Maintaining Member Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic

**March 29, 2020**

We are living in rapidly changing environment that needs bold imaginative and timely interventions. What may be right today may well be wrong or different tomorrow so we need to be agile, responsive and willing to change as our communities need us more than ever before.

Rotary International is Monitoring the impact of the coronavirus (CONVID-19) outbreak on events and operations and has issued the following guidance note. Click link below.

<https://www.rotary.org/en/rotary-monitors-coronavirus-outbreak>

In our efforts to maintain engagement during times when clubs have postponed or cancelled in-person meetings, projects or social events, we are sharing this guide with ideas and strategies for Club Leaders to consider. The following is an offering of support, not a requirement. Club Leaders are encouraged to consult with their boards to assess and determine which strategies will be useful on the local level.

None of these strategies is a replacement for timely, transparent and regular communication with your members about your plans to continue modified operations throughout this time. Be sure that all committees and leaders in your club are equipped with consistent messaging to minimize confusion to your members and to streamline communications about changes as they arise. Consider sending brief weekly updates to your members or provide a timeline for when decisions will be reviewed and modified if necessary.

**Stay safe and stay connected so Together we may flatten the curve.**

Karen DeMatteo

DG 7410

**Acknowledgment**: This page has been created in response to COVID 19 by Tony Sheard, Colin and Susan Macdonald with input from Richard Fox DG 7850, Karen DeMatteo DG 7410 and District 6690 Membership Chair Membership Chair Jenny Stotts on the basis of *Adopt Adapt Improve*.

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**Virtual Meetings with Zoom –**The “New Normal”

We are offering the Zoom Service to ALL clubs. The cost will be fully funded by the District and this service will be made available initially until June 30th, 2020. All clubs are strongly encouraged to take up this FREE offer. Of course you may use the Zoom FREE version or purchase your own Pro version if you prefer.

To become a Zoomer apply for your Host Account by sending an email to [rotarydistrict7410@gmail.com](mailto:rotarydistrict7410@gmail.com)  indicating that you would like to take advantage of this free offer - including:

* the club name,
* the key contact for the club,
* the email address for the account.

The key contact person (and email address) must be prepared to take responsibility for setting up and scheduling the club Zoom meetings and should be prepared to learn the little bit that is required to schedule and host the meetings.

Learn to Zoom…

**For the clubs that have accepted the free ZOOM Conferencing offer, here are some tutorials for you and to share with your club:**

[**How to join a meeting or how to host a meeting click here**](https://rotary6330.org/page/zoom-joining-a-meeting-as-easy-as-1-2-3./)

[**For more advanced training go here**](https://rotary6330.org/page/zoom-learning/)

Already a Zoomer? Here are some [**Tips & Tricks**](https://rotary6330.org/page/zoom-tips-tricks/) for better Video Meetings

**Tips for hosting a “Virtual Meeting”**

* Consider shortening the length of the virtual meeting to make it more feasible for members to “tune in.”
* Do keep your fellowship activities if they can easily migrate online (for example, “getting to know you” activities, interesting speakers, and happy bucks/dollars)
* Avoid taking up “video time” with elements of your meeting that would be better shared in writing such as basic announcements or upcoming dates to note – consider sending those in a follow up email once the virtual meeting concludes
* check out Rotary resources on virtual meetings
  + <https://www.rotary.org/en/how-take-your-club-online>
  + <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/learn-topic/online-club-meetings>

As well as using Zoom for Club and Committee Meetings, think differently.  Why not hold a **virtual coffee morning**meeting or a **virtual happy hour** meeting just for social interaction? – Just have a chat. Think you are at Starbucks or your local bar but you are connected from the comfort of your own home

**Less Interactive** – There are other tools that are still incredibly useful and may be the perfect fit, but don’t require that everyone log in at a specific time, which could be the perfect level of flexibility for your club. The suggestions below range from social media tools to project management and communication tools.

**Facebook Live** | <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/facebook-live-guide>  
**Instagram TV** | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaRxgAW9mUY>  
**Basecamp** | <https://basecamp.com/>  
**Slack** | <https://slack.com/>

**Share Ideas and Experiences**

Please share your experiences, ideas on how your club and community is coping with the situation on the District Facebook Page to help us ALL learn. Rotary District 7410

**District Wide Zoom Forum Wednesdays at 7 pm  
...**your opportunity to connect

Each Wednesday evening, we will be hosting a District wide forum to share experiences starting on Wednesday April 1st at 7 pm to 8 pm. Join us for the latest update so we may share ideas and experiences. Just click on this link on Monday evening  <https://zoom.us/j/533871734>

Time on your hands? Why not brush up on your Rotary knowledge and skills from the comfort and safety of your own home.

