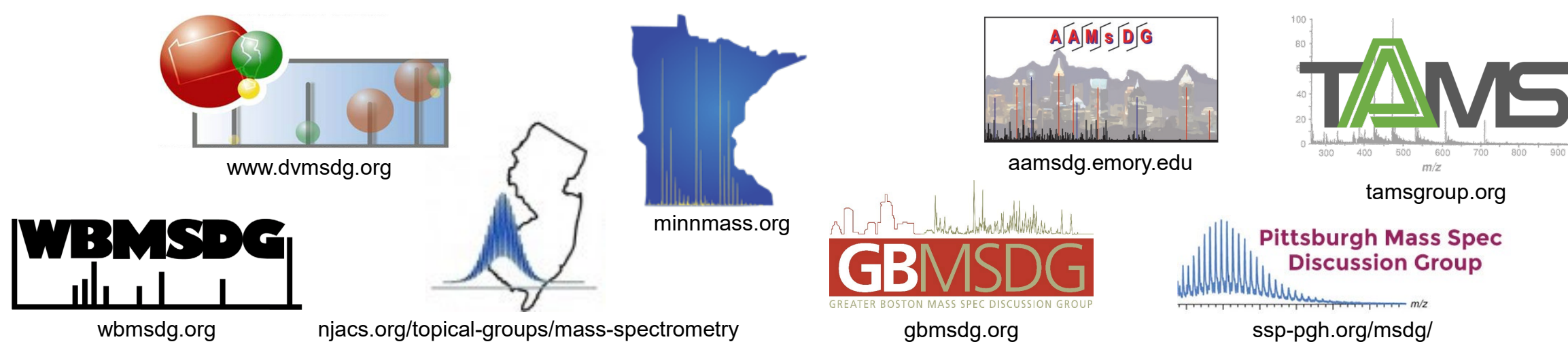
There have been MSDGs in **over 35 cities** in the past 60 years, including over 20 groups that are currently active, five outside North America, many formed in the same cities at different times (Syracuse, Ottawa, Seattle, Ann Arbor, etc.), three currently affiliated with other scientific societies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



- Active ● Former MSDG ● Defunct (as of Jan. 2025)
- | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Washington-Baltimore MSDG | 11. London Biological MSDG | 21. Michigan MSDG | 31. British Columbia MSDG |
| 2. Dutch Society for MS | 12. East Tennessee MSDG | 22. Connecticut MSDG | 32. Northeast Ohio MSDG |
| 3. Delaware Valley MSDG | 13. Colorado Biological MS Society | 23. Bay Area MSDG | 33. San Diego/So. Cal. MSDG |
| 4. North Jersey MSDG | 14. NIH Proteomics Interest Group | 24. Los Angeles Metro MSDG | 34. London Proteomics DG |
| 5. MinnMass Discussion Group | 15. Pacific Northwest MSDG | 25. Louisiana MSDG | 35. Austin MSDG |
| 6. Greater Boston MSDG | 16. Montmountain MSDG | 26. Ottawa MSDG | 36. Intermountain MSDG |
| 7. Atlanta Athens MSDG | 17. Chicago MSDG | 27. Urbino MSDG | 37. Oklahoma MSDG |
| 8. Pittsburgh MSDG | 18. Arizona MSDG | 28. Atlantic Canada MSDG | 39. New Mexico MSDG |
| 9. Triangle Area MSDG | 19. Central Ohio MSDG | 29. Texas MSDG | 40. Cambridge MSDG |
| 10. Midwest MSDG | 20. NCI-Frederick MSDG | 30. Toronto 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.



