

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLUB CULTURE

This *Creating an inclusive club culture* textbook is partly extracted from RI online Learning Center course. Please visit the Rotary Learning Center for further information needed on the Rotary website: [Rotary.org](https://www.rotary.org)

Translating Committee
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Creating an inclusive club culture

Course Description

Each of us has something unique to contribute, and we should all have the opportunity to do so. Creating a club culture that is welcoming to everyone starts with having conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Discussing these topics takes time and isn't always easy. This course will help your club hold these discussions, assess its policies and practices, and make changes to create a more inclusive culture.

Note: Rotary International recognizes that our members belong to diverse cultures with diverse values and norms. We value cultural differences and believe inequities are a universal problem that manifest differently by region. This course is intended to challenge you to think critically about your club's norms and practices and how your club can be more inclusive.

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Hold conversations with your club

As members of an organization that embraces The Four-Way Test, we want to act in a way that is fair to everyone. And we know that creating an inclusive club culture is the fair thing to do. Talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) with your fellow club members is an important first step.

Remember that people will react differently to this conversation. For groups that have not historically experienced barriers to membership or leadership opportunities, discussing their real or perceived advantages can be uncomfortable. For people who have not had the same opportunities to become a Rotary member or leader, it can be important and empowering to voice their perspectives. And people of any background may experience a mix of emotions. Some will be energized by this discussion, while others may struggle to understand why it matters.

As you work through various topics, your fellow members will learn and grow, with the understanding that behavior that is exclusionary will not be tolerated.



Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not political issues. Every member has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to have equal opportunities for friendship and service, and to be given the same platforms for their voices to be heard.

Tips for talking about DEI

To make progress toward a common understanding, be prepared to have many discussions and don't shy away from talking about difficult topics like race, religion, or gender. Empower members to speak respectfully but openly, honor each person's experiences, and remember that you all share a goal.

Select each card below to learn more important tips. Use the ones that work best in your culture or the cultures represented in your club.



Designate a DEI champion rather than leaving it to club officers to lead the effort. An informed and enthusiastic member or an expert can present the content well and help members navigate difficult conversations.



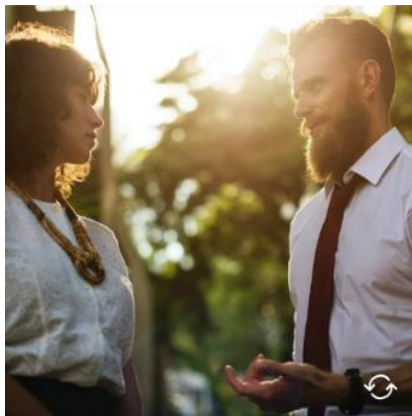
Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Discomfort often accompanies growth. If the conversation is uncomfortable, that may mean that you're learning.



Find the fun. Include activities and questions that will make learning about each other and the community fun. You might even make new friends!



Practice. As with anything else, we get better at inclusion if we practice it. Think about words you can use to speak up, or act as an ally for someone who might need one.



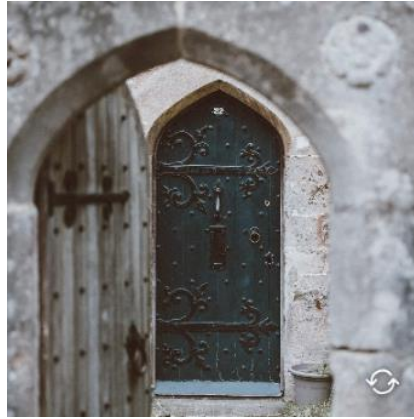
When you make a mistake, apologize and move on. Accept that we will all make mistakes as we learn. Be gentle with others, and encourage everyone to try.



Support each other. Foster a culture that is supportive of everyone, no matter how much or how little experience they have with these topics. Hold each other accountable, but encourage each other, too.



Set intentions and ground rules for your DEI discussions. For example, treating everyone with respect and care.



