

ROTARY: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity in the United States is growing at an increasing rate and includes large groups of business professionals from many cultures and vocations. Zones 23 and 24 are among those parts of the country with the most rapid growth. For example, in California, the 2006 updated census numbers show that approximately 36% of the population come from Latino or Hispanic origins. That is an increase of 11% since 2000. Some 12.3 % of the population are Asian up 13% since 2000. For the most part, those cultures are significantly underrepresented in our clubs. This represents a huge opportunity for membership growth while increasing Rotary's diversity. We need to attract qualified individuals from these cultures.

Membership is Everyone's Job is a very effective membership development system, used by District 5230, however, in spite of our best efforts, there are qualified individuals from some cultures that will not, I repeat will not, join a traditional Rotary club. The reasons have to do with being outside the comfort zone of their culture and language. So...if they are unwilling to adapt to our Rotary clubs, then Rotary must adapt to them. How? By chartering culturally based Rotary clubs.

The following are two examples from District 5230.

The Rotary Club of Monterey Korean was chartered with 23 members in March 2007. Think about this... in the Monterey/Salinas area there are approximately 7000 Korean households. Before this club was chartered the 13 local Rotary clubs had very few members of Korean heritage. We now have a tremendous growth opportunity within the Korean community.

In May of 2007, two and half months after the **Rotary Club of Fresno Latino** held its first organizational meeting it was chartered with 32 members... 2.5 months. The club now has 38 members. They are involved in multiple community projects, fund raising, Youth Exchange and other Rotary activities. The enthusiasm for Rotary demonstrated by these Latino professionals is overwhelming. This club has generated interest in Rotary in Latino communities throughout the district. Several members, who have left due to job opportunities, are joining Rotary club in their new location.

Both of these clubs are excited about Rotary, and are growing in numbers and capabilities. And the average age is around 40.

There are several cultural based Rotary clubs around the country, however, District 5280 in Los Angeles is the leader. In the 1980s, an Iranian club and a Korean club were chartered. A Latino club was chartered in 2005. In 2007, the district chartered 4 more (Thai, Filipino, Lebanese, and Colombian-American) and they are working on others. Our large cities have great opportunities because of pockets of cultural communities. So what does all this mean to Rotary? No matter how it comes about, we all know that Rotary needs more members serving our communities and bringing hope around the world. It is just that simple. As Rotarians, I believe we have an obligation to provide opportunities and a structure to those who want to serve their communities and believe in "Service above Self," regardless of which Rotary club they belong to, where it is geographically or what language the members speak.

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So how does one go about forming a culturally based Rotary club. Every Rotary district is different. Each culture is different. The following “Success Factors” are based on the experience of District 5230 (four counties in central California) and District 5280 (Los Angeles)

Connecting with Cultural Community leaders:

Connecting with leaders of a cultural community is necessary to gain interest in a Rotary club. If the leaders are not known, then the following approaches may help.

- **Contact local elected officials.**

They are familiar with leaders in the cultural community because they vote.

Introductions can be arranged.

- **Contact Consulate offices of the home country.**

They are usually supportive of developing a Rotary club. The Consulate is acquainted with community leaders and can arrange a meeting with community leaders where you can discuss Rotary and the potential for a Rotary club in their community.

- **Find a city**

(local if possible) that has a “Sister City” relationship with a city in the home country of interest. Determine if there is a Rotary club in the Sister City. Make contact with the leaders of the Rotary club and use them as a reference with local community leaders. Potentially, the Rotary Club in the home country could be a Sponsor Club for the new club.

- **Contact the local community leaders**

and hold a “town meeting” with a proposal of a Matching Grant for a project in the home country. This will get the leaders involved in the project and demonstrate the power of Rotary.

Charter Leadership:

The best situation is to have experienced Rotarian(s) from the culture in place as Charter Club President and other key positions within the club leadership. If this is not possible, select a well-known community leader who is enthusiastic about establishing a new “Cultural” Rotary club.

In either case, the District Governor must select a “Governor’s Special Representative” that has a strong understanding of Rotary and Rotary clubs. The Special Representative must keep the new club moving and on track without being too pushy. The elements needed to charter a club are outlined in the Organizing New Clubs Guide (808-EN). It is especially important, when forming a new cultural club that the process continues to move quickly. The entire membership must be aware of the steps in the process, where the club is in the process and what are the next steps. If the members perceive that the process is slowing they may lose interest.

Sponsoring Clubs:

If possible, name two co-sponsor clubs. In addition to the traditional sponsor club responsibilities, the clubs should name at least two members who will be part of an on-going support team for the new club. Be aware that forming “cultural” clubs may be met

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with resistance from some Rotarians. If this is the case, call me and we can discuss the situation. Before asking a club to sponsor the new cultural club the District Governor or District Membership Chair may need to meet with the potential sponsor club board to explain the goal and answer questions. To further support the new club, sponsor clubs should have joint projects, joint fundraisers, and joint club meetings. In this way the new club gets good ideas and members from each club get to know one another. Becoming a Sponsor Club is a two-year commitment.

Support and Training:

The new clubs leadership team (hopefully the entire club) needs special training and a designated support team. The support team should consist of an assigned Assistant District Governor, the District Training Officer, the Governor's Special Representative and one or two Rotarians from the sponsoring clubs. The training should include an orientation regarding Rotary International organization and programs, The Rotary Foundation organization and programs, the Club Leadership Plan and how to conduct a club meeting. At the end of the training the new club should be organized with the leaders understanding their responsibilities. The club should start operating their meetings as a Rotary club, even in the early development stages.

Language spoken at meetings:

Most members of cultural Rotary clubs have not joined traditional Rotary clubs because they did not feel comfortable with a language and culture different than their own. Many have joined traditional clubs but ultimately dropped out for the same reasons. The new club is organized and managed similar to any Rotary club, but more in keeping with the language and traditions of their culture. The club meetings can be held in the language the club members prefer. It is the club's choice. However, English speaking visitors should be accommodated. Since many members are bilingual, one of them should sit with the visitor in a place that will not be disruptive to the meeting and interpret as the meeting progresses. Another way is to stop the meeting at important junctures with a summary of the content repeated in English. This is similar to the way visitors are accommodated at many Rotary club meetings in foreign countries.

Note: You can find census statistics for your area down to the county and cities over 25,000 by accessing <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/>