

Working with Rotary: A Guide for Literacy Practitioners

An Introduction to Rotary

What is Rotary?

Rotary is an international service organization of business and professional leaders. The Rotary motto, Service Above Self, conveys the humanitarian spirit of the organization's more than 1.2 million members. Strong fellowship among Rotarians and meaningful community and international service projects characterize Rotary. One of the main avenues of service for Rotary Clubs is community service through projects and activities undertaken to improve life in the Clubs' communities.

Organizational priorities are: peace and conflict prevention/resolution, disease prevention and treatment, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, basic education and literacy, economic and community development. Rotarians address needs locally and internationally.

Each year, an international theme is chosen. For example, the International Theme for 2012-2013, chosen by Rotary International President, Sakuji Tanaka, is Peace through Service. Each District and Club will determine the way they will interpret and honour the theme.

To learn more about Rotary International log on to: www.rotary.org. In addition, many districts and clubs have their own websites.

How is Rotary organized?

Rotary International is made up of Districts and Districts are made up of Clubs. Local Rotary Clubs each belong to a District.

British Columbia contains several Districts:

- District 5020: Vancouver Island
- District 5040: Most of the Lower Mainland and Western BC from Vancouver to Prince George
- District 5050: The remainder of the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley to Hope
- District 5060: Central BC and the Okanagan
- District 5080: South Eastern BC
- District 5370: Dawson Creek and Fort Saint John

The Rotary year begins on July 1st. The International President, District Governors and Club Presidents serve for one year.

Each Rotary Club meets once a week for fellowship and interesting/informative presentations dealing with topics of local and global importance. Although many Clubs focus on the year's theme as set by Rotary International, there are many that choose their programs to fit the International Calendar. For example, October is Vocational Month, December is Family month and March is Literacy month.

Rotary Clubs Support Literacy

Each Rotary Club supports projects and programs in which its members are interested. So the composition of the membership determines what the Club supports.

Clubs are expected to focus on both international and domestic issues – the balance between these varies and changes. Sometimes it is harder for Clubs to find domestic projects, so they will be interested to hear what you are doing.

Many organizations approach Rotary Clubs for financial assistance. The amount of funding available through Rotary Clubs varies. Clubs collect money from member fees and from fundraising. Some Clubs receive additional funds by applying for grants from Rotary International, the Gaming Commission or charitable foundations.

There isn't a standard application process for funding, so talk with the Club president about how funding is granted in your community. There may be restrictions on what the club can fund.

In addition, Rotarians are leaders in the community so they can offer a network of business and professional people that can support you and your literacy work in a variety of ways. Some examples are:

- Office supplies at a discount price
- A place to hold meetings
- Members for boards and committees
- Volunteers to support community events which brings your organization and the Rotary Club together as partners
- Funding for local programs/projects through small grants or joint fundraising such as book sales.

Rotary Clubs have supported the following literacy projects:

- Books for Babies – funding for the whole program or aspects of it
- One to One Tutor program for children – funds and volunteers
- New kitchen for a child-development centre – funding and assistance with the landscaping
- Book boxes for children of all ages – designed and built them
- Speakers about the importance of reading with children
- The labour and fundraising support for the library of a community centre
- Books for a women's transition house
- Books for children in grades 1-3
- Volunteers to read with children.

How can you develop a partnership with your local Rotary Club?

Rotary Clubs have speakers at some of their meetings. Your local Rotary Club might contact you to either provide a speaker for an upcoming meeting or to become a member.

If it has not, here are the steps you should take:

1. Learn more about your local Club. Look for the local website or find your local Club by searching on the appropriate District website. Larger urban areas such as Vancouver and Prince George (and even Quesnel!) have more than one Club. Visit several clubs to see which one fits.
2. Find out about who the current president of your local Club is. Some Clubs have designated someone to arrange for speakers.
3. Find out about what the local Club's projects are. Club websites are an indication of the Club's interests but the site may not be up to date.
4. Offer to make a presentation to the members at one of their regular meetings – there is often a business meeting once a month; you want to present at a regular meeting. The Club is often very receptive to a speaker who fits in with the year's theme or calendar. Presentations are booked in advance, so be prepared to wait for a time slot.