Use metaphors. Sometimes it's easier to talk about certain topics by using metaphors to remove any context that might evoke biases. For example, we might say that to welcome everyone into a room, we wouldn't just crack the door open but open it all the way.



Celebrate progress. Change can be hard. It can also bring joy or relief. Be sure to acknowledge new practices and other accomplishments.

Using a shared vocabulary

The language we use matters, whether it's in formal or informal conversation, or in written materials, like club bylaws or a membership application. Before your club can have meaningful conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion, take time as a group to review definitions of the words you'll use and see often, to make sure everyone understands them the same way. Their meanings may seem obvious, but misinterpretations can prevent conversations from being productive.

Select the plus signs (+) to learn how Rotary defines these terms.

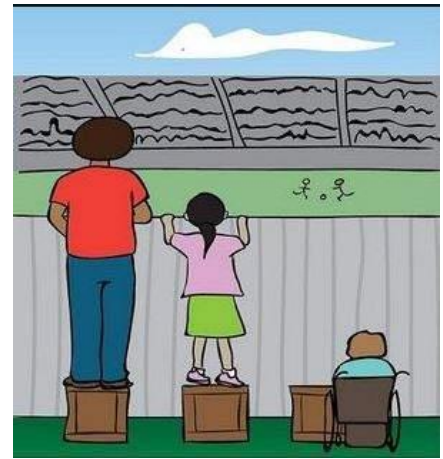


Diversity

Diversity refers to differences among people's backgrounds, experiences, and identities. It may be based on their culture, religion, ethnicity, race, color, age, abilities, learning style, socioeconomic status, marital status, languages spoken, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, as well as their ideas, thoughts, values, and beliefs.

Equality

Equality means that two or more things, people, or groups are the same or have the same worth, or that they are treated the same way. Treating people equally is right in some but not all situations. For example, giving everyone the same medicine for different illnesses, or offering the same assistance despite differences in people's needs, may not be fair for all concerned.



Equity

Equity means providing differing resources, opportunities, and levels of support, according to people's needs or circumstances. An equitable approach gives people what they need in order to have the same possibilities that everyone else has.

Inclusion

Inclusion makes everyone feel comfortable being themselves. No one has to hide part of their identity in an inclusive environment.



Tokenism

Tokenism is the practice of including one person or a few people from underrepresented groups (for example, by inviting them to join a Rotary club), mainly to appear inclusive or prevent criticism. People who are included in this way are known as tokens and are often expected to represent the perspective of their entire community.

Marginalized groups

Marginalized groups are those that experience social exclusion or discrimination because of unequal power relationships. Those who have historically experienced barriers to opportunities or whose rights have not been recognized, such as members of ethnic or racial minorities, women, older people, and people with disabilities, belong to marginalized groups.



Take action

You're a member of an organization that values fairness to all and is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ensuring that your club acts on these values and gives everyone an opportunity to serve and to lead is the right thing to do. It will build a culture of inclusion. And inclusion of people from marginalized groups will help your club create lasting change.

Here are some ways your club can initiate meaningful conversations that lead to a culture of inclusion.

- 1 Dedicate a series of meetings to discussing key DEI topics.
- 2 Tell members that misunderstandings are common, and agree to minimize them by using terms as defined in your discussions.
- 3 Consider appointing a committee to establish processes to make your club more welcoming and diverse.

Identify what shapes your perspective

As your club discusses matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion, it's important to keep in mind that your club is made up of individuals with unique social identities. Understanding these social identities helps us recognize what shapes our perspectives. We all come from different places, have had different experiences, are positioned differently in society, and have various identities. We were born with or into some of these identities, and some are ascribed to us by others. Our identities can be visible or invisible, can be associated with a majority status or a marginalized status, and can be ones that we embrace or have difficulties with. These identities make us unique in our experiences and influence our beliefs and how we see the world.

Because we understand things from our own perspective, we're all biased. We're often unaware of our own biases, which is why it's called unconscious bias. But drawing on our collective perspectives will make us more effective as a group.

