

**ROTARY INTERNATIONAL RETENTION PILOT PROGRAM  
FINAL REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2006**

**OVERVIEW OF RETENTION PILOT PROGRAM**

As membership retention is an issue that challenges many Rotary clubs, a Retention Pilot Program was approved by the Rotary International Board in November 2002, decision #130. The pilot project was approved for a three year term: 1 July 2003 through 30 June 2006.

The purpose of the pilot program was to determine effective activities that support and sustain membership retention at the club level. The objective was also to identify any regional discrepancies or differences that exist with retention practices.

This was an appropriate time to study retention trends, as during 2001-02 the association had experienced significant membership increases. And, from an historical perspective, when the association experienced significant membership increases, retention became a challenge: significant membership losses were immediately sustained.

**SELECTION PROCESS**

Three Rotary clubs from each of the 34 Rotary zones were selected to participate in the Retention Pilot Program, for a total of 102 Rotary clubs. Participating clubs were to reflect an equitable cross-section of Rotary clubs with new, old, large, small, urban, and rural clubs represented. 2002-03 District Governors were invited to submit the name of a Rotary club from each district as a possible participant in the pilot program. Clubs were required to submit an application to participate. The application required both District Governor and District Governor-elect approval. As the goal for final selections was to achieve an equitable representation of clubs throughout the world, the following criteria were considered:

- Zone or Regional Location
- Urban versus Rural Location
- Club Size
- Charter Date
- Positive Financial Standing

Clubs were selected by a three-member sub-group of the 2002-03 RI Membership Development and Retention Committee.

One-hundred fifty seven (157) clubs applied to participate. One-hundred two (102) clubs were selected to participate. Final club participants are noted in Exhibit I. Four (4) clubs officially dropped out of the pilot program during the three-year term.

Clubs agreed to specific Terms of Participation. Exhibit II includes these terms as well as other elements of the pilot program.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

### **Guidelines**

Eight (8) specific steps were to be followed by the participating clubs. RI has historically promoted these steps as effective retention measures. The eight steps are:

- Identifying well-qualified members.
- Informing all non-Rotarian visitors or prospective members of RI's programs and providing a club profile outlining the club's service efforts.
- Inviting a prospective member with a personal visit by the proposer and a member of the club's membership committee.
- Orienting or informing potential new members properly.
- Inducting new members in a dignified and meaningful manner.
- Educating the Rotarian at all membership levels: prospective, new and long-term.
- Involving the Rotarian in club committees, club fundraisers, board meetings, club meetings, club social activities, etc.
- Addressing attendance requirements above 60%.

Exhibit III are the guidelines the clubs received. Clubs were given the opportunity to slightly alter the guidelines after one year. Fourteen (14) clubs altered the guidelines slightly.

### **Communicating & Reporting**

The Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinators (RRIMCs) were responsible for monitoring the clubs on a consistent basis during the pilot period.

The Membership Development Division forwarded various materials and information on a regular basis. All current membership materials were forwarded to the clubs at the beginning of the pilot period. Any new or revised membership materials were sent to the clubs when produced. In addition, quarterly retention statistics based on club membership as of 1 July 2003 were forwarded to the clubs.

A final survey report was forwarded to the retention pilot club participants to identify their experiences, challenges and obstacles. Results are noted in the Final Report Analysis section.

### **Feedback**

In order to receive direct feedback through the course of the pilot program, a feedback meeting for all participating clubs was conducted in October 2005. All clubs who had been actively engaged in the pilot program since its inception were invited to attend. Fifty-one (51) clubs participated, with one participant from each club.

## **TREND ANALYSIS**

### **Retention & Statistics**

Retention was based on actual club members, whether an individual who was a member at the beginning of the pilot program was still a member at the end of the pilot program. A retention rate of 80% was identified as successful.