In addition, consider:

- Going to one or two meetings as a visitor in advance of your presentation. Visitors are always welcome to attend regular meetings. Phone or email the contact person to ask about doing this. You will get to know a bit about the Club and its members and they will get to know you.
- Finding someone in the Club to talk with about what you want to present.

What can you offer Rotary?

Because of Rotary's focus on community service with an area of interest being basic education and literacy, literacy organizations and programs provide an opportunity for Rotary Clubs to do something in this area.

- Rotary Clubs are always looking for presenters for meetings and would be interested in an informative and engaging presentation on literacy needs in their communities.
- Awareness-raising through invitations to events or to visit programs is another possibility.
- Remember that Rotarians want to help you and opportunities to work with your organization or program help them meet their goals. Opportunities to help can be in the form of funding assistance and in-kind contributions.
- Recognizing Rotary contributions through thank you notes, publicity, celebrations, or small gifts lets them know that their help is appreciated.
- Keeping Rotary Clubs up to date with literacy in your community is one way of acknowledging their interest and keeping them interested.

Making a Presentation to Rotary

Rotary Meeting Protocols

Rotary Clubs meet in different places. Clubs have various meeting times. A meal is nearly always part of the meeting. Some Clubs meet for breakfast, some for lunch and some meet in the evening. Each Club always meets on the same day and at the same time. They usually meet for 1 to 1 ½ hours. Breakfast meetings are early – usually about 7:00 am.

Attendance at meetings varies and who is in the room varies from time to time. Not all members attend all meetings.

Rotary meetings are not secret and Clubs enjoy visitors. When you visit or present, stay to the end of the meeting if you can. Also, go a bit early so that you can meet people.

What to expect:

- You will be asked to sign in to the meeting.
- If you are a visitor at a meeting, you should expect to pay for the meal; when you are presenting at a meeting, the cost of your meal will be covered by the Club.
- There will likely be 2 or 3 flags at the front of the room: Canadian, American and BC. There may be a Club banner.
- You can sit anywhere.
- There will be a president and a sergeant-at-arms; there may be a fine sergeant.
- There will be a starting bell to indicate that the formal meeting has begun – and an ending bell.
- The members will sing or play the national anthem.
- There may be a prayer or thought for the day.
- You will be introduced as a visitor during the announcements. Ask the president if it is okay to say a few words – very briefly thank the members for their hospitality.
- Some Clubs ask for “happy dollars” or something similar. You should participate in this. Give one or two dollars and say something brief that you are happy for. A container may be passed around or you may go up to the front and put money in a pot. This is for fun. It may happen at the beginning or the end of the meeting.
- There may be a 50/50 draw. Everyone gets a ticket. If you win, give the money back. Some clubs have different rules for guests. For instance – if a guest wins they get their breakfast free.

What should a presentation to Rotary look like?

Be familiar with the Club, its history and its members. This shows that you are really interested in the Club and members appreciate that.

Clubs vary in size from 15 – 500 members. Be sure to ask about how many people will likely be at the meeting.

In general, you will have 10-15 minutes to make a presentation. Do not go over your allotted time unless you are encouraged to do so by the members.

For tips on planning a good presentation, consult the **Tips for a Good Presentation** checklist. It includes information on the content and format of a presentation. Rotarians like to enjoy their meetings; make your presentation interesting, fun and memorable.

Offer to send a photo for use in the Club's bulletin, if appropriate. Each Club sends out a weekly bulletin about what happened at that week's meeting.

Most importantly, enjoy presenting to the group. Rotarians are friendly and eager to offer help and if you are having a good time they will be too!

Rotary Presentation - Draft script for Literacy Outreach Coordinators

Rebecca Beuschel, who is a member of a Quesnel Rotary Club and the Literacy Outreach Coordinator in Quesnel, suggests the following sample script for a presentation to Rotary.

