



# Rotary Fellowships Handbook



# Introduction to Rotary Fellowships

Rotary Fellowships are international, independently organized groups of Rotarians, Rotarian spouses, and Rotaractors who share a common vocation or recreational interest. Rotary Fellowships give their members the opportunity to have fun, make new friends around the world, and enhance their experience in Rotary.

Rotary Fellowships began informally in 1928 when Rotarians with a shared interest in the international language Esperanto joined together. In 1947, a group of Rotarian boating enthusiasts began flying the Rotary flag from their crafts, calling themselves the International Yachting Fellowship of Rotarians — which now holds the distinction of being the oldest continuing fellowship. The scope of fellowships has changed significantly over the years, but their purpose remains the same: to unite Rotarians in friendship and provide opportunities to enjoy favorite recreational or professional activities.

Many fellowships also use their special interests to serve others. For example, the Fellowship of Canoeing Rotarians has organized cleanups of polluted rivers; members of the International Computer Users Fellowship of Rotarians conduct training sessions for Rotarians and others in their community; and members of the International Fellowship of Rotarian Scuba Divers join local Rotary clubs to undertake service projects on each of their diving trips.

Rotary International has established specific policies for forming a Rotary Fellowship. The RI Board of Directors evaluates each prospective group before deciding whether to formally recognize it. However, each fellowship operates independently of RI, with its own rules, dues requirements, and administrative structure. Membership is open to all Rotarians, Rotarian spouses, and Rotaractors.

To learn about the fellowships currently recognized by RI, go to [www.rotary.org/fellowships](http://www.rotary.org/fellowships). You will find a listing of existing fellowships, as well as a directory that includes contact information for each group. To learn more about a particular fellowship, or to inquire about joining, contact the group directly. Members will be happy to hear from you!



# Organizing a Rotary Fellowship

Organizing a fellowship requires considerable commitment, but Rotarians who have done so consider the effort worthwhile. To begin, assess the need for the fellowship by networking with Rotarians in different countries to determine whether there is widespread international interest that would ensure the group's long-term viability. Also, confer with experienced leaders of existing fellowships about the basic administrative structure and operations.

If you are unsure about how to begin promoting your idea to prospective members around the world, consider these strategies:

- Ask your district Rotary Fellowships chair for assistance. Start by gaining support in your own district, and then reach out to district chairs in a few other countries to begin building a team of prospective members and organizers.
- Use Rotary's social media networks on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to spread your idea and connect with Rotarians in different parts of the world who may share your interest. Visit the social networking section of [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) to learn how to get connected.
- Ask Rotary Service staff for assistance. They may be able to connect you to other Rotarians who share your interest and can help you promote your idea. You'll find contact information for Rotary Service staff at the end of this handbook.

## APPLYING FOR OFFICIAL RECOGNITION

Prospective fellowships seeking official recognition from RI must demonstrate their compliance with the Rotary Code of Policies and their readiness to operate as an active, successful international association. To be considered for official recognition, prospective fellowships must submit a formal proposal that includes the following elements:

- Completed application form (available from Rotary Service staff) with a clear explanation of the group's purpose
- Copy of the group's proposed bylaws or constitution
- List of proposed officers and their responsibilities
- Roster of potential members, representing at least three countries

Organizers should contact Rotary Service staff for guidance before preparing this material, as RI's policies for Rotary Fellowships and the requirements for official recognition may change from time to time. Organizers are also encouraged to consult with staff on proposed logo designs and website URLs to ensure that they are in compliance with Rotary policy.

Once RI receives an application, it is reviewed by Rotary Service staff and the Rotary Fellowships Committee and then forwarded to the RI Board for consideration at its next meeting. Proposed fellowships that are denied recognition may not reapply for two years, so before submitting a proposal, be sure that your group is well organized and that your proposal is thorough and fully compliant with Rotary policies.

