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 to meet 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 at least 33 cities in the past 60 years, including 19 groups that are currently active; three outside North America, many formed in the same cities at different times (Ottawa, Seattle, Ann Arbor, Columbus, etc.), three currently affiliated with other scientific societies or government groups as parent organizations, and one that became a national society.

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, research center, or parent society, but 84% of groups are funded by corporate sponsors. Funds may also support other services for students and the membership.
78% of active groups serve a membership radius of 60 km. Of those groups, 43% serve a membership traveling within a single city or metro area to attend meetings. 44% of MSDGs host at least one regular joint meeting with other scientific groups or include presentations from students and postdocs.
Half 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 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 organizing PI waves or retires—although rotating leadership is in 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.

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 lean more of this fascinating field of science.

The future of MSDGs: New and Lasting Communities
The initial barrier to creating re-orientation 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 in 2015, Los Angeles Metro MSDG in 2017, and burgeoning Latin American and legacy groups endure. Members of defunct MSDGs have also joined in symposia in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver for over a decade under the Canadian Forum for Analytical and Bioscientific Sciences.

WHAT MAKES A DISCUSSION GROUP DIFFERENT FROM A GROUP ORGANIZATION?
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 must also be able to commutate with commuters, meetings after business hours, family obligations, and everything else that fills up the life of a busy scientist. Encouragement from PIs and group leaders makes a large impact on a meeting of fewer than 50. Regular central meeting locations are also helpful. The volunteer leadership must attend regularly as 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.

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, so do other services like refreshments and travel awards. Sponsorship is vital. Vendor representatives are a common sight at meetings and often recognized as “vendor nights”, even for groups supported by member dues, parent societies, or universities.

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Groups: Mass Spectrometry in the Region
G. Asher Newsome
Smithsonian Institution

Early Group Foundings
Government scientists in the DC region of D’Amico (FDA), Henry Fales (NHI), Henry Rosenstock (NSIST), and Fred Saalfeld (NBL) started the Washington MSDG in approximately 1962, which later expanded to include meetings hosted by Catherine Freasnight in Baltimore. In 1949 Peter van der Haak and Henk Hofman at the University of Amsterdam began an MSDG with 19 members, which 1963 became the Dutch Society for Mass Spectrometry (NVMS). Groups formed in Delaware, New Jersey, and Toronto in 1970, and more followed in the 80s in the US and Canada. By 1990 there were at least 23 active groups.

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