

When I say that Rotary Connects the World, it is not just a slogan for me. I really believe it. Rotary Connects the World is a description of how and why Rotarians achieve so much. We invest in relationships. We make decisions grounded in evidence. We know how to mobilize our networks to create solutions that last. And we are always learning from our experiences in projects, clubs, and careers.

More than a century ago, Rotary pioneered a new model of service leadership grounded in person-to-person connections. Today, those connections are a network that spans the globe—bridging cultural, linguistic, generational, and geographic barriers—and all of us share the vision of a better world.

But what does that mean for us? Rotary allows us to connect with each other, in deep and meaningful ways, across our differences. Rotary connects us to people we would never otherwise have met, who are more like us than we ever could have known. It connects us to our communities, to professional opportunities, and to the people who need our help.

When you combine this network with the energy and commitment of Rotarians, the results are almost magical. We are people of action—people who not only want to change the world, but also have the ability to turn inspiration into real and lasting change. We have that ability, because of who we are, and because of what Rotary allows us to do.

As People of Action, we understand that fulfilling any vision requires a plan built on the foundation of Rotary connections. And this year, we are rolling out a new Action Plan, which over the next five years will increase our impact, expand our reach, enhance participant engagement, and increase our ability to adapt. If you want to know specifically how and why Rotary Connects the World, this plan brings it all to life.

Our Action Plan is clear-eyed about the challenges Rotary faces. It is rooted in our historical values of fellowship, integrity, diversity, service, and leadership. It also recognizes the value of human connection in a time when technology can make it harder to actually connect.

The Plan draws on the remarkable capabilities we have developed in our own professional lives and careers. It respects that younger generations have different expectations about how to spend their time, who they spend it with, and what motivates them. And our Action Plan makes it easier for us to use our collective, global imagination to develop great ideas about what is possible and how to bring those ideas to the forefront.

To learn more about the specifics about the plan, I invite you to visit MyRotary at rotary.org. But today, I want to give you a broad overview of what our Action Plan will do and how it helps Rotary Connect the World.

First and foremost, our action plan is about getting results. My friends, if you ever have doubts that Rotary can live up to all of our lofty goals – that we have set the bar too high, we are too ambitious, we are promising beyond what we can do — I want you to remember what Rotary has already accomplished in the eradication of polio. And I want you to remember, none of us are going to do anything alone.

Throughout the fight to end polio, we have shown what we can do when we draw on our collective strengths. We have created solutions that match the people they serve. We have evaluated the results to learn from our successes and setbacks.

In pursuit of the plan's first goal, Increasing Our Impact, Rotary will return to the polio model again and again in pursuit of our audacious goals: educating the world's children, ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation, helping local economies grow sustainably, and so much more.

We have built a solid platform of action and results, but there is so much more left to achieve. Let's seek new ways to translate our expertise into making a difference—in our communities and across the globe. Let's prove that our impact on the world has only just begun.

Our Action Plan is a blueprint for future results. We know that our capacity to make a difference is larger when more people unite with us. That is what the second goal is all about – expanding our reach. We want the world to appreciate our ambitious, compassionate, and inclusive spirit—because when they do, they see that Rotary is the source for the person-to-person involvement so many are seeking.

This is why we need to grow Rotary – reaching out to new members, engaging current members, and creating more alternatives for membership for the next generation of Rotarians.

By making Rotary larger and more diverse, we get to tell a wider and more emphatic story. We give people hope that the world can change for the better, inviting listeners to imagine themselves as part of that change, too. This will create a continuous cycle, where more and more people will want to be part of our amazing success.

Let's build connections and opportunities that will allow people who share our vision to do the same.

Just as important as growing Rotary is making sure that all Rotarians are fully engaged in their membership, which brings us to the third goal, enhancing participant engagement. Just like the people and communities we serve, our participants need to be seen and heard. They are seeking experiences that are relevant and fulfilling.

When they see our dedication to investing in them at every stage of their professional lives, our participants are eager to go the distance with us—even at a time when there are many other options for networking and volunteering.

This is why I believe so strongly in building a more family-friendly Rotary -- one that welcomes children to our activities and that is considerate of families in our scheduling. Let's recommit to putting the needs, expectations, and growth of our participants at the center of all we do.

The final priority of our new Action Plan is increasing our ability to adapt. We have shown throughout our history that we excel at finding new ways to lead the world to lasting change. And we have proven in our own careers that we know how to help organizations of every kind move forward. That is why new approaches to our organizing principles do not threaten our sense of who we are.

Along these lines, I believe that Rotary must respect professional commitments and not require Rotary leadership to be a full-time job. We need to respect the time and responsibilities of young people who are building careers.

We are ready to seek out fresh opportunities, create more paths to leadership, open up our conversations to diverse voices, and simplify how we operate—with confidence. Let's stay true to ourselves and stay ahead of change in our next 114 years.

Staying true to ourselves also means keeping and building upon our historic relationships. This Rotary year, we will connect Rotary to the world, through the ties we have and the goals we share with the United Nations.

There are so many parallels between the work we already do through our Areas of Focus, and the work of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. While those goals are indeed incredibly ambitious—they are like any other ambitious goal we have ever undertaken, in Rotary or anywhere else.

Rotary was there at the beginning of the UN. We were there when the world pulled itself from the brink of destruction and rebuilt. Over the next year, the UN will mark the 75th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter. And to celebrate our enduring relationship with the UN, Rotary is hosting five special events—UN Day in New York, three presidential conferences in Paris, Santiago, and Rome, and a final celebration just before the Convention in Honolulu.

This relationship with the United Nations is but one example of how, together, we can serve the world. Alone, we cannot provide clean water for all; alone, we cannot eliminate hunger; alone, we cannot eradicate polio. But together? Of course we can.

We have a proud legacy upon which to build. This year, we will further that legacy as Rotary Connects the World.

These connections that I have talked about today are not the work of a self-driving organization or even of the great Rotarians that came before us. The connections are yours. The service is yours. And Rotary's impact on the world is up to you.

You will have a lasting impact on the world, but you will not do it alone. While we may approach things differently, together we are so powerful. We represent an organization of 1.2 million inspired women and men, who have come to Rotary with the goal of building a better world. Building a better world might seem like a daunting task—until you understand the power of connection. Because it is the power of connection that will allow all of us to do the tasks we have set out to do.

We are Rotarians, Rotaractors, and supportive members of the Family of Rotary. And we are going to harness the power of connection just as our organization has been doing now for over one hundred fourteen years. We have a long, proud heritage. And we will thrive for another 114 years because we are not afraid of change.

Together we will walk the path of this important journey, as Rotary Connects the World.