## KEY CRITERIA FOR RECOGNITION

While RI's policies for fellowships may be amended from time to time, as of this writing, fellowships must meet the criteria listed below. Once recognized, fellowships must continue to follow these policies in order to retain their status. A policy-compliant fellowship

- May not duplicate the purpose of an existing fellowship or conflict with the policies or programs of Rotary International or The Rotary Foundation
- Must be organized internationally and have members in at least three countries
- May not impose any obligation on the part of RI or Rotary clubs and districts
- May not act on behalf of RI or imply that it has authority to do so
- Must use the Rotary Marks (the Rotary emblem and other registered trademarks of Rotary International) in accordance with RI policy
- Must be neutral with respect to religion and politics
- May not promote other organizations
- Must be financially and administratively self-sustaining
- Must comply with the laws of the countries in which it operates
- Must respond to all communications, particularly those from RI, in a timely manner
- Must support its members by publishing a newsletter at least once each Rotary year and hold an annual forum that allows members to meet and interact
- Must submit an annual report of activities, including a financial statement, to its members with a copy to RI by 1 October of each year
- Must notify RI in advance of any plans to either approach other organizations for funds in excess of US\$25,000 or form other cooperative relationships
- Must obtain advance approval from the appropriate district governor(s) to request any type of cooperation from Rotarians outside the group's membership

Contact Rotary Service staff to receive a current copy of RI policies for Rotary Fellowships.

## CHOOSING A NAME

Prospective Rotary Fellowships should include the word “fellowship” in their proposed name. In accordance with RI’s trademark policies, the word “Rotary” may not be included in a fellowship’s name. In general, fellowships include the word “Rotarian” in their name to identify themselves as a Rotarian entity. The following are examples of appropriate fellowship names:

- International Curling Fellowship of Rotarians
- Rotarian Fellowship of Quilters and Fiber Artists
- World Fellowship of Rotarian Gourmets

## GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Each fellowship has considerable freedom in developing its administrative structure, provided that the basic Rotary policy requirements are met. Establishing constitutional procedures in the early stages of planning will help ensure an orderly change of officers in coming years.

A fellowship must have a governing document, such as bylaws or a constitution, that is consistent with RI policy. This document should include:

- Statement of purpose
- Responsibilities of each officer
- Procedures for electing officers
- Membership requirements
- Dues policies

Fellowships may choose to incorporate. Before incorporating, consult with Rotary Service staff to learn about specific Board-mandated guidelines. Fellowships should not incorporate before being recognized by the Board, and must submit proposed articles of incorporation to staff for review before submitting any formal applications.

## FELLOWSHIP LOGOS

Many fellowships develop their own logos that reflect their activities. Before finalizing your logo, be sure to forward a copy to Rotary Service staff for review to ensure that the design complies with RI guidelines, especially those governing the use of the Rotary emblem.

## **OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES**

Each fellowship must have a chair (president or other administrative head) and at least two other officers. While fellowships may have as many officer positions as they see fit, most fellowships appoint, at minimum, a chair, a treasurer, and a membership secretary. Many fellowships also appoint regional officers to oversee activities in a particular country or region. Officers' responsibilities should be balanced; placing too much authority with a single officer could exhaust the leadership and jeopardize the fellowship's success. At the same time, dividing responsibilities among too many officers could hamper clear communication. The leadership structure should be designed to help the group remain viable for years to come.

## **DUES STRUCTURE**

Certain costs are involved in running a fellowship, including the costs of membership communication, program promotion, and events. Rotary International requires fellowships to be financially self-sustaining, so unless fellowship officers bear all expenses, dues will be necessary. Most fellowships set annual membership dues at US\$30 or less. Some fellowships offer a discount on multi-year or lifetime dues. Although fellowships are free to develop a dues structure that meets their members' needs, be aware that setting dues too high could discourage people from joining and may impede recruiting efforts. On the other hand, members willing to pay at least minimal dues are likely to stay involved.

New fellowships may wish to increase the scope and number of their activities as the membership and resulting revenues grow. The governing documents should provide a schedule for reviewing the dues structure and a process for changing it.