Select the plus signs (+) below to learn how different identities shape our perspective.



Ethnicity

Our ethnicity is linked to our cultural identity and our expression of it. It might influence our beliefs, the holidays we celebrate, and our customs.

Sexual orientation

Our sexual orientation is whether we are attracted to a different gender, the same gender, or no gender at all.

Social class

Social class shapes the opportunities we have, how we're perceived by others, and our lifestyle.

Religion

Religion refers to an organized system of beliefs, observances, rituals, and rules used to worship a god or gods.

Race

Race is a socially and politically constructed category based on physical characteristics, ancestry, historical affiliation, or shared culture.

Age

Our perspective is shaped by the time period of our upbringing, the events and personal circumstances we've lived through, and what we have learned throughout our lives.

Ability status

Our ability status shapes what we can and can't do in our daily lives and more broadly. Someone with a disability encounters obstacles that able-bodied people do not. Experiencing hardships and overcoming obstacles can also affect our viewpoints.

Tenure

Having tenure in Rotary or our professions can inspire a sense of confidence or ambition in taking on challenges.

Gender

What gender we identify with, how we express it, and whether we choose to conform to a gender at all may affect how we are treated by others and how we think and feel about various situations or issues.

Profession

Our professions affect how we approach issues, our areas of expertise, and possibly what behavior we consider appropriate.

Military or veteran status

Military members and veterans have received rigorous training, have been in difficult or dangerous situations, and have often experienced violence, all of which can influence our perspective.

Personal trauma history

Whether or not we have experienced any personal trauma, and the nature of that trauma, will affect our perspective. A person who has experienced trauma might feel uncomfortable or less confident in certain situations or around certain people.

Take a few minutes to think about your various identities. Make a list and reflect on how those identities have shaped your perspective.

Take action

Understanding our identities better helps us see where our biases come from. Here are a couple of ways your club's members can determine what has shaped their perspectives:

Assess your club's culture



Your club's culture is complex. Each member's behavior and actions contribute to it, and it will take time and effort to create a culture of inclusion. Look at various facets of your club to help you find opportunities to make it more inclusive.

Select each tab below to see aspects of your club that you could make more inclusive.

Regular meetings

- Does your meeting include prayers, invocations, or pledges? These can make some members and guests feel uncomfortable or excluded.
- What are your criteria for choosing guest speakers? Who do they appeal to? Who's choosing them? Whose perspectives are not asked for? Invite members to speak about their experiences. It demonstrates that the club values each member's unique perspective.
- Who participates in your meetings, and who is quiet?
- Who in the community might find your meeting time, format, or location a barrier to participating? Is the building you meet in accessible to those with disabilities? Does the



meeting time exclude many? If you meet virtually, do you offer captions for members and guests who have hearing impairments?

- Are your club dues too expensive for many potential members? Cost is the most common reason members leave Rotary. How could you make membership in your club more affordable? Could you consider a sliding scale or offer exceptions in certain cases?
- Are your meetings welcoming to families or convenient for members who have small children?
- Do you celebrate members' personal achievements?
- Would your social activities be uncomfortable for some, such as single people or those who don't drink alcohol?

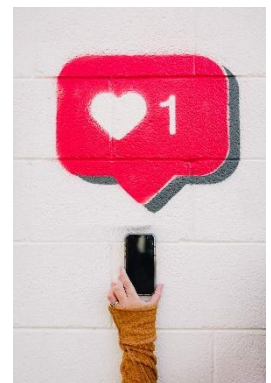
Service projects

- Do you invite members of the community to participate in service projects and propose ideas to them?
- Do your club's service projects address pressing needs in your community? Or are they projects that make members feel good more than they help others?
- Who benefits from your club's projects? Are there others in the community who could benefit more?
- Who chooses your club's projects? Do all members have an equal say? Do members feel empowered to express differences in opinions?
- Are your club's projects ones that members with disabilities could participate in?
- Do you partner with other organizations to expand your reach?



