

Conducting a “Hybrid” In-person/Zoom
(or other videoconferencing software)
Rotary Club meeting

Introduction

During and following the Ohio stay-at-home order, many Rotary Clubs began holding “virtual” club meetings and social events to stay connected with their members using videoconferencing software such as Zoom (which seems to have been one of the most popular communications app). Many clubs have found that this approach to be very effective as a way to stay in touch with their members (and provide a way for Rotarians to stay connected to each other), and in many cases have discovered that this approach to conducting meetings actually enhanced the Rotary experience for members who (even without a pandemic) would have been unable to participate in club meetings or other events due to work or personal travel or other circumstances.

Now that the stay-at-home order has been modified to the “Stay Safe Ohio Order” and “Responsible RestartOhio,” many Rotary clubs are now considering offering in-person meetings for their members, either in lieu of or in combination with a continuation of videoconferencing (that combination of in-person and videoconferencing being commonly referred to as “hybrid” meetings). This document is designed to provide some things for clubs to consider as they move toward some form of in-person meetings, including some suggestions on hardware configuration and operations of computers in connection with a hybrid club meeting.

District Recommendations in Conducting In-person Rotary Club Meetings and Gatherings

District 6690 leadership recognizes that Rotary clubs are autonomous entities and that District 6690 leadership can only offer advice to clubs on how to approach restarting in-person meetings. In April 2020, at the height of the stay-at-home orders that were being implemented across the country and beyond, the Board of Trustees of Rotary International met to take action on COVID-19 and its impact on Rotary. The key decisions of the Board of Trustees affecting Rotary clubs remain in effect (we anticipate that these will be in effect until a vaccine has been developed and is widely available). Those directives to clubs are:

- No in-person meeting or event shall be mandatory for any Rotary participant who may feel uncomfortable attending because of the pandemic.
- All conveners and organizers of Rotary meetings are strongly encouraged to consider all health concerns in deciding whether to hold in-person meetings.
- All conveners and organizers of Rotary meetings shall fully comply with all health and safety rules in effect in that location.

When the District shared this information with D6690 clubs in April, we also emphasized the following:

- Any decision that a club makes with respect to its meetings and events is a decision of that club. The District, however, encourages clubs to continue to monitor the protocols for gatherings and events as recommended and mandated by the State of Ohio. Clubs are encouraged to regularly check the state's coronavirus website for updates here (<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>). At this site you will need to:
 - Scroll down to **Resources**, below the Helpful Videos, bottom left of the page
 - click on **Public Health Orders**
- Clubs should be aware that Rotary International has informed us that the general liability and directors and officers/employment practices liability coverage provided by RI to the District and to clubs (see <https://my.rotary.org/en/us-rotary-club-and-district-liability-insurance-program>) will be renewed as of July 1, 2020, and RI is being told by its insurance provider to expect that coverage for losses as a result of COVID-19 will be excluded from the policy coverage when it is renewed. We expect to have more detail about this in the near future, but if this is the case, a club or a specific officer subject to a claim related to COVID-19 might not have the benefit of RI insurance coverage.
- If clubs determine to hold in-person meetings or events, clubs are **strongly encouraged** to continue to offer virtual meeting and event attendance to its members and to count that virtual attendee present just the same as a member attending in person. We also encourage clubs to continue to be creative in thinking of ways to keep their members engaged during this period of "social distancing."

District leadership reaffirms these recommendations.

As clubs contemplate implementing in-person meetings again, we ask clubs to:

- Continue to follow the requirements and recommendations of the Ohio Department of Health.
- Work closely with the venue where you hold your Rotary meetings to determine how best to configure and utilize your meeting space. Your venue managers should be very knowledgeable of the best ways to safely conduct a meeting in their space.
- Continue to offer a videoconferencing option for members who choose or are otherwise unable to participate in person – the "hybrid" meeting approach.
- Avoid creating two classes of meeting participants with a preference to in-person meeting attendees. Make a conscious effort to incorporate online participants into the meeting.
- Do what you can to encourage and assist members who are not comfortable attending in-person meetings but are also not "tech savvy." They may need your assistance getting more comfortable with their online participation. We don't want to lose these valuable club members.

Nuts and Bolts of Managing a “Hybrid” Meeting

We wanted to share some basic advice regarding managing a hybrid meeting, based on the experience of the Upper Arlington Rotary Club, which has been conducting hybrid meetings since June 2nd and has given us permission to share this with you. The following are some tips they shared for using videoconferencing in a hybrid Rotary Club meeting:

- Make sure your meeting space is configured with strong Wi-Fi capabilities.
- Utilize at least two Wi-Fi capable devices in the room (laptops seem to work best – Upper Arlington Rotary found that the videoconference integration with the live meeting doesn’t work as well with phones or iPads, but it might also work to have only one laptop in the room which is operated by the videoconference “host” and have that laptop connected to a camera at the podium). Both devices will log into the meeting using the videoconference app you are using.
 - One laptop will be located at the podium (the “Podium Laptop”). The Podium Laptop will be logged in as a “participant” to the videoconference (not the host of the meeting with meeting controls).
 - The Podium Laptop will utilize its camera and built-in microphone to pick of the video and audio of the speaker at the podium.
 - For larger spaces, you will want a separate microphone for the PA in the meeting room.
 - The Podium Laptop will also have a “video out” cable attaching the laptop to a projector or video display in the room. That video will be for the benefit of in-person meeting attendees.
 - The second laptop (the “Host Laptop”) will be located at the back of the room. That laptop will be the “host” of the videoconference session.
 - The person operating the Host Laptop will be responsible for monitoring participants who fail to mute their own microphone and for other videoconferencing controls. This is why you don’t want the Podium Laptop to be the meeting host and have to worry about these issues.
 - The Host Laptop should be placed as far from the Podium Laptop as possible in order to avoid a feedback loop. Speaker volume on the Host Laptop should be kept off in order to minimize feedback (or have that laptop audio out go to headphones).
 - The Host Laptop will also have any PowerPoint programs or other audio/video programs for the meeting loaded on it, and the operator of the Host Laptop will “share screen” with in the videoconference, which will also result in the Podium Laptop having the PowerPoint displayed on the screen at the front of the room.
- If you include a Q&A as part of your speaker’s presentation, be sure to remind the speaker to repeat any questions coming from in-person participants so that videoconference participants can hear the question. The person operating the Host

Laptop will also be responsible for monitoring the “chat” in the videoconference to pick up questions submitted by videoconference participants.

- You also have the ability with some videoconferencing software to publish your meeting to other apps like Facebook Live and to record the meeting and put the link in the Club newsletter, website or other social media so that members and others who cannot attend the meeting have the ability to view the meeting after the fact. This can also be a great public relations and marketing opportunity for your club.
- Consider “opening” the videoconference early so that Rotarians participating in the meeting have the opportunity to “talk amongst themselves” before the start of the meeting.
- Build in time before your first hybrid meeting to test the system to make sure it works well and you are comfortable running the hardware and software.

Perhaps you have already figured out another system that works for your club. If you have some interesting tips of your own, please share them with us.

Conclusion

Yes, this is a difficult time for a lot of folks, and Rotary clubs are certainly not immune from the impacts of the pandemic. But, this is also an opportunity to explore new ways to connect with existing members who may have been unable to participate in in-person meetings in the past due to work or other constraints. In addition, this situation we are all forced to deal with may serve as a way to connect with potential new members who otherwise wouldn't know what your Rotary club is doing. So much of our successes and failures during this extraordinary time will be dependent on our attitude about turning lemons into lemonade!

Dated: June 18, 2020


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