

Roundtable Session 1 - Table 3 - Career Development and Equity in the Mass Spectrometry Community

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Abstract:

This roundtable examines the factors that shape career advancement for scientists working in mass spectrometry. As analytical demands grow more complex and cross functional, distribution of opportunities is not always equal. Barriers such as unequal access to advanced instrumentation and training, underrepresentation in senior technical and leadership roles, inconsistent mentorship and sponsorship, and disparities tied to gender, race, career stage, and site location continue to limit who advances and how quickly. This discussion will explore what equitable career development looks like in practice, including transparent promotion criteria, sponsorship versus mentorship, recognition of technical (non-people managerial) career tracks, cross functional visibility, and the role professional societies and internal programs play in expanding access. Participants will share experiences and strategies for building career pathways in mass spectrometry that are fair, transparent, and sustainable for scientists at all levels.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the biggest structural barriers to career advancement in mass spectrometry today? Do they differ by company size, site location, career stage, region, or function (R&D, QC, manufacturing)?
2. How do technical or individual contributor career tracks (such as steward or principal scientist roles) compare to management tracks in terms of compensation, recognition, and advancement opportunity?
3. How can mentorship and sponsorship be made more accessible to scientists who lack informal networks or senior advocates within large organizations?
4. What role should internal talent programs and professional societies play in promoting equitable access to training, high visibility projects, and leadership opportunities?
5. What specific actions can individuals and organizations take now to close equity gaps in career development for mass spectrometry scientists?

Notes:

The roundtable focused on strengthening career development and equity in the mass spectrometry community through broader skills, accessible mentorship, clear career paths, and structured feedback.

Career Development and Skills

- **Build broad skills:** Training should combine technical expertise with communication, collaboration, curiosity, and continuous learning.
- **Clarify career paths:** Academia, industry, technical, and management routes should be visible and equally valued; advancement should not require becoming a manager.
- **Increase access and equity:** Employees at all career stages need fair access to development opportunities, visibility, mentors, and feedback. Technical forums and professional societies can support networking and career exploration.

Mentorship

- **Clarify roles:** Define the distinct purposes of mentors, coaches, and managers.
- **Offer flexible models:** Use one-to-one mentoring, mentorship circles, peer or reverse mentoring, and mentors with different perspectives.
- **Expand access:** Internships, university partnerships, and professional-society programs can connect students and early-career scientists with experienced professionals.
- **Develop leaders:** Team-lead training and shadowing can strengthen mentoring, management, and people-development skills.

Development Planning and Feedback

- **Plan ahead:** Set role or capability goals for approximately 3, 5, and 10 years, then seek the experiences, mentors, and skills needed to reach them.
- **Broaden experience:** Short rotations of approximately 3–6 months can expose employees to alternative roles and perspectives.
- **Use structured feedback:** A midyear 360-degree review with 3–5 colleagues, followed by an end-of-year assessment, can provide balanced input and time to improve.
- **Use technology appropriately:** AI tools may support career exploration and planning, while human mentors provide context and judgment.