

A New Chapter for Rotaract

Sunil K Zachariah, Past DRR and PDG

"March is the month we celebrate Rotaract — and this has been quite a year for our young partners in service" - Mark Maloney.

I was 16 years in 1973, when Rotaract touched my life. My perspective, my vision and my life changed in the next 12 years that I was in Rotaract. I served as DRR and also as the Chairman of the All India Council of DRRS.

Those were formative years of Rotaract. I remember going to a Rotarian's office and on being introduced as Rotaractors, his Secretary could not understand why we are called RoadTractors !

Rotaract originally began as youth program of Rotary in 1968 in Charlotte, North Carolina, United States. It has now grown into a major Rotary-sponsored organization of over 10,904 clubs spread around the world and 250,792 members in 184 countries.

For many years, I had knocked the doors of our international leadership to convince them on why and how Rotaract needs to be transformed. I was convinced that a buoyant Rotaract meant large pool of young members for Rotary. It was as though no one was listening. An then suddenly, everything changed recently. The 2019 Council on Legislation amended the constitutional documents to define Rotary International as an Association of Rotary and Rotaract Clubs. After this landmark decision in April, RI president Mark Maloney appointed the Elevate Rotaract Task Force, composed of Rotaractors and Rotarians, to recommend updates to policies to better reflect Rotaract's newly elevated status. At every stage of the Task Force's discussions, the critical goals were to learn what Rotaractors want from their membership and to give them every opportunity to shape these important policy decisions through surveys and focus groups.

In October 2019, the Board of Directors of Rotary International made several changes to the policies related to Rotaract, which were recommended by the Elevate Rotaract Task Force.

Here are some notable changes to Rotaract — effective 1 July 2020:

- Rotaract clubs will be able to establish a new club with or without a sponsor.
- Rotaract clubs will able to choose other Rotaract clubs as their sponsors.
- Rotaract clubs will be open to all young adults at least 18 years old.

- Rotaract policies will be moved from Chapter V, “Programs,” to a revised Chapter II, “Clubs.”
- The Standard Rotaract Club Constitution and the Recommended Rotaract Club Bylaws will be amended to reflect these policy changes.
- Rotary districts are encouraged to include Rotaractors in every district committee.

Other key decisions are:

- Beginning 1 July 2022, an annual Rotaract per capita dues fee structure of US\$5.00 for university-based clubs and \$8.00 for community-based clubs will be effective. Simultaneously, \$50 one-time chartering fee for new Rotaract clubs will be eliminated from 1 July 2022. (I personally fail to understand why there will be two types of fees for being a Rotaractor)
- The RI president, the RI Board of Directors, and The Rotary Foundation Trustees will consider how Rotaractors might advise them on Rotaract matters.
- Rotary International has set goals for Rotaract to:
 - Increase the number of Rotaractors reported to Rotary by 100 percent by 2022
 - Increase the number of reported Rotaractors who join Rotary clubs by 20 percent by 2022
 - Increase the number of reported Rotaractors to 1 million by 2029

For several years, the Board, Trustees, committees, Rotarians, and Rotaractors around the world have been discussing how to elevate Rotaract and recognize Rotaract clubs as Rotary clubs’ partners in service. Rotaractors have offered their ideas to the Board through RI’s Rotaract Committee, at the annual Rotaract Preconvention, and through online surveys and focus groups — and it was time to take action.

Overwhelmingly, we heard that Rotaract was more than just a program and Rotaractors wanted more flexibility, more products and services, and more recognition from Rotary for the amazing work they’re doing in their clubs, districts, and multidistricts. After the 2019 Council on Legislation voted to officially recognize Rotaract clubs as a membership type, the President appointed the Elevate Rotaract Task Force to discuss how to update Rotaract policies to reflect this new status and create an inclusive, innovative, and flexible membership experience. The Standard Rotaract Club Constitution will be updated on 1 July 2020, and only the RI Board can amend it. The Standard Rotaract Club Constitution automatically applies to all active Rotaract clubs. The Recommended Rotaract Club Bylaws will also be updated at the same time, and clubs are encouraged to customize them to meet their needs.

A major change is removing the upper age of Rotaractors from 30 years. Now each Club can determine the upper age. Rotaract clubs are still intended for younger professionals. Removing the upper age limit

of Rotaract membership allows people to choose the club experience they prefer, regardless of their age. Under the current policy, Rotaractors are often required to leave Rotaract before they're invited to join a Rotary club or before they feel ready to join one. So, instead, they leave the family of Rotary.

Restricting Rotaract membership to people age 30 or under is perceived differently in different regions. In some places, members are likely to feel that the age limit should be raised. In others, they want it lowered. After careful consideration, the Elevate Rotaract Task Force and the Board decided that it was important to give Rotaractors the flexibility to decide for themselves when they're ready to leave Rotaract. The majority of Rotaractors we surveyed believed that removing the age limit would either improve or not change their club experience, and they said they would still pursue joining a Rotary club in the future.

Rotaractors will still be encouraged to join Rotary clubs that offer the club experience they want at any time. Rotary clubs should continue to partner regularly with Rotaractors at meetings and events and on service projects. Inviting a Rotaractor to join the Rotary club will be a natural step when the time is right. Rotaractors can join a Rotary club while they are still active members of Rotaract clubs, or they can start their own Rotary clubs.

Another major change - starting 1 July 2020, Rotaract clubs can be sponsored by a Rotary club or clubs or another Rotaract club, or they can organize themselves without a sponsor. This will give clubs greater flexibility to choose the sponsor relationship that best meets their needs and allows for collaboration.

The Board and Trustees value the input of Rotaractors and have recommended that the RI president appoint Rotaractors to committees. They will continue to discuss ways to involve Rotaractors more directly in the future. President Elect Holger has encouraged District Governors to appoint Rotaractors to every District Committee.

As for me, I am thrilled. A Rotaractor for 12 years could not have asked for more for Rotaract. The world is changing and so must we. If we do not attract youngsters to Rotaract and Rotary, we will be destined to the dustbins of history.

I wish there was some structured program to attract former Rotaractors too. Like the Foundation Alumni Association, we must have former Rotaractors associations. Youth and youth organisations are not easy to administer. Former Rotaractors can bridge the gap between Rotaract and Rotary.

Come 1 July 2020, we are going to write a new chapter for Rotaract. It will be a new chapter for Rotary as well.