

A Plan to Grow Your Club

UNDERLYING TRUISMS

- *Rotary Clubs that grow understand that the entire club membership needs to be the “Membership Committee.”*
- *The best way to add members to your club is to invite them—personally.*
- *Those who fail to plan usually accomplish what they have planned.*

1. Analyze where you are now

Dedicate a club meeting to consider the atmospherics of your club. Brainstorm around the question: “What contributes to and/or inhibits our club’s ability to attract and retain new members and grow?” Appoint a scribe to record responses.

The following is a list of suggested questions to be posed to club members at this meeting. This list is not exhaustive, it’s intended to stimulate your thinking around factors contributing to the atmosphere of your club. In brainstorming around these questions it’s important to not only think of their impact on current club members, but also on potential club members.

- What is the balance of members in our club by ...
 - ... Gender? (the percentage of men and women in the club)
 - ... Age?
- Does our club reflect the demographics of our community with regard to such things as ethnicity, socio-economic factors, etc.?
- Is our meeting time attractive to those we would like to see added to our club’s membership?
- Is where we meet attractive to those we would like to see added to our club’s membership? (examples: is it visible, easily accessible, does meeting at a Senior Center—for instance—discourage younger people from attending, etc.)
- Will some form of “Alternative Membership” (such as Corporate or Family) help grow our club?
- What practices that we take for granted are possible inhibitions to club growth? (examples: requiring members to prepay meals, assessing Foundation contributions, are we in any way priced out of the “new member market?”)
- Other relevant questions that you might devise.

Convene a meeting of the club’s Membership Committee (If you don’t have a committee, now is a good time to recruit one of at least three club members). At that meeting, analyze the responses gleaned at the club meeting and propose any proposed changes to the next meeting of your club’s Board of Directors for consideration and action.

2. Plan to Invite potential members

Dedicate another club meeting to talking about specific individuals that you would like to see as members of your club. Use some of the issues identified in the previous meeting that you dedicated to club atmospherics and add other categories that you can think of. Some categories to consider might be:

- Younger potential members (especially if your club membership is aging)
- Women (especially if your club is male dominated—note: an analysis of district clubs indicates that clubs that have gender balance are more likely to be growing clubs)
- Activists in your community (people with a passion for a particular area of service in the community such as outreach to the poor, environmental issues, etc.)
- Community leaders (manager/mayor, police/fire chief, selectmen, library trustees, school committee members, leaders in civic groups, etc.)
- People whose business/profession is “missing” from your membership (a good old-fashioned classification survey is a good idea)
- People of a community demographic (an ethnic group, for instance) that are conspicuous by their presence in the community, but absent from your club
- Any other categories of potential members you can think of

Be certain that you name names as you discuss this and develop an ambitious list. Comments such as, “Oh, he/she will never want to join our club,” are forbidden.

Once you are satisfied that you have a complete list (a list at least four times what you expect will prove to be fruitful candidates), it is time to divide the potential members among your club members. Make sure that everyone on your list is either accepted by—or assigned to—some club member. Do that by asking such questions of each potential member as:

- Does anyone have a business association with this person?
- Who knows this person best?
- etc.

Divide up the names that remain after this among the membership. Set a time (a month or so) in which to complete the invitations. Arm the members with some form of physical invitation to present to the potential members they will call on. That physical invitation should include the time and place of your meetings and offer a free meal (or two) to those who are invited to “try on” Rotary. Try to make invitations in person (not by email or phone).

Set a brief time aside in a future meeting when members can report on their invitations. Don’t expect that all invitees—or even a majority of them—will respond affirmatively.

3. Engage new members

Simply getting warm bodies to join your club isn’t enough; engaging members is what keeps them in the club. Some basic engagement strategies are:

- Some form of orientation introducing prospective members prior to their induction, detailing expectations and benefits of membership
- Including an insert to new members’ “Welcome Packet” listing membership expectations and opportunities
- Inviting members to choose a committee and/or club project to commit to at the time they are welcomed into the club
- Asking new members to give their input into what they would like to see your club doing