



# INTRODUCING NEW MEMBERS TO ROTARY

AN ORIENTATION GUIDE



Rotary



“Our club has veered away from the traditional, formal Rotary orientation where we give the full history of Rotary including the history of our 78-year-old club. We make the ... members comfortable in an ambience of club fellowship and camaraderie. Information about our club is passed on as part of an informal conversation. ... We also engage his/her family members into the conversation. We make them feel that Rotary is all about family. So far, it works.”

— Evangeline Maranan,  
Rotary Club of Baguio,  
Benguet, Philippines

When new people join your club, you have an opportunity to connect with them and inspire them to be active members.

Research shows that clubs that have a new member orientation program also have higher member retention rates. A new member orientation program is a plan for engaging new members and acclimating them to your club. This guide can help you develop your own orientation plan or improve the one you have.



## DEVELOP A NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION PROGRAM

There is no formula for an effective Rotary orientation — clubs all over the world are finding creative ways to introduce new members to Rotary. The orientation programs that are successful are those that offer a meaningful learning experience, personal connections, inspiration, and fun.

In comparison to how we teach prospective members about Rotary, new member orientation is more in-depth but also slower-paced, so as not to overwhelm new members with too much information. Some clubs hold informational sessions and others have fun “start classes” in a less formal setting. The size of your club may inform the format you choose. Regardless of the setup, pacing the orientation allows new members to form relationships and get involved in ways that best fit their interests and needs.

**Check with your district membership attraction and engagement chair to see if your district offers a districtwide new member orientation, and encourage new members to attend.**

## WHAT TO COVER

Before joining, your newest members learned a little about Rotary and your club as prospective members. Build on their understanding, and answer any questions they may have. The table below offers ideas to get you started.

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### ROTARY

- + For context and depth, start by explaining:
  - That your club is part of an international organization of people who share a passion for service
  - Rotary's mission and values
  - Rotary's legacy in the effort to eradicate polio worldwide
  - How Rotary started and grew
- + Find historical information and more on the **About Rotary page** or take courses such as Rotary's Strategic Plan, Areas of Focus, and Rotary Foundation Basics on the **Learning Center**.

### BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- + Explain the benefits of membership, including opportunities to:
  - Make a difference in the lives of others
  - Develop skills that can easily be applied to a career, like public speaking, project management, and event planning
  - Network with other professionals
  - Build lifelong friendships
  - Make international connections
- + Let new members know they can also receive discounts on a variety of services all over the world through the **Rotary Global Rewards** program and post offers from their own companies.
- + Find more information on **video.rotary.org** or the **Member Center**.

### YOUR CLUB

- + Give new members a clearer idea of what to expect as a member of your club, including:
  - Your club's culture and different kinds of meetings
  - What your club does best and what it's known for
  - Your club's history
  - Projects and activities your club is involved in
  - Social events
- + Point new members to other information about your club, including its website, social media pages, and any other materials your club has.

**Note:** Communicate financial requirements and participation expectations to prospective members before they join.

How you decide to offer orientation to new members will reflect your club culture. Some clubs have fun activities new members have to complete in order to earn a badge, "passport," or other type of recognition, and the program ends with a celebration. See the page 6 for a list of ways new members can get involved and learn more about Rotary. Whatever you do, make sure new members feel welcome and have an opportunity to engage with your club right away.

Your club may already have a new member orientation program. If so, just use this guide to get ideas to enhance it. Regularly evaluate your program by asking new members for feedback, and then use it to improve your program for future new members.



“Mentoring is, in my opinion, the most important part of the orientation process. However, mentors cannot just be appointed and left on their own. They must be trained! Their duties and expectations must be clear and a list of expected activities or actions with the new member must be clear. ... Effective mentors will virtually guarantee long-term retention and active involvement of the new member. Poor mentorship will almost certainly assure short-term retention. Mentoring is too valuable to leave it to happenstance.”

— Joseph Hentges,  
Rotary Club of Marana  
Dove Mountain,  
Arizona, USA



## ASSIGN A MENTOR

Clubs around the world have found it's useful to assign new members a mentor. The mentor should be someone who has something in common with the new member, has a welcoming personality, is committed to the club's growth, and is knowledgeable about Rotary. Be sure that the mentor you assign has the time to devote to helping the new member become integrated into your club. While some mentoring relationships continue for some time, the first six months are the most important.

### ASK MENTORS TO:

- Let the new members know how to contact them
- Check with them regularly to make sure they're comfortable
- Introduce them to other club members
- Encourage them to invite someone they know to a meeting
- Show them Rotary's tools on My Rotary, including **Club Finder** and the **Learning Center**, and any app your club uses
- Talk to them about open roles they could fill
- Invite them and their family members to attend the district conference
- Accompany them to events

You can offer mentor training to members to improve their mentoring skills with this **leadership skills training** guide.



“[Once] new members are inducted, we give them the following:

- **A mentor to help guide the new Rotarian and answer questions.**
- **A temporary name tag. When they have completed a “passport” checklist, we present them with a permanent badge and a Rotary club jacket at a club meeting.**
- **A printed club history as well as a glossary of Rotary terms and acronyms to help explain the “language” of Rotary.**
- **An invitation to a “fireside chat.” Twice a year, we hold these for new members and their spouses. They are held at a Rotarian's home and are attended by several Rotarians of various ages. This provides a relaxed social setting. The objective is to give new members a chance to interact and ask questions that club meetings don't provide.”**

— Brian Wilson, Rotary Club of Peterborough, Ontario, Canada



“We’ve grown our club from 78 to 112 by focusing on our orientations. We have a social at the chair’s home [where we cover] the history and Rotary basics with everyone present reporting. ... Prior to the meeting we orient again for 1 hour with even more members speaking about their roles. In all, our new members meet 15-20 members. We ask new members when initiated that day to give us a membership moment about themselves and they will have practiced it two times during the orientations! People really get Rotary with this process.”

