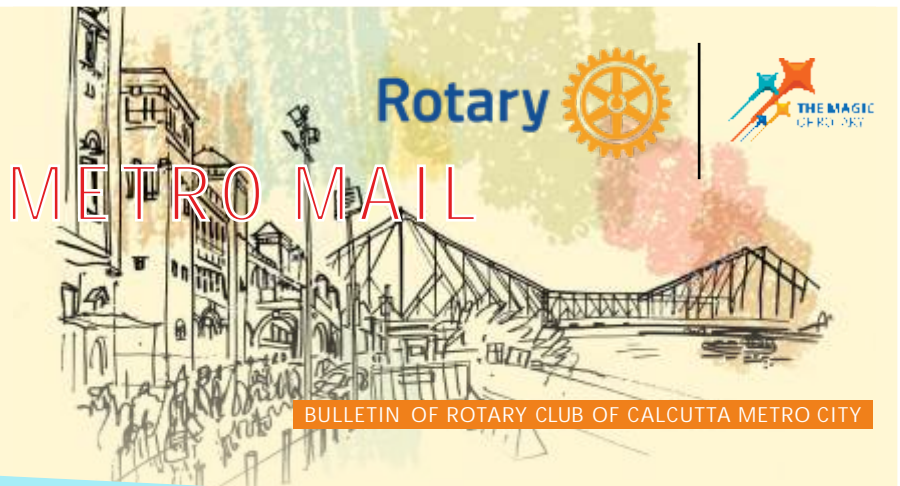


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Navigating Challenges, Shaping Impact

Rotarians and Rotary Clubs in India face multifaceted challenges in today's dynamic landscape, from economic pressures to evolving member expectations. Despite these hurdles, our commitment to service continues to inspire meaningful change.

Economic pressures include inflation and economic instability has reduced donor contributions, while corporate support is increasingly competitive. Managing operational costs and addressing diverse economic disparities within our membership demand innovative approaches.

Fundraising hurdles like saturation of the donor base, a decline in traditional events, and barriers to digital fundraising in rural areas challenge our resource mobilization. Additionally, heightened accountability expectations require investments in transparent and robust reporting systems.

Membership challenges range from recruitment to retention remains key concerns. Younger generations prefer flexible, short-term commitments over traditional structures, and diverse professional and cultural backgrounds necessitate initiatives that resonate widely. Perceptions of Rotary as elitist or outdated must be addressed to boost engagement.

Strategic solutions like collaborating with CSR initiatives and government programs, adopting digital tools for fundraising, and showcasing success stories can build trust and resources. Simplifying membership structures, introducing tech-savvy programs, and focusing on local impact can attract and retain passionate change-makers.

Let's rise to these challenges with adaptability, innovation, and collaboration, upholding the values that make Rotary a beacon of hope in our communities.

Subhojit Roy



In places where winter brings snow and ice, a classic Rotary club fundraiser is the polar plunge. It's downright heroic to jump into an icy lake when the outdoor temperature is below freezing, so participants have little trouble getting their friends and family to pledge to donate. But what about when winter temperatures are far above freezing, as they usually are in Alpharetta, Georgia, USA? Do people still get excited — and open their wallets — for a less-than-icy plunge?

You bet they do.

"It's a unique fundraiser here," says Jeff Davis, the president of the Rotary Club of Alpharetta. "It's not something you really think about a lot in the state of Georgia, so we usually get a segment on the local news. In 2020 we actually had snow. We've gotten a ton of use out of the pictures of that year's snowy Polar Bear Plunge."

This unconventional approach to fundraising has worked well for the Alpharetta club. Last year's plunge raised more than US\$150,000 for Rotary and other local charities, and that wasn't the only benefit.

Last year, The Rotary Foundation received more than US\$1.3 million on and around Giving Tuesday, with more than 2,600 donations made from 82 countries in less than 48 hours. More than 1,580 clubs had at least one member who gave, and the average total donated per club was US\$567.

"It's a great advertisement for Rotary," Davis says. "Folks in the community get a better understanding of what Rotary does. It's more visibility, which helps bring in more members and ultimately more donations."

