

Regional Chapters

A BOUNTY OF OPPORTUNITIES

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Introduction

Regional Chapters can offer so much to so many! Do you want an opportunity to sharpen your leadership skills? Do you want to be more involved in your professional society? You may want to consider forming or joining a Regional Chapter.

There are many reasons to establish, support, and attend meetings of Regional Chapters. The purpose of this article is to provide guidance in the formation of new Regional Chapters and to help understand the many important aspects of the Regional Chapters program. The benefits of becoming active in Regional Chapters include opportunities to grow professionally by taking a leadership position as an officer and finding excellent opportunities to network with students and experts in acoustics. Many senior professionals feel grateful for all of the collaborations and opportunities for growth that the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) has facilitated and feel the need to give back to the Society by assuming leadership positions in their respective chapters. Others want to become mentors of future acousticians such as students and junior professionals. Many professionals want to spread the news of their research in acoustics at the regional, national, and international levels. Regional Chapter meetings are also well attended by retired acousticians who welcome those venues to socialize and maintain their professional friendships as well as to provide insight and a sense of history to the field. In addition, many acousticians simply cannot afford to attend the ASA national meetings and they welcome Regional Chapter meetings as rich yet economical alternatives.

Local acoustics businesses benefit from the Regional Chapters because each meeting is an opportunity to market their services and products in the form of vendor displays, advertisements, and as invited speakers. A major benefit is exposure to potential customers and those at the regional level are the most likely to make use of their services and products.

Students can also take leadership positions to grow into their professional lives. They benefit by adding their professional involvement to their job resumes and by establishing

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relationships with professionals who can serve as references and direct them to acoustics positions in companies, government, and academia. Some Regional Chapters conduct student poster competitions for scholarship awards that greatly benefit them in completing their degrees. Chapters that promote student activities have the potential to grow the membership of the ASA. There is room for growth in the Regional Chapters Program.

The Regional Chapters program

The ASA established the Regional Chapters program to increase interest in and knowledge of acoustics and to promote acoustics through outreach and involvement within their respective regional communities. It also formed the Committee on Regional Chapters (CRC) to promote the formation and growth of

those chapters. The CRC membership consists of a representative (liaison) from each Regional Chapter, and the Society's treasurer, the chair of the education committee, a student council liaison, and two committee co-chairs. The Regional Chapter liaisons are the communication vehicles between the CRC and their respective chapters while the committee's co-chairs are the communication vehicles between the CRC and the Internal Affairs Council of the ASA.

The CRC meeting is usually conducted on Wednesday mornings of the week-long ASA national meetings. The CRC meetings may cover topics related to the formation of new Regional Chapters or to address challenges that existing chapters might be facing. These meetings are also excellent opportunities for Regional Chapter representatives to share their best practices and accomplishments.

Starting a Regional Chapter

The ASA does not assign national ASA members to Regional Chapters. Instead, an interested group forms a consensus and petitions the CRC to acknowledge the new organization. The chapter Start-up Kit can be found on the ASA website and will guide the group toward their goal. Just click the “Chapters” button at the ASA web page followed by the chapter resources link. You will also find links to the web sites of most Regional Chapters at this site.

Early in the formation of a Regional Chapter, the organizing group should become familiar with the make-up of the potential chapter members. Questions that you may ask yourself are—is there enough critical mass to support a Regional Chapter? Are the potential members tightly concentrated to minimize their travel distance to the meetings? What are their acoustics fields of interest? How enthusiastic would they be in attending local acoustics meetings? What else could attract ASA and non-ASA members to the meetings? Would they prefer to meet at a restaurant or in a conference room in a local business organization, college or university? Would they attend tours to local acoustics facilities or concert halls? How often should the meetings be held?