Social media

- Do your club's social media posts include all of your members?
- Do they show members who represent diverse groups in the community?
- Do your posts invite others to participate?
- Does your club tokenize certain members in its social media posts?



Policies

- Does your club consider prospective members from underrepresented groups for membership? Look at who your club invites and who hasn't been invited.
- What criteria are considered in club membership decisions? Do they exclude any underrepresented groups? Are they documented in your bylaws? Are there also unwritten criteria?
- What are your club dues, meeting details, and other expectations of members, and who do they potentially exclude?



- Does your membership application ask about religion or holidays celebrated?
- Who benefits from your club bylaws, and who is left out? Whose perspective is missing?

Document the unwritten rules

Sometimes exclusive practices are written into policies, whether or not they are intended to exclude anyone. Other exclusionary practices are intentionally left out. Review your club's constitution and bylaws, membership application, succession plan, and other procedures, and look for anything that is not inclusive. There may be some rules that are understood but not officially documented. Look especially closely at those and evaluate whether they are fair or biased. This is your opportunity to revise any rules and update your policies to make them more inclusive.

The bylaws below were adapted from a number of Rotary clubs around the world. Select the plus signs (+) for tips on making your club's bylaws more inclusive.

Article 1 – Fees

- (a) The entrance fee is set at \$ [REDACTED] and the applicant can only join upon paying. In addition, the member must pay the social fee of \$ [REDACTED] per year.

Article 2 – Method of member election

- (a) Those who wish to join this club must be recommended by two Rotarians, one of whom must have a friendship with the candidate for at least two years to ensure they are a good fit.
- (b) The Committee will consider all recommended candidates recommended by its members, and investigate their eligibility.

Article 3 – Meetings

- (a) Method of meeting. Attendance may be in person, by phone, online, or through an online interactive activity.
- (b) Attendance. Active members must attend statutory meetings of the club in accordance with the rules of Rotary International.
- (c) Cancellation. The board may cancel a regular meeting for these reasons:
- A holiday or during a week that includes a holiday

Article 4 – Officer elections

- (a) The president elected by this club is the nominee of the president and he shall serve as the director for the year immediately after the election on July 1st.

1 Fees

Your club sets its own dues and fees. If they're too high, they can make membership unaffordable for some who might serve your club and Rotary well. Consider whether the amount club members pay is necessary to provide useful service to your community and a good experience for members. Would lowering dues and fees open membership to more people?

2 Membership criteria

Rotary International's membership criteria say that adults are eligible if they demonstrate good character, integrity, and leadership; possess a good reputation within their business, profession, and/or community; and are willing to serve in their community and/or around the world. Review any additional criteria your club has and consider who they may exclude.

3 Words matter

Be aware of what may be implied by vague words like "fit" or "quality," which could be used to justify devaluing people who are different. Instead, write specific criteria so it's very clear what qualifies someone for membership. Article 2(a) makes it hard to make a club more diverse, because it automatically bans anyone who is new to the area or who isn't already in members' circles.

4 Unwritten rules

Consider any rules or customs that aren't documented in your bylaws and why they aren't. For example, an unwritten rule might be that you have to own a business or be in a managerial position in order to join the club.

5 Method of meeting

The club that wrote this bylaw allows members to attend in a variety of ways. Establishing this flexibility in its bylaws sends a message that the club understands that in-person meetings aren't always possible to attend.

6 Attendance

Expectations that create a culture of obligation exclude people who can't attend every meeting. RI no longer has an attendance policy and encourages clubs to relax such rules.

7 Holidays

The holidays people observe vary. Be sure your club doesn't make anyone who celebrates different holidays feel excluded and that your meetings and activities don't interfere with those occasions.

8 Pronouns

In documents like club bylaws and other materials, use pronouns that are gender-neutral or otherwise inclusive of everyone.

