

TAKING ACTION FOR CHANGE

We are at a defining moment in Rotary's history. We're implementing our Action Plan, a strategic road map that will help us better connect with each other, grow as an organization, and more effectively share our stories of how we are making a difference in communities.

At every level of Rotary, we have embraced opportunities to work together to achieve our goals. Over the coming four issues, you'll hear from Rotary members around the world who will offer their inspiration, encouragement, and guidance as we carry out the four priorities of the Action Plan.



IMPACT

We want to put our resources behind programs that will have the greatest impact and that align with our areas of focus.

We're creating tools and guidelines for tracking and sharing our efforts. We're also developing an evaluation process that will help us make objective recommendations about what is working and what we should continue, start, or stop doing.

REACH

We're committed to exemplifying and embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in everything we do.

We're testing new products and alternative models that will allow more people to connect and take action with us in ways that work best for them.

ENGAGE

We're tearing down the walls between "us" and "them" and focusing on participants.

We're asking people how they want to participate, finding ways to meet them where they are, and making sure they know we value them.

ADAPT

We're streamlining operations so we can be more agile and responsive.

We're simplifying the way we do things and helping members manage change so that our clubs, districts, and zones can more effectively communicate and work together.

Learn what your club can do at rotary.org/actionplan.

INCREASE OUR IMPACT

A CONVERSATION WITH
TUSU TUSBIRA

“A good project is a catalyst for sustainable change.”



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Q. The Action Plan asks us to increase our impact. How should we think about doing that?

TUSU: Here's an analogy: When your children are in school, it's easy to get excited about a great grade or test result — the success of that immediate moment. But as parents, we know we also need to take the long view. What kind of people are our children becoming? What will they do for the world after we're gone?

Real impact is something that resonates well beyond the work we do on a project. It's sustainable long after we have left the scene.

This definition of impact requires us to think about service in a different way. It is not what we give to communities that creates sustainability. It's whether the project enables communities to take ownership and drive the transformation on their own after we are gone. A good project is a catalyst for sustainable change.

Q. Why is it important to measure our impact?

TUSU: So we can be smarter about what we need to start doing, what we need to continue doing, and what we need to stop doing. It's essential to the future of our organization. Major funding agencies demand evidence of impact. Young people — the future of Rotary — have grown up asking institutions and organizations for greater accountability and transparency.

Q. What changes are you already seeing in Rotary?

TUSU: I'm heartened that Rotary is identifying consistent ways to assess and measure results. This way, we'll all be on the same page when it comes to planning projects and identifying impact.

I'm also seeing a greater appetite for risk. Less proscriptive funding will promote smart risk-taking and will encourage people to learn from — rather than fear — setbacks.

MEET FRANCIS "TUSU" TUSBIRA.

A founding partner of an information and communications technology consulting firm, Tusbira is a member of the Rotary Club of Kampala-North, Uganda, and served on Rotary's Strategic Planning Committee when our Action Plan was developed. He's also a member of The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers.

There's greater support for clubs to focus their efforts on a few key areas, rather than trying to do too many projects. Instead of starting by asking "What are the deficits here?" clubs are learning how to build on a community's strengths and seeking out what I call the "pressure points" — areas where targeted, concentrated work can set in motion a cascade of change.

I'm also excited by the new Programs of Scale Initiative. These projects have the longer time frame necessary to make a sustainable difference. Most important, Programs of Scale incentivize clubs to work together and recognize them for doing that. If you want to provide clean water sources, why would you want 50 clubs doing 50 different projects? We unite against polio. Let's unite to solve other challenges facing our world.

Q. What makes you feel optimistic?

TUSU: Our work eradicating polio proves we are an organization capable of genuine and lasting impact. And I'm excited about the rising generation of Rotarians and Rotaractors who are bringing their commitment to sustainable solutions. We can do this.

Besides that, my name, Tusbira, literally means "we hope"!