To answer these questions a survey of local ASA members can be conducted. A survey may be as simple as questions in a text e-mail message or as a web form that sends the answers in the form of an e-mail message when submitted. A web form survey that was used by the Washington, DC Regional Chapter is available to use as a template at: asachapterdc.org/survey/webform.htm. Feel free to download and modify it at will. E-mail broadcast is also available to distribute the survey or to announce the chapter organizing meetings. To broadcast the survey to local members, the coordinator should contact the ASA office manager, Elaine Moran (elaine@aip.org), requesting that the broadcast be distributed to local members. You may furnish, for example, a number of relevant zip codes or request the broadcast be sent to members in the entire state. The number of submitted forms is a good indicator of interested regional members. Survey questions could also include preferences of meeting days of the week, time, and duration. The survey also serves to obtain the buy-in of local members to attend the meetings that they may wish to influence and to increase member involvement.

Follow-up yearly surveys of the chapter members may provide additional feedback to assess what is working and what needs to change. Ask them to suggest speakers who might attract them to the next meeting. They might also have good ideas on other possible venues. Documents explaining how to draft a meeting announcement and how to prepare for a meeting are available to download from the ASA Chapter resource webpage.

Regional Chapters tools and support

The Regional Chapters Internet presence has become the most useful communication tool for some chapters. Pertinent information that can be found in these pages includes contact information of the chapter officers and announcements of chapter meetings. Another example of Internet presence is the formation of a chapter newsgroup where members can broadcast messages to the entire group on topics related to acoustics. The Washington DC chapter formed a newsgroup (<http://groups.yahoo.com/~asachapterdc>) of more than 200 members where future chapter meetings are announced and where their monthly electronic newsletter (*Acoustics Update*) is distributed. *Acoustics Update* contains acoustics-related news with links to the news sources for the full stories. Even though this newsgroup was originally intended for Regional

Chapter members, it currently includes a significant number of members from other states and countries that find the newsgroup to be very useful in keeping them informed of the latest developments. As another example of a communication tool, the Mexico City Regional Chapter publishes its own newsletter and makes hardcopies available to its members.

Chapter monetary support from the ASA is multifaceted. Newly approved Regional Chapters receive a start-up fund of one thousand dollars to cover their expenses during their initial year of activities. During subsequent years, each chapter obtains a reimbursement of five hundred dollars per year plus five dollars per meeting-attendee during that entire calendar year. Hence, sign-in sheets are paramount for the financial support of the chapters. The chapters are also encouraged to conduct student-outreach efforts and reimbursements of two hundred dollars per year are offered for talks and demonstrations at local schools. Another two hundred dollars per year is reimbursed for science fair student awards and an additional two hundred dollars per year for university student participation awards. The Madras-India chapter, for example, is very active and focuses their efforts on high school events. Chapters may also offer honoraria to invited speakers. Eighty percent of these funds are reimbursed up to \$500 per year.

The Regional Chapters program also benefits from the support of organizations and individual contributors. For example, Larry and Julia Royster, long-time champions of the Regional Chapters program, started and have generously funded the Royster Student Scholarship Award Program through a grant to the ASA. This competition is held every year by one or two Regional Chapters that want to hold the competition and are approved by the CRC at the spring ASA meeting. A scholarship award can be as much as five thousand dollars. Each poster must be on a topic related to hearing conservation or noise control such as education, sound surveys, hearing protection, audiometric evaluations engineering and administrative controls. Additional details for this competition may be found on the chapter resources webpage. The North Carolina chapter has already conducted several competitions and they include additional awards based on donations collected from local organizations.

Some chapters charge yearly membership fees or a nominal meeting registration fee to supplement the support from the ASA. These extra funds may be used to pay for banquets or catering during the meetings. Other chapters are thriftier and do not charge a fee for meeting attendance. Their objective is to attract students and non-ASA members that might be interested in the talks. Each chapter is free to decide how to arrange its finances. However, the ASA requires a yearly financial report and limits the reimbursement if the chapter's balance is above two thousand dollars unless prior arrangements have been made.

