

Virtual Rotary Club Changeovers



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The Rotary year's end is fast approaching. Officers-Elect are planning their year in office. Serving Officers are ready to put their feet up. And everyone prepares to celebrate a year of hard work with one of our annual ceremonies: The Changeover.

Our traditional Changeovers, like many things in the world of COVID-19's Global Pandemic, aren't an option. But where some clubs are opting to cancel or postpone their Changeovers, many are asking another question: "How might we do our Changeover online?"

Whilst we might feel this a challenge beyond what we can execute, we see just how much has adapted recently. My fellow Australians would remember the recent highly successful re-imagining of ANZAC Day; an entire set of cultural ceremonies build around physical proximity. And unlike ANZAC Day, we already have lots of experience in the world of virtual events.

What's important in a Rotary Club Changeover?



The “Rotary Chicken” dinner aside, why is it that Changeovers are important to us? This answer will vary from Club to Club. It’s important to think about what is important to us. We can design Changeover events that reflect what we value most and remembering why they are so important.

Celebrating Accomplishments are integral to Changeovers, and being able to look back on a year of hard work. Such reflection shouldn’t just be a vanity for the President and Board, but something all Rotarians can take pride in.

Acknowledging Service follows on to this. Honouring those Rotarians who stand out among us remains ever so important. Hard work in service to the club and their community, and generous to our Rotary Foundation are things to be celebrated.

Looking Forward to the year ahead, where we can see new opportunities for Service above Self, and working together to build an even brighter future for the world.

Fellowship and Banter can be more difficult over Zoom, but is even more critical than ever. Let's remember why we love doing what we do, joined with our fellow Rotarians not just as partners in service, but as dearest friends.

How should we structure our Agenda?



Fortunate news here: It doesn't necessarily have to change! If your club has a Changeover program that they are particularly attached to, see what you might do to convert it to working online.

If in doubt, think about the discussions above around what is vital for your club. Discuss it with others in your club, including your President's incumbent and elect, your Sergeant-at-

Arms/Master of Ceremonies, your Changeover committee, or your general members.

Unlike most things that we do, Changeovers are absent presence in our Constitutions, Bylaws, or formal practices. Instead, let us make it something to reflect what our Club wants and needs it to be

How do we practically run the event?

Most active Rotarians will now have experience using videoconferencing for their club meetings

Online Meetings can be a bit like herding cats; things are constantly changing, everyone wants to do their own thing, and nobody is quite sure what the purpose of what having a herd of cats is in the first place. So, what is the magical solution to running a good online event?

We already know the answer: **Having a good Master of Ceremonies**

Being able to keep the event flowing, audience interested, everything on-time, and in order is the hallmark of a good MC, equally online as it is in person. Having someone in charge who can keep things going in the face of disruptive audiences, or an honoured member wanting to recant the history of their Rotary life is a essential to a good event.

But there's another part here: **Knowing the platform**

Zoom and other videoconferencing platforms have a lot of useful features for an event host. Being able to forcibly mute

participants, having people raise their hands to indicate a desire to speak, and sharing presentations are all handy.

Don't worry, your MC doesn't have to be an expert on Zoom. You might find it useful having an Assistant MC to manage the technology. Meanwhile, the MC oversees the event itself. You could also consider technically experienced friends of the club, including family members, or Rotaractors to act as Assistant MC.

How might we run our particular rituals?



Award Ceremony

Honouring our fellow Rotarians is just as important this year, as any other. And the process can be very much the same, with the Club President announcing the recipients of the awards.

Not all awards are a surprise. Your Paul Harris Society members likely know they're due to receive the upgrade for their PHF. Mail them early, and have members show off their new award as they're announced.

Surprise awards are still similar; just mail the award on the day of the Changeover. They'll find out before it arrives, and receive it soon after

Investitures

Due to the limitations of the physical universe, your Club's Presidential Collar (or other regalia, like a gavel) can only be in one place at any given time. How might we handle this difficult challenge?

How should you do this? Consider the significance of the physical transfer, and how it works with your club, given your own culture and traditions. Is it a symbol of the end of a year, or the start of a new year? Does the special significance attach to the Collar, or the President? Does the Collar hold any special significance for your club at all?

You might consider whether to physically hand over the collar between Presidents before, or after the event. You might have each President take a photo or video with the Collar as part of the presentation. You might simplify the process by not using the Collar in this year's formal ceremony at all.

Badges for Officers are much simpler and can be mailed ahead of time, similarly to awards. As the incoming President calls their names, they can display the badge of their position to the audience.

National Anthem

Ever heard two people trying to talk at once on a video call? Multiply that by several dozen, and you have an attempt to sing the National Anthem together at your changeover. Even with disciplined timing, the nature of the technology is that it just doesn't work.

Another option might be for a recording of the National Anthem to be played, and having your members sing-along on mute. Or if that might feel a little silly, even having everyone listen silently on mute is an option.

Other Things

Your club may have other ceremonies, rituals, or habits that you like to undertake at a Changeover event. So, how might you handle it?

Experiment. Practice.

Get your Changeover Committee together, and try things on a smaller scale in a meeting. There is no substitute for experimentation, and practice will reveal what can work. Other rituals may need to be adapted, modified, or in some case, sidelined for the year.

What if we have a large number of attendees?



Anyone who has been in a large Zoom call knows that it's hard to spot who is talking, or where a particular person is, even if they're the only ones unmuted.

Another option is to use the **Spotlight Video** feature of Zoom. Similar to Speaker view, it allows the Host to display to everyone, a single person of the Host's choice on the screen. During Awards or other processes, this could help share the focus of the audience. Other videoconferencing platforms have similar features.

Even larger events with hundreds of participants or complex practices may find that they require additional tools to broadcast their Changeover effectively. In this, the advice is simple and no different to any major event: Start planning now.

Could we put it on hold until after the pandemic?



Of course. Your Club's Changeover belongs to your Club, and the event is run for the benefit of the Rotarians of your Club.

Before deciding on that, there are two things to be considered:

Changeovers are moments in time, and we hold them as close as possible to the turn of the Rotary year as a point of significance in transition. The further away from July 1 the event is, the less meaning it may hold. So, we might ask ourselves; Would a physical Changeover in November be more meaningful than a virtual one in June?

COVID-19 is challenging member engagement, and even with all of our efforts, it can be harder to feel as attached to Rotary at the moment as we might otherwise be. Changeovers are a beautiful occasion for us all to celebrate what we do, and the value of being a part of our Club's. If we just ignore such a pivotal event, would it be harder for the individual Rotarian to justify paying those annual dues come July?