



D7620 VISION PAPER: ENGAGING YOUTH

Introduction

This paper is intended to provide guidance on engaging our youth in Rotary during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Youth are the future of Rotary. For Rotary to survive, we must continue to find ways to support them and engage them in Rotary work. High turnover in our Interact and Rotaract clubs is due to a lack of sponsor commitment, weak school relationships, and graduation from schools. This creates challenges in retaining youth membership during normal times and becomes more problematic during the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery periods.

Below are suggestions for keeping youth engaged. These ideas have already been utilized by some of our District 7620 Rotaract and Interact Clubs. As you try out these suggestions, thanks for sharing feedback with the authors of this Vision Paper regarding your outcomes, lessons learned, and things you think should be done differently. The intent is to share your experiences and feedback with D7620 Rotarians.

Interact

Many of the 'school-based' Interact clubs were negatively impacted upon the unexpected closure of high schools. While some of the school based Interact Clubs that have strong school connections with their school administrators were able to pivot, others were immediately challenged with keeping Interactors engaged once the closures began. Many high schools do not permit students to engage over social platforms like Zoom due to security and safety issues. Engaging Interactors to return to their Interact Club when allowed to meet in person could be a challenge because of the high turnover that is being experienced in these clubs. Sponsoring Rotary Clubs will need to develop strong working relationships with school leadership to stay connected with students. Club liaisons should request authorization to text, email or connect through social media with students. They should also request access to school portals (if permitted in your jurisdiction) for calls to maintain secure social connections. In this case background checks may be required, and Rotary Clubs and/or our District may need to be prepared to bear the cost.

Interact Clubs that are community based have been able to convert to online in the same fashion as Rotary Clubs without the worry of security and safety. Club liaisons of these Interact Clubs have a

direct connection to these students' parents. The beauty of community Interact Clubs is they provide continuity even during pandemics or school closures.

The transition to virtual meetings could also be financially challenging for some families. Rotary Clubs can provide support for virtual meetings and events by writing grants for hotspots for Internet access. Clubs could also purchase laptops or partner with large-box technology stores to request donations of tablets or laptops and Internet connection devices.

Rotaract

The closure of colleges impacted 10 of the 13 Rotaract Clubs in the District. College students were forced to return home for online learning as college dormitories closed. Sponsoring Rotary Clubs were thrown into action assisting Rotaract Club members to return home safely. Some Rotaract Clubs are struggling because the students come from all over the country, and in some cases the world. These students have returned home and have not remaining engaged. Club Liaisons should request rosters of Rotaract Club members that may have returned to their hometowns and encourage them to continue to engage with their local Rotaract Clubs until they return to college. They should also ensure that the Rotaract Clubs have held elections and selected leaders for the upcoming school year to ensure the successful transition from one Rotary year to the next.

Virtual engagement has been a seamless transition for a few of the university based Rotaract Clubs. Some Rotaract Clubs have stayed connected utilizing social platforms to hold member inductions, club nominations, meetings with speakers, etc. The transition to virtual meetings/engagement has also driven Rotaract Clubs to get creative with fellowship and community service opportunities. Virtual trivia events, Amazon 'wish lists' for nonprofit organizations, virtual care package sporting events, etc. have allowed Rotaractors to stay engaged during Covid-19.

Sponsoring Rotary Clubs should use this opportunity to invite Rotaractors (and Interactors) to their virtual meetings, service projects and events as applicable. This is also a unique opportunity to partner in virtual professional development opportunities such as mentoring, informational interviews, networking, etc. that allow both Rotarians to maintain a steady line of communication between its Club and their Rotaract and/or Interact clubs.

Leadership Training

Another great way to keep your youth engaged is through leadership trainings. Rotary has long provided leadership training for our youth and will continue to engage them through the following training options:

- **RYLA:** Currently working on the development of both an in-person and virtual RYLA event in February 2021 until we better understand what type of event can be held.
- **Half-day district leadership conference:** Provides online training for Interactors and Rotaractors.

- **Toastmasters:** Rotary International is collaborating with Toastmasters International to create tailored speaking courses for Rotarians including Interactors, Rotaractors and Rotarians. Youth are always looking to improve their public speaking capability, so this is a great way to get youth engaged in Rotary. The collaboration with Toastmasters also provides youth with the opportunities to grow their personal networks, gain leadership experience and improve their communication skills, and impact their community via local service.

Service

Service is a key reason why youth join Rotary. Youth are becoming aware of community needs and want to have an impact. It can be a challenge to do service work during times when in-person projects are not permitted. Some Clubs have completed service projects through virtual events. Virtual service activities include:

- Virtual Happy Hours to raise money for a charity
- Letter writing to eliminate social isolation, writing to seniors in the community
- The delivery of PPE
- Staying in touch with seniors in your community by delivering groceries, medicine, other
- Connecting Rotaractors to Rotaract & Rotary Clubs in their home area to participate in service projects

Bottom-line: If your Rotary Club is having a service event, please remember to contact Interact and Rotaract Clubs and invite them to participate in this event.

Fundraisers

- Some Rotary/Rotaract/Interact Clubs have been successful holding virtual 5K run events
- Interactors are struggling with virtual fundraisers since most fundraisers in the past included the purchase of items; please provide guidance to Interact Clubs on how to hold a virtual fundraiser on social media platforms like Zoom or GoToMeeting
- Creating Amazon 'wish lists' for nonprofit organizations and encouraging purchases through social media engagement
- Host virtual trivia nights to raise funds for projects

Engagement

Clubs have also been finding ways to remain engaged through virtual social experiences. These include:

- Virtual Movie Nights
- Virtual Meetings including speakers and activities such as virtual health and mindfulness events
- Virtual elections
- Virtual induction of officers and new members
- Virtually rewarding members for work well done
- Mentoring – connecting with youth and providing one-on-one mentoring sessions

Conclusion

In the ideal scenario, a young person joins Interact, then transitions to Rotaract, and then transitions to a Rotary Club. Engagement is key and survey results confirm most youth join Rotary to give back to their communities and to network with others. Identifying opportunities for service through virtual events and networking virtually are important ways to keep our youth engaged. Critical to all our Interact and Rotaract Clubs is the leadership provided by and connection to their sponsoring Rotary Club, a strong Club liaison and/or a school club counselor. Leveraging technology is critical to engage and retain youth. Rotary will need to continue to provide online leadership training and overall Rotary education on our six areas of focus as well as on the 'art of the possible'. Ongoing Club guidance is required to help develop leaders and to keep youth focuses on Rotary initiatives they relate to.

Questions/Comments

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