



FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING



This Fostering Engagement and Belonging textbook is partly extracted from the District Leader Essentials Learning plan at Rotary's Learning Center. Please visit the Learning Center for further information needed at My Rotary.

Translating Committee
Rotary Centre in Thailand
January 2026

Fostering Engagement and Belonging

Course description

We are committed to putting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) at the core of the Rotary experience. Learn more about Rotary's DEI statement, what DEI means, and how you can put it into practice to create positive experiences.

Updated May 2025

Content

Rotary and diversity, equity, and inclusion	1
Understanding and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion	4
Diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice	8
What's next?	11
Resources	12

Rotary and diversity, equity, and inclusion

Rotary remains committed to fostering a culture of belonging and respect. By increasing our efforts to put this concept at the core of the Rotary experience, we create an environment where everyone feels welcome, included, and valued — and one that represents Rotary at its very best.

Learn how Rotary's history laid the foundation for this approach and how diversity, equity, and inclusion can be part of everyone's Rotary experience.

A history of diverse backgrounds

When Chicago attorney Paul Harris founded Rotary, he invited his colleagues and friends to create a club where professionals of diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and form meaningful friendships. Over time, that expanded to service to their communities.

Since the first club meeting more than 120 years ago, Rotary has grown into an international organization with clubs in nearly every country. Our membership comprises people of countless backgrounds and identities who share a singular passion for making the world a better place for everyone.

Rotary has learned from its successes — and more importantly, from its challenges — to adapt and become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. For instance, Rotary did not admit women as members until 1987. Today, we are working toward a goal of 30% of all leadership roles being held by women.

Creating situations where everyone feels they belong doesn't diminish opportunities for others — it ensures that everyone, regardless of their background or life experiences, has an equal chance to contribute meaningfully and thrive in Rotary. By recognizing our history and planning intentionally for our future, Rotary reaffirms our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Our diversity, equity, and inclusion statement

Rotary's Board of Directors affirmed the importance of these efforts in 2021, adopting an updated statement that says:

At Rotary, we understand that cultivating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture is essential to realizing our vision of a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change.

We value diversity and celebrate the contributions of people of all backgrounds, across age, ethnicity, race, color, disability, learning style, religion, faith, socioeconomic status, culture, marital status, languages spoken, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity as well as differences in ideas, thoughts, values, and beliefs.

Recognizing that individuals from certain groups have historically experienced barriers to membership, participation, and leadership, we commit to advancing equity in all aspects of Rotary, including in our community partnerships, so that each person has the necessary access to resources, opportunities, networks, and support to thrive.

We believe that all people hold visible and invisible qualities that inherently make them unique, and we strive to create an inclusive culture where each person knows they are valued and belong.

In line with our value of integrity, we are committed to being honest and transparent about where we are in our DEI journey as an organization, and to continuing to learn and do better.

This statement is an exciting step in Rotary's commitment to creating a positive environment for current and future members, as well as the communities they serve.

Rotary's Action Plan

Rotary's strategic plan, known as the Action Plan, is based on our values and builds on the remarkable capabilities and spirit of Rotary members. It's our way of ensuring a stronger and more effective future for Rotary. The four priorities of the Action Plan are:

- 1 Increase our impact.** Find new ways to use our expertise to make a measurable and sustainable difference in our communities and around the globe.
- 2 Expand our reach.** Build connections and opportunities that allow people who share our goals to make change.
- 3 Enhance participant engagement.** Recommit to putting the needs, expectations, and growth of our participants at the center of all that we do.
- 4 Increase our ability to adapt.** Find new opportunities, create more paths to leadership, open our conversations to more diverse groups, and simplify how we operate.

The priorities of the Action Plan align with our position on diversity, equity, and inclusion. When we embrace this concept, we advance our organization and create positive experiences for everyone who engages with Rotary.

Engaging people from all cultures, experiences, and identities and making them feel welcome and a part of the Rotary experience will allow us to attract new members, which is vital to the health and longevity of our organization. Inviting diverse perspectives offers us new and bold ideas to keep Rotary relevant for the next century.

Making diversity, equity, and inclusion a priority is everyone's responsibility — from club members to Rotary staff members.



**"We believe in diversity because Rotary at its best unites the world and therefore must reflect every part of humanity. You cannot properly serve the world unless you can see and hear that world accurately. Diversity ensures that Rotary represents all voices and speaks in every language."
— *Barry Rassin, 2018-19 Rotary International president***

Understanding and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion

Defining diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging

Find Rotary's definitions for these concepts.



Diversity

Rotary welcomes people of all backgrounds, experiences, and identities regardless of their age, ethnicity, race, color, abilities, religion, socioeconomic status, culture, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Equity



Rotary strives for the fair treatment and advancement of all participants. Embracing equity means carefully considering how to provide different support, opportunities, and resources so participants have a similarly welcoming and productive experience.

When we embrace equity, we create an environment built on respect and dignity for all.



Inclusion

Rotary is committed to creating experiences in which all people feel welcome and respected. By embracing inclusion, we create an environment where every person knows their contributions are valued.

Belonging

Belonging is the sense of being a part of a community where people feel accepted for who they are. At Rotary, we strive to foster a culture where every person feels connected, supported, and empowered to fully engage and contribute.



What does it all mean?

Here's how diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging can be applied. Imagine you're planning a party for members, friends, and family.

Diversity means that everyone is invited to and welcome at the party.

