

CLUB FLEXIBILITY

2016 Council on Legislation GRANTS CLUBS GREATER FLEXIBILITY

Representatives from Rotary districts around the world met in Chicago in April to revise Rotary policies. They approved changes that give clubs greater flexibility in when, where, and how they meet and the types of membership they offer.

Why are these changes needed?

In some parts of the world, Rotary continues to grow at a rapid rate. In others, membership has been declining and the average age of members is increasing.

Over the past 15 years, Rotary has carried out pilot programs that have explored innovations in membership, classification, and the club experience. Consistently, in research and in the experiences of members, we have found that when clubs have more freedom to determine how they hold their meetings, who they invite to membership, and what defines engagement, the club is more vibrant and more able to grow.

All Rotary clubs will now be able to adopt the new options the Council approved by amending their bylaws. Clubs that wish to continue to follow their traditional requirements for meetings, attendance, structure, and categories of membership may do so.

Flexibility in meeting frequency, format, and attendance

Council on Legislation representatives voted overwhelmingly to eliminate limitations on how Rotary clubs conduct their meetings. They also recognize that club health is not determined by attendance alone. The RI Board and Council representatives agree that individual clubs should be able to:

- Determine the best day and time for their meetings
- Change or cancel a meeting, if the need arises
- Count service projects or social events as meetings
- Choose whether to gather in person, meet online, alternate between online and in-person meetings, or even use both formats at the same time (for example, a member could participate in an in-person meeting online through video chat)
- Amend their bylaws to either relax or tighten attendance requirements and policies of terminating members for poor attendance

Rotary clubs now have the option of reducing their meeting frequency as long as they meet in some way at least twice per month. They are still expected to forward attendance reports to the district governor within 15 days of the last meeting of each month.

The recent Council on Legislation decisions *do not* modify the current rules of the Standard Rotary Club Constitution. Clubs that want to adopt these changes will need to amend their bylaws. Clubs that wish to continue to adhere to the traditional requirements regarding meetings, attendance, structure, or categories of membership may do so.

E-clubs and Rotary clubs

Having decided to give all Rotary clubs greater flexibility as to how they meet, the 2016 Council concluded that it was no longer necessary to label them as either e-clubs or traditional clubs. For that reason, references to e-clubs have been removed from Rotary's Bylaws and the Standard Rotary Club Constitution, but e-clubs may continue to name and brand themselves as e-clubs to emphasize that they meet exclusively or primarily online.

Flexibility in Membership Types

The RI Bylaws and Standard Rotary Club Constitution provide for two types of membership: active and honorary. By amending their bylaws, clubs may offer additional membership types that are desired in the community, such as associate, corporate, family membership or others.

- Rotary International will continue to record, and grant all of the benefits of membership to, active members only who pay RI dues
- Clubs that offer additional membership categories should report these members to Rotary International as active and are responsible for paying said members' RI dues
- Clubs and districts set their own policies about these members' other financial obligations (club and district dues, meal costs, etc.), attendance requirements, and service expectations and reflect these policies in their bylaws
- Clubs determine how they accept former or transferring members, including whether they allow current Rotaractors to join

Dual Membership for Rotaractors

The Council amended the Rotary International Bylaws to permit Rotaractors who meet the qualifications of membership to join a Rotary club while remaining Rotaract members.

We hope that giving qualified young leaders a way to maintain their involvement in Rotaract, along with giving Rotary clubs greater flexibility in the format and frequency of meetings, will facilitate Rotaractors' transition to Rotary clubs. As members of the family of Rotary, Rotaractors are committed to the world community and share Rotary's goals of furthering service, world understanding, and peace.

With all of this change, is Rotary putting its reputation and brand at risk?

While the enactments adopted by the 2016 Council increase clubs' flexibility in meetings and membership categories, they don't permit clubs to deviate from Rotary's essential elements:

- We are still business, professional, and community leaders. Our qualifications for membership have not changed.
- The Object of Rotary, our basic tenets, have not changed.
- Our essence statement — join leaders, exchange ideas, and take action — have not changed.
- Our values of fellowship, integrity, diversity, service, and leadership have not changed.
- The Four-Way Test, one of our most important distinguishing features, has not changed.