This draft script is intended to be used as a guide for a presentation to a service club, such as Rotary. The details will need to be changed to suit your community, your program, your activities and your personality. Improvising is encouraged as a non-scripted presentation is much warmer and possibly easier to relate to. If you are nervous in front of groups, the best advice I can offer is to state this up front by saying something such as "I often feel nervous speaking to a crowd and I am going to read my prepared presentation so I don't forget anything".

The Rotarians I know are interested in hearing about what is going on in their communities and how they can help and they will not be there to 'judge' your speech but rather to absorb the information and figure out where they can fit in to helping you.

My name is *(your name)* and I represent *(the name of your organization or your community literacy task group)*. I am really pleased to be here today to talk to you about literacy work in our community.

Let me start off by saying thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I appreciate the opportunity and your interest in literacy.

What is literacy? This is a question that many of us in this field wrestle with on an ongoing basis. The definition changes from time to time – which I believe is a good thing because the definition 20 years ago was limited to “the ability to read and write”. In the technological world of today, literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy is about being able to participate – having the skills to participate in the society in which you live. Therefore, today, literacy is about the ability to read, write, communicate orally, do math, use a computer and other technology, problem solve and think critically.

My role is to work with the community and in the community to build the literacy skills of everyone who lives here. Sometimes that means starting new programs and initiatives. Sometimes it means enhancing and strengthening literacy practices and awareness levels that already exist.

It is an intangible role because I don't quite fit into a category - think teacher, doctor, lawyer, landscape gardener. What I do is respond to the community by answering calls, referring to other agencies and businesses, by offering training and by collaborating with groups to ensure whoever needs support and assistance for literacy growth, is getting it. *(You will need to change the details to suit what you do – tutor training coordinator/running drop in programs/offering clear language training etc.)* I often spend my time helping people understand what I do so that they can picture literacy in a broad context. Sometimes I think the outlines are there and I am helping to fill in the colour.

I work closely with a group of people called the community literacy task group. The members of that group help me develop and support activities for the community. I also work with the Board of Directors of the (literacy society) to determine goals, objectives and overall strategies to develop literacy. *(You can name the members of the committee/board if appropriate or you can name the groups represented by the people on your task force/board.)*

Some of the activities I have been involved in over the past year include:

(You might want to give a little detail to explain the activities but keep it brief – the presentation does not need to explain in minute detail what it is you do, the intent is to inform the group generally and they can pick up on the pieces they want more information on. By listing off some activities you do in the community; you will paint a fuller picture of how your work shapes the community.)

- Outreach activities such as coordinating or facilitating story time events, roots of empathy, parents in education, word wizard game, supplying the community with bright red bookshelves
- Maintaining the Books for Babies program
- Working with groups to deliver training – Adults Learning Together program, One to One literacy programs at Dragon Lake & Voyageur schools
- Participating in community committees such as Success by Six, Parent Child Resource Team, Adult Services Team, Pregnancy Outreach Program Advisory Committee,
- Helping with one-off activities such as assessments at Nazko Band Office
- Organizing training for the community – emotional literacy, structure of intellect
- Collaborating with District PAC to raise awareness
- Being available to include people, listen to their feedback, and incorporate their thoughts into what we do.

(If there is something you want to ask for help with, now would be a good time to add it in. For example you could say:)

We are looking to secure 6 volunteers for our one to one literacy program at Dragon Lake Elementary School. I am wondering if anyone here would be interested in coming to a free 3 hour training session on June 9. The training will prepare you for your role as a volunteer tutor working in the school with students who are struggling with their reading skills.

(Or you could suggest ways for them to support you financially:)

Our Books for Babies program involves assembling book bags for families having a new baby. *(You can give some details of how it works.)* I have completed the application form that I was sent/emailed/given, and am hoping you can support the program by considering our request of \$1,000 *(or whatever amount you have requested)*.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have if there are any.

Thank you very much for having me here today. I have enjoyed meeting you all and appreciate the opportunity to share with you the work that I do.

Wait for questions and answer any to the best of your ability. A member of the Rotary group will thank you for your presentation. Then you can go back to your seat and enjoy the rest of the meeting.

You might wish to make one or two specific suggestions about what the Club members can do in their community and through their businesses to improve the literacy skills of both adults and children at home and in the workplace.