

**Club innovation – Meeting format**  
**The Rotary Club of Rochester, Minnesota, USA**  
**Three meeting formats that increase member participation**

*By Stacey Vanden Heuvel*

As one of the largest clubs in our district, we knew we had to do something to address our declining attendance and meet the needs of our diverse membership. Beginning in 2015 with a club visioning exercise, we began looking for ways we could be flexible and innovative. Here's what's worked for us.

One of the first things we did was revise our attendance guidelines to stress that attendance is more about participating than attending meetings. We ask members to have 50 percent attendance. But taking part in any of our club's many service activities qualifies, as do our club's leadership or committee meetings, other Rotary club meetings anywhere in the world, or any Rotary activity. We know Rotarians will benefit more from membership when they participate more regularly, so we ask our members to consider the many ways they can participate.

We also introduced two new meeting formats beginning in January 2017. During **Service First Thursday** on the first week of each month, we gather at the Rochester Public Library to volunteer. The location is easily accessible; parking is free; and we work together to support the Library in its efforts to strengthen community and enrich lives through engagement and learning.

We also introduced **1905 Meetings** on the third Thursday of the month. These meetings pay homage to Rotary's beginnings, when the first Rotarians gathered in small groups at each other's places of work. For the business portion of the meeting led by our club president, we are all linked via a live Facebook feed from a central downtown location. Then we disconnect and at various remote locations, a board member or program committee member leads a small group discussion around a video presentation focused on the Rotary theme for the month. Some of our willing Rotarians host these meetings in their places of work. These are "brown bag" lunches. We

imagine that Paul Harris held his meetings in much the same way, except that we are using different technology!

The many benefits include having a cost-free meeting for those on a budget, providing meeting locations closer to a variety of people's workplaces, creating better opportunities for meaningful dialogue in small groups, and allowing people at home, at work, or traveling to take part. While our weekly attendance is around 60 members per meeting, our Facebook live and recorded live videos for our 1905 Meetings have generated 1,169 views for three of these meetings!

Finally, we introduced a **Speed Networking** meeting. Members sit across from other members and have four minutes to visit on a few selected topics. After that, one side of the table moves down one seat to talk with another member. One side stays put to accommodate members who have a harder time with mobility. The room is filled with energy and chatter, and local and visiting Rotarians alike have enjoyed this meeting format, some asking us for materials to take back to their clubs.

We have made the meeting changes in the spirit of innovation and flexibility, but keeping key values of service, being globally focused, community, fun, and friendship in mind. We are highlighting that there are many ways to serve and even more ways to regularly get together to encourage fellowship with other Rotarians.