The changes the Council did make are not a threat to the quality of Rotary's membership. Instead, they empower clubs to adapt to a changing environment to remain relevant in our second century of service.

When do these changes take effect?

Changes take effect 1 July 2016. Now is the time to begin discussing what changes, if any, your club might pursue to make them more relevant to current members and the business, professional, and community leaders you seek to attract.

Since the 2016 [Council on Legislation](#), Rotary clubs have had the flexibility to choose when, where, and how clubs meet and the types of membership they offer.

5 Ways to Use the New Flexibility

It's up to your club to decide how — and if — you want to make it more flexible. Look at the examples below to see what changes may benefit your club. After you settle on a change, remember to update your bylaws.

Here are some examples of how your club can apply the new flexible options:

1. **Change your meeting schedule.** Your club can vary its meeting days, times, and frequency. For example, you could hold a traditional meeting on the first Tuesday of the month to discuss business and service projects and get together socially on the last Friday of the month. You just need to meet at least twice a month.
2. **Vary your meeting format.** Your club can meet in person, online, or a combination, including letting some members attend in-person meetings through the Internet.
3. **Relax attendance requirements.** Your club can ease attendance requirements and encourage members to participate in other ways, such as taking a leadership role, updating the club website regularly, running a meeting a few times a year, or planning an event. If your club is dynamic and offers a good experience for members, attendance won't be a problem.
4. **Offer multiple membership types.** Your club could offer family memberships, junior memberships to young professionals, or corporate memberships. Each type of membership can have its own policies on dues, attendance, and service expectations. Rotary will count these people in your club membership and will consider them active members if they pay RI dues.
5. **Invite Rotaractors to be members of your club.** You can invite Rotaractors to join your club while remaining members of their Rotaract clubs. If your club chooses to, it can make special accommodations for these members, such as relaxed attendance requirements or reduced fees, as long as they are reflected in the club bylaws.

Find examples of bylaw amendments that clubs might use to try these new flexible options below, and review our frequently asked questions for more information.

Resources & reference

Club Flexibility FAQ

Does our club have to make these changes?

No. Any Rotary club wishing to take advantage of the flexibility that the Council on Legislation approved can do so by amending its bylaws as permitted by the [Standard Rotary Club Constitution](#). But clubs can also continue to follow their current requirements for meetings, attendance, structure, and categories of membership.

Is it a problem that revising our club's bylaws results in contradictions of the Rotary International Bylaws and the Standard Rotary Club Constitution?

No. Typically, a club's bylaws cannot supersede the Rotary International Bylaws or the Standard Rotary Club Constitution, but provisions were added to both documents at the 2016 Council to allow clubs to do just that for certain sections. A club must approve the exceptions to those specific sections and include them in its bylaws.

How do corporate memberships work?

Your club is free to offer alternative membership types of any kind, as long as new members are counted as individuals — corporate members in this case — rather than the corporations that sponsor their membership. If the members pay RI dues, they will be included in your club's official membership count and receive all the benefits that other active, dues-paying members enjoy.

Your club can have different policies for these members' other financial obligations (club and district dues, meal costs, etc.), attendance requirements, or service expectations, as long as these policies are reflected in the club bylaws.

How do associate memberships work?

Your club can define associate membership as it wishes. Some clubs use associate membership as a trial period to engage interested people. If the associate members see value in the experience, they can join the club. In such cases, the club would report them as active members once they've joined, and the members would then receive all the benefits that other active, dues-paying members enjoy and would be included in the club's membership count.

What's the difference between active and honorary members?