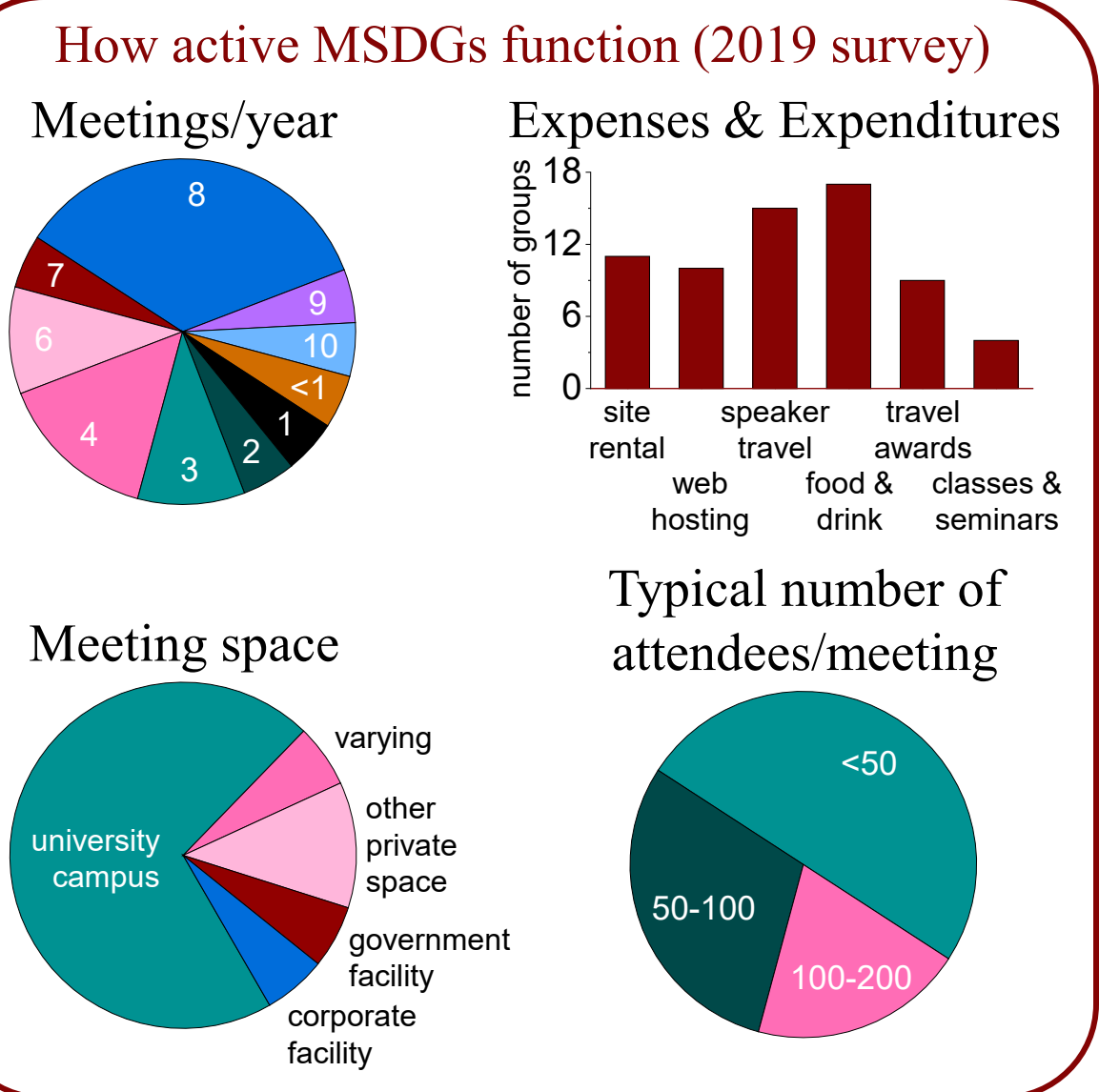
MSDG STRUCTURE

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 mi./100 km. Of those groups, 40% serve a membership traveling within a single city or metro area to attend meetings.

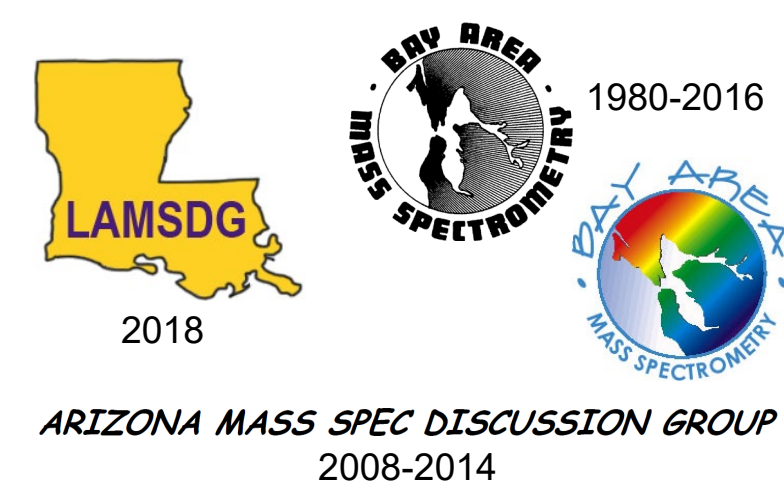
42% of MSDGs host at least one regular **joint meeting** with other scientific groups or include presentations from students and postdocs.

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



Defunct Groups

Like anything else, MSDGs can change, never build sustaining momentum, or go dormant. The Louisiana MSDG only held a single meeting, but even the metropolitan Bay Area and Toronto MSDGs ceased activity 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.



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 LinkedIn, Bluesky, Twitter, ResearchGate, and Reddit r/massspectrometry, plus streaming videos and podcasts. However, like Usenet those platforms are subject to change.

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
– 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.

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 or even re-form – Central Ohio, LA Metro, London, San Diego, Texas, Cambridge, and New Mexico since 2015 – and **legacy groups** endure. Members of defunct MSDGs have also joined symposia in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto under the Canadian Forum for Analytical and Bioanalytical Sciences since 2000.



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

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