

Reimagining Rotary

It's been a challenging year, but Rotary has proven again that we can adapt and thrive in the face of change. The lessons we learned this year will shape our organization for years to come.

— Rotary International General Secretary John Hewko

When the Rotary year started on 1 July 2020, we were nearly four months into a pandemic. We were not immune to the fear, uncertainty, and loss experienced by millions around the globe. During this challenging time, our members rallied behind a shared purpose to connect and serve. In-person meetings turned into virtual gatherings, and service projects began to include sewing masks and donating personal protective equipment to first responders.

Through it all, the RI staff has continued to support members and operations and find new ways for Rotary to thrive, while still delivering on the promise of our four Action Plan priorities. Rotary added a new area of focus — the environment. We awarded our first multimillion-dollar grant and achieved a major milestone in ending polio. We developed learning opportunities to keep members engaged and introduced technology that enhanced the membership experience.

Although this was indeed a challenging year, as people of action, we knew that the world needed Rotary to step up like never before. And we did.



Like the people and communities that we serve, our members need to know that they are seen, heard, and valued. This year, we focused on enhancing the experiences of our members and participants by providing meaningful, engaging opportunities that furthered their personal and professional goals.

The state of membership

During 2020-21, membership remained relatively steady with more than 1.4 million Rotarians and Rotaractors in more than 48,000 clubs. As existing clubs continue to attract new members and engage current members, hundreds of new and different types of clubs have also been formed. These new clubs are helping to expand Rotary's reach and attract new and more diverse participants.

Diversity makes us stronger

Our capacity for doing good is amplified when those who take action with us reflect our communities' diversity in experience, culture, and perspectives. Diversity has long been one of our core values and a guiding force for how we interact with each other and our communities. But we recognize that we still have opportunities to learn and grow.

This year, we continued to put a strong action plan behind our [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) statement](#). Rotary leaders convened a [DEI task force](#) composed of Rotary members and participants with professional backgrounds in this work to ensure that DEI is further ingrained in Rotary's culture. Our first step was to assess how diversity, equity, and inclusion are perceived and experienced by Rotary members around the world, so we conducted the organization's first DEI survey to hear directly from our members about their experiences. The survey results will help us develop an actionable plan that leads to change and strengthens Rotary for the future.



Facing the challenges of COVID-19, Rotary clubs and partner organizations are finding new ways to support access to education. [Read more](#)

Learning from home

During the times when many of our members were heeding the advice of local and global public health experts by staying at home to limit the spread of COVID-19, they turned to [Rotary's Learning Center](#) to enhance their skills and learn new ones. In fact, members completed more than 144,000 courses this year, including newly created courses about Rotary's public image and diversity.

Through our alliance with Toastmasters International, we also introduced an eight-course leadership and communication series that encourages people to practice their skills with others. To date, we've had over 15,000 registrations for these courses.

The Learning Center now offers interactive courses to our youngest participants, too. Service-learning is a proven method for empowering young people to address the causes of community problems and hone their leadership skills. Developed in partnership with the [National Youth Leadership Council](#), our new service-learning courses are designed to teach young people to spark and create lasting change, building a path for a lifetime of service.

Beyond the club experience

We added five new Rotary Fellowships this year, bringing our total to more than 90. Through Rotary fellowships, members can refine their craft, participate in shared hobbies, and build professional skills outside their clubs.

The addition of two new Rotary Action Groups — the Rotary Action Group for Menstrual Health and Hygiene and the Rotary Action Group for Refugees, Forced Displacement, and Migration — means that members now have 27 action groups that they can join to help clubs and districts design and implement service projects.

Rotarians and Rotaractors connect

RI President Holger Knaack hosted three virtual presidential conferences to highlight and encourage collaboration between Rotarians and Rotaractors. These events were organized by the Rotaract Brazil MDIO, District 9141 (Nigeria), and Ascension Rotaract Network MDIO (USA). Rotaractors were heavily involved in planning and organizing these events, which drew more than 4,400 registrants from around the world.



As people of action, our members are problem-solvers, even in the face of a pandemic. The Secretariat helped clubs increase their impact by providing programs, resources, and opportunities to make a meaningful difference in communities near and far.

