

# What young professionals are looking for in Rotary

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Rotary members who attended the Young Professionals Summit 26-27 September.

*By Chris Davidson, Rotary Club of Newport News, Virginia*

I attended the first-ever Rotary Young Professionals Summit held in Chicago on 26-27 September, which gathered 30 Rotarians under the age of 40 to discuss how Rotary can better attract and engage young professionals.

The summit was a huge success and thoroughly captured the essence of what Millennials and members of Generation Y are looking for — mentorship, friendship, opportunities, and fun. One of my Rotary mentors, past RI Vice President Anne L. Matthews, who I had worked with on district membership projects, had encouraged me to apply.

Joining Rotary as a 32-year-old young professional was a life-changing event. I knew I wanted to develop my leadership skills and was looking for ways to meet influential members of my community. Once I was exposed to Rotary, I realized that the best way to develop relationships with successful people was to work alongside them in the service of others. One year after joining the Rotary Club of Newport News, I traveled to Zambia as part of a grant to build footbridges in remote “limited access” communities. Rotary offers so much to young people who have the desire to help others, make connections, and learn servant leadership in a world that desperately needs more of that.

The Young Professionals Summit took place in an unconventional meeting space in downtown Chicago, furnished with coffeehouse-style seating and optimized for creative thought. For two

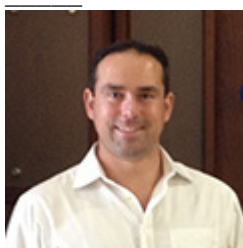
days, we engaged in a variety of brainstorming exercises, interactive games, and small group activities, concluding each with a facilitated discussion. Ideas were documented live on large white boards by a professional sketch artist.

Common themes that emerged included:

- Young professionals are not opposed to joining a club with older members, but they are seeking clubs with a broader range of members that reflect many different categories of diversity.
- Millennials and members of Generation Y want to do significant acts of service that make a real difference in the lives of others.
- Young professionals are appreciative of the business and mentorship opportunities they experience through Rotary. However, they do not feel these benefits, and others, are being marketed effectively to their generation.
- The younger crowd is looking for a fun, flexible experience with Rotary and prefers to avoid stuffy traditions, rituals, and internal politics.

Summit attendees came from all over the United States. My favorite part was definitely the new friendships I formed. I also got a sense that Rotary International intends to put our collective ideas into action. As one of my new friends, Adam Barth from North Carolina, said, “Rotary should be a verb, not a noun.” If these young professionals are any indication, I’d say the future looks very bright for Rotary!

Are you a young professional? Tell us your thoughts about Rotary in the comments section below. Interested in joining? [Find a club](#) near you.



**About the Author:** *Chris Davidson, 36, is a member of the Rotary Club of Newport News, Virginia, USA, and served as club president in 2012-13. He is currently membership chair for District 7600 (Virginia).*