Check it out at <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference>

Of course, the BEST way to engage members is the same in-person or on-line! Get creative with ways to keep the spirit of service alive with your members!

**Engagement through Social Media Tools**

Social Media is a great tool for engaging members and the general community every day. Clubs can optimize and concentrate their social media channels as a resource to bolster engagement during the hiatus from in-person contact. Many of these strategies can be used once you return to business as usual, so this may prove to be a pilot for your club.

**Fellowship**  
Use social media prompts to mimic the fellowship your members enjoy during your meetings. Included among the resources are social media assets that you may use to start these online conversations. Here are few examples:

* What are you reading?
* Picture Contest: Sunrises
* Kindness is Contagious

**Social Media Takeovers**  
Allow various members to “take the reins” on your social channels and let them use pictures and stories to share how they’re dealing with the changes to daily living brought on by the pandemic. Here is a useful guide:  <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-takeovers/>

**Migrating Meeting Activities to Social Media**

* "Getting to know you" activities like Hot Seat or Member Profiles
* Happy Bucks or Happy Dollars online (sample social assets are included in resources)
* Asks members or “guest speakers” to record video presentations to promote through social channels. Have a member with an interesting hobby like beekeeping? Any business owners getting creative during the pandemic?  Have members who are passionate about particular service projects? Ask them to share a self-recorded video!
  + These can be recorded simply using a cell phone. Try to limit video recordings to 5-6 minutes maximum.
  + Remember to write engaging posts that encourage members and guests to interact with the content.
  + \*\*Facebook Live is a great tool for short presentations featuring your members with interesting hobbies, because the audience can ask questions in real-time that the presenter can answer on the spot.

**Engagement through Service (from Afar)**

**Community Needs Assessment**

Once you have connected your members turn your attention to how Rotary can help in your community.

- Consider carrying out an accelerated simple **community needs assessment** to see how Rotary can best respond. Our motto is *Service Above Self*. Reach out to your local Municipality, Social Services, Schools, Health organizations, Chamber of Commerce, BIA, etc. to see what help they need. Remember those businesses that have donated and sponsored Rotary in the past, how are they coping now? These are challenging times that need bold imaginative and caring responses over the coming months. [***Click here for guidance on carrying out a needs study.***](https://rotary6330.org/documents/en-ca/8f0f68e7-2651-4816-87d6-f868b4bfa272/1)

- Check-in with local organizations to see how they’re doing and if they need any assistance. - Be aware of community needs. When COVID-19 cases increase, local first responders and health care facilities will be strained and may be in need of support. Challenging times bring an increase in needs (not just for toilet paper), and we are great at serving community needs.

- Check-in on your neighbors, especially those in the at-risk populations (the elderly and the immunocompromised) and see how they’re doing. Help out when and where you can. Physical distance may be healthy at this time, but social isolation can be deadly as it contributes to depression and allows people in need to fall through the cracks. Be a good neighbor and a good friend.

- AND don't forget to take care of yourself and your families – pay attention to your physical and mental health. Ask for help if you need it. And even if, like me, you are one of those “it won’t happen to me” types, try to remember that your health and the public health are interrelated. While you may feel fine, you might just be carrying something harmful to others. If we stay connected and lend a hand where we can, the worst that will happen is that our communities will survive a trying global pandemic. The best that can happen is that this all passes us by and we grow stronger as Rotarians and as a community.

**Donate**  
As always, you can ask members to donate to The Rotary Foundation (hint: use the array of Rotary assets including videos to promote; all available on My Rotary). Other considerations include initiating “friendly competitions” with other clubs to see which can raise the most money for a particular focus area or fund to earn “bragging rights” (or maybe the “losing” club has to provide the manual labor for the winning club’s future project). Get creative and use this opportunity to bolster promotion of opportunities for Rotarians to give.

