



The Regional Pilot Project offers us the unique opportunity to work together to ensure that Rotary flourishes in our region for another 100 years.

# Regenerating Rotary

## A Transformational Regional Pilot Project



In January 2019, Rotary International approved a pilot project for Rotary in our region to help address membership challenges and ensure our organisation thrives long into the future. To do that, we need your help. Regional Pilot Project co-chairs PDG Ingrid Waugh and PDG Peter Frueh are urging Rotarians both established and new to jump onboard and get involved.

*Words by PDG Ingrid Waugh & PDG Peter Frueh  
Co-Chairs, Regional Pilot Project*

**Rotarians** who attended the recent Rotary conference in Christchurch, NZ, were astounded to see the impact of the destructive 2011 earthquake, which resulted in the loss of 1200 CBD buildings, 6000 suburban homes and 185 precious lives. But the city is getting on with its massive regeneration task, which, along with the recent mosque attacks, has brought the community together like never before.

The courage and resilience of the Christchurch people is outstanding and is a great example for Rotary Zone 8 (Australia, New Zealand and the South West Pacific) as we face our regeneration challenges.

## PROJECT VISION

To significantly increase the reach and impact of Rotary in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Our membership has declined 12 per cent in the past five years, with 127 clubs closing in the same period, continuing a trend that's been happening for the past 20 years. In presenting these trends at the recent Regeneration Conference, Zone 8 coordinators Tim Moore and John Prendergast encouraged delegates to embrace transformation or face continued demise.

Rotary membership challenges are not dissimilar to those in organisations such as golf clubs, associations

and churches. We are all dealing with significant societal changes in volunteering patterns led by social media and other developments. An ageing demographic adds to the challenge, bringing about a growing sense of urgency for us to work together and act now.

In environments of mounting complexity and rapid change, it is a fact that traditional hierarchical

## PROJECT PURPOSE

To build upon our past and transform Rotary in our region to provide relevant and engaging experiences that better serve our communities and enable us to grow.

organisations tend to be risk-averse and resistant to change, which is the reason why Rotary International has approved a Pilot Project for our region to help address the challenge.

With Rotary International's support, this is an exciting and unique opportunity to regenerate Rotary for those passionate about our future.

Volunteers with knowledge, passion, energy and enthusiasm, who are keen to see Rotary flourish in the next century, are now being sought. Both longer serving and new generation volunteers are required for working groups that will recommend how we will achieve our objectives (Objective Groups) and for Reference Groups that provide regular feedback on the changes being considered.



**“Winston Churchill once said, ‘To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often’. As Rotary in our part of the world celebrates our centenary in 2021, it is vital that we continue to review Rotary and Rotaract to ensure we are relevant and effective in our communities.”**

**– Ian Riseley  
President, Rotary International 2017-18**

## Rewards & Benefits

The rewards of being involved in this initiative are tremendous, and include fulfillment from pursuing a mission one believes in and the chance to collaborate with a broader array of people across Rotary in our zone.

The benefits for Rotary will be immense as the new strategic plan encourages us to:

- Increase our impact locally and globally by focusing our programs and leveraging partnerships;
- Enhance our reach by growing and diversifying our membership with new channels into Rotary;
- Support our clubs to better engage members with better leadership development and skills training; and
- Increase our ability to adapt by simplifying and reviewing our governance structures and fostering more diverse perspectives in decision making.

## Get Involved

Successful change initiatives always build on the valuable and important past and tap into resources across the organisation. It is also recognised that in today's fast changing world, traditional top-down change management methodologies just don't work, particularly in volunteer organisations. Without the involvement of people throughout our clubs and districts, success will be severely limited – their participation, ideas, leadership, knowledge and skills are essential.

Accordingly, an army of volunteers from clubs, groups and various demographics is being sought.

Opportunities are available for people interested in contributing in two key ways:

1. Objective Working Groups are being set up for those with skills related to the objectives in the areas of communication, culture, governance, public image, and leadership and development. Their task will be to work out how we will achieve the vision, purpose and relevant objectives.
2. Reference Groups will be established for each Australian state, two for New Zealand, and geographically and culturally appropriate groups for the Pacific Islands.

To get involved in either the Objective Working Groups and/or the Reference Groups, please send an expression of interest to [rotaryregionalpilot@gmail.com](mailto:rotaryregionalpilot@gmail.com) succinctly explaining your interests, location, club or district role, demographic group and background.