Retention statistics were calculated on a quarterly basis and were shared with each pilot club on a regular basis. For a final analysis, in order to evaluate how successful the pilot program was overall and how effective the designated guidelines activities were to overall club membership retention, the retention statistics of the pilot program participants were compared to two groups of randomly selected clubs.

1. A blind set of clubs were randomly selected. A club within the same district, chartered at approximately the same time and about the same size was paired with each retention pilot club.

Quarterly retention statistics were also generated for this pool of clubs for the duration of the pilot program.

2. An additional random sample of one-hundred-ninety-nine (199) clubs was selected with representation from all Rotary regions. Three year membership trends were analyzed to determine existing member retention, new member retention, and overall termination activity.

**Retention Pilot versus Blind (Control) Group**

The following is a regional and worldwide recap of existing member retention statistics for the retention pilot clubs versus the blind (control) group of clubs (the group with the higher retention result is noted in bold).

**RETENTION STATISTICS: PILOT GROUP VERSUS CONTROL GROUP**

	<b>Retention Stats: Pilot Group</b>	<b>Retention Stats: Blind (Control) Pool</b>
<b>India (5)</b>	<b>86.45%</b>	74.76%
<b>Europe (12)</b>	<b>86.03%</b>	84.87%
<b>Asia: 4B &amp; 6B (5)</b>	<b>85.54%</b>	69.94%
<b>Japan (9)</b>	<b>80.88%</b>	79.47%
<b>RIBI (5)*</b>	80.61%	
<b>Austr./New Zea. (5)</b>	78.72%	<b>82.29%</b>
<b>Latin America (13)</b>	<b>77.93%</b>	67.22%
<b>Worldwide (98)</b>	<b>75.90%</b>	<b>75.60%</b>
<b>North America (36)</b>	71.81%	<b>73.94%</b>
<b>Korea (2)</b>	<b>68.59%</b>	55.91%
<b>Philippines (1)</b>	<b>68.04%</b>	65.38%
<b>Mid. East &amp; Afr. (5)</b>	65.07%	<b>73.93%</b>

*\*Statistics for RIBI cannot be calculated as ORC does not retain RIBI membership data.*

Per the trends noted above, at the worldwide level there was little difference between the two groups. However, it appears that at the regional level all pilot groups performed better than the blind (control) group except for North America, Australia & New Zealand and Middle East & Africa. This indicates that in most regions the process identified in the guidelines should be considered effective at supporting retention.

In comparing the retention of the pilot clubs to the success rate established for the pilot program, five regions met or surpassed the 80% retention rate: India, Europe, 4B & 6B, Japan and RIBI. It should be noted that Europe’s control (blind) group also surpassed the 80% rate.

The areas experiencing the greatest challenge are Middle East & Africa, Philippines and Korea. In both of these areas the pilot group performed better than the control group indicating, once again, the effectiveness of the guidelines.

**Retention Pilot versus Second Random Group Comparison**

For the second comparison group a more detailed membership analysis was completed for both the retention pilot clubs and the random sample. Existing member and new member retention statistics were compiled as well as overall termination activity. Termination activity for members with tenure of less than 3 years was compared. Each trend will be reviewed individually.

**EXISTING MEMBER RETENTION**

	<b>Existing Member Retention Stats: Pilot Group</b>	<b>Existing Member Retention Stats: Benchmark/Random Pool</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>86%</b>	71%
<b>Europe</b>	<b>86%</b>	83%
<b>Asia: 4B &amp; 6B</b>	<b>85%</b>	72%
<b>Japan</b>	<b>81%</b>	74%
<b>RIBI*</b>	81%	
<b>Austr./New Zea.</b>	<b>79%</b>	76%
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>78%</b>	73%
<b>Worldwide</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>North America</b>	<b>72%</b>	70%
<b>Korea</b>	68%	<b>70%</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	68%	68%
<b>Mid. East &amp; Afr.</b>	65%	<b>74%</b>

*\*Statistics for RIBI cannot be calculated as ORC does not retain RIBI membership data.*

As noted previously the following regions surpassed the 80% goal: India, Europe, 4B & 6B, Japan, and RIBI. Once again, Europe’s random sample group also surpassed 80%.

