



FOUR QUESTIONS

Return engagement

When clubs cultivate relationships with Rotary alumni, both sides benefit

It's always a pleasant surprise for Rotarians to meet someone who notices their Rotary pin and then to learn that the person was once a Rotary Youth Exchange student or Rotary Scholar. These conversations with Rotary alumni are great reminders of how many lives Rotary has had a positive effect on.

Rotary alumni can also have a positive effect on the organization, and many are looking for ways to reengage with Rotary. Chris Offer, a past governor of District 5040 in British Columbia, has seen firsthand what Rotary Peace Centers alumni can bring to the table. He and his wife, Penny, also a past governor of District 5040, were so impressed with the peace centers program that they established an endowment fund to support it; Offer now serves on the Rotary Peace Centers Committee. And peace fellows are only one part of the community of Rotary program alumni. One of them could make a fantastic speaker at your next meeting, bring valuable expertise to your club project, or be a great addition to your membership.

1 Why engage with program alumni? There's a great opportunity for Rotary clubs to hear firsthand from alumni — whether it's Rotary Peace Fel-

lows, Youth Exchange students, Rotaractors, or Rotary Scholars — about their challenges and successes. They've been there, they've done that, they've worked in the field. They can relate their experiences personally, not in an abstract way. Some alumni have incredible stories about how the experience changed their lives.

2 What is the best resource for contacting peace centers alumni for speaking engagements?

The Rotary Peace Fellowship Alumni Association (rpfaa.org) launched an online database last year. The database is voluntary in terms of who wants to be listed on it, so privacy restrictions aren't an

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issue. And remember, peace fellows can be consultants as well as presenters. They aren't just potential speakers to a club or at a conference. The database has a brief description of what kind of consulting they can do and where their expertise lies. If you're doing a water project, you may need an engineer. If you're dealing with a peace initiative, you should have someone who can help you avoid faux pas that can arise from cultural differences. Peace fellows bring all sorts of skills and can be a valuable resource.

3 What is the procedure for contacting alumni to speak at meetings or events?

There are no do's and don'ts. Getting hold of most alumni can be more challenging than contacting peace fellows, because we still don't have those types of databases readily available for other alumni. If you want a recommendation for a good alumni speaker, the district alumni chair would be a smart place to start, or any of our youth program chairs. If you're interested in hearing about a vocational training team, you could contact a district grants chair. There are district chairs related to various alumni activities who can help connect you. Keep an eye on who is speaking at other clubs by following them on Facebook and Twitter and be sure to check the social media of the alumni groups. That may give you a lead on a potential speaker.

4 Many clubs have shifted to virtual meetings. How has that changed our engagement with alumni?

Alumni are everywhere around the globe, and with Zoom you can have a speaker from anywhere in the world. People are more available, and alumni are very willing in most cases. Our club had a peace fellow speak to us from London. You could have your Rotary Youth Exchange student talking to you live from a foreign country instead of sending a letter. Whenever the “new normal” finally arrives, one of the legacies for Rotary clubs will be having remote speakers.

— PAUL ENGLEMAN

Rotary's alumni relations team is always ready to help you connect with alumni and answer your questions about engaging them in your club or district projects. Write to alumni@rotary.org.