ENHANCE PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

A CONVERSATION WITH ISAAC B. OWOLABI

“We need to do everything we can to say, ‘We’re thankful you’re here. You matter to us.’”



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Q. What do we mean by enhancing participant engagement?

ISAAC: Simply put, we enhance participant engagement when we meet people where they are, rather than just assuming they'll find a way to fit in. It goes far beyond saying, "Come on In! You're welcome!" Focusing on participants is far more proactive.

Q. Why is this such an important part of the Action Plan?

ISAAC: Rotary has offered me many opportunities to get involved, to learn new skills, and to lead. But I've also met a lot of people who feel there is no room for them to serve in Rotary. And we know we have a challenge when it comes to retaining members.

That's why making a concerted effort to engage participants is important. When participants don't find experiences that feel personally and professionally relevant, when they don't feel seen as individuals, they go elsewhere — and they have plenty of choices.

Q. Why are we talking about participants instead of Rotary members?

ISAAC: The word *participants* encompasses Rotary and Rotaract members as well as all others who engage in Rotary activities, such as family members, friends, and alumni. Thinking in terms of participants gets us to a new mindset. We begin to look at every encounter as an opportunity to show others what Rotary can do — and what they can do with us.

Q. What can clubs do to focus more on participants?

ISAAC: One word: Listen. As leaders in our professions and communities, we already know how important it is to listen — and how much effort it takes to listen in ways that feel genuine and authentic to those around us. We need to apply that same skill and determination to our Rotary involvement.

MEET ISAAC B. OWOLABI. A professor emeritus of business and marketing and also an ordained minister, Owolabi is a member of the Rotary Club of Asheville-Biltmore, North Carolina, and a past governor of District 7670.



Don't just give people a list of things you want to accomplish and ask them to check a box. Instead, ask participants if they're feeling engaged and heard, and if Rotary is meeting their expectations — and listen to what they say.

Another important step is to make sure everyone who engages with us knows that we value their participation. We need to do everything we can to say, "We're thankful you're here. You matter to us."

Q. You're a big believer in surveys. Why are they a useful tool for enhancing engagement?

ISAAC: Surveys are a relatively easy way to identify strengths and weaknesses. In my club, we conduct surveys every year to ask members how they want to be engaged and what community projects they are interested in. I'd also urge clubs to measure member engagement and satisfaction regularly so you can better understand what people are getting out of their Rotary experience.

But don't stop with your club. Consider surveying your community or sponsoring a town hall meeting where people can provide feedback about your projects and share their own ideas. When we engage with the community more broadly, we become known as the people who spot opportunities for positive change.

Let's make sure we see, value, and hear people. When we do that, we make Rotary stronger.

The ROTARY ACTION PLAN

EXPAND OUR REACH

A CONVERSATION WITH KATEY HALLIDAY

“We all can and should be working on this. It isn’t something that leaders alone can do.”



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Q. Our Action Plan calls for Rotary to expand our reach. How can we get beyond thinking about membership in terms of numbers?

KATEY: In the past, there’s been a lot of focus on achieving a certain head count: “How many people did you get to join?” But if we want a Rotary that’s strong, effective, and able to prepare the next generation to lead, we need to make sure more people feel welcome and at home in Rotary, year after year. And that means we must become more diverse and inclusive and provide equitable opportunities for everyone.

Q. Why is diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) so crucial to Rotary expanding its reach?

KATEY: Above all, because it’s the right thing to do. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is not a political issue; it’s a responsibility we have to each other and to our communities. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to have equal opportunities for fellowship and service, and to be given the same platforms for our voices to be heard. As an organization that’s both global and grassroots, we have to lead the way.

But it’s also the smart thing to do. Potential members, especially those who have experience with DEI initiatives in their own workplaces, may be put off by a club that is not DEI-friendly. But when those people experience a club that welcomes all kinds of people — all kinds of leaders — you’ll turn them into our most effective ambassadors. They’ll tell their own friends and networks about Rotary.