Identifying potential chapters

There are currently 17 active Regional Chapters, three of which are student chapters, and two are international chapters; one in Madras, India, and the other in Mexico City, Mexico. The number of chapters is growing thanks to the

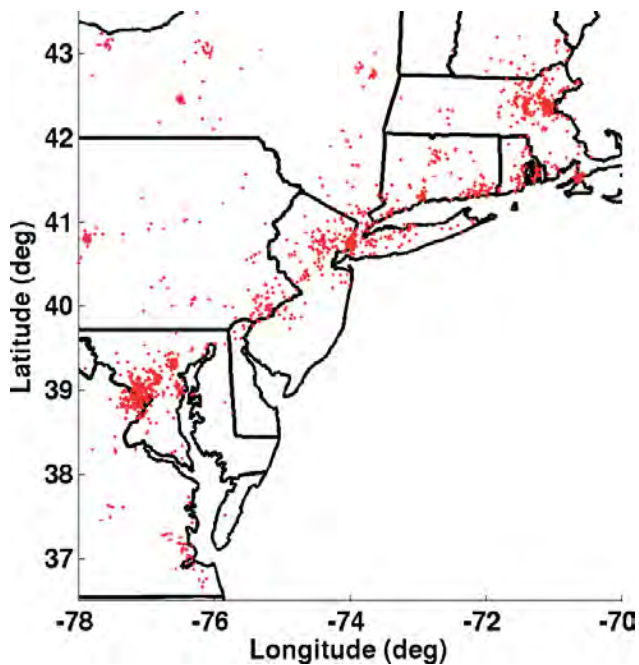


Fig. 1. ASA membership population distribution across the northeastern United States. Each red dot represents the mailing zip code location of each member as of September 2005. A 2-D Gaussian random number generator with a standard deviation of two minutes of a degree was added to the dots to spread the location of members that share the same zip code.

recent ASA approval on the formation of student chapters. Each chapter has its own character and activity level, which are influenced by the motivation and desires of the officers and members.

Meeting attendance depends on many factors including ASA regional member population size, density, and fields of interest. Figure 1 illustrates the ASA member population distribution as of September 2005 in the Northeastern United States. Each red dot represents the zip code of the mailing address of each member. Note that the largest population distribution runs along the northeastern corridor from Boston, MA, to Washington, DC. Most chapters are located in regions with a very high member population size and density. There are other regions, such as spots in Connecticut, Norfolk VA, and New York State, that may support Regional Chapters.

Population size and density are not the only factors in determining if a region can support a chapter. North Carolina has a very active chapter but the number (75) and density of ASA members are not large as indicated in Fig. 2. Why? Most chapters encourage non-ASA members including students that greatly increase attendance and outreach. The Norfolk area has a similar population size but does not have a chapter.

Oxford, MS, does not have a chapter but it has a very tight population size of 35 members. In Florida, the Gainesville area has a chapter that just re-started. It has a very tight population density that benefits the chapter since members will have a shorter trip to and from the meeting location. In the past, however, this chapter covered most of the state by holding meetings in various locations. ASA members in

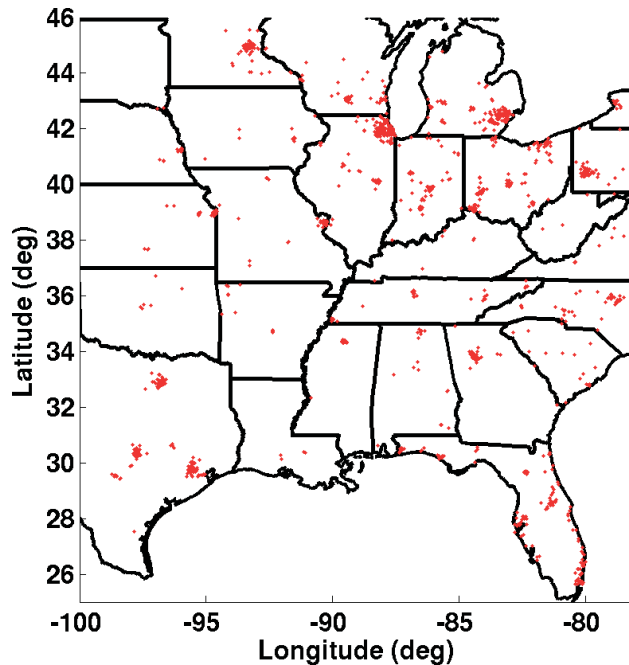


Fig. 2. ASA membership population distribution across the eastern United States.