In most regions the retention pilot group performed better than the regional benchmarks. The worldwide average also exceeded the benchmark. The only two regions that did not exceed the regional benchmark were Korea and Middle East & Africa. Korea, Philippines, and Middle East & Africa performed the weakest.

**NEW MEMBER RETENTION**

	<b>New Member Retention Stats: Pilot Group</b>	<b>New Member Retention Stats: Benchmark/Random Pool</b>
<b>RIBI*</b>	96%	
<b>Europe</b>	92%	92%
<b>Japan</b>	<b>83%</b>	74%
<b>Asia: 4B &amp; 6B</b>	83%	83%
<b>Mid. East &amp; Afr.</b>	<b>81%</b>	80%
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>80%</b>	79%
<b>Korea</b>	<b>80%</b>	77%
<b>Worldwide</b>	<b>79%</b>	78%
<b>India</b>	<b>76%</b>	74%
<b>North America</b>	72%	<b>73%</b>
<b>Austr./New Zea.</b>	<b>71%</b>	67%
<b>Philippines</b>	60%	<b>75%</b>

*\*Statistics for RIBI cannot be calculated as ORC does not retain RIBI membership data.*

With respect to new member retention, the following pilot club regions surpassed or met the 80% goal: RIBI, Europe, Japan, 4B & 6B, Middle East & Africa, Latin America and Korea. The worldwide average for the pilot

group was slightly below 80%. The Philippines performed the weakest. It is noted that Europe's random sample, or benchmark group, also performed extremely well with new member retention.

In most regions the pilot group met or exceeded the benchmark established by the random sampling of clubs. The worldwide average exceeded the benchmark. The two regions that did not exceed the benchmark were North America and the Philippines.

***PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL TERMINATIONS WITH LESS THAN THREE YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP***

	<b>% of Total Terminations with less than years of membership: Pilot Group</b>	<b>% of Total Terminations with less than 3 years of membership: Benchmark/Random Pool</b>
<b>RIBI</b>	23%	
<b>Europe</b>	<b>33%</b>	48%
<b>4B &amp; 6B</b>	37%	<b>36%</b>
<b>Japan</b>	41%	<b>32%</b>
<b>Austr./New Zea.</b>	47%	<b>44%</b>
<b>Worldwide</b>	<b>49%</b>	50%
<b>North America</b>	50%	50%
<b>Latin America</b>	51%	<b>39%</b>
<b>Zone 10</b>	54%	54%
<b>India</b>	<b>54%</b>	59%
<b>Korea</b>	60%	<b>45%</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	67%	<b>58%</b>

*\*Statistics for RIBI cannot be calculated as ORC does not retain RIBI membership data.*

The goal with this segment is to have the percentage of terminations in the retention pilot group lower than the benchmark established by the random sample. The worldwide percentage is slightly lower than the benchmark, with two regions resulting in lower percentages than the regional benchmark: Europe and India. Two regions are equal to the regional benchmarks: Middle East & Africa and North America. The other regions did not result in lower percentages as expected. This is an area of concern.

Though this pilot project was focused on retention, in comparing new member inductions for the retention pilot clubs versus the second random sample group it appears that the retention pilot groups continued to identify new members. Though the time period for generating trends is somewhat different, from 1 July 2003 through 30 June 2006 the 102 retention pilot clubs inducted 1,981 new members. From 1 July 2002 through 1 July 2005, the 199 clubs in the random sample group inducted 4,013 new members. Proportionately, these numbers are approximately equal.

**OCTOBER 2005 MEETING**

The purpose of the meeting was to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the pilot program, the effectiveness of the guidelines and the experience of the clubs.

