

Harbor Country Rotary Club Strategic Plan 2021-2022

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VISION

The vision remains to help the people and communities in Harbor Country grow and flourish through our community service work. This service work, undertaken in the company of friends and fulfilled through a series of ongoing projects, is deliberately designed to help build a sense of community, heal divisions, foster literacy, support youth and local schools, help alleviate factors contributing to economic insecurity, address needs of the elderly, foster environmental stewardship, and undertake such activities that help us to fulfill the Rotary Four Way Test both locally and internationally.

To support this vision, this strategic plan was developed with the aid of a volunteer committee and informed by more than 80 listening sessions with area residents. The purpose of this document is to provide a guide map for meeting the needs of the community, local and international, while strengthening the relationships and fellowship experience of club members.

The club sponsors activities that support the community in five general areas. Members are encouraged to propose and become champions of ideas that fit under these pillars:

1. Community building
2. Environment
3. International involvement
4. Social welfare
5. Youth and education

We are proud of the ongoing projects and good work of the past and also encourage innovation and new ideas to keep the club vibrant.

In addition to our outward-facing, external goals, we have included internal goals related to building and maintaining the strength of the organization.

This strategic plan is designed to be used as a guideline but not a prescriptive formula. It is hoped that each year the new president will review this document with the board, as it is an important lens through which to view and determine the action items for the coming year.

ACTION PLAN

External

1. COMMUNITY BUILDING

“Bridge the Gap”

An important area of focus that rose to the top of our community surveys was working to “bridge the gap(s)” in our area. The gap was defined by interviewees as economic, political, religious, racial, second home owners vs. full-time residents, natives vs. transplants, gay vs. straight, white collar vs. blue collar, progressive vs. conservative. Efforts to deescalate the polarization and vilification of “the other” was an expressed priority.

Connecting with other area nonprofit groups will amplify the positive impact each group can make on their own while magnifying the reach of our voice by leveraging influence on important regional decisions. Additionally, cross-references and cross-connections help stakeholders and citizens of Harbor Country understand resources available among the various nonprofit groups.

Goal: Maximize impact by developing relationships with other area nonprofit groups and cultivate goodwill by engaging citizens across the economic, political, and social spectrum.

Example Action Items

- Host a series of free dinners for all members of the community; consider including a sports equipment exchange or some other means of enticing members to attend
- Host a regular meeting with leaders of other nonprofits, such as Lions Club and Neighbor by Neighbor, to keep one another apprised of activities and to coordinate efforts and communications
- Create a website where available resources can easily be identified; create an awareness campaign to spread the word

Listening Sessions

Attached are the results of 83 listening sessions with a range of stakeholders in Harbor Country. People were asked, in general, several questions: Why do you live here? What do you most like about living here? If you could change something, what would it be and why?

A number of issues emerged: bridging the gap(s), job opportunities, lack of transportation, the need for affordable housing, a desire for improved vocational training, better access to medical services, coping with the pace of change, poor rural internet, quality of local schools. Many like living here but feel powerless or unheard. Most cite access to nature and potential for community as positives but many also note growing divisiveness. Harbor Country Rotary Club can use this data, along with Rotary International goals and member interest, to determine the priority of future projects.

Issues raised during listening sessions (ranked according to frequency mentioned):

1. Bridging the gap
2. Employment
3. Affordable housing
4. Education
5. Transportation
6. Basic necessities
7. Community building
8. Diversity
9. Activities for young people
10. Environment
11. Sustainable farming
12. Arts
13. Rural internet
14. Daycare
15. Communication

Goal: Ensure Rotary projects fulfill needs for both members and the community

Example Action Items

- Plan to conduct listening sessions every 2-3 years to stay informed and in touch with the community and its needs

2. ENVIRONMENT

Modeling stewardship for the planet and the living things on it is a priority for the club. Congruent with Rotary International's focus on combating climate change through fostering "greener" choices, our club must continue to lead, promote, and initiate projects that bring about increased awareness of the fragility of life on the planet, offer solutions, and encourage a deeper appreciation of the interconnection of all life forms and the consequences of our choices.

Goal: Continue to create awareness of the ramifications of our choices on the environment while fostering greater appreciation for a more verdant planet

Example Action Items:

- Plant and maintain model pollinator gardens

- Continue the tree planting program
- Promote educational series on alternatives to heavy pesticide use
- Promote energy efficiency
- Continue annual seed planting with elementary students

3. INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

To be a part of a worldwide movement to do good and support positive change by making progress on Rotary International goals. It is important that the club contributes internationally to a project or cause as well as completing our local projects. To be a part of a worldwide movement to do good and support positive change by making progress on Rotary International goals expands the scope and reach of our mission and connects our local projects, interests and passions with the greater issues facing the planet.

Goal: Create awareness and support international goals of Rotary

Example Action Items

- Identify an international project to support each year
- Consider an international trip for club members with a service focus
- Regularly invite speakers with an international focus to address the club

4. SOCIAL WELFARE

According to the latest A.L.I.C.E. (Assets Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report commissioned by the United Way, almost 40 percent of residents in Berrien County, Michigan live below or just above poverty level. This means they are one flat tire, medical bill, or increase in rent from being underwater financially. The accompanying food insecurity, avoidance of medical care due to worry about cost, lack of public transportation, unemployment, and scant access to affordable housing all continue to weigh heavily on too many residents in our club's territory.

