

FIVE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL DISTRICT CONFERENCE



This guide is designed to help district conference committees plan an event that meets the guidelines set by the Rotary International Board of Directors and the RI Constitution and Bylaws while finding fresh, entertaining ways to engage and energize participants. Adapt these guidelines to suit your district.

Use the [District Conferences](#) page on [My Rotary](#) as your main resource when planning a district conference. You'll find current information on all aspects of Rotary, including details about conference requirements, roles and responsibilities of the conference team, program details, news, announcements, and ways to promote your conference.

Purpose

The purpose of the district conference is to bring together members and community leaders in the district to inspire greater involvement with Rotary, strengthen existing relationships, and to showcase the impact and outreach of Rotary in the world. The event, whether virtual or in-person, should recognize accomplishments of members, clubs, and the district in order to give them a vision of Rotary beyond the club level and to provide a memorable fellowship experience.

Requirements

At a minimum, your district conference program should include:

- Two conference addresses and brief closing by the RI president's representative (*if applicable*)
- Discussion and adoption of last year's audited financial statement (*if applicable*)
- Approval of the district levy, if it was not approved at the district training assembly or the presidents- elect training seminar
- Election of a member of the nominating committee for the RI Board of Directors, as appropriate for your zone
- Election of the district's representative to the Council on Legislation and Council on Resolutions (*if two years before the next Council and if the district chooses not to use the nominating committee procedure*)

Resources

Throughout this guide, you'll be challenged to think differently about the district conference than you may have in the past. Before you begin, be aware of these key resources to support you as you plan your conference:

- [Manual of Procedure](#) — Includes policies regarding the district conference
- [Tell Rotary's Story: Voice and Visual Guidelines](#)

Step 1: Setting Priorities to Focus on Member Engagement

Before you begin planning conference details, determine the priorities of your conference:

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What do you want attendees to learn and experience?
- How can you use the conference to engage your members in fun new ways?

Here are a few suggestions for determining your priorities and your strategy to engage members:

Assess the needs of your district:

- Seek feedback from members: Have they attended a conference before? If so, what did they enjoy? What would they change? What do they want to learn this year? How would they like to see their time structured? What would inspire them to attend?
- Check for and avoid scheduling conflicts with the district training assembly, the International Assembly, a Rotary institute, the Rotary Convention, and any public holidays.

Recognize accomplishments at all levels and inspire everyone to get involved:

- Recognize and welcome new members, first-time conference attendees, club presidents, and incoming club officers.
- Recognize those who have participated in Rotary Foundation activities.
- Promote successful club and district projects.
- Highlight achievements of individual members.
- Ask those being recognized to share their Rotary moment.

Engage members and non-members:

- Incorporate activities that appeal to a broad range of attendees, and definitely consider trying something new.
- Invite partners or families to attend events.
- Invite Rotaractors, Interactors, Rotary Youth Exchange students, Rotary Foundation alumni, and other Rotary program participants to speak about their experiences, participate in a project, and attend events.
- Invite prominent community members as guests to familiarize them with the good work Rotary does.

Step 2: Planning Logistics

Conference logistics should be coordinated well in advance to ensure a well-organized and enjoyable event.

General planning

In order to develop an effective conference:

- Create an action plan and timetable, collaborating with everyone involved in planning.
- Assign subcommittee members to specific tasks, with deadlines, appropriate to their particular skills and interests
- Select a site and hotel that meet conference needs. Obtain written confirmation, such as a contract, specifying your conference dates and requirements, as far in advance of the event as possible.
- Send out registration and promotional materials to members as soon as possible.
- Secure adequate liability and property insurance to protect the district and conference organizers against public liability and property damage claims. Insurance should cover all conference activities, including fellowship events, meetings, and meal events.

Logistics to maximize membership engagement

By prioritizing membership engagement when you make logistical decisions, you can significantly influence Rotarians' decision to attend the conference. Consider:

Site selection — Hold your conference at a location that encourages maximum participation.

Budget — Keep participants' conference expenses to a minimum. Select reasonably priced venues, hotel rooms, and entertainment. Determine whether participants will pay a registration fee or the district fund will cover all or part of the expenses. Consider selling advertising space in the program book or obtaining local business sponsorships to help offset costs to individual members.

Registration — Determine how this will be handled: on the district's website, as part of the invitation packet for family members mailed to each member, distributed and promoted by club secretaries at weekly meetings. Keep in mind that a simple process may lead to higher attendance.