As Rotary International covered travel, hotel and meal expenses for the participants, the 2005-06 Membership Development and Retention Committee chair and vice chair wanted to be assured that only clubs who were actively and rigorously following through with the pilot program details were invited to attend the October meeting. As the Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinators (RRIMCs) were the established monitoring body for the pilot clubs and were responsible for communicating with these clubs, they were asked

to confirm that the club(s) they were monitoring had been cooperating and active and should be invited to participate. Seventy-nine (79) (of the one-hundred-two) pilot clubs were extended an invitation to participate. Fifty-one clubs participated.

The meeting was structured in line with other RI training meetings. This was a one-and-a-half day meeting with an opening reception and dinner. The agenda included both plenary and small group discussion sessions with the majority of time spent in small group discussion sessions. Small group discussion sessions were facilitated by former Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinators who had also been International Assembly Training Leaders. The small group discussion sessions provide participants with the best opportunity to share experiences, practices, and fellowship. Topics included: actions stipulated within the guidelines which included identifying, informing, and inviting prospective members; inducting and orienting new members; and continued education and involvement of members. Additional topics included club resources available from RI; elements of the club leadership plan; club assessment resources available from RI; communication; and best practices. General issues specific to pilot programs were also discussed.

The meeting was successful in that it provided the participating clubs an opportunity to discuss their individual reactions and experiences to the guidelines and the program. It also provided the 2005-06 RI Membership Development & Retention Committee chair and vice-chair and RI Membership Development staff an opportunity to hear first-hand club reactions and experiences.

The following points were gained from this meeting.

- The eight (8) actions or steps that RI included within the program guidelines were all considered to be essential in supporting membership retention. One action was not considered more important over another.
- Membership retention is an on-going process that requires constant attention, action, work and commitment at the club level.
- There weren't any unusual actions, programs or steps that clubs identified to support retention efforts.
- Through the course of the pilot program, RI provided the participating clubs with all membership publications and materials developed and maintained for clubs and districts. Many of the clubs were not aware of these materials and publications, found the materials very useful, and were very complementary towards them. Clubs supported the continued development and production of materials targeted to membership.
- Many of the clubs were not aware of the assessment tools currently available to clubs to identify membership and club strengths and weaknesses. When used, these assessment tools were considered quite effective in determining which club practices should be continued, which practices should be altered or discontinued, and evaluating and assessing club member satisfaction and demographics. Clubs supported the continued development and production of assessment tools targeted to membership.
- As many clubs were not aware of available materials, RI must better market current resources to the clubs.
- Participating clubs supported the use of pilot programs to evaluate and assess programs and practices.
- The one issue that generated significant discussion was accounting for retention in two categories: terminations that resulted from club actions or practices; and terminations that could not have been remedied by club practices, such as professional relocations. The participants strongly supported differentiating between issues clubs could remedy and issues for which could not take action.

## **EXPENSES**

The budget submitted and approved with the initial plan was \$US262,250. This was to cover the additional expenses the Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinators incurred in monitoring these clubs for the three-year period and expenses for the October 2005 feedback meeting.

Actual expenses for the pilot program were approximately \$US190,000, with \$US155,900 attributed to sponsoring the October 2005 meeting: travel, hotel, meals, ground transportation, simultaneous interpretation (translators and equipment), publications, and materials. The remaining amount covered expenses for the RRIMCs during the three-year pilot period.

A positive variance of approximately \$US72,000 was incurred between budget and expenses.

## **FINAL REPORT ANALYSIS**

Participating clubs were forwarded a final report survey. Approximately 30% of final surveys distributed were returned.

### **Identifying Prospective Members:**

- 55% did not have a procedure established to identify prospective members.
- 62% revised prospective member identification procedures.
- 80% updated the club's classification survey to include new and current professional positions.
- 72% indicated they did have a plan for inviting prospective members prior to the pilot.
- 71% indicated the club developed a procedure for inviting prospective members as a result of the pilot program.