## **INSURANCE**

Many fellowship activities carry some risk and may involve participants who aren't members of the fellowship. Because Rotary Fellowships are not covered by RI insurance, they should carefully assess their risk and, if necessary, secure appropriate liability coverage.



# Attracting and Keeping Members

A fellowship cannot exist without its members. To remain viable, a fellowship should have a long-term plan that addresses recruitment, communication, and events and activities that bring members together and provide value to their membership commitment.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication among members — whether face-to-face, through a monthly newsletter, or online — is central to the success of any fellowship. Effective communication helps members stay involved, which improves membership retention and helps fellowships stay vibrant and active. Regular communication with nonmembers is also essential to attracting new members. Most fellowships use email as the primary method of information exchange, and maintain websites to keep current members informed and provide information to interested Rotarians.

### Newsletter

RI requires each fellowship to publish a newsletter for its members at least once during the Rotary year. A fellowship's newsletter provides a forum for members to share information and ideas on the activity or interest that brought them together, and helps keep members interested and engaged. While fellowships may opt to send traditional print newsletters, most find it easier and less costly to distribute electronic newsletters via email.

Be sure to send a copy of each newsletter to your Rotary Service staff liaison at the mailing address at the end of this handbook, or to [rotaryfellowships@rotary.org](mailto:rotaryfellowships@rotary.org). Familiarity with your fellowship's latest activities helps staff promote your group more effectively to Rotarians around the world.

### Website

Rotary Fellowships are strongly encouraged to maintain a website to facilitate their members' activity and communication. A prospective fellowship that has not received official RI recognition may develop a website to promote its proposed activities, but the website must be taken down if the group fails to gain Board recognition. The RI website contains a fellowship directory with links to the websites of all fellowships that are in compliance with Rotary policy. Before purchasing a URL or investing time and funds in designing your website, consult with Rotary Service staff to ensure that it is in compliance.

Consider these tips when designing your website:

- Clearly identify your fellowship using your group's official, RI Board-recognized name in a prominent location on the home page.
- Clearly describe your fellowship's purpose and activities.
- Include material that will serve both prospective members and current members.
- Provide accurate contact information.
- Be sure that all information on the site can be easily updated to keep it current.
- Keep your design clean and simple, with a consistent navigation scheme throughout.
- Post your fellowship newsletter online, as well as timely, relevant announcements and updates.
- Provide a membership application, in either interactive or downloadable form. Be sure to request the name of the applicant's Rotary club (or Rotaract club) so you can verify membership.
- Ensure your members' privacy. Do not post contact information or other personal information without written consent from the individuals concerned.

For more ideas, explore fellowship websites at [www.rotary.org/fellowships](http://www.rotary.org/fellowships).

## EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

While most day-to-day fellowship activities may take place online or through correspondence, the most successful fellowships facilitate regular opportunities for members to interact in person. To optimize your group's membership growth, plan local, regional, and international activities. For example, sporting fellowships hold regional matches and world tournaments, fellowships related to travel or excursions plan destination trips, and vocational fellowships often plan get-togethers at professional conferences and seminars. These types of activities will help maintain existing members' interest in the fellowship and also attract new members.

Consider these event-planning tips:

- Organize fellowship events in conjunction with the RI Convention to give fellowship members from all over the world the opportunity to meet in person.
- Appoint an officer or committee to coordinate each fellowship event and serve as the primary contact.
- Notify members about events — particularly international events — far enough in advance to ensure high participation.
- Ask the appropriate district Rotary Fellowships chairs to promote fellowship events in their districts. This can be an effective way to attract prospective members.



## RI CONVENTION

Rotary International provides fellowships with free exhibition booths and meeting space at the annual RI Convention on a space-available basis. Fellowships are encouraged to display materials that promote their group and inform convention goers about their activities. If you are planning an event that is open to all convention attendees, notify Rotary Service staff ahead of time and they will help you publicize the event prior to the convention.