Take action

Assessing your club's culture takes careful thought and an open mind. It's an important step in better understanding your club and ensuring that it's inclusive. Here are some ways your club can assess its culture:

- 1** Examine your bylaws carefully to see what could be revamped.
- 2** Think about aspects of your club, such as your meeting or service projects, that could be broadened to be more inclusive.
- 3** Ask members what unwritten rules they believe to exist.

Gather feedback about your club

It is said that criticism or feedback may not not always be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to what is unhealthy so you can address it.

Listen to your fellow members.

The answers to these questions can help you identify documented or undocumented club rules, policies, and traditions that should be updated.

Flip the cards below for questions you might consider asking all members.



Do you feel like you belong? Do you feel like you can be yourself in this club?



Do you feel that you have a fair chance at leadership? What barriers, if any, are in your way?



Are you using your unique talents and skills in this club?

Ask for feedback

Feedback helps us understand what we're doing that works well and what we could improve, so seek opinions about your club from a variety of people. The observations of members, former members, and guests are all valuable. It's important to be open to feedback and not be offended by it. Use the Member Satisfaction Survey to get members' opinions about your club, or create your own survey about belonging. If you are asked for feedback, say what you observe in the club and how it makes you feel.

Select the plus signs (+) to learn what kind of feedback each group could provide.



Former members

Take the time to learn why members have left your club. Give them the Exit Survey and tell them you're open to candid feedback. The club environment is one of the top three reasons members leave Rotary. If you can find out what former members didn't like, you can consider changing it.

Current members

Current members can explain what they've noticed about your club that could be unappealing to others. Do members bring guests to your club's meetings? If not, find out why. It may be that they're aware of some things that may not seem welcoming to nonmembers. Do members feel like they belong? If they could change one thing about the club, what would it be?



Guests

Whether or not a guest visits again is good feedback for your club. If someone visited your club, did they feel welcome and included? Think about your club's processes for welcoming guests, and document them. Is there a designated person to talk to guests after a meeting, project, or event to learn why they came and answer any questions? Does your club follow up with guests later and invite them back? Assign someone to be

in charge of making sure guests are welcomed in the way your club wants. For example, you could have someone sit with them and explain what is happening or introduce them to others.

Take action

Assessing your club's culture takes careful thought and an open mind. It's an important step in better understanding your club and ensuring it's inclusive. Here are some ways your club can assess its culture:

- 1 Conduct the Member Satisfaction Survey, conduct a belonging survey, and have individual conversations with members.
- 2 Talk to former members and ask what would need to change for them to want to come back.
- 3 Invite three to five leaders from a group in your community that is underrepresented in your club to visit, observe your club in action, and provide feedback on your culture at a future meeting.
- 4 Think of actions your club can take to address what you've learned from the feedback you gathered and from your own review of various aspects of your club.

Make changes

When you've identified your club's areas for improvement and your own opportunities for personal growth, it's time to make some changes.

Start with yourself

Every member contributes to a club's culture. What can you contribute that will make yours better?

Learn to distinguish between what is objectively true and what people might see differently, depending on their culture or perspective. Realizing that not everyone shares your experiences or sees things the way you do can feel isolating at times. But these differences are natural, and they also bring a richness to our clubs and our lives. And listening to how others truly feel and reflecting on our own identities, biases, and experiences can lead to growth. Take the time to reflect, understand, and make improvements.



Having difficult conversations

In creating an inclusive culture that values diversity, you may have to have difficult conversations — for example, one in which you tell someone that they offended you, or one in which you realize that you are privileged in some way. It might be challenging for members to reflect on their interactions and talk through differences of opinion, but it's sometimes needed in order to understand other people's perspectives and life experiences. So be patient with each other and with yourself.

Why is it difficult?

Holding one another accountable for our words and behavior can make us feel uncomfortable for many reasons:

- 1 We might not be sure how to address the situation. We may feel overwhelmed and paralyzed, not knowing what we can do.

- 2 We might feel that our character is in question or that we're being accused of being the part of the problem.
- 3 We don't want to say the wrong thing and offend someone unintentionally.
- 4 Our long-standing beliefs may be challenged, and it's humbling to see flaws in our thinking or actions.

