

# Increasing Member Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic



A Guide for Rotary District 6690

*Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, we released a guide on **Maintaining Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic** to support Rotary clubs as they made the pivot to alter operations during early shelter-in-place orders and lockdowns. As practices continue to evolve and change across the district, Rotary clubs continue to adapt and respond. One thing we've learned is that Rotary operations might look a little different for quite some time, perhaps indefinitely. This guide contains tips and resources for increasing engagement during the changing dynamics of the pandemic. We have developed 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 committee and office 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.*

*Have a great strategy that's working for you? Send details to District Membership Chair Jenny Stotts so it may be added to this guide and shared with others.*

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## Managing Meetings

*Depending on local rules and regulations as well as individualized club discussions, clubs are holding meetings in a variety of formats. Below, please find some tips and suggestions to maximize the impact of your meetings to create engaging and dynamic experiences for your members, along with resources to maintain safety. [Be sure to check out this document from the District 6690 Governor Line regarding meetings and activities.](#)*

**Continued Virtual Meetings** - By now, many clubs are "zoom competent" but some may be looking for ideas to mix it up. Below is a collection of ideas and strategies to consider to create more dynamic virtual meeting experiences.

- Working Meetings - Consider adding occasional "working meetings" to your schedule. In these meetings, you would forgo the traditional speaker and, instead, ask your members to work on planning a project, setting strategic goals for the club, an initiative or otherwise working on solutions for a community problem. You may also consider using the breakout room feature and ask your club committee chairs to hold 20-25 minutes forums in various breakout rooms for members to get involved with committee work and share ideas.
- Rotary "Celebrities" - The world is at your fingertips! Many Rotary influencers are more than willing to join club meetings to share their expertise and experiences. Check out the [Rotary Voices Blog](#), the [Rotary Connecting the](#)

[World](#) Facebook Group and the [Rotary Vimeo Channel](#) for ideas and don't be shy - reach out and make the request!

- Watch Party - Browse Rotary's [Vimeo](#) and [YouTube](#) Channels for inspiring or thought-provoking videos, such as videos from past International Conventions or Assemblies, and consider screening them during your virtual meeting. Most videos are less than 15 minutes and might inspire interesting and important conversations.
- Joint Meetings - Connect with another Rotary club in your area or around the district or even across the world and host a joint meeting. You might even find a club that meets at the same time as you. Work with the club leader to plan the agenda and share your club traditions with one another. [Check out this sample co-meeting plan](#).

**In-Person Meetings** - Some club leaders have elected to resume in person meetings. Be sure to check with local regulations and public health guidelines prior to holding an in person gathering. If you have members who are not attending in-person meetings, be sure to follow up and ask why. It may be that the member is not comfortable with an in-person gathering. In that case, make sure you take steps to include them. Check out the next section on "hybrid meetings" for links to sample protocols for clubs to consider or adapt to meet their needs. These are sample frameworks and do not supersede local, state or federal laws, guidance or restrictions.

**Hybrid Meetings** - Many clubs have started to offer an in-person experience for members which also includes a virtual opportunity for those who can't participate face to face. If your in-person meeting is compliant with local regulations and public health guidelines, this can be a great way to offer many avenues for member participation. Below are some considerations and ideas to get the most out of hybrid meetings:

- Be sure that virtual participants are wholly included in the discussion. A large screen with multiple web cameras and microphone/speaker systems arranged throughout the space is ideal. Ask in-person participants to speak loudly and work hard to make sure that the speaker's back is not to the webcam. Below are some resources to assist in managing the technical aspects of the meeting:
  - [District 6690 Governor Line's Guidance on Meetings](#)
  - [Upper Arlington Rotary's Guide on Hybrid Meeting Management](#)
  - [Club Innovation Article on Hybrid Meetings](#)
- Consider the venue and be sure that you can maintain sanitary conditions along with appropriate distancing. Consider an outdoor location if possible.
- Be mindful of safety and public health implications. Rotarians are leaders and your community looks to you to set an example.
- Your board or club leaders should determine a protocol in accordance with local, state or federal law for meeting participation and communicate it clearly to members. This will help to avoid uncomfortable situations and help answer questions down the road. [Here is a sample protocol that you may consider](#).

**Meeting Absences** - These are stressful times and members have varying levels of risk factors and general comfort levels with many aspects of Rotary. For some, they may not feel safe attending an in-person meeting, others may feel very uncomfortable during virtual meetings. It is important to avoid assuming why someone is not attending and be sincere about opening a working dialogue with the member. Please check out this [District 6690 Guide](#) on engaging with members who have disconnected during the pandemic for practical tips and strategies to reconnect in a variety of situations and scenarios.

## Engaging Through Service

*When Rotary members are asked why they joined or why they've stayed, they tend to credit service as the primary motivator for their continued involvement. While the types of projects we can complete have certainly changed in recent months, it doesn't mean that we can't continue to engage our members through services.*

Leverage the Expertise of the Group - Ask your members to think about what types of service projects could be implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lead these conversations with care and challenge members not to jump to conclusions about the barriers to various ideas, but rather to focus on solutions about how to conduct projects safely and responsibly.

Modify Existing Projects - Consider hosting a working meeting and ask members to look forward to the coming year of service projects you would typically hold. Ask members to work in groups to brainstorm solutions for modifying those projects to be safely accomplished during the pandemic. Connect with your long-term community partners and ask them how your club can support their efforts.

Projects Ideas - Not sure where to get started with a project during the pandemic? Check out these ready-to-go project ideas complete with instructions to adapt to your own local community. Also, remember to check out the service ideas included in the [original engagement guide](#) from District 6690.

- [Rotary Responds \(with kindness\) Postcard Project](#)
- [Pop Up Pantry Project](#)
- [Community Conversations Project](#)
- [Essential Kit Project](#)
- [Virtual Blanket Making Party](#)
- [Digital Storytime](#)
- [Healthcare Worker Appreciation Event](#)

## Engaging Through Fellowship

*If service is the #1 reason members join and stay in Rotary, fellowship is a close second! Just because we can't meet for drinks at the local pub, doesn't mean we can't still build friendships through Rotary!*

Virtual Happy Hours - By now, we've all probably attended a virtual happy hour. Sometimes they go really well, sometimes they feel like work. Here are a few tips for hosting a successful virtual happy hour:

- Have a plan! Designate a "host" for the evening and consider a loose, behind-the-scenes agenda to keep the event rolling. Start interesting conversations with ice breakers like "tell us your favorite story about your first pet" or "share a celebrity encounter."
- Add a theme! If you have a monthly virtual happy hour, consider a new theme each month. Ideas include:
  - Fancy Pants Party
  - Groovy Gathering
  - Roaring Twenties
  - Sports Night
  - Favorite Musicians
- Mix it up with fun activities such as Mad Libs, Virtual Casino Games or a Pet Show

Socially Distanced Gatherings - While traditional gatherings might not be safe, your club might consider a socially distanced alternative, such as a hike, a paddle board gathering or even a "bring-your-own" picnic. Be sure to maintain a safe distance and mask up.