In accessing other organizations for potential members, the chamber of commerce was identified most frequently, with professional business associations to follow.

- 58% indicated members had access to the RI publication *How to Propose a New Member* (#254).
- 46% indicated members actually used the proposal publication.
- 92% keep track of and give credit to proposers.
- Between 75% and 100% of those invited accepted the invitation to become a member.

### **Club Profile**

- 48% indicated they did not have a club profile.
- 61% indicated they developed a club profile as a result of participating in the program. Most indicated materials were in printed format.

### **Public Relations**

- 56% indicated the club had a public relations plan prior to participating in the pilot.
- 65% indicated they established a public relations plan while participating in the pilot.

### **Pre-Induction**

- 68% had a pre-induction information program.
- 48% implemented one as a result of the pilot program.

- 79% noted that the actions outlined in the guidelines were included in the pre-induction orientation. Most conducted meetings focused on membership responsibilities and obligations and meetings on Rotary information.

### **New Member Orientation**

- 79% had a new member orientation program.
- 54% developed an orientation program as a result of the pilot.
- 91% included the items suggested in the guidelines.

With respect to specific actions, most clubs provided written materials, encouraged members to get involved in their areas of interest, conducted meetings and fireside chats.

### **Induction Ceremony**

- 92% had an induction ceremony.
- 44% indicated the club developed a new ceremony while participating in the pilot.

### **Continuing Education**

- 63% had a Rotarian continuing education program implemented prior to the pilot program with a variety of practices employed: various communication tools, meetings, and encouraging involvement and participation.
- 84% indicated the program included the actions outlined in the guidelines.

### **Mentoring Programs**

- 48% had a mentoring program prior to the pilot.
- 92% using established members as mentors. Clubs that developed a program during the pilot used established members.

With respect to the guidelines targeted to member involvement the actions most frequently noted as not being used: implementing a plan for transferring membership; badge programs, asking newer, younger members to bring in new members; and a STAR program.

- The majority of the clubs tried new approaches.
- Respondents noted that actions not used were due to the actions not being culturally appropriate for the area.

### **Member Involvement**

- 56% indicated the clubs get new members involved within the first 6 months.
- 36% indicated between 6 months and one year.
- 71% indicated new members assume a club office position within 1 - 2 years of becoming a member.
- 80% of the clubs did not alter attendance requirements.

### **Overall**

- 72% indicated the guidelines were effective in improving retention.
- 95% indicated the guidelines were effective in increasing awareness of the importance of retention.
- 80% indicated the club improved its retention efforts with being involved in the pilot program.
- 92% indicated the club gained additional information with being involved in the pilot program.

- 76% indicated the correct amount of materials were sent to the pilot clubs, 20% indicated not enough materials were forwarded.

Practices identified as being **most successful** with retention were:

- identifying qualified prospective members
- fellowship
- education
- involvement
- relevant projects and meetings

**The action noted as being the least effective: taking no action.**

When asked what type of membership materials from RI would be helpful to the club:

- 96% noted the need for additional materials for new members.
- 80% for materials to educate new and current members on Rotary activities.
- 68% on informing non-Rotarians on Rotary activities.
- 72% indicated sharing of best practices.

88% noted the club has a membership development and retention chair, and 68% have a committee.

The **strengths** of the pilot program noted were:

- Greater awareness of the importance of retention.
- New approaches were implemented.
- More emphasis being placed on retention at the club level.

The **challenges** of the pilot program noted were:

- Communication from RI and the monitoring body to the pilot clubs.
- Support from the district.
- Continuity at the club level.
- Too much emphasis on statistics and trends rather than ideas.

### **Future Pilot Suggestions**

- Reports should be required annually.
- Contact with the club should be quarterly.
- Meetings should be at the beginning of the program.
- 96% indicated that pilot programs are useful.