It's no surprise, then, that Alpharetta was one of The Rotary Foundation's top performers in online donations for Giving Tuesday in 2023. Observed on the Tuesday after the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, Giving Tuesday is a day in late November or early December when nonprofit organizations around the world solicit donations and publicize their causes.

But fundraising is a year-round activity for the clubs that raised the most money for The Rotary Foundation last Giving Tuesday. The Rotary Club of Taipei Nankong, Taiwan, asks all members to donate at least US\$100 each year.



Members of the Rotary Club of Alpharetta, Georgia, USA, participate in a polar bear plunge to raise money for Rotary International and local charity organizations. Alpharetta, Georgia, USA. 3 February 2024. Credit: Clark Savage

One of the club's main projects this year was establishing a free health clinic in Changbin, a rural township in southeast Taiwan. It also collaborated with clubs in Myanmar to open a similar clinic there and is currently working to establish one in Thailand.

Other clubs emphasize the importance of donating in November, which is Rotary Foundation Month. The Rotary Club of Toyohashi, Aichi, Japan, was another of the Foundation's top Giving Tuesday clubs in 2023, excelling in the category of donor participation. This year, though, the weak yen has discouraged members from giving very much, says Tomoaki Kurebayashi, the club's president. Still, he and the other club leaders haven't given up.

One of the Toyohashi club's signature projects dates back to 1998. The club works with the Rotary Club of Bangkok Benjasiri, Bangkok, Thailand, and members of Thailand's Indigenous hill tribes to develop housing and educational resources for tribe members. Tying donations to specific projects also has been effective for the Rotary Club of Edmonton South, Alberta, Canada, another of The Rotary Foundation's top Giving Tuesday clubs. One of the club's main projects is building playgrounds and supporting education for girls in Belize.

"A number of our members have traveled to Belize to build these playgrounds. Their enthusiasm rubs off on other members and creates financial support," says Brian Rothwell, who served as the club's Foundation chair from 2021 through this year.

The key to successful fundraising, Rothwell says, is having a strong club whose members believe in Rotary's ideals. He notes that his club's 53 members are diverse in age and gender.

Rothwell has tried to get as many members as possible to contribute even a small amount to The Rotary Foundation every year, and he found testimonials from contributing members to be useful. But he cautions against placing too much emphasis on fundraising. Instead, he says, club leaders should focus on building a strong, nurturing culture.

"Clubs should avoid a hard sell when it comes to contributions. We use a gentler approach," he says. "If the club is strong and supportive of its members, the money will come."

Keep the Buzz going to fight polio

Unexpected bumps fail to dampen an epic road trip around Europe in an electric VW Buzz

Bashar Asfour is no stranger to ambitious road trips. He's managed the course for an annual motorsport rally through the desert in his home country of Jordan — before there was Google Maps. He's had a passport since he was 4, traveled through 57 countries, and, as a polio survivor who has difficulty walking, is an ace driver himself. So, he was confident about organizing his own road odyssey around Europe last year to raise money for polio eradication.



Image credit : Maurizio Gambarini

He even had a cool ride picked out: a VW Bus. Not the classic version, but Volkswagen's modern electric one, known as the Buzz. At times, however, the Buzz turned out to be more of a buzzkill. "Charging the car was a real hassle," Asfour says, recalling charging stations that were fussy, slow, miles out of his way, or that wouldn't accept his credit card. "The trip took 54 days, 12,342 kilometers, hundreds of hours of driving, and hundreds of hours charging the car!"

Thankfully, the longtime Rotarian, who currently lives in Jordan but is forming an e-club based out of Georgia, made it to the finish line, raised an estimated \$277,000 (preliminary figure), and — astoundingly — missed only one of his 48 fundraising

events. He also had a grand adventure, met some incredible people, and was awestruck by the kindness of strangers. Here, in his own words, are some of the stories from the 2023 My Journey to End Polio, which began in Berlin on 31 August.

