

HANDBOOK

New beginnings

Starting a club takes a mix of inspiration and good planning

Tom Gump has thought a lot about what it takes to start a successful Rotary club. In a little over two years, Gump, governor of District 5950 (Minnesota) and a member of the Rotary Club of Edina/Morningside, has helped form four new cause-based Rotary clubs, including ones focused on serving veterans, ending human trafficking (see “Clubs Made to Order,” August 2020), and protecting the environment (turn to page 54 to read more).

It may seem like a daunting undertaking, but as Gump notes, “If you start a new club, you can ask: ‘How do you want to meet, where do you want to meet, and what do you want to focus on?’” By breaking the process down into steps, you can start a new club that has the strong sense of purpose and solid basis that will allow it to thrive.

— JOSEPH DERR

CHECKLIST

To apply for a new club, you’ll need:

- ▶ Club constitution
- ▶ Club bylaws
- ▶ New Rotary club application
- ▶ Club charter fee (\$15 per charter member)

Templates and forms are available on My Rotary.



Step 1 SET EXPECTATIONS

Chartering a club takes time — you can’t rush developing new relationships — as well as careful planning and dedication. Be prepared, but don’t be overwhelmed, says Gump. “If I can start the world’s first Rotary club for veterans in a state that doesn’t have a single active-duty military base, then you can form a club too.”

TIP: Look at what the clubs that are already in your community are working on, what the community needs that those clubs might not be addressing, and what potential members are missing from those clubs. Think about different times, locations, and formats for meetings.

Step 2 EXPLORE OPTIONS

Today’s Rotary is flexible. Do you want to start a Rotary, Rotaract, or satellite club? Will meetings be in person, online, or a combination? In addition to traditional and cause-based clubs, options include passport, corporate, and alumni-based clubs. “Whatever you do, make sure it is the members of the new club who make the decision, and not you,” says Gump. “After all, it is their club and not yours.”

Step 3 FIND MEMBERS AND SUPPORT

Reach out through traditional and social media and invite the community to informational meetings, keeping diversity and inclusion in mind. Look for new ways to find members, says Ramesh Hariharan, a member of the Rotary Club of Silicon Valley Passport and past governor of District 5170 (California), who helped form four clubs that brought in more than 300 members, almost all of them new to Rotary. “Rather than bringing potential new members to existing clubs and adding them incrementally, we brought potential new clubs to people, to their organizations,” Hariharan says.

TIP: Club and District Support staff at Rotary International are multilingual professionals who help guide the formation of hundreds of Rotary clubs every year. Find your CDS representative at my.rotary.org/cds.

Step 4 PLAN MEETINGS AND PROJECTS

At this stage, the club will define its name, vision, and values. Gump is convinced that cause-based clubs help attract volunteers, especially younger ones, to Rotary projects. “Many volunteers today want to have great impact in one area of service, such as ending human trafficking,” he says.

Step 5 CHOOSE CLUB LEADERS

Elect your club officers and work with RI staff to approve the club name. Sponsor clubs can play an important role in answering questions and providing guidance at this stage. Blessing Michael, a member of the Rotary Club of Port Harcourt North, Nigeria, who has helped form three new clubs, recommends getting two or three members from the sponsor club to become members of the new club whenever possible. “Clubs with all new members face challenges and need support,” says Michael.

RESOURCES

- ▶ Find links and resources, including the Starting a Rotary Club guide, on the Start a Club page: rotary.org/start-club.
- ▶ Complete the new Starting a Club training module on the Learning Center, rotary.org/learn.
- ▶ Read Tom Gump’s guide to starting cause-based clubs at bit.ly/3iGA0Yz.

Step 6 CHARTER, CELEBRATE, PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Have your district governor sign the new club application before submitting it to RI. Once it’s approved, your club is official. As you celebrate, be sure to share the excitement on social media. Draw up a strategic plan and maintain contact with your club’s support network to help it grow and thrive. “Nurturing the new club in its early period of growth is just as important as, if not more than, setting up the club,” says Yvonne Kumoji-Darko, governor of District 9102 (Benin, Ghana, Niger, and Togo) and a member of the Rotary Club of Accra-South, Ghana.

TIP: Form committees to share responsibilities such as creating a strategic plan, organizing projects, and planning club meetings.