Equity means that everyone has the chance to help plan the party and make decisions.

Inclusion means that everyone is fully engaged — talking, eating, laughing — in a way that is accessible and meaningful to them.

Belonging means people feel truly connected and valued, knowing that they matter and can bring their authentic selves to the party.

How does Rotary embrace these values today?

Find examples of how initiatives that support diversity, equity, and inclusion are already part of the Rotary experience.



1 Rotary Fellowships

Rotary Fellowships are global groups that are based on shared interests of all kinds and are dedicated to creating inclusive, understanding, and welcoming communities within Rotary. Young Rotarians, Rotarios Latinos, and the LGBT Rotary Fellowship are among the fellowships related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

2 Club flexibility

Clubs are able to create new types of memberships, dues structures, and meeting formats to make their clubs more accessible to current and potential members.

3 International leadership

Rotary's Board of Directors and the Trustees of The Rotary Foundation are selected from many regions of the world to make sure that our leaders represent our members.

4 Rotary events

Ensuring accessibility for people of all abilities is a priority when Rotary selects event venues. The Rotary International Convention also provides space that members of all faiths can use for worship and prayer throughout the day.

5 Women in leadership

Rotary's goal is to increase the number of women in leadership roles at all levels.

More women are being appointed as learning facilitators, regional leaders, and Rotary International committee members.

6 Global communication

Rotary provides materials in a variety of languages to create a more inclusive experience. Many of Rotary's communications, including our website, are available in several languages.

Major events like the Rotary International Convention and the International Assembly offer simultaneous interpretation to ensure that people can participate in real time.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Code of Conduct

Rotary has a DEI code of conduct that provides a framework for how members can create and maintain environments that are collaborative, positive, and healthy for everyone. The code asks Rotary members to:

- Use respectful language
- Be supportive
- Foster a welcoming and inclusive environment
- Celebrate diversity

Free expression is of course important, but what we say and how we behave matter. Rotary does not tolerate speech or behavior that promotes bias, discrimination, or hatred. All Rotary members are expected to exemplify this code of conduct and take responsibility for how their words and actions may affect others.

The reasoning behind inclusion and belonging

Ultimately, our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is about ensuring that Rotary is a place where people of all backgrounds and identities feel they belong. A sense of belonging is crucial to people's emotional well-being, and Rotary at its best is a place where people can feel connected to others who share their passion for creating lasting change — across the globe, in their communities, and in themselves.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice

Diversity, equity, and inclusion: Who we are

As Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary participants, it is our shared responsibility to make the Rotary experience as welcoming and accessible as possible to people from diverse backgrounds and those with a wide variety of identities.

Under each heading below, find ideas about how you can increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Rotary experience that your club or district offers. Think about how your club can incorporate these ideas. If you're already involved in efforts like these, share your experience and success with other clubs in your area.

At club events

- Assess how welcoming your meetings and events are to people of various backgrounds and abilities, and identify any opportunities to improve them.
- Plan events at venues that are accessible.
- Manage event costs to keep them affordable.
- Promote events in all areas of your community.
- Invite people from across the community to participate in your club's service projects.



In club and district leadership

- Select leaders who are representative of your community and your club's members.
- Eliminate any club requirements that prevent newer members from seeking club leadership positions.
- Encourage people from underrepresented groups to take on leadership positions and support them when they do.
- Have selection committees for leadership positions that are made up of diverse members.
- Ensure that district and club committees have members with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

When we seek new members

- Identify demographics in your community that aren't represented in your club.
- Focus on offering a club experience that's engaging to the people you want to attract as members.



When we engage young leaders

- Involve young leaders in your events.
- Treat young leaders as equals, and assign them tasks that allow them to contribute in significant ways.
- Empower young leaders to engage in meaningful opportunities, projects, and roles that advance and support their goals.

In providing flexibility

- Use Rotary's club flexibility options to make your club more accessible to a wide variety of members.
- Ask for feedback from your members, and adjust your meeting schedule or costs to make sure everyone can participate.
- Offer a variety of membership types to meet the needs of current, new, and prospective members.



What would you do?

An acquaintance approaches you at a local community event and says that they very much want to join your club, but the timing makes it difficult. As a single parent to two young children, they find the required weekly evening meeting is a barrier to their participation.

The club is strict about its attendance policy and has always been an adults-only environment. You know that this person would bring leadership expertise to the club and would be an active participant in its service activities.

What changes could your club make so that membership is a possibility for this person? How would you approach your club about making any changes?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion: What we do



As Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary participants, we have a great opportunity to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion across communities through our service.

Think about

What opportunities exist for your club to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in your community through your service efforts?

How do your current projects already advance these ideas?

What new projects could you consider that would make a bigger difference?

What's next?

Now that you understand Rotary's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, think more about how you can implement this concept into the Rotary experience. Consider these questions:

- Why is it important to consider DEI in all aspects of the club experience, including in designing projects and forming partnerships?
- What are some examples of inclusive practices in your club? What opportunities does your club have to be more inclusive?
- What actions can your club take to build a club that better represents your community?
- What actions can clubs take to create a sense of belonging for members of all backgrounds?
- How can your club's service efforts support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in your community or elsewhere?

Resources

Learn more about the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Rotary:

Rotary's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Link: <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Code of Conduct

Link: <https://my-cms.rotary.org/en/document/rotary-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-code-conduct>

Rotary's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council

Link: <https://my-cms.rotary.org/en/rotarys-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-advisory-council?embed=true>