For all of these reasons, we can become uncomfortable, defensive, or even angry when we discuss issues. Be gentle with each other and try to establish rules for having these conversations to keep them civil and productive.

Setting new guidelines

When you update your club culture, you may need to establish some new rules or habits for listening to each other, finding value in everyone's experience, and being kind and respectful through it all. Listening is not simply being quiet while someone else speaks. Each of your club's members should feel that they are valued equally and that their ideas are important. Rotary's DEI Code of Conduct includes guidelines that can help. Below are some more ways to ensure that all members are heard and feel heard.

Select the plus signs (+) below for tips to help you become a better listener. Note that, depending on your culture, some of the tips may apply more than others.



Maintain eye contact

It's easy to be distracted when someone is talking to you. To show that they have your attention, maintain eye contact during the conversation.

Don't interrupt

Sometimes it's really difficult not to express an idea, thought, or feeling as soon as you have it. Practice focusing on what the person is saying to you, not what you want to say to them. When it's your turn to speak, you can share your thoughts.





Focus on the message

Don't get hung up on a detail. Listen to everything to hear the main message being communicated.

Restate the message

To show that you heard the person, restate what you heard them say in your own words, and ask if you understood correctly.



Ask clarifying questions

Demonstrate your interest — and your desire to learn more — by asking any questions you have.

Listening well improves your relationships with others. In your club, it can help build connections and understanding and create an environment where everyone feels valued. When members feel valued, they are more open to listening to and learning from others. Then difficult conversations can become learning conversations.

Learning conversations



Instead of seeing a difficult conversation as a battle of messages, shift to thinking about it as a learning conversation. The following are tips for entering a difficult conversation. If you approach it with the goal of learning something, it will likely be less difficult.

These concepts are from "Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most," a book by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen.

① Truth



Instead of assuming that you know everything you need to about a topic or event, assume that everyone has different information to bring to the conversation and that it's likely there are important pieces that you don't know.

② Intentions



Rather than explain why someone else is wrong, explain how their words or behavior affects you and what your intentions are. And find out how your words and behavior affect them. You both may learn that something you say or do has unintended consequences.

③ Blame

Instead of trying to get someone to take responsibility or admit their mistake, aim to see what your part in the situation was, and how you both contributed.



④ Feelings



Understand that feelings are at the heart of the disagreement. Aim to acknowledge them and address them without judgment.

⑤ Identity

Some conflicts might make you feel that your identity is under attack or your image is threatened. It may be helpful to acknowledge that both people have a lot at stake, and neither is perfect. Try to understand others' feelings about their identities and how those feelings might be affecting the conflict.



Conclusion

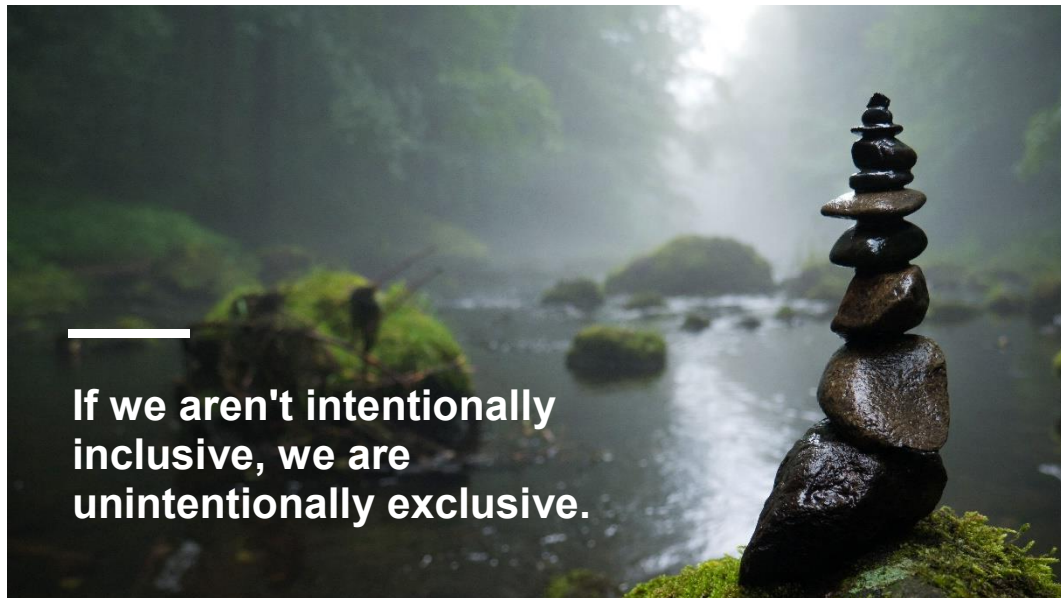
Approaching a difficult conversation with the goal of learning can make it less difficult and more productive.