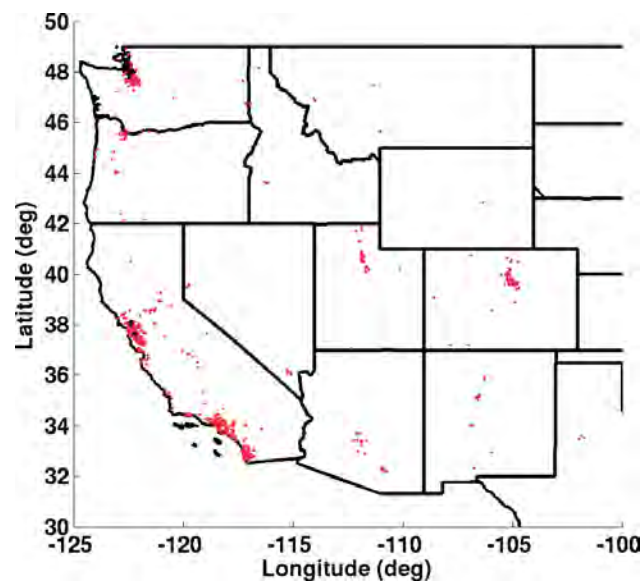


Fig. 3. ASA membership population distribution across the western United States.

Texas are mainly in the Austin, Dallas, and Houston areas. Dallas has an active chapter (North Texas Chapter) that supports science fairs.

There are Chapters in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Madison. The chapter in Minneapolis is very active (Upper Midwest Chapter). Detroit, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Champaign, St. Louis, and Buffalo could also support Regional Chapters but none have been established in these cities yet. Thirty-one ASA members and students in Lincoln, Nebraska have recently formed the University of Nebraska Student Chapter. The most recently formed Regional Chapter is the Student Chapter at the University of Kansas.

Among the western states (see Fig. 3), Denver has about 84 members but lacks a Regional Chapter. Salt Lake City, with 63 members, has a recently activated student chapter at

Brigham Young University (BYU). The San Diego, Orange County and Los Angeles chapters are somewhat active in southern California, but this figure shows that the chapter-less San Francisco/San Jose area has the potential for chapter activities.

Knowledge of the region's population size and density is also helpful in tempering the expectations when counting the attendees in a chapter meeting. A good rule-of-thumb of involvement in chapter activities is to count on about 10% to 20% of the local ASA member population to attend the first chapter meeting.

After a long time of inactivity, the first chapter meeting tends to attract the most attendance. ASA members in the Metropolitan New York Chapter region and the Washington DC Chapter region have revitalized their Chapters with great success. It is very rewarding to receive comments of gratitude from attendees thanking the organizers for moving the chapter forward.

Presently, this study has been limited to US membership. However, the CRC also welcomes additional professional and student chapters from other countries.

Developing a sustainable Regional Chapter

Once the chapter is formed and the first meetings have been conducted, the next step of a good leader is to ensure that the chapter is sustainable. The leadership of the chapter can accomplish this by giving others the opportunity to prepare for and conduct a meeting with supervision. After a successful meeting, the leader should celebrate the accomplishment and let everyone in the team know that, in fact, the collective efforts contributed to this success.

To build the leadership among the active members, the proven leader should step aside and allow those interested to take on the responsibilities of leadership positions. Holding office for more than a couple of years in the same executive position is too long and the chapter may risk becoming stagnant. For example, when the chapter chair becomes the past-chair he or she can step aside and offer guidance to the following leadership. The new chair should have a vision to direct the chapter, be able to share this vision to the team and motivate them to increase member involvement.