— Cindi Hewitt, Rotary Club of Summit (Greensboro), North Carolina, USA



## INVOLVE AND CONNECT MEMBERS

Prospective members join Rotary to make a difference, and they stay because of the friendships they’ve made. No matter how much impact your club has in the community, if new members don’t make a connection with others in the club, they are unlikely to stay. Here are some ways to create a welcoming environment:

- Keep presentations brief and avoid Rotary acronyms in and outside of meetings
- Let new members know how they can involve their families

Find ways to get to know new members better and help them get to know other members. For example, some clubs give their new members access to a member directory (printed or online) with pictures and a short bio for each member. Others ask new and seasoned members to take turns each month, giving brief talks about themselves, their professions, and backgrounds.

### Share your ideas on our **Membership Best Practices discussion group**.

Involving experienced members as mentors, trainers, celebration planners, or event speakers allows them to share insight and enthusiasm that can inspire new members. This is also a way to engage experienced members who are otherwise disengaged. Offering their experiences and advice can be enjoyable and rewarding. Many clubs find fun ways for members to get acquainted through games or interactive activities.



**“New members should be treated like new employees at a company. The [early] months [are] critical for both [the club and the new member,] as that is when a new member will feel the most engaged and excited about their decision to join the club. So engaging them to keep that feeling high will enhance the experience for that new member, as well as the club. Like a new employee in a company, there should be an effort to make them feel welcome, training, socials to make new friends, etc. Too many times I have seen new members become disengaged early because they are left to themselves to figure it out.”**

— Gina McBryan, Rotary Club of Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands



“All new members are given a checklist to complete before we give them their membership badge. This includes items such as ... attending a board meeting and getting involved in one of our projects. This helps to engage new members immediately in the club before they become complacent and view Rotary as a weekly lunch obligation.”

— Chase Moses, Rotary Club of Lake City, Florida, USA

## HOW CAN WE ENGAGE NEW MEMBERS?

Encourage new members to get involved in some of the following ways:

- Read the Rotary Foundation Reference Guide and Connect for Good
- Introduce yourself to two new people each week
- Meet with a mentor
- Attend new member information sessions
- Attend a club board meeting
- Attend a district meeting (for example, the district conference)
- Create a My Rotary account
- Participate in a service project
- Join a committee
- Present at a club meeting
- Take an online course on the Learning Center ([learn.rotary.org](http://learn.rotary.org))
- Find information about the club (website, etc.)
- Invite a friend to a meeting
- Explore club website and [Rotary.org](http://Rotary.org)
- Have some fun!



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**“Our club offers a weekly “Rotarian in the Spotlight” with a twist. We play “Three Truths and a Lie” with a member each week in an effort to get to know members better. We have found in a club our size people like to “be known,” and we rotate interviewing board members, 20+ year members, and brand new members. This seems to work better than simply having someone stand up and share a few words about who they are and what they do — and it always leads to laughs!”**

— Mandi Stanley, Rotary club of Madison-Ridgeland, Mississippi, USA



“In addition to Rotary new member information, our club has what we call a fireside chat. That is when a senior member of the club sits one-on-one with a new member and discusses some of the history of Rotary. There are also videos available on Rotary’s website that the whole club can view. It is always good to share these with all members. Additionally, it is always good to get new members involved. Get them on a committee, a fundraiser, or whatever seems a good fit.”

— Grant Bayer, Rotary Club of Gloucester Township-Pine Hill, New Jersey, USA



## USE ROTARY RESOURCES

Rotary has resources to supplement your training. You can find all kinds of information about Rotary on the **About Rotary page**. Show new members videos about Rotary, and why members joined, on **video.rotary.org**. Have new members register for My Rotary and take a course or two at Rotary’s **Learning Center**, such as Rotary Foundation Basics, Strengthen Rotary, and Rotary’s Areas of Focus.

Order the **New Member Welcome Kit** for new members from **shop.rotary.org**.

Your members’ needs will change over time, and engaging with them at all stages of their membership, not just when they’re new, is key to keeping them happy and active in the club. To understand how to engage current members, see **Improving Your Member Retention** and **Connect for Good**.

To learn how to follow up with and engage prospective members, see **Creating a Positive Experience for Prospective Members**.



“Rotary completely changed me as a person ... now I have a more mature ... responsible role to play as a global citizen. ... That’s the hidden power of Rotary ... exemplifying how Rotary can make a 360-degree impact on a new Rotarian ... needs to be incorporated [into new member training].”

— R. Murali Krishna, Rotary Club of Berhampur, Orissa, India

## TAKE A FRESH APPROACH TO CREATING A MEANINGFUL CLUB EXPERIENCE

These resources can help

### MEMBERSHIP ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Take time to address specific membership areas

### CONNECT TO MEMBERSHIP LEADS

Contact interested candidates and grow your club

### ROTARY CLUB HEALTH CHECK

See how your club is doing and find remedies for problem areas

### BE A VIBRANT CLUB

Find ideas to reinvigorate members

### STRENGTHENING YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Create a plan to give your club a boost

### CONNECT FOR GOOD

Inspire members to explore ways to get involved

Available for download  
[www.rotary.org/membership](http://www.rotary.org/membership)



One Rotary Center  
1560 Sherman Avenue  
Evanston, IL 60201-3698 USA  
[www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)