Take action

Here are some things your club can do:

- 1 Hold yourselves and each other accountable. Speak out when a member's actions do not reflect Rotary's ideals or values.
- 2 If your club has pervasive DEI issues, announce what behavior and words are not acceptable and explain why. Provide alternative examples of behavior and words that are more inclusive. If some members are not meeting your club's commitment to DEI, discuss it with them privately.
- 3 Use this unspoken norms activity to see what barriers and unspoken norms exist in your club.

Focus on the positive



If we aren't intentionally inclusive, we are unintentionally exclusive.

Rewrite policies to build in inclusion

Consider your club's practices and reflect on what their effects could be. Document what will change and how you'll maintain your inclusive practices. Here are some examples of inclusive practices:

- Alternating nonmale club presidents with male ones, or making sure your club board has a certain number of women
- Appointing a DEI or inclusion officer and committee
- Removing vague language like "fit" and "quality" from member selection processes and developing explicit membership criteria that don't involve anything that is beyond a person's control
- Abolishing unspoken norms and making any invisible rules visible
- Reciting, or inviting someone to read, the DEI Code of Conduct or part of it at each meeting

Show members their value

Strive to make sure that all members know that they're valuable to the club.

Select each plus sign (+) to see some ways you can do this.



1 **Celebrate unique abilities and experiences**

Get to know members when they join. Invite them to give a talk about themselves and their expertise, professions, hobbies, or interests. It's likely that they'll discuss topics that others will connect to, which will foster friendships.

2 **Inclusion officer**

Delegate the responsibility of managing the club's culture of inclusion to a dedicated member, and allow them to choose a team to work with.

3 **Mentors**

Having a mentor or mentoring someone can increase one's sense of value in the club.

4 **Engagement opportunities**

Learn about all the different ways members can get involved in the club, the district, and the Rotary world. When members find ways to participate that match their interests and unique skills, and are appreciated for them, they feel a greater sense of belonging.

Read the article below, in which Rotary DEI Task Force member Todd Jenkins opens up about DEI and Rotary.

 **ROTARY VOICES**



Smile and celebrate the small wins in DEI

Todd Jenkins Editor's Note: In September 2020, Rotary formed a task force charged with assessing the current status of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in Rotary and shaping a comprehensive action plan to help us further value and live those principles throughout the organization. This is the third in a series of blog posts from...

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Take action

Here are some things your club can do:

- 1 Document your club's values and its commitment to being inclusive. Post them on your website and include them in your newsletters or printed club materials.
- 2 If your club is not open to this process and your efforts don't succeed, talk to your district leaders about joining a different club or starting a new one.



How will we know when we're done?

Like personal growth, creating an inclusive club environment is a process that is never finished. Embrace a culture of continuous, lifelong learning. This effort is crucial to your club's well-being. Use the readiness assessment in this course to help you navigate the process, and review the course as needed.

Thank you for completing this course! When your club has finished the process outlined in this course, you're ready to diversify your club. Please select the X to close the window and continue.