

What works to attract younger members? District 5420 (Utah) experiments to find answers.

The U40 Citation Initiative was an experiment in trying out several ideas for attracting and retaining younger Rotary members. The ideas grew out of a Utah Rotary District 5420 focus group session of current and lapsed Rotarians under 40 years of age (abbreviated to 'U40') held March 2019.

Eleven clubs took the U40 challenge over a six-month period ending in January 2020. The Rotary Clubs of Cedar City, Dixie Sunrise, Kaysville, Layton, Midvalley, Millcreek, Ogden, Roosevelt, Salt Lake, Tooele, and West Jordan will receive \$1,000 in social media marketing consultation and recognition at District Conference on Saturday May 16.

All clubs experimented with at least five new ideas during the Initiative and reported monthly, with one Final Report at the end of the period. The summary of these reports is included in this article.

Eight clubs reported attracting new members (2 to 10) during this six-month period. The larger membership gains were due to incorporating dual Rotaract memberships – recently approved by Rotary International - into their membership structure. The clubs instituting dual Rotaract membership reported that their Rotaractors meet separately for the most part, joining club service projects.

Ten clubs **added evening socials**, mostly replacing a weekly meeting – a well-received change. “Socials help our club feel more like a group of friends united by doing good in our community,” remarked Becky Payne, the Kaysville Club Initiative coordinator. All club coordinators felt adding regular – mostly monthly - evening socials made their clubs more welcoming for new members, and deepened fellowship for most members. One club noted Rotaractors did not attend the socials, and another club noted the older members did not appreciate replacing weekly lunches with evening socials.

Nine clubs **revised their dues structure**. Eight of these nine clubs attributed gaining new members at least in part to making costs more transparent and lower. In addition to adding dual Rotaract memberships (two clubs), clubs added corporate, couples, organizational, introductory, ‘a la carte’ memberships as well as making meal cost optional.

Nine clubs **increased service**, mostly replacing weekly meetings with a service project once a month. Millcreek club strives to combine service with socials as a strategy for boosting member participation and fellowship. All these clubs stressed consistently inviting Interactors and Rotaractors to service projects. These invitations “show young people we are here for them, and lets them know what the future in Rotary looks like,” said Jodie Turner of Midvalley club. Many clubs noted that families should always be invited to evening or weekend service projects. Most clubs said new members joined because of the addition or expansion of club local service.

Eight clubs **revamped meeting structure**, dialing down formality, substituting roundtable discussion or member spotlights for speakers, mixing it up with evening meetings for business, socials or service projects. “Respecting members’ time” was a theme for many clubs who tightened up agendas, put announcements online, and made sure programs did not run long. Changes in meeting structure was by far the most controversial change related to the U40 experiment, especially for older members. Clubs reporting success with meeting structure change spent time discussing openly with members, and enlisting member involvement in generating ideas to make meetings more meaningful for everyone.

Six clubs set out to **examine club culture** – another controversial effort – but again, member involvement in this undertaking was crucial to success. Cedar City club, with the leadership of Miriam Keener, organized a U40 Focus Group to assist the board with service and program ideas. The club also conducted a member satisfaction survey to spur changes to make meetings more welcoming for new and current members – and a classification and demographic audit to raise club member awareness of their aging population and the need to recruit new members. “We asked all members to accept ownership for growing the club, specifically to generate younger prospects,” said Miriam.

Clubs also **formalized including younger members on their boards**, giving leadership to this demographic in club structure. Many **instituted or revised new member orientations**, allowing for deeper club connection early on and increased chances for retention. A couple of clubs began **business or local government relationships**, asking for sponsorship for new members from their ranks.

Many clubs noted lessons learned: the importance of open communication and discussion, careful planning, keeping members informed and enlisted in any change, the difficulty in holding members accountable for reaching out in a systematic way to potential new members, and in cross-generational conversation. “Change takes time,” said Mikelle Despain of Roosevelt club, “Celebrate small wins.”

Several coordinators noted the **self-reflection value** of the U40 Citation Initiative: “Thinking outside the box, improving instead of just doing what we always have,” said Becky Payne of Kaysville club.

“This initiative made club leaders imagine what we look like to someone visiting for the first time. We must always be asking ourselves: Is this the impression we would want to give a guest?” said Dixie Sunrise U40 Citation coordinator Michael Branum. “Vibrant, active, growing clubs are not that way by accident or chance. The U40 Initiative reinforced the importance of periodically evaluating where we are as a club and ensuring we remain an organization where a diverse group of service-minded individuals can gather to do greater good than we could each do on our own.”