A yearly officers meeting is paramount to regroup and discuss the status of the chapter and where to go from there. A new chapter may start with just a handful of technical meetings in a year. Depending on the feedback of meeting attendees, they may want to add other activities such as tours or school visits. The chapter may benefit by assigning a coordinator responsible for each event.

Always try something new even if it feels risky. If the idea does not achieve the intended objective, then learn why and perhaps try a different approach or just move-on to entertain other ideas. Otherwise, the meetings may become overly routine and chapter attendance may dwindle until officers become discouraged and the chapter becomes suited for deactivation. Encourage variety to maintain the value of the chapter to its members.

Diversifying the talks also contributes to interesting meetings. Invite talks from as many fields of acoustics as possible keeping in mind the preferences of the chapter members.

Invite speakers from industry, government, and academia to offer a wide range of perspectives. Avoid inviting too many speakers from the same organizations. Inviting women and minorities to add to the diversity of the speakers would likely attract attendees from those same groups. Hold some meetings at universities to attract students, but move to restaurants and other venues during the summer since students are more likely to be at the beach at that time of the year.

Some chapters value their interactions with other professional societies and they assign people to serve as liaisons to the other societies such as the American Physical Society (APS) or the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Increased attendance is possible by coordinating joint meetings with Regional Chapters from other professional societies with common interests. Members from the co-hosting society may become interested in joining the ASA chapter. Joint meetings with another ASA Regional Chapter are also possible where the meeting can be held at a venue half way between the areas covered by the chapters. For example, the North Carolina and Washington DC chapters conducted a joint two-day meeting at Hampton, VA. The Narragansett and Boston Regional Chapters have also held joint meetings. Joint meetings also allow the chapters to learn from each other.

Something different may include coordinating a "double-feature" with two invited speakers from two different fields of acoustics. Perhaps a meeting featuring university students where each gets 15 minutes to talk about their research topics. This would be a great opportunity to provide constructive feedback and to videotape their talks so that they can see for themselves how well they did and where they should make improvements. If the meetings are videotaped, consider making them available at a nominal fee to members who really wanted to listen to the talk but were unable to attend.

Selecting good speakers requires some research. The program of the ASA national meetings is a source of valuable information. Just take a few moments to look through the latest program to search for speakers with addresses within your chapter's area. These speakers could easily deliver the same talk at a chapter meeting with little need for additional preparation. If the chapter liaison or any officer has the opportunity to attend the national meeting, it would take just a few minutes to assess the quality of the talk before inviting the speaker to deliver that same talk at a chapter meeting. Also the chapter's honorarium may be used to invite a prominent speaker from out of town that may draw attendance.

It also may be important to cater to the speaker preferences of the regional areas. The authors analyzed the statistics connected with each state and found that there seemed to be a predominance of member interest that is unique for each. The primary field of interest in California is noise control, while Massachusetts is dominated by psychological and physiological acoustics, New York focuses on speech communication, Maryland on underwater acoustics, and Pennsylvania is equally dominated by physical acoustics and noise control. Illinois dominates in architectural acoustics but has no interest in ultrasound. Hawaii is mainly interested in animal bioacoustics. Also, a whopping 63% of Mississippi's

members (concentrated in Oxford) are mainly interested in physical acoustics. Texas has the most diverse interests among the states with a large population of acousticians starting from underwater acoustics followed by physical acoustics, architectural acoustics, speech communication, noise control, and psychological and physiological acoustics. This diversity is partly attributed to the different preferences of members in the Houston, Austin, and Dallas areas. Speech communication is the only field that is of interest to at least one member in every state in the table and acoustical oceanography is not of primary or secondary interest in any



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state. For hard numbers that back our observations, the reader is referred to the table posted at our web site (ASAchapterDC.org/AcousticsToday/CRCstudy.htm).

In summary, this article was written to encourage and aid leaders and potential leaders of ASA Regional Chapters with useful information and best practices from active Regional Chapters. However, all chapters are different and some originality will be required to lead the chapter into becoming an indispensable tool to its members.**AT**



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