## **PILOT ANALYSIS**

Overall, comparing the retention trends of the pilot clubs versus both random sample comparison groups, indications are that the retention pilot program was successful and provided evidence that the retention guidelines are effective and positively support and impact club retention efforts. These guidelines incorporate the fundamental activities RI has historically communicated as supporting retention.

The information and data gained through this pilot program will be shared and communicated in all membership related training, materials, and publications.

Per the respondents, 80% indicated the club improved retention efforts, 72% indicated the guidelines were effective in improving retention, 95% indicated the guidelines were effective in increasing awareness of retention, and 92% indicated the club gained additional information with being involved in the program.

However, there continue to be challenges. Reviewing both the statistical trends and the final feedback from the pilot participants, it appears that clubs still require support with the prospective member process; from identifying qualified prospective members to providing them with the appropriate materials, information on membership obligations and responsibilities, and communication. Responses from participants noted that less than 50% of clubs had a procedure in place prior to the pilot. Club profiles were lacking and many members do not access RI's main proposal vehicle, *How to Propose a New Member*. This is also supported by the fact that 96% noted the need for additional materials for new members. More emphasis will be placed on better marketing of current publications. The development of new materials as needed will be explored.

This is an area requiring additional attention which the Membership Development Division will address with the RI Membership Development & Retention Committee.

As with most RI activities there are vast differences with respect to cultures and regions. Regions are challenged by different environmental circumstances and these should be accounted for in club practice as well as expectations. Clubs alter guidelines to reflect or accommodate such differences, and, thus, it may be necessary to alter expectations depending on region. The success rate identified for the pilot program was 80%. This may be unrealistic for some regions in that they are confronted with issues impacting membership outside of the club's control. Rotary International should consider a worldwide retention rate of 75% as a minimum success rate, with varying rates depending on region. The benchmarks established with the 2<sup>nd</sup> random sample group are excellent parameters at the regional level. This will be discussed with the RI Membership Development & Retention Committee.

Trends from this study, as RI has historically stated, indicate that Europe remains strongest in retention for both existing and new members. Statistical trends indicate that North America, Korea, Philippines, and Middle East & Africa are confronted with the most retention challenges.

With respect to retention statistics, the extensive club membership analysis to determine overall retention performance and benchmarks at the regional level may not have been performed outside of this pilot program. This provides the association with excellent documentation and data that will be shared in a variety of sources.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PILOT PROGRAMS**

Through the experience of this pilot program the following suggestions should be considered for future pilot programs.

96% indicated that pilot programs are useful.

#### **Selection Process**

The initial challenge was experienced in the selection process for club participants. The subcommittee received copies of all club applications to review. Their discussions and deliberations were handled via email. Per the 2002-03 RI Membership Development and Retention Committee chair, in the future, this process should be handled through an on-site, personal meeting of the selection subcommittee. This was a difficult and cumbersome process via email.

#### **Support & Continuity**

Club and district continuity at times posed a problem. With multi-year pilot programs, continuity, communication, and consistency should be addressed with any future programs.

#### **Monitoring**

The Regional Rotary International Membership Coordinators (RRIMCs) were given the responsibility for monitoring the participating pilot clubs. At times there was uncertainty as to what this responsibility entailed. Future monitoring bodies must be provided much clearer instructions as to their responsibilities. 78% of respondents indicated pilot participants should be contacted quarterly. The Secretariat should assume the role of gathering an annual status report from program participants.

### **Communication**

The Membership Development Division communicated with the participating clubs on a consistent basis. Statistics were forwarded on a quarterly basis. Current membership related publications were forwarded at the beginning of the program. New materials were forwarded as produced. The clubs found this information useful. It is suggested that this type of communication structure be employed with future pilot programs.

### **Meetings**

73% indicated that an orientation meeting would have been more effective and helpful at the beginning of the pilot program rather than a meeting towards the end of the program.