For more information, see the [District Conferences](#) page on My Rotary.

Step 3: Planning Programming

The success of a district conference depends largely on its program. General sessions should include interesting and relevant presentations. Your programming should focus on topics that will engage and inspire members with different levels of experience and different interests.

While there is business to attend to, remember that your program should also be fun. The district conference is an opportunity for members to meet new people, strengthen their connection to Rotary, and celebrate accomplishments — of individual members, of clubs, and of the district as a whole.

Here are some recommendations for creating engaging programming:

Program to all member types:

- Provide a new member orientation program, including time for both learning and networking, and recognize new members' participation.
- Dedicate time to different facets of membership: networking and fellowship, a service project, and Foundation-related activities.

Keep programming exciting and innovative:

- Invite both member and non-member speakers. Often, the latter can address a Rotary-related topic- for example, a teacher discussing literacy.
- Include topics that will provide new information to both new and longtime members.
- Introduce new ideas implemented by clubs in your district and in other districts for carrying out service projects or attracting new members.
- Use a variety of formats to keep things exciting: small group discussions, videos, panel discussions.
- Use sessions to brainstorm new service project ideas or ways to collaborate with other clubs.
- Include opportunities for fellowship and networking in all sessions.
- Identify opportunities to engage non-members in your activities. Consider ways to position your conference as a recruitment event for potential members.
- Consider ways to incorporate the current presidential theme to create cohesive messaging and programming.

Step 4: Promoting the Conference

Organizers of outstanding conferences often begin by asking themselves, “What will encourage members to attend?” To be effective, conference promotion efforts must be multifaceted and carefully planned, building enthusiasm by focusing on the benefits of attendance.

A good publicity effort takes skill and time. To take advantage of the resources and expertise in your district, the district conference committee chair should select someone to serve as a liaison to the district public relations committee. Or consider creating a marketing subcommittee for the conference. Successful marketing starts early and builds during the year, with frequent reminders sent to members. Develop a calendar to help you plan and manage your efforts.

Consider these strategies:

- Ask your district governor to include conference information in regular communications.
- Build excitement on social media. Start a Facebook or Twitter campaign to highlight fun or rewarding activities, describe benefits of attending, and feature a countdown to the big event.
- Make an entertaining video to promote the conference. Post it to social media and email it to members.
- Develop engaging publicity packets and distribute them to each club.
- Include up-to-date information about the conference on the district website.
- Work with the governor to distribute short, timely correspondence about the conference.
- Offer a prize for the club with the best conference-related public relations efforts to encourage greater participation.

Media

Media coverage not only generates excitement among the district but also promotes Rotary’s good work in your community. Look for opportunities to promote your conference through local media, work with the district public relations chair to identify newsworthy program features, and draft a press release to go to all local media outlets. For more information on how to engage local media, refer to the [Public Relations page](#) on My Rotary.

Step 5: Executing, Evaluating, and Enjoying your District Conference

Now that you've put all of this time, energy, and brain power into planning your district conference, it's time to put your plan into action. Be prepared, identify potential problems, and have contingency plans. And remember: Flexibility is key to a successful conference.

Conducting conference business

The district conference is an ideal time to address important district business, including:

- Adopting the annual statement of district finances (*if applicable*)
- Setting the district levy (*if not set at the district assembly or presidents-elect training seminar*)
- Voting on conference resolutions
- Selecting a member of the nominating committee for RI director
- Choosing the district's Council on Legislation and Council on Resolutions representative
- Selecting the governor-nominee

Many districts also use the conference to discuss other district business, such as financial reports from the treasurer; to gain support for district activities and challenges; to recognize new clubs; to present district awards; and to obtain club input on the use of the District Designated Fund.

You'll find resources for conducting conference business, including policies and procedures for voting and taking action as a district, on the [District Conferences](#) page on My Rotary.

Evaluating

It's important that you take the time to ask members to evaluate their district conference experience. Develop a survey they can either complete at the event or that can be emailed after. This will give next year's conference team a solid foundation as they begin planning, and is a good way to see the impact that your team has had. As a committee, maintain a list of tips for next year's conference, helping your successors learn from your successes and challenges.

Enjoying it!

You've set priorities, focused on membership engagement, nailed down the logistics, and promoted your conference. Now it's time to watch it all come together and enjoy every moment, as you celebrate the accomplishments of your district.