

Do More than Belong—Participate!

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As I alluded to in my second “Reflections” (of course you remember my appeal to give to the ASHS Endowment Fund), at this last Annual Conference, I spent most of my time in committee meetings. I did go to the featured talks, which were excellent, but other than that, committee meetings! I am not complaining, since this goes with the territory. However, one morning I had a free hour and I saw that one of my Professional Interest Groups (PIGs) was having their Business Meeting (OK, I know, another meeting, I just can’t help myself), and I went. However, when I arrived I found only three of us present! *Friends, interactions of individual members in Professional Interest Groups are the heart of ASHS.*

Professional Interest Groups provide a forum for individuals with common interests in research, extension, teaching, and industry to develop, discuss, exchange, share, and disseminate ideas. This has been a wonderful way to find out what was current in my own area of research, because all the major players were at the annual conference. We also had great discussions. It was our opportunity to identify critical needs, discuss best methods and procedures, and many a research project and proposal came from these dialogues. Thus, through these interactions, PIGs are promoting, encouraging, facilitating, and coordinating basic and applied research, and identifying and promoting liaisons with other organizations with similar interests.

One of my first leadership positions in ASHS was as an officer in one of my PIGs (at that time called Working Groups). Taking on this responsibility helped me personally and professionally. Professionally, I could put this on my annual report and CV, but personally were the people I met and interacted with who had similar interests (in my case vegetable genetics and breeding). This is a perfect opportunity for young scientists to become involved and gain leadership experience. Let me share a secret with you—PIGs are always looking for volunteers to take leadership positions!

Members of PIGs share information and ideas at annual conferences through workshops, oral sessions, poster sessions, contributed paper sessions, discussion groups, business meetings, and field trips. We even plan regional and national meetings for related groups with the same interests. Unfortunately, our most common methods of sharing information are traditionally 15-minute presentations in oral sessions, and 30-minute presentations in workshops. We know that our membership has changed over time, and for many of our members today, these formats are really not very effective. We have an excellent Education Division, led by David Kopsell (Education Division Vice President) and Teaching Methods PIG, and they tell us, and prove, that there are much more diverse and effective means to help people understand information in our areas of interest. We are changing. For instance, workshop proposals now *must* emphasize participation and group discussion, if possible with problem-solving and/or hands-on activities. Many recent Workshops do not have any, or very few, actual “talks.” When are workshops proposed and designed? Yes, in PIG Business Meetings!

Professional Interest Groups do much more than have talks at annual conferences, and these activities are planned at PIG Business Meetings! I trust you are seeing a theme here—don’t just belong, but participate! Here are some examples of what some PIGs are doing: producing a list of experts/consultants; producing a webinar; running competitions; creating member video profiles on careers in their field; distributing articles of interest; and writing columns (I am open to guest “Reflections”). Other PIGs are currently discussing: putting together photo collections for class use;

producing tutorials; publishing monthly student spotlights; developing many different webinars; loading Intellectual Property Resources on the ASHS site; and suggesting tours. In addition, don't forget something PIGs have done well for some time—recognize outstanding contributions through awards. I hope you can see that how effective a PIG becomes is limited only by their members' imaginations.

I am currently active in a number of PIGs. However, I do not limit myself to just these groups. One thing I have done at each Annual Conference for some time is go to an oral session or Workshop by a PIG that is related to, but not exactly in, my area of emphasis. For instance, I am a geneticist/plant breeder, and I have worked with several vegetable, landscape, and bioenergy crops over the years. However, I might go to a fruit breeding or floriculture session since we all are dealing with similar problems/issues, and I am interested in how different groups address these same problems and issues.

I cannot encourage you enough to not only sign-up for PIGs, but actively participate. You will gain much from your interactions with others in these groups, and the groups will gain by your input and potential leadership.

A special thank you to ASHS Assistant Executive Director Tracy Shawn for her help with this "Reflections". Her knowledge of what PIGs can do, particularly in the ASHS Annual Conference Program, is second to none.