African region certified wild polio-free

We received excellent news early in the Rotary year when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the African region free of wild poliovirus. Five of the WHO's six regions, representing more than 90% of the world's population, are now free of wild polio. This is a huge step toward global polio eradication.



By building on a proven concept – such as efforts to stamp out malaria in Zambia – Rotary's new multimillion-dollar Programs of Scale grants help make good better. [Read more](#)

A Rotary first

The Rotary Foundation awarded its first multimillion-dollar [Programs of Scale grant](#) to Partners for a Malaria-Free Zambia, a member-led

program that will use proven methods to respond to cases of malaria and prevent transmission. The annual \$2 million Programs of Scale award builds on Rotary members' efforts and expertise, expanding well-developed, evidence-based programs in our areas of focus to help more communities.

Protecting the environment

Through our newest area of focus — the environment — Rotary members can support activities that strengthen the conservation and protection of natural resources, advance ecological sustainability, and foster harmony between communities and the environment.

Our members and program participants have been protecting the environment for years — [saving pollinating monarch butterflies](#) from extinction, [helping herders earn income](#) while protecting grasslands, [raising awareness about the effects of plastic](#) on the environment, and more. Starting in the new Rotary year, members can apply for grants specifically for projects that protect the environment.

As Rotary's work in this area grows, groups like the [Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group](#) will play an important role in providing resources and support.

The growth of grants

As requests for district grant funding remained stable compared to recent years, demand for global grants continued to grow significantly: As of 1 May, The Rotary Foundation awarded 1,683 global grants, exceeding last year's total of 1,359. To better support this growth, The Rotary Foundation Trustees recently approved [policy changes](#), effective 1 July, that will better balance financial resources with program demands and allow more clubs to participate in grants.

- 848,382

Number of district grants approved (\$31 million in total funding)

- 81,868,883

Number of global grants approved (\$47 million from the World Fund, \$120 million in total funding)

- 8,288

Number of disaster response grants approved (\$688,000 in total funding)

A year of giving

We set a goal to raise \$410 million for The Rotary Foundation — an ambitious aim for any organization, particularly during a global health crisis. But donations to the Foundation remained strong this year. Donors contributed more than \$920,000 for World Polio Day — the most ever raised online for this annual event. And after the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's 2-to-1 match, more than \$2.7 million was donated to PolioPlus. In December, contributions for Giving Tuesday increased 17% from last year, and we raised more than \$783,000, surpassing our goal and breaking all previous Giving Tuesday records.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we are on track to meet our fundraising goal this year.



COVID-19 increased our use of technology to host club meetings, hold fundraisers, and manage service projects. Things changed and Rotary adapted to find new ways to connect and serve.

Rotary responds

Rotary and Rotaract clubs responded to the pandemic by helping their communities with what they needed the most. Rotarians in Italy, Spain, and Sweden [helped isolated elders](#) with their shopping and called them regularly to combat their loneliness. Rotaractors in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, helped prevent a second wave of COVID-19 infections by [distributing cleaning supplies](#) and health information at nearby public health care centers.

Rotary members used our decades of experience fighting polio to support local COVID-19 vaccination efforts. Throughout the [United Kingdom](#), Rotarians volunteered at vaccination clinics. More than 12,000 Rotarians in [North Carolina](#) (U.S.) coordinated with local health authorities to support vaccination clinics by performing data entry, helping manage crowds, and checking residents in for their appointments. And in [Sri Lanka](#), clubs partnered with the WHO and Ministry of Health to develop educational materials that encourage vaccination.

An established infrastructure adapts for a new virus

The infrastructure that Rotary and our partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) built to fight polio persisted, even as the COVID-19 pandemic forced polio vaccinations to pause for a short time.



Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Interactors in Sri Lanka worked together in a nationwide project that promoted behavior change and initiated safety standards for business. [Read more](#)

In Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan, emergency operations centers used to fight polio were repurposed to serve as coordination centers for the COVID-19 response. The logistics, networks, and systems that are needed to store, transport, and distribute vaccines are now helping fight COVID-19 in places like India, where mass immunization campaigns also provide a variety of other health screenings and treatments.