Rotary International defines active members as those who meet the requirements for membership, pay RI dues, are eligible to vote on district matters, and are eligible to hold a club officer position. Honorary membership is used to recognize people who have distinguished themselves by meritorious service and embody Rotary ideals, or those considered friends of Rotary for their support of Rotary's causes. They are exempt from paying RI dues, have no vote in Rotary matters, are not eligible to hold any club office, and are not included in a club's membership numbers. Active members are called Rotarians, while honorary members are called honorary Rotarians.

What are the official requirements for membership?

The only mandatory qualifications for membership are that Rotarians must be adults who have demonstrated good character, integrity, and leadership; have a good reputation in their business, profession, and community; and are willing to make a positive difference in their community and around the world.

Now that Rotary no longer distinguishes between e-clubs and other clubs, are clubs that meet primarily online still called e-clubs?

Yes and no. Rotary no longer distinguishes between clubs that hold face-to-face meetings and clubs that meet online. That's because all clubs now have the option of meeting in person or online, allowing members to attend in-person meetings using applications such as Skype or FaceTime, or switching between any of these formats. However, clubs that identify themselves as e-clubs may keep that word in their names and continue to brand themselves as e-clubs to emphasize that they meet exclusively or primarily online.

Are current Rotaract and Interact e-clubs still considered e-clubs?

The Rotaract and Interact standard club constitutions and bylaws already permit these clubs to meet in person, online, or a combination of both, with the approval of their sponsor Rotary club or clubs. Rotaract and Interact clubs' official names do not include "e-club," but clubs may name and brand themselves as e-clubs to emphasize that they meet exclusively or primarily online.

Because of the age of Interact members, all online activities, such as the club website and social media pages, must be operated in accordance with applicable law and regulations, and sponsor Rotary clubs must obtain written consent of Interactors' parents or legal guardians in advance of Interact participation as necessary.

How could my club benefit from creating a satellite club?

Some clubs create a satellite club to accommodate members' differing schedules. This allows some members of the club to meet at a different time and place than the rest of the club. The benefit is that the club doesn't lose members because of scheduling conflicts. Satellite club members are officially members of their sponsor club, but if membership grows enough, the satellite club can break off and charter as a new club.

Does our club secretary still need to send monthly attendance reports to the district governor?

Although the recent policy changes allow clubs to focus less on attendance and more on engagement, clubs are still required to provide some kind of attendance report to the district governor. The form that report takes will differ from club to club, depending on their attendance rules. It may be more useful for district governors to receive a report that indicates how engaged your members are.

Are we allowed to charge an admission fee for new members?

Yes. However, new members can also be admitted without paying admission fees. Whatever your policy is, be sure your bylaws document it.

If I'm a Rotaract member and a Rotary member, do I have to pay dues to both clubs?

Yes. You would pay the required club or district dues for both clubs and annual Rotary member dues to Rotary International. Rotaract member dues are collected only at the club or district level, not by Rotary International. However, your club has the flexibility to create different membership types for Rotaract members and young professionals. This could include reduced club or district dues for members who belong to both Rotaract and Rotary, as long as the club subsidizes the RI dues for the member.

Governance Documents

Clubs and districts are guided by the Manual of Procedure, RI Constitution, and RI Bylaws. These documents provide the structure for RI's policies and procedures. Every club and district can propose amendments to constitutional documents through the Council of Legislation.

Manual of Procedure

The [Manual of Procedure](#) offers a concise version of Rotary's policies and procedures. The manual is geared to Rotary club and district leaders and features information that's most relevant to their roles. It is published every three years to reflect adopted legislation and decisions of the RI conventions, the Council on Legislation, the Rotary International Board of Directors, and the Trustees of The Rotary Foundation.

The manual covers these key areas:

- **Structure:** Includes policies and procedures for clubs, districts, zones, Rotary International, and The Rotary Foundation.
- **Carrying out Rotary's mission:** Includes the structure, policies, and procedures of the programs of RI and the Foundation
- **International Meetings:** Includes the RI Convention, Council on Legislation, and International Assembly

- Rotary's constitutional and legal documents

Rotary's constitutional documents

The Rotary International constitutional documents provide club and districts the foundation for RI's policies and procedures.

