

Best Practices in Rotary Clubs’ “Service Above Self” Project Selection

Choosing “**Service Above Self**” community projects is a core responsibility for Rotary Clubs, and many have developed effective, **best-practice approaches** to ensure their service initiatives truly meet community needs and achieve lasting impact. Below we outline key strategies Rotary clubs use to select projects, followed by real **examples from both U.S. and international Rotary Clubs** that illustrate these practices in action.

Engage the Community

Conduct needs assessments – Successful clubs start by listening to their communities. Through surveys, focus groups, and community *mapping* exercises, Rotarians identify **real local needs and priorities** before choosing a project. This ensures projects truly align with what residents want and will support.

Clear Selection Criteria

Set guiding criteria – Many clubs establish formal guidelines for evaluating project proposals. A strong donations policy typically **prioritizes projects aligned with Rotary’s focus areas**, benefits the broad community (rather than individuals), and favors **sustainable, “capital” projects** (infrastructure, equipment, etc.) over short-term operating expenses.

Transparent Processes

Use committees & member input – Clubs often form project selection committees or invite member participation in decisions. For major community grants, some clubs solicit written applications from nonprofits and then have *club members review and vote on finalists*, ensuring a **fair, transparent selection** and strong member buy-in.

Impact & Sustainability

Aim for lasting impact – Chosen projects are those that promise measurable, long-term benefits. Rotary’s own guidance emphasizes that effective service projects “respond to real issues, improve lives, engage beneficiaries, and have **specific goals with measurable results**”. Many clubs seek projects with clear outcomes and plans for sustainability.

The table below highlights **examples of Rotary Clubs (U.S. and international)** implementing these best practices in selecting and executing community service projects:

Rotary Club (Location)	Project (Year)	Selection Process / Criteria	Impact / Outcome
Rotary Club of Joliet (Illinois, USA)	<i>Imagination Library</i> – Early Childhood Literacy Program (2024)	Invited local nonprofits to apply for a \$50,000 community grant funded by the club’s annual raffle; 15 applications were vetted by a committee, three finalists presented to the full club, and <i>members voted</i> to choose the	Provided a \$50K donation to Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library to mail free, age-appropriate books monthly to ~39,000 children (birth to age 5) in Will County, Illinois [willcounty...linois.org] , [willcounty...linois.org] , boosting

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		winner [willcounty...linois.org] . The chosen project aligned with Rotary's focus on Basic Education & Literacy [willcounty...linois.org] .	early literacy and demonstrating broad, long-term community impact.
Rotary Club of Kelowna (Downtown) (British Columbia, Canada)	<i>Freedom's Door Kitchen Renovation – Transitional Housing</i> (2016)	Established a Major Project Selection Committee to engage members and identify high-impact local needs. In 2015, the committee conducted a thorough review of proposals and recommended funding a major renovation at a local addiction recovery home [rotarykelowna.org] . This transparent, member-driven process has been repeated annually to select "big impact" projects [rotarykelowna.org] .	Invested \$85,000 (raised via a pro-am golf fundraiser) to build a new commercial kitchen for Freedom's Door, a nonprofit providing housing and meals to ~50 people in recovery [castanet.net] . The upgrade enabled the home to serve 54,000 meals/year and significantly improved services for residents [castanet.net] . The club also coordinated volunteers and partners (e.g. a local utility) to reduce costs [castanet.net] , exemplifying sustainable collaboration.
Rotary Club of Roatan (Bay Islands, Honduras)	<i>St. Helene Water & Education Initiative – Global Grant Projects</i> (2021)	Performed an in-depth community assessment in the remote St. Helene village (community meetings, focus groups with residents, and community mapping of local resources) to uncover the true needs beyond initial assumptions [rotary.org] , [rotary.org] . This participatory approach revealed that the community's priorities extended beyond just clean water to include education and other infrastructure [rotary.org] .	Adopted a holistic project plan addressing multiple needs. Instead of only a small water project, the club secured two large Rotary Foundation global grants – ~\$156,000 for a sustainable water system and \$176,000 for a new community high school [rotary.org] . This approach provided clean water access and extended local education to high school level , creating lasting change in line with community priorities.
Rotary Club of Walajapet (Tamil Nadu, India)	<i>Jambal Community Development – Needs Assessment</i> (2024)	Utilized Rotary's Community Assessment Tools handbook to guide project selection. Club members, like Booma Mahendrarvarman, led local residents in mapping exercises and	This participatory selection process strengthened community buy-in and yielded projects targeting the top local priorities (e.g. water access, sanitation, education) with culturally appropriate solutions. By

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		<p>focus groups to identify village assets and needs in Jambal, India [rotary-mah...masina.org]. By partnering with community members and even using visual mapping, the club ensured that project ideas came directly from those being served.</p>	<p>aligning projects with residents' own identified needs, the club lays the groundwork for sustainable, "service above self" initiatives that have strong community support and long-term impact [rotary.org], [rotary-mah...masina.org].</p>
<p>Rotary Club of Burnaby (British Columbia, Canada)</p>	<p><i>Community Grants Program</i> – Ongoing (Policy Example)</p>	<p>Developed formal donation guidelines for evaluating and approving project funding requests. The policy requires that projects align with Rotary's main causes (areas of focus), benefit a broad group (rather than one individual), and preferably fund tangible capital assets (equipment, facilities, etc.) over recurring costs [rotaryburnaby.org], [rotaryburnaby.org]. External organizations must submit a written application and secure a Rotary Club member as a project champion, who will sponsor the proposal and guide it through club deliberations [rotaryburnaby.org].</p>	<p>By using clear criteria and requiring a club "champion" for each funded project, the club ensures that supported initiatives are mission-aligned and have internal ownership. This approach has resulted in successful support of numerous local causes – from funding community equipment to partnering on service facilities – with visibility for Rotary and lasting benefits for Burnaby residents [rotaryburnaby.org], [rotaryburnaby.org].</p>

Takeaways: Across these examples, **effective project selection** in Rotary involves *identifying authentic community needs, setting clear criteria for impact and alignment with Rotary's values, engaging club members and community stakeholders in decision-making, and focusing on sustainable outcomes*. By following these best practices – from **formal application reviews and member votes** (as in Joliet) to **major project committees** (Kelowna) and **grassroots needs assessments** (Roatan, Walajapet) – Rotary Clubs ensure their "Corporations Investing in the Community" initiatives truly embody the **"Service Above Self"** spirit and deliver meaningful, lasting community impact. [\[clubrunner...indows.net\]](#), [\[rotary.org\]](#)