Participation in Reference Groups will be mainly online, with the purpose of providing ideas, feedback, validation, feelings and opinions on proposals being developed. Clubs may wish to collaborate in clusters and opportunities may be available for demographic focus groups as well.

## Outcomes & Objectives

The need for a regional approach to these challenges has been recognised for many years, but it was galvanised in September 2018, when last year's Zone 8 governors unanimously agreed to petition RI to develop a pilot regional structure that aims to:

- Promote a strong and relevant brand;
- Grow national and state community partnerships;
- Develop a coordinated public voice; and
- Provide more supportive and proactive change management for clubs and districts.

To help achieve the project vision, purpose and aims, working groups are being set up for five objective areas – communication, culture, governance, public image, and leadership and development.



**“This is a changing world; we must be prepared to change with it. The story of Rotary will have to be written again and again.”**

**– Paul Harris**



## Timeline for Transformation



## A club at the crossroads: Lessons in transformational change

In 2016, the Rotary Club of Port Adelaide, SA, was at a crossroad. Membership had been steadily declining, and members were facing the very real possibility of losing their charter.

Weekly meetings were steeped in tradition – formally chaired with procedures strictly adhered to – and

most of the members were retired businessmen who had been long-term, loyal members of the club.

An ingrained belief that the club's shaky future was the result of external factors had negated the need for the club to take ownership of its predicament and take a long, hard look in the mirror.

**"We can't fall into the trap of addressing 21st century challenges with 20th century solutions."**

**– John Hewko  
General Secretary,  
Rotary International**



**"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."**

**– Charles Darwin**



Traditional recruitment strategies were failing, and the occasional new member didn't hang around for long.

They knew something had to change... and that something was the members themselves.

In adopting a strategy of transformational change, members set about redefining the entire culture of the club – new ideas, new attitudes, new customs and new behaviours. Underlying strategies and processes were rethought and a new vision looking to the future was embraced.

In order to attract new members, they stopped trying to attract new members. Instead, they focused on creating a club that was both relevant and valuable to the community.

A number of strategies were adopted.

The club's weekly bulletin, solely distributed to the club's 20 members, was transformed into a marketing tool to advertise what they have been up to in the community. Two weekly publications are now distributed to two different audiences, with a combined readership of approximately 2000. Both Rotary members and community businesses pay to advertise in the publications.

The established Business Awards took on a new life, thanks to the fostering of community partnerships, and now consist of two different categories – Business of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year. The change has seen a massive increase in businesses applying for the awards, which now attract sponsorship from the local radio station, local council and a range of local business and community groups. Two major events – a Gala Launch and a Gala Presentation – have attracted strong attendance and gained high profiles in the community.

One weekly meeting has been replaced with a monthly Business Network Lunch, which attracts more than 40 non-Rotarians and high-profile speakers from the business, political and entrepreneurial world.

Another weekly meeting now takes the form of an Open For Business breakfast event – aka an informal networking catch-up.

These initiatives, among others, have given the Rotary Club of Port Adelaide a new lease on life, but 2018-19 president Steve Smart said it would be wrong to surmise that this new-found success is built on one or two of the initiatives it has introduced.

"It has been mentioned that the success of our club is because 'we have gone back to business networking'. This is far from the truth," Steve said.

"Our club is transforming to achieve our vision by looking forwards to the future, not backwards to the past. This transformation has included strategies, processes, ideas, attitudes, customs and behaviours. It is because of ongoing transformational change that the future of our club is looking positive."

While an increase in membership has not been the focus of the club during its transformational process, this has indeed been the result.

"For the first time in a number of years our membership will increase this Rotary year and we have a number of prospective new members," Steve said.

**"Transformational Change is a shift in the culture of an organisation resulting from a change in the underlying strategy and processes the organisation has used in the past. A transformational change is designed to be organisation-wide and is enacted over a period of time."**

**– Zone 8 Coordinator Tim Moore**



## Characteristics of Transformational Change

- An acceptance that the club must change as society changes.
- A flexible approach: While there needs to be an over-arching strategic vision for change and direction, the details will evolve during the journey.
- An organisational approach: We must look at the way we do things at all levels of the club.
- High levels of leadership and communication: It involves challenging processes of giving and receiving feedback, learning, problem-solving and negotiation.
- Unique solutions: Don't just duplicate another club, analyse your club's strengths and weaknesses, and develop your own vision, goals and strategies.
- Patience and belief: Fast-tracking transformational change will only create an illusion of true long-term change.
- Good communication: All members of the club need to be regularly informed of the changes that are occurring and the reason for those changes.
- An open mind: Understand that transformation will change some of the traditional roles and responsibilities of club leaders and members.
- Empathy: The changes can be challenging and even threatening to some members.
- Involvement: If members are not actively supporting and participating, they will ultimately undermine and reject the change.