- [Constitution of Rotary International \(PDF\)](#) ([Word](#))
- [Bylaws of Rotary International \(PDF\)](#) ([Word](#))
- [Standard Rotary Club Constitution \(PDF\)](#) ([Word](#))

All clubs admitted to Rotary membership must adopt this constitution.

- [Recommended Rotary Club Bylaws \(PDF\)](#) ([Word](#))

Clubs can tailor these bylaws, as long as their changes align with Rotary's constitutional documents and the Rotary Code of Policies. If you have doubts about your proposed changes, please submit them to the general secretary for the RI Board to consider.

Rotary Code of Policies

The [Rotary Code of Policies](#) compiles all of the organization's general and permanent policies. The revised version is available after each meeting of the RI Board and the Council on Legislation. A separate [document](#) outlines amendments made to the code whenever it is updated.

The [Rotary Foundation Code of Policies](#) is maintained in a separate document. A revised version is available after each meeting of The Rotary Foundation Trustees.

Read the latest [RI Board decisions](#) and [Rotary Foundation Trustees decisions](#).

Start Guide for Alternative Membership Types

Use this worksheet to decide which types of membership your club will offer. Document any change to membership types in your club's bylaws. We especially recommend that you amend the bylaws to reflect the answers to the asterisked questions.

Remember that Rotary International recognizes only active and honorary memberships. When reporting members to Rotary, assign any alternative membership types to one of those two categories.

1. What new type of membership does our club want to offer?*
2. Why do we want to offer this new membership type? How would our club benefit? What membership issues do we expect it to address?
3. What are the potential drawbacks to this type of membership?
4. What would be the eligibility requirements for this type of membership?*
5. What club dues will members of this type be expected to pay?*
6. Can someone with this type of membership serve as a club officer? Will this type of member have club voting rights?*

7. What are the attendance expectations for these members, and how will our club secretary include them in reports to the governor?*
8. Will there be a limit how long someone may hold this type of membership?
9. Are members who hold this type of membership active or honorary Rotarians?*(You'll select one of these two categories when reporting members to Rotary.)
10. Will our district recognize this type of membership?

Sample EDITED BYLAWS on Flexible Membership Types

Here's an example of how you could modify your club bylaws to include alternative membership requirements.

Article 12 Membership

Our club offers the following membership types:

- a. _____: These members enjoy all the benefits, opportunities, and responsibilities of Rotary. Requirements include_____.
- b. _____: [Explain requirements for membership type "b" here]
- c. _____: [Explain requirements for membership type "c" here]
- d. _____: [Explain requirements for membership type "d" here]

Start Guide for Flexible Meetings and Attendance

Use this worksheet when considering changing your meeting format or frequency or relaxing attendance requirements. Document any change in meeting format, frequency, or attendance in your club's bylaws.

Rotary International requires clubs to meet at least twice monthly. Be sure to update your club website with changes to your meeting schedule.

Meeting formats:

1. What types of meeting is our club considering?
2. Why do we want to offer other types of meetings?
3. How will our club benefit from offering an alternative meeting format?
4. What are the potential drawbacks to changing our meeting format?
5. How often will our club meet in person?
6. When our club meets in person, how often will we hold a traditional Rotary club meeting?
7. Will we hold any nontraditional in-person meetings? (e.g., a service project or social gathering.)
8. Will we offer an online option for our club meetings?
9. Will an online activity serve as one of our club's meetings? (For example, taking a course in the Learning Center, or posting on the club website's discussion group.)

Meeting frequency:

1. What adjustments in meeting frequency is our club considering? (Rotary requires that clubs meet at least twice monthly.)
2. Why do we want to change our meeting frequency?
3. How will our club benefit from this change?
4. What are potential drawbacks to changing how often we meet?
5. How will our club communicate a meeting cancellation?
6. How will our club communicate the meeting schedule to members?