Goal: Continue to focus on projects that address the immediate needs of financially challenged members of the community

Example Action Items:

- Continue to fund and support food trucks
- Continue to deliver Holiday Food Baskets
- Continue Hats and Mittens Program
- Continue to fund personal supplies
- Use the voice and influence of the club on local issues, such as affordable housing or the need for vocational training

5. YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Literacy and Learning

Promoting literacy and learning has long been one of the main goals of the club. Supporting teachers and students in the local schools with materials, volunteer tutoring and supplies has helped strengthen the education of many local students. Our focus has not been merely on reading; we have also supplied math books to rising sixth graders, books with diversity themes to the teachers and students, funded book vending machines and birthday books, and funded the One Book/One School program. We have also offered vocational scholarships to graduating seniors on an annual basis, tutored students in the schools, helped lead outdoor education through the Mighty Acorn Program, sponsored and coached Science Olympiad and Robotics Teams and helped bring in guest authors to the schools. Beyond school-age residents, we are launching the Rotary Bookmobile in an effort to bring free books to all corners of Harbor Country and promote literacy. Finally, through RYLA we are fostering young leaders and encouraging foreign exchanges as an important experiential learning opportunity.

Example Action Items:

- Continue the birthday book program
- Resume in-school tutoring when pandemic abates
- Continue to promote numeracy as much as literacy
- Support the bookmobile

Internal

1. DEVELOPMENT

The club should continue to fundraise and cultivate annual donors so that the financial resources are available to pursue projects and activities congruent with our vision. The act of becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization greatly aids in this endeavor as it makes grants from corporations, foundations, and individuals more accessible. It is essential that the club continue to keep track of donors and keep them apprised of how their philanthropy is making a difference. This work is in addition to annual fundraiser events. Additionally, we should continue to annually train a few volunteer club members in grant writing.

Goal: Continue to fundraise by maintaining current donors, cultivating new donors, and obtaining grants

Example Action Items

- Solidify a “major gifts” team: members who develop a list of potential major donors and cultivate them
- Create a stewardship team: 3-5 volunteers who track donors, send personal thank you notes, and keep donors aware of Rotary activities
- Train 3-5 club members in grant writing

2. DIVERSITY

The club has achieved admirable gender diversity. The next goals are to broaden the age range and include more lifelong residents. Exploring satellite meetings may yield more interest from

those whose work schedules do not allow for early Friday meetings. The club has continued to grow; now the challenge is to intentionally attract diverse growth. Commendable strides have also been made to keep the cost of membership low (almost a third of many area clubs) through the creation of a sliding scale for annual dues, sharing the preparation of breakfast, and making progress toward a club credit card (meaning no member has to front the cost of a project). These steps help us achieve economic diversity.

Goal: Increase diversity among membership

Example Action Items

- Continue hosting monthly Friday social hours and encourage members to bring a prospective member
- Consider creating a satellite club that meets in the evening to accommodate those who can't attend or aren't interested in an early morning meeting
- Consider creating a core team of people who give presentations to other groups (other nonprofits, churches, social groups, chamber of commerce) to recruit new members
- Invite speakers to address the club with a focus on diversity experiences/issues

3. FELLOWSHIP

Community service in the company of friends is an essential aspect of Harbor Country Rotary Club. Good work in the service of others is, of course, one of the main reasons our club exists. But the camaraderie and fellowship is also essential. Being welcomed with laughter, and the recognition of the value of each member is, in many ways, the lifeblood of the club. It engenders warmth, belonging, team spirit and pride. The value of finding the balance between our work projects and the simple pleasure of being with a group of like-minded friends and fellow Rotarians cannot be overstated.

Goal: Retain current members and increase membership by creating a strong sense of fellowship

Example Action Items

- Identify a welcome committee of volunteers who reach out to members who have not attended in awhile, who greet members on arrival at meetings, who cultivate engagement in activities outside of meetings, including social hour
- Continue to strike a balance between business and fun at meetings
- Continue to share personal stories such as "Happy Bucks"
- Continue once a month social events
- Strive to engage every member in at least one activity/project/committee annually

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

HCRC will continue to develop its web page, donor site, and social media presence in various formats to make our work and mission known and accessible to all.

Goal: Broaden our reach through social media and PR

Example Action Items

- Consider hiring an intern or recent graduate to coordinate social media and PR
- Develop a regular email communication (perhaps quarterly) to share with donors and others to keep them informed of activities
- Consider advertising on a billboard to raise awareness of club
- Leverage messages about Rotary by piggybacking on communications from sister organizations

5. ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS

Continuity, transitions of leadership, and teams working together to ensure the smooth operation of the club are essential. The roles of the Board, President, President-Elect, President-Nominee, Secretary, Treasurer, and Committee Chairs are all essential and help each member understand his/her important role in the club. Cultivating the next cohort of leaders and helping them get training and support is an important ongoing goal.

Goal: Increase awareness of leadership opportunities and cultivate future club leaders

Example Action Items

- Regularly share information about Rotary training opportunities and conferences and encourage attendance
- Continue to financially support attendance at Rotary training sessions
- Continue to have regular presentations by committees on activities and encourage engagement
- Ask each officer/committee chair and project leader to create a pass-on file for their successor