**Service ideas (If you have better different or better ideas please email us at** [rotarydistrict7410@gmail.com](mailto:rotarydistrict7410@gmail.com) **so we can add them to this list)**

* Colored Care Card Alert System – Householders display a Colored Card in their window or on their door to indicate GREEN ‘I am OK”, ORANGE “I need assistance” RED “I need urgent assistance”. To enable people to have a system other than online/social media of advising they need help. A simple solution to reach out to community members who may not have access to online social networking and where volunteers can take an active roll to check up on friends, and neighbors or people who do not have many community connections.
* A variation on "Pay it Forward": For example, Pay for a meal for home delivery from a local Restaurant for some one less fortunate or send a Rose or Bunch of Flowers to cheer someone up.
* Online Art Competition or Story Writing Competition.  The online contest will encourage children to use their imaginations and connect with each other through this challenging time and provide parents a focused activity to provide them with. Entries will be submitted to a generic email address and uploaded to a photo album to a website page, Facebook and posted to Instagram. A modest prize of say $50 - $100 weekly prize, in gift cards to local restaurants for takeout or local stores think may work best and also support struggling business in the community (half a cash card for the child, and half a gift card to a local restaurant so they could order take out etc.)
* Use your video conferencing creatively, think differently why not hold a **virtual coffee morning**meeting or a **virtual happy hour** meeting just for social interaction – Just have a chat. Think you are at your local diner or Starbucks or your local bar but you are connected in the comfort of your own home.
* Why not donate a one year subscription to Zoom to another non for profit organization to help them connect through this difficult time.
* Choose a local charity and ask all members to highlight it using their social channels. Choose a new charity each week! This is a great way to leverage the influence of Rotarian leaders to elevate causes that matter to your local community (and it might even sprout a future project collaboration!).
* Coordinate with local hospitals or nursing homes for members to send cards or letters to combat loneliness from isolation in facilities that have limited visitors.
* Ask members to make blankets for My Very Own Blanket or similar organizations
* Challenge members to look through their homes and sort items that can be donated to charity. Once it is safe to do so, hold a group donation day to a local charity thrift store (remember to take pictures!).
* Ask members to record themselves reading children’s books and post through your club’s social channels for parents to share with their children for “alt-tv time” during school closures.
* Start a gift card drive. Ask members to purchase gifts cards (bonus points if it’s a local small business) and then mail them along with a note from the Rotarian to organizations that would be able to put them to good us

**Creative Engagement Strategies**

**Chain Letters** – Start a good old-fashioned-chain letter to engage members. See resources below for a template of an easy example to distribute via email.

**Pen Pals** – Develop a relationship with another club near or far to start “Rotary Pen Pals.” See the sample invitation letter. This is a great way to strike up a relationship with someone you’ve met at an International Convention or a District Conference. Invite the partnering club to share mailing addresses for their members and then assign each one to a member of your own club to start exchanging letters.

**”Crash” an E-Club!** Or Passport Club Meeting – Share information about e-clubs with your members. Some e-clubs hold “virtual meetings” and some include online content. Anyone can peruse the websites of e-clubs and get inspired for other ways to maintain engagement without in-person meetings (they are the experts, after all!)

**Board Buddies** – Assign each of your board members (and possibly committee chairs) to 5-6 club members and ask them to maintain regular contact to foster engagement

**District Event Status**

**District Conference April 18th & May 2nd,**  
The 2020 Conference Team are working quickly to turn our conference experience into a virtual one.

Stay tuned for more details soon.

**PETS Presidents Elect Training Seminar:**

The training is been moved to online so please check the website or contact DGE Joe Loughman at

[jrotary@frontier.com](mailto:jrotary@frontier.com) <https://petsmidnortheast.org/>. Training will consist of sessions on the learning center at Rotary.org and live online sessions beginning April 15th.

**Rotary Youth Exchange Program,**

The District 7410 Youth Exchange committee working closely with ESSEX, the YEO's and the students (and their parents) to offer them the best advice available as the situation unfolds.  Based on current information and government advisories regarding travel, we feel that it is safer for students to stay in place in their host countries (travel appears to be much riskier than not travelling).  However, if parents want their child to return home, we are working with them to make it happen.  Additionally, some countries/districts have decided to end exchanges early this year due to local circumstances which is also resulting in some students being returning home early.

**Membership Promotion –**

The current promotion to GROW Rotary will continue through April with a possible

extension to the end of May. Invite folks to your Zoom meetings!

**RYLA 2020 June 28th to July 2nd –** Currently still scheduled and accepting applications

**Rotary International Convention in Honolulu, Hawaii -** **Cancelled**

A message from President, Rotary International, 2019-2020 Mark Daniel Maloney regarding the decision [**can be viewed here**](https://rotary6330.org/documents/en-ca/ab676351-dc74-4b98-9663-7079a8d5813f/1)**.**

**Government Guidance**

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

Please stay in touch with your members, family and friends using all safety precautions and protocols. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to me at [karenandrotary@gmail.com](mailto:karenandrotary@gmail.com). Let’s stay connected and stay well.

DG Karen DeMatteo