

Rotary International Convention Report to District 5160
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At the 2022 Houston Rotary International Convention held on June 4-8, I was reminded of how inspiring it is to belong to a community of service-minded people around the world, as well as how much structural support there is for us to do high-impact service projects. While in Houston, I visited most of the booths in the House of Friendship, attended the General Sessions, and participated in a number of training sessions. As noted in my application to the District for support, I was interested in connecting with potential international project partners, and will share some opportunities with District clubs. On a professional and personal level, I was also interested in understanding how we measure and learn about project impacts over time. I'll be pursuing connections I made for the impact assessments over the coming years, and will keep the District informed if there are ways our clubs can lead in this area. Below are some projects that made a particular impression on me from the House of Friendship, as well as other particularly inspiring Rotary resources.

The Guatemala Literacy Project is sponsored by a club in Colorado who agrees to buy an initial set of textbooks for a community, as long as the community commits to setting aside enough money over time to pay for the next set in about five years. Free education in Guatemala is only guaranteed through the 6th grade, and many students don't have textbooks even if they can pay tuition. The project model leads to more education, more pride and cohesion in the community, and is sustainable. Some communities are on their fourth set of textbooks, so this seems like a great model. Clubs could either help with funding, or use the model on their own. More information is here:

<https://coeduc.org/textbooks/#RevolvingFund>

The Rotary Peace Fellows program trains 130 early to mid-career professionals every year to be effective catalysts for peace. There are a number of centers around the world where the fellows study, including one at the University of Queensland in Australia that I visited right before the pandemic. The fellows are very inspiring, and I am still in touch with one of them. I encourage Rotarians to look up whether they will be traveling near one and arrange a visit if they can. Districts can also nominate fellows. Given the large refugee and international population in California, clubs should think about how we can participate. More information is here: <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/peace-fellowships>

Project Amigo is a school in Colima, Mexico that serves disadvantaged youth so they can reach their full potential. I learned about it a few years ago when Craig Reynolds spoke about it at a Davis Sunrise meeting, and have been a donor ever since. So I was delighted to reconnect with them. In addition to accepting financial support through their 501(c)(3), they also have volunteer week opportunities if clubs want to organize an international service trip. More information is here: <https://www.projectamigo.org/>

We talked to the Colemans (who live in Zambia) about Tutudesks, malaria nets/shields, and a community education garden. The Tutudesks project is a fairly straightforward funding ask once the recipient schools are identified. Same with malaria nets. The community education garden will need assistance with agriculture, water, and market development issues.

There are a number of projects on helping schoolgirls with menstrual health. There was a lot of interest in our Pads Project, as it features reusable pads and potentially is self-sustaining while providing jobs. We'll continue working on how to pay for pads locally so external funding is not necessary.

Food waste diversion in schools: a club in Maryland has been working with local schools to divert usable food such as unopened milk or juice cartons, fruit, or packaged food to local food banks. The first step is to go do a garbage count to see what the potential is, and then work with the school to figure out the logistics of who diverts, where it gets collected, and how it is transported to the food bank. With care, it can help feed hungry people and reduce methane in landfills from decomposing food, as well as reduce the volume of garbage. California has composting regulations and is trying to reduce garbage, so this might be an easy project to adopt in our communities. More information here:

<https://esrag.org/blog/2022/06/04/maryland-students-huge-win-to-reduce-food-waste/>

Rotary Action Groups are organization-wide networks of Rotarians with experience and interest in particular areas, such as economic development, water, sanitation, and health, or the environment. They have ideas for projects, can help clubs learn more about a particular area, and can be a sounding board if a project has issues. Tapping into these resources can help clubs avoid reinventing the wheel, and set up projects for success by warning about common issues. They are also a great way to make international connections with like-minded Rotarians around the world.

The full listing and additional information are here: <https://my.rotary.org/en/take-action/empower-leaders/rotary-action-groups>

Programs of Scale is a new initiative that offers 2 million over 3-5 years to a project that has demonstrated success and is ready to be spread. The first two awardees are a malaria reduction program in Zambia and a maternal health project in Nigeria. This is particularly exciting to me, since this should be the connection between the local efforts at the club level and more traditional national-level development projects. More information is here: <https://my.rotary.org/en/take-action/apply-grants/programs-scale-grants>

Community Assessments have been required for international projects since 2018, and are intended to help clubs focus their efforts on what are the most urgent needs in a community. Even though we care about helping people, we all come in with our preconceived notions, and the assessments are intended to help us check our work. For example, suppose a Rotary club wants to help a poor community. They have read about local economic development has heard about the success of providing chickens to poor people to turn them into poultry entrepreneurs. Before spending money distributing chicks, the club should go talk to the community and see if this would be effective. Are there already lots of poultry farmers supplying the market? Would community members be able to house and feed the chickens, or bring them to market? Is the climate suitable? Would they be poultry farmers if they had a source of water? Conducting a assessment also helps respect the expertise and autonomy of the community members, and makes it more likely that they will think about sustainability and make it work over the long term. More information is here: <https://my-cms.rotary.org/en/document/community-assessment-tools?embed=true>

There are several Cadre of Technical Advisers members in District 5160 who have agreed to share their expertise to help clubs set up and monitor high-quality projects around the world. They can assist with audits, design of projects, or provide advice if problems develop. Although I initially thought this was mostly auditing, they do have experienced international development professionals, and I will be exploring how I can help. More information is available here:

<https://my.rotary.org/en/take-action/apply-grants/cadre-technical-advisers>

Overall, attending the Convention was well worth the time and expense and sweat! The next Rotary International Convention will be in Melbourne, Australia, and it's very tempting to go to that one.

Expenses:

Flights from Sacramento-Houston: Southwest, \$632.96

Rotary International Convention Registration: \$540

AC Hotel: \$998.96

Cabs: \$75.60

Total: \$2,247.52