BREMEN, Germany, 2 September

When the Buzz, with its bright paint job and End Polio Now logos, is displayed in the historic town center, it generates quite the buzz as passersby stop to ask what I'm doing or ask about polio. Later in this journey, other Rotary districts will do the same, putting the Buzz in the middle of marketplaces and old town plazas for a few hours to show people the good that Rotary is doing in the world. Many people in this part of the world have forgotten about polio, and it's important to remind them that it remains a problem and we need their support still.



Image credit: Bashar Asfour

MILAN, 13 September

One of the biggest challenges of this journey is fatigue. I'm driving a minimum of six hours a day and sometimes as many as 13. Crossing the Alps from Switzerland to Italy, I discover a time-saving tunnel is closed, forcing me to drive over the mountains — and to charge the car even more. In Italy, charging stations are very difficult to find. On the positive side, there's a gala dinner with a large crowd waiting for me in Monza, outside of Milan. And later, there's an even larger crowd — the biggest of the trip — in Rome. While there, I will pass by the Colosseum, one of many extraordinary landmarks on the route.



Image credit: Bashar Asfour

IZMIR, Turkey, 25 September

Crossing the Aegean Sea from Greece to Turkey — with a VW Buzz — is no easy feat. The first ferry takes hours. I arrive at an island at midnight to catch another boat with just enough room for the Buzz. The sea is choppy and every bump sets off the car alarm. I arrive at a port near Izmir, only to have customs hold the Buzz hostage. At last, a Rotary incoming district governor bails me and the Buzz out. Beyond the gates, I am amazed to find two dozen Rotarians and Rotaractors in End Polio Now T-shirts greeting me warmly. The memory brings tears to my eyes. It was so beautiful. I forgot all the troubles I had.



Image credit: Bashar Asfour

ANKARA, Turkey, 28 September ISTANBUL, 1 October

The hospitality of the Turkish people is exquisite. This is another beautiful moment. Before reaching Ankara, I pull into a rest area and am surrounded by a motorcade of Rotary members in End Polio Now vests riding motorcycles. They escort me into the capital. The people are so generous. After discovering that my credit card wouldn't work at charging stations in the country, Rotary clubs call on their members to meet me on highways to charge me up. Some even invite me to lunch. Then, as I leave the country, I'm allowed to cross the border into Bulgaria like a VIP, without any delays. Once inside Bulgaria, a police escort is waiting to take me to my next stop, Stara Zagora. These moments I will never forget.

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia, 12 October

If I ever decide to retire, I will retire here. They have delicious food, very kind people, and the most beautiful old town.

MUNICH, 13 October

Oktoberfest may have just ended but Rotarians here organize the production of a beer named My Journey to End Polio to raise funds. Of all the stops, Munich raises the most in contributions. During an event at a nearly full auditorium, local Rotarians present a check for 39,000 euros. I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack and am moved to tears again. With other contributions, the total raised here will hit 46,000 euros (about US\$48,000).

CHEMNITZ, Germany, 20 October

I arrive at the finish line in time to celebrate World Polio Day. I set out to do something big, and with the support of Rotary districts around Europe, I have. I'd like to do more of these trips on other continents. It has been a wonderful experience. I met so many friends and people I had never met before, but we talked like we'd known each other for 100 years. We are Rotarians, the same family.

District News



Sammelan - Annual District Conference of RID 3291- January 3rd-5th, 2025, Nicco Park, East Pavillion-Members are requested to register alongwith their spouses/guests.



CLUB NEWS

2nd December'24, 6:30pm, Calcutta Club-Investor Awareness Program under Financial Literacy jointly with RC Calcutta Inner City and the Calcutta Club Ltd supported by National Stock Exchange and RC Calcutta Amory.

8th December'24- Visit to Nayagram Balika Vidyapeeth, Jhargram for Donation of Dektrop Computers and Sewing Machines.

13th December'24- Club Fellowship Meet at PDG Shyamashree & President Rtn Sunando Sen's residence.

18th December'24- Felicitation and Interactive program with the differently abled cricketers of Bengal in association with British Deputy High Commission and IBSA.



Edited & Published by PP Rtn Subhojit Roy

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