

Getting To Ask

Potential new Rotarians who are not known to club members

Historically Rotary has relied upon members introducing people well known to them as potential Rotarians. Clubs have evolved as new members have brought new ideas and vigor.

In recent years recruitment in that way has not kept pace and our total membership has fallen. In addition our membership has aged with the result that some clubs have little or no representation from their local business or professional communities.

In order to address this situation and to build a stronger future for Rotary, clubs have been encouraged, for a number of years, to be more pro-active in the search for new members and to be more open to approaches from those who may be interested in joining, but who may not be well known to existing members.

This greater openness has been reinforced by a greater emphasis on Public Relations, encouragement of outward facing web sites at Rotary International, District, and club level, a new membership recruitment toolkit (Ignite), and by specific membership marketing campaigns.

These are telling people that Rotary will welcome approaches from those who wish to learn more about Rotary and may wish to consider joining. Clubs are raising their own profile and openness through their own service activities. As a result more clubs are receiving approaches from people who are unknown to any current member. This is an outcome to be welcomed by Rotary Clubs - as a means of increasing membership, widening diversity and expanding commitment to the ideals of Rotary. A flexible, sensitive attitude will be required and common sense will need to be used when responding to approaches but the following guidance is intended to help.

First Approach

By definition, the first approach will be made by the person whose interest in Rotary has been sparked because they have become aware of something that Rotary has done. They may approach a Rotarian engaged in a local project, may have “goggled” Rotary and found something of interest, may have seen or heard an advertisement, or may just turn up at one of the Club’s local meetings.

A warm welcome should be extended and formality kept to a minimum so as not to deter prospective Rotarians. We should make their first experience of a Rotary meeting, service project, social or other Rotary event as welcoming as possible.

If they are to progress to membership they will need to feel welcome. We should remember that any organization needs the constant renewal that new members can bring. Thus we should be open in our response and bear the following in mind:

1. We need new members with energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas.
2. All Rotarians must be prepared to accept the values of Rotary including the Four Way Test.
3. A potential Rotarian must be an active person of good character and good business, professional and/or community reputation
4. The club needs a well-balanced membership
5. A current club member must sponsor an application for membership.

When the club and potential member are ready the normal club recruitment procedures may be followed.

First Meeting

A potential Rotarian deserves to be hosted by the club at his/her first meeting (service project, social, or other Rotary Event) with the courtesy and hospitality that the club would offer to any visitor. Whether a first-time visitor is charged for a meal is entirely a matter for the club. Even if it is an un-announced visit, someone must be ready to act as host, to use the meeting to say something about Rotary and to find out something about the visitor, probably including their professional and personal interests and motivation.

It is suggested at least one Rotarian is appointed for this duty in advance and in readiness for an un-announced visit. Any member of the club, however, should be ready to host a visitor courteously. In principle, no visitor should be excluded from attending a club on the grounds that confidential business will be discussed. Confidential business can be deferred & discussed at a meeting scheduled outside the normal club meeting times if necessary.

The focus at this first meeting must be on finding common ground and exploring the reasons why the visitor could become a Rotarian, not the reasons why they could not. A positive, welcoming and friendly approach should be adopted. The first meeting should close with an informal but nevertheless honest assessment, principally from the visitor, about whether it is worth proceeding. If it is, then they should be invited to attend further meetings. Whether charges are made for subsequent visits is entirely a matter for the club.

Mentoring – The Start

At this stage it may be appropriate for the club to appoint a host, possibly with similar interests or a near neighbor, of the potential Rotarian, to act as host at subsequent meetings, during which the host should be considering whether they are approaching the position where they may be prepared to sponsor the visitor for membership. That host should, of course, take every opportunity to introduce the visitor to all the other members of the club as well as broadening his/her awareness of Rotary in general and the club, and its program, in particular.

Similarly it would be expected that all the members of the club would make every effort to get to know the potential member. The obligations and benefits of membership must feature during these meetings bearing in mind that the potential member needs to understand fully the kind of organization that they are thinking of joining. This will be a two way process – the Rotarians getting to know their prospective colleague who, in turn needs to get to know them, the club and Rotary.

The objective of this developing relationship must be that the appointed host (or an alternate host if necessary) must take every opportunity, and do everything they can, to get to know the potential Rotarian as well as possible. However, it has to be recognized that the knowledge gathered will never be as comprehensive as it would have been if they had known the potential Rotarian professionally, or socially, for some time. The possibility that the potential member may be better suited to an alternative club should also be considered and, perhaps, an introduction arranged.

This relationship, if properly managed, should be the start of a lengthier process of mentoring a new Rotarian, by supporting their learning and development through at least their first year of active membership, and acquainting them with the wider aspects of Rotary - in the District and Rotary International.

Proposal for Membership

Once the hosting Rotarian is content and prepared to sponsor the visitor for membership, the recruitment procedure will follow normal practice.