Clubs also report that when participants have many different perspectives, they come up with ideas and projects that make a bigger impact. That doesn’t surprise me. Workplace studies of diversity, equity, and inclusion demonstrate that diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints is a strength.

It’s an ongoing effort, of course — and an opportunity for continual growth. I think

MEET KATEY HALLIDAY. A member of the Rotary Club of Adelaide Light, Australia, and a charter member of the Rotaract Club of Adelaide City, Halliday serves on Rotary’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force.

DEI



the vast majority of members are feeling empowered and energized by the positive changes we’re making.

Q. How can clubs expand their reach and fulfill their commitment to DEI?

KATEY: There are three key things. First, make your club more accessible through flexible membership models and meeting formats. Second, give all members something meaningful to do. It’s not enough to invite people from diverse backgrounds to our meetings and events; we need to include them in planning and decision making, and we need to value their contributions. Finally, bring in outside help. Collaborate with a local expert on diversity, equity, and inclusion training. It’s a great way to forge new kinds of partnerships.

And Rotary has so many resources! Check out the DEI-themed posts on the Rotary Voices blog for inspiring stories and ideas. Make a plan using the Diversifying Your Club assessment, which you can find at my.rotary.org/membership. Or take one of the DEI courses in our Learning Center.

Q. What should every Rotary member know about DEI?

KATEY: We all can and should be working on this. It isn’t something that leaders alone can do. When we have a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture, we will expand our potential to create lasting change and realize our vision of a world where people unite and take action.

INCREASE OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT

A CONVERSATION WITH NICKI SCOTT

“We can achieve harmony and amplify the sound if we all play the same tune instead of a staccato selection of solos.”



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Q. Why is increasing our ability to adapt one of the priorities of the Action Plan?

NICKI: Everyone, and every organization, is looking to make a greater societal impact. It's an enormous opportunity for Rotary to be a thought leader and a sought-after partner. But if we want to lead in a time of accelerating change, we need to become — and to be seen as — more agile and relevant.

Q. What are the challenges?

NICKI: As an organization, we're very fragmented and hierarchical. We have rules, officers, titles, and committees instead of teams. The more administrative layers you have, the more removed you are from the actual work.

We need to look at leadership as something anyone at any age can own. You don't need 40 years of experience before you can significantly contribute. Remember, Paul Harris was only 36 when he started Rotary.

Q. Where are you seeing opportunities?

NICKI: Before the pandemic, a large percentage of Rotary members didn't really think or see beyond their club. They didn't have a sense of themselves as a global network of change-makers. During the pandemic, people were joining virtual meetings in different districts and countries and seeing for the first time all the things Rotary was doing.

We're capitalizing on this momentum. I worked with a team in Great Britain and Ireland that started a Rotary global hub, an online platform that connects people to clubs but also gives them the opportunity to participate based on causes rather than location. And their involvement can be episodic rather than tied to a weekly meeting at a specific time. It is proving very successful in both attracting new and retaining existing Rotarians.

MEET NICKI SCOTT. A change-management consultant and a member of the Rotary Club of The North Cotswolds, England, Scott helped develop our Action Plan as part of Rotary's Strategic Planning Committee. She is the 2022-23 vice president of Rotary International.



I also see Rotary doing more to build on the work of others, to share leadership. In Great Britain and Ireland, we host Volunteer Expo, an event where all kinds of people and organizations can come together and collaborate. We don't have to reinvent the wheel every time.

Q. What structural changes will increase Rotary's ability to adapt?

NICKI: More regional autonomy is key. What might work for one region might not be a cultural fit for another.

We can be much more regionally focused without losing the Ideals of a global organization, or losing the power of a global brand. We can achieve harmony and amplify the sound if we all play the same tune instead of a staccato selection of solos.

Q. What makes you most optimistic?

NICKI: Rotary has something powerful to offer. There are a lot of well-meaning organizations out there, but good intentions don't always translate to results. Rotary has the infrastructure and the integrity that people are looking for, and the connections in communities to know what is really needed. We know how to get the job done. We are people of action.