### Reach Out to Rotaractors!

Rotaractors are young men and women ages 18 to 30 who organize in community- and university-based Rotaract clubs sponsored by local Rotary clubs. They meet every two weeks to enjoy fellowship, learn new skills, and provide service to their communities.

Fellowships that wish to benefit from the participation of enthusiastic, energetic young members should consider reaching out to Rotaractors by asking fellowship members to work with their district Rotaract chairs. Fellowships have a unique opportunity to involve Rotaractors in international activities and help them build relationships with Rotarians outside of their sponsor clubs. By inviting Rotaractors to join, fellowships can help them develop a lifelong connection to Rotary and simultaneously benefit from a new generation of participants.



# Support for Rotary Fellowships

The following groups of people are available to help promote and support fellowships and prospective fellowships.

## ROTARY FELLOWSHIPS OFFICERS

Officers of existing fellowships can provide a wealth of advice to organizers of new groups. Many fellowships have been in operation for decades, and their leaders are knowledgeable about the best ways to promote fellowships and resolve problems. Consult the Rotary Fellowships Officer Directory for contact information.

## DISTRICT ROTARY FELLOWSHIPS CHAIRS

District Rotary Fellowships chairs are appointed by district governors to facilitate communication between fellowships and the Rotary clubs within the district, and to promote participation in fellowships. These officers are encouraged to support fellowships in these ways:

- Visiting clubs and giving presentations on Rotary Fellowships. Invite fellowship members in the district to attend presentations and promote their groups.
- Publicizing fellowship events taking place in the district on the district website or in the district governor's newsletter.
- Conferring with chairs of the district membership development committee to bring new, internationally minded members into Rotary. Notify the chair of the public relations committee about interesting fellowship activities planned for the district.
- Distributing the Rotary Fellowships flier (available for download at [www.rotary.org/fellowships](http://www.rotary.org/fellowships)) to Rotarians in the district and encouraging them to contact groups that interest them.
- Asking the district governor for permission to exhibit or present information about the Rotary Fellowships program at the district conference.
- Seeking out Rotarians who are outstanding in their professions, enthusiastic about a hobby, or involved in service projects, and either directing them to corresponding fellowships or encouraging them to develop new ones.
- Encouraging Rotarians to emphasize fellowships in June, which is designated as Rotary Fellowships Month.

Rotarians may contact Rotary Service staff to obtain contact information for their district Rotary Fellowships chair.

## ROTARY COORDINATORS

Rotary coordinators are zone-level leaders, appointed by the RI president, who assist districts and clubs in promoting RI programs and implementing the RI Strategic Plan. Rotary coordinators work in partnership with the RI director for their zone, regional Rotary Foundation coordinator, and district governor.

## ROTARY FELLOWSHIPS COMMITTEE

The Rotary Fellowships Committee provides guidance and advice to the Board on all aspects of the Rotary Fellowships program, assists prospective fellowships with the application process, and makes recommendations to the Board concerning recognition of prospective fellowships. Consult the *Official Directory* or contact Rotary Service staff for committee contact information.

## ROTARY SERVICE DEPARTMENT STAFF

Rotary Service staff handle general inquiries about the Rotary Fellowships program and refer interested Rotarians to specific fellowships. In addition, staff members regularly contact fellowship officers with news about the program; offer advice on issues such as promotion, recruitment, and event planning; and help publicize Rotary Fellowships activities around the world. Fellowships are encouraged to submit stories and photographs of their activities to the staff for possible use on the RI website or in other Rotary media outlets. Stories with a timely or unique angle and photos that show members in action have the best chance of being featured.

Rotary Service staff also maintain a variety of resources on the RI website, including an electronic listing of Rotary Fellowships with hyperlinks to their websites, and an annually revised directory of Rotary Fellowships officers.

## CONTACT US

[rotaryfellowships@rotary.org](mailto:rotaryfellowships@rotary.org)

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