

Maintaining Membership Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Guide for Rotary Clubs of District 5750 (Special acknowledgement to District 6690)



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to support the Rotary Clubs of District 5750 in their efforts to maintain engagement during times when many clubs have reduced in-person meetings, projects or social events. We have developed this guide with ideas and strategies for Club Leaders to consider. The following is an offering of support, not a requirement. Club Leaders are encouraged to consult with their boards to assess and determine which strategies will be useful on the local level.

None of these strategies is a replacement for timely, transparent and regular communication with your members about your plans to continue modified operations throughout this time. Be sure that all committee and office leaders in your club are equipped with consistent messaging to minimize confusion to your members and to streamline communications about changes as they arise. Consider sending brief weekly updates to your members or provide a timeline for when decisions will be reviewed and modified if necessary.

Have a great strategy that's working for you? Send details to District Secretary Megan Law so it may be added to this guide and shared with others.

Interim Virtual Meetings

Please consider the creative use of technology to host “virtual meeting” experiences for your members until you can resume in-person meetings and events. Below are a few ideas and favorite tools for virtual meetings. Each suggestion includes links to helpful how-to guides and/or other information to assist you in navigating these tools.

Highly Interactive Tools – There are many free and paid options for hosting virtual meetings. Chances are someone in your club already has a pro version of one of these for their business, but there are also lots of great no-cost options that include basic features. Many of these programs are offering reduced fees and no-cost extended trials during this time.

Zoom Basic Free | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2pq4I1urXA>

GoTo Meeting Free | <https://support.goto.com/meeting>

Google Hangout

Free | <https://support.google.com/hangouts/answer/3115553?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>

Interactive – There are other tools that are still incredibly useful and may be the perfect fit, but don't require that everyone log in at a specific time, which could be the perfect level of flexibility for your club. The suggestions below range from social media tools to project management and communication tools.

Facebook Live | <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/facebook-live-guide>

Instagram TV | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaRxgAW9mUY>

Basecamp | <https://basecamp.com/>

Slack | <https://slack.com/>

Tips for hosting a “Virtual Meeting”

- Consider shortening the length of the virtual meeting to make it more feasible for members to “tune in.”
- Do keep your fellowship activities if they can easily migrate online (for example, “getting to know you” activities, interesting speakers, and happy bucks/dollars)
- Avoid taking up “video time” with elements of your meeting that would be better shared in writing such as basic announcements or upcoming dates to note – consider sending those in a follow up email once the virtual meeting concludes
- check out Rotary resources on virtual meetings
 - <https://www.rotary.org/en/how-take-your-club-online>
 - <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/learn-topic/online-club-meetings>

Engagement through Social Media Tools

Social Media is a great tool for engaging members and the general community every day. Clubs can optimize and concentrate their social media channels as a resource to bolster engagement during the hiatus from in-person contact. Many of these strategies can be used once you return to business as usual, so this may prove to be a pilot for your club.

Fellowship

Use social media prompts to mimic the fellowship your members enjoy during your meetings. Included among the resources are social media assets that you may use to start these online conversations. Here are few examples:

- What are you reading?
- Picture Contest: Sunrises
- Kindness is Contagious

Social Media Takeovers

Allow various members to “take the reins” on your social channels and let them use pictures and stories to share how they're dealing with the changes to daily living brought on by the pandemic. Here is a useful guide: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-takeovers/>

Migrating Meeting Activities to Social Media

- "Getting to know you" activities like Hot Seat or Member Profiles
- Happy Bucks or Happy Dollars online (sample social assets are included in resources)
- Asks members or "guest speakers" to record video presentations to promote through social channels. Have a member with an interesting hobby like beekeeping? Any business owners getting creative during the pandemic? Have members who are passionate about particular service projects? Ask them to share a self-recorded video!
 - These can be recorded simply using a cell phone. Try to limit video recordings to 5-6 minutes maximum.
 - Remember to write engaging posts that encourage members and guests to interact with the content.
 - **Facebook Live is a great tool for short presentations featuring your members with interesting hobbies, because the audience can ask questions in real-time that the presenter can answer on the spot.

Engagement through Service (from Afar)

Of course, the BEST way to engage members is the same in-person or on-line! Get creative with ways to keep the spirit of service alive with your members!

Donate

As always, you can ask members to donate to The Rotary Foundation (hint: use the array of Rotary assets including videos to promote; all available on My Rotary). Other considerations include initiating "friendly competitions" with other clubs to see which can raise the most money for a particular focus area or fund to earn "bragging rights" (or maybe the "losing" club has to provide the manual labor for the winning club's future project). Get creative and use this opportunity to bolster promotion of opportunities for Rotarians to give.

Spread Good Will

- Choose a local charity and ask all members to highlight it using their social channels. Choose a new charity each week! This is a great way to leverage the influence of Rotarian leaders to elevate causes that matter to your local community (and it might even sprout a future project collaboration!).
- Coordinate with local hospitals or nursing homes for members to send cards or letters to combat loneliness from isolation in facilities that have limited visitors.
- Ask members to make blankets for local organizations
- Challenge members to look through their homes and sort items that can be donated to charity. Once it is safe to do so, hold a group donation day to a local charity thrift store (remember to take pictures!).
- Ask members to record themselves reading children's books and post through your club's social channels for parents to share with their children for "alt-tv time" during school closures.
- Start a gift card drive. Ask members to purchase gifts cards (bonus points if it's a local small business) and then mail them along with a note from the Rotarian to organizations that would be able to put them to good use

Creative Engagement Strategies

Chain Letters – Start a good old-fashioned-chain letter to engage members. See resources below for a template of an easy example to distribute via email.

Pen Pals – Develop a relationship with another club near or far to start “Rotary Pen Pals.” See the sample invitation letter. This is a great way to strike up a relationship with someone you’ve met at an International Convention or a District Conference. Invite the partnering club to share mailing addresses for their members and then assign each one to a member of your own club to start exchanging letters.

”Crash” an E-Club! – Share information about e-clubs with your members. Some e-clubs hold “virtual meetings” and some include online content. Anyone can peruse the websites of e-clubs and get inspired for other ways to maintain engagement without in-person meetings (they are the experts, after all!)

Board Buddies – Assign each of your board members (and possibly committee chairs) to 5-6 club members and ask them to maintain regular contact to foster engagement

Important Links & Resources

Useful Links

www.rotary.org

<https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/learn-topic/membership>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2pq4I1urXA>

<https://support.goto.com/meeting>

<https://support.google.com/hangouts/answer/3115553?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>

www.rotaryclubone.org

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/facebook-live-guide>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaRxgAW9mUY>

<https://basecamp.com/>

<https://slack.com/>

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-takeovers/>

<https://www.rotary.org/en/how-take-your-club-online>

<https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/learn-topic/online-club-meetings>

We hope you find these resources useful; and our goal is to offer more online resources to this section. Please check back often for more ways to Connect the World.

We would like to acknowledge Rotary District 6690 for developing this valuable resource.