Polio immunization activities resumed in Afghanistan and Pakistan in mid-2020. Vaccinators took precautions, such as wearing masks and washing their hands often, to keep families and themselves safe while reaching millions of children.

The new normal

For many of us, milestone events, celebrations, and holidays took place online this year. For Rotary, this included our training events — including the International Assembly and the new Regional Leaders Global Institute. We prepared hundreds of hours of instruction and discussions for leaders in 80 countries across 24 time zones to prepare them for their new roles. And to help clubs and districts host their training events virtually, RI staff created Learning Center courses and resources.

It became clear in early 2021 that this year's Rotary International Convention would need to be held virtually instead of in Taipei, as originally planned. We instead created a virtual convention that connects, informs, and entertains members — especially those who couldn't have traveled to Taipei.

Each day of the virtual convention focused on aspects of the 2020-21 presidential theme, Rotary Opens Opportunities. With three preconventions, three general sessions, 20 live breakout sessions, hundreds of displays in the virtual House of Friendship, and a wide variety of other activities, there was plenty to be excited about.

A new way to fundraise

[Raise for Rotary](#) is our new digital fundraising tool that empowers Rotary members to create a fundraiser for a birthday, anniversary, or an event like World Polio Day and share it with their friends and family online. This type of peer-to-peer fundraising allows Rotary members to expand their reach through email and social media.

Since Raise for Rotary launched in August, it's been used to raise more than \$360,800. It's currently available in English and accepts

only donations in U.S. dollars, but we plan to add more currencies soon.

Virtual exchanges

Although in-person Rotary Youth Exchanges were suspended, we continued to offer intercultural experiences safely by hosting virtual exchanges. The [Rotary Youth Exchange 2019-20 Annual Report](#) shows the strength and impact of this program and how it adapted.



Positive change starts by welcoming the talents and ideas of others. We accomplish more when we draw on our collective strengths and forge partnerships with others who share our passion for fellowship and service.

Strengthening our global brand

In 2020, after nearly 110 years, The Rotarian magazine, which serves English-speaking Rotary members primarily in North America, changed its name to Rotary. The new name is more inclusive of parts of the Rotary community like Rotaractors, program participants, and alumni. It also supports our strategic goal of increasing awareness of Rotary and aligns the magazine with our more than 30 regional magazines.

Rotary magazine also completely updated its look and content to bring readers more stories that will increase Rotary's impact, expand our reach, and increase engagement.



After many failed attempts, Rotary clubs in the Philippines deliver toilets, hygiene education to remote villages. The project also paid

local teach a small stipend to lead workshops on safe hygiene education and encouraged behavior change. [Read more](#)

Expanding networks outside of Rotary

Through our alliance with Toastmasters International, members have even more opportunities to build new skills and expand their networks. A [Rotarian](#) from Ghana helped start a Rotary club that includes Toastmasters members and a Toastmasters club that includes Rotarians. In the Philippines, the Pilipinas Rotaract MDIO worked with its local Toastmasters district to develop a virtual [Speechcraft](#) program in which Rotaractors took the communication courses in the Learning Center that were developed by Toastmasters and then practiced their skills by giving speeches to Toastmasters. Toastmasters members offered advice, encouragement, and support.

Collaborations such as these introduce more people to Rotary, strengthen community ties, and expand our reach in new ways. In fact, we've received more than 530 inquiries from Toastmasters who are interested in joining a Rotary club.

Partnerships and alliances can be established locally as well. In Guatemala, local and U.S. clubs worked with Engineers Without Borders to [build pedestrian bridges](#) that have helped people get to health clinics, schools, and markets during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was such a success that Rotarian civil engineers developed a "Rotary roadmap" for city planners in 12 countries to use to replicate the project in their communities.

Connecting on social media

As many of us stayed home to stop the spread of COVID-19, members turned to Rotary's social media for information and engagement. Our social media channels grew to reach an estimated audience of 2.5 million this year — a 4% increase from last year.

A great deal has changed this year, but we adapted, just like our members did. And though we also faced challenges, I am pleased with what we were able to achieve. No matter what, supporting you — our members — continues to be the Secretariat's top priority. I look forward to seeing what the new Rotary year brings.