



Working in the Community: Implementing Effective Service Projects

Service, both local and international, defines Rotary's character, is the basis for its appeal and visibility in the community, and is the reason Rotary continues to grow. Community Service responds to the needs of the local community. The top Community Service priorities for clubs are best determined by examining the assets and needs in the local community and developing a response. This ensures that Rotary will not function in isolation, but be an active part of the community with projects that are relevant and effective.

The approach to selecting and implementing a service project can be the same regardless of what issue the club decides to address. The following steps can help your club to truly identify their niche in the community and to develop effective service projects.

❖ **Selecting a project**

Bring together a group of community members, including Rotarians and Rotary Community Corps members, to discuss the community's strengths and weaknesses. What are the assets in the community? What are the needs? Which direction is the community heading and how are community members involved in these changes? What is the vision for the community that the members should strive toward?

The discussion will help identify where resources and talents are best utilized, and identify partners with whom the club can work in addressing particular issues. Use a Rotary club or RCC meeting to discuss members' views on the role that the club/corps should play in the community, which topics interest the members, and possible projects.

❖ **Planning a project**

Meet as a group to set goals for the project and do some preliminary preparation. A project coordinator or committee for the project can then develop a work plan and budget, as well as initiate discussions about fund-raising, informing the public, and evaluating the results of the project.

It is important to keep in mind other groups who may be working in the same arena and seek out collaborative opportunities. Partnerships can be an effective use of resources and will help develop relationships with the community.

Establish specific and measurable goals and objectives. Obtain agreement from the members and others who are involved. Create a timeline indicating the steps involved and who is responsible for each step. Make sure you are setting targets that are achievable – it is better to have a small but successful project than an ambitious project that fails.

A plan for communicating the information within the Rotary club or RCC is also necessary. Effective action requires motivation, commitment, and follow-through. Rotarians and RCC members are volunteers — some very motivated, others less so. It is important to inspire people to take part in service activities by keeping them informed of the project's progress.

❖ **Public relations**

If you have done the preliminary planning for a project, you will be able to articulate what the project is about and what you hope to accomplish – the “message”. To prepare for promotion of the service project both within the club/corps and with the community at large, prepare a one-page brief describing the goal of the project, the action plan and budget. This brief becomes your “selling” document.

Send announcements to interested individuals. Place posters at central locations. Take advantage of speaking opportunities. And while the project is underway, distribute materials bearing the Rotary club and RCC name.

The media is one of the most effective ways to reach the community. Identify the contacts for community-related news at the local radio and televisions stations, and with local newspapers and magazines. Let them know what you are doing, providing them with the one-page brief or press release.

❖ **Raising funds**

Auctions, contests, dinners, festivals, and lectures are some fundraising ideas. Depending on the support required, you may need to contact individuals more directly, asking them for personal donations of funds or supplies, or if their respective businesses could help in other ways. Use your one-page brief to provide the specifics for the project.

Consider researching local foundations that are known to support the cause to which your project is related. Ask for application forms, deadlines, and grant processing times. Take care to fill out applications carefully and completely – failing to do so may prolong or stagnate the application process.

❖ **Evaluating success**

For a project to be effective, it is important to ensure that it is reaching the goals that you established. Evaluating the project while it is underway allows you to revise strategies and improve the project. The information is also useful during public relations campaigns and can be helpful when applying for further funding.

An evaluation need not be expensive or time consuming if the aims and activities of the project are properly thought out and written down before the project begins. Keep track of how many people are involved and how the targets have changed. Through interviews or surveys with those participating in or benefiting from the project ask whether the changes your club or corps envisioned are actually taking place, and how all aspects of project implementation could be enhanced as new efforts are coordinated in the future.

Publications available from RI:

Communities in Action: A Guide to Effective Projects (605A)

A Menu of Service Opportunities (605B)

Effective Public Relations: A Guide for Rotary Clubs (257)

Rotary Community Corps Handbook (770)

Rotary Community Corps Brochure (779)

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