# The Regeneration of Christchurch Sunrise

By Ross Milne, ONZM  
Rotary Club of Christchurch Sunrise, NZ

Like most middle-aged clubs, the Rotary Club of Christchurch Sunrise, NZ, was starting to fall into a tired, old and comfortable routine at meetings. There was quite a lot of discourse about boredom, the quality of speakers, a loss of energy, an ever-greying membership and non-meaningful projects. This is a condition all clubs face from time to time and, in the context of Rotary, it is important to recognise this condition and actively seek to address it.

The Rotary hierarchy is fixated on building numbers in order to overcome these issues, but in the story of Christchurch Sunrise, the answer was a case of heavy pruning, driven by Christchurch's period of natural and human disasters, in order to spark new growth.

## Key lessons from the regeneration of Christchurch Sunrise

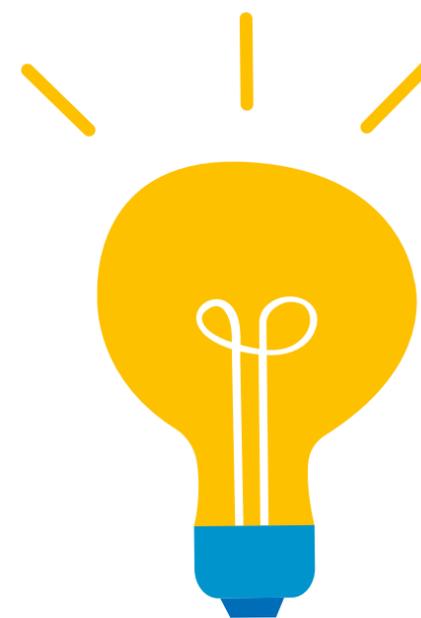
1. First, the club needed to change the way it was structured in a way that had relevance to the environment it worked in. To function effectively the club needed to have a fluid and flexible structure; for example, Club Service became Club Sustainability. This changed the focus. They operated mostly on a project team basis, with individuals encouraged to bring their ideas to a conclusion.
2. The president's year is not about the president. Being the president is not about running the agenda, having all the ideas and controlling the club; it's about releasing the talent of the members to run the club. By changing the president's perceived role, the club managed to encourage more individuals to step up to take on the role.
3. The group did away with some of the unnecessary trappings – chain of office, head tables, etc., to break down the barriers. They threw out the rule book and now live by Rotary's ethos: *Service Above Self* and the *Four Way Test*.
4. One of the key aspects was to take the club back to basics. Rotary was started to foster fellowship, friendship and business networking. As a broken club, members needed to be strong to help their communities; being stronger enabled them to achieve more.
5. The club looked at the things that made them different to other clubs in the district – they had fun, they were challenging, their fellowship program was active, and they did great projects. The club felt that if these were the keys to their success, then they should build their growth around them.
6. The club recognised that growth was not about numbers and set no membership target in the 2012-13 year. Growth is about relevance. Growth is about the individual and collective deeds performed for the community. For the past seven years, the Rotary Club of Christchurch Sunrise has lived by these beliefs, but, like any successful organisation, they recognise the need to continue to challenge the things they do and constantly refresh.

**If Rotary is to stay relevant in the 21st century it must make quantum and revolutionary changes. Trotting out the 'same old same old' will not make the improvements sought. Technological changes are driving societal changes and Rotary, to retain its influence, needs to be a high-profile player in driving the social agendas within its communities.**



# "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less."

– General Eric Ken Shinseki, US Army



Following the September 4 earthquake, the club found itself without a venue, and many members' lives were in turmoil. The situation was exacerbated by the February 22 quake, when more of the city suffered extreme damage. A number of members left the club and the city because of trauma and the club's community was in a perilous state.

The club found temporary premises and continued to support each other, but the conversations were all about

the earthquakes and the damage. The presidents in the first two years post-quake (Stuart Rose and the late Trevor Bailey) did a remarkable job keeping the club functioning.

The next aim was to rebuild Christchurch Sunrise, and to regain the spirit they had always exhibited.

During Trevor's year as president, the club undertook a study to see what was needed to rebuild and members set about re-imagining the club.





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