

Membership Survey Report July 2015

Mark Huddleston, D9520 Membership Chair



Rotary
District 9520



District 9520 Membership Survey

Background.

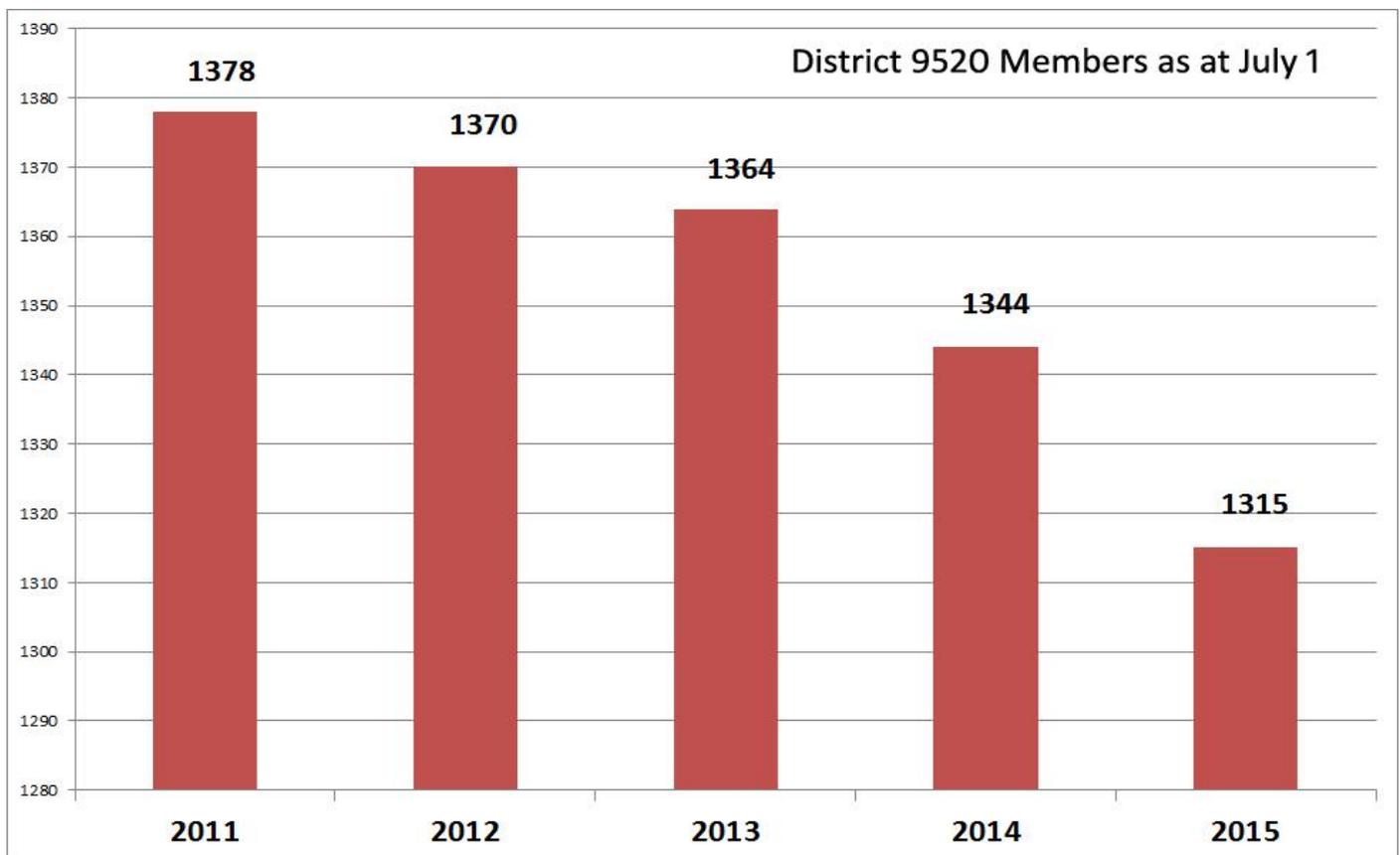
One must understand a problem before one can attempt to address it.

Rotary's details of membership beyond raw numbers are disturbingly vague. Gender is often assumed based on one's name, ages are estimated, reasons for joining and leaving are largely unknown. The most common response to most questions is "unknown".

Gaining this information is relatively simple. One just has to ask, nicely.

At the time of writing this report, responses were received from 32 of 50 clubs. Ideally, responses would have been received from all clubs, but the data compiled from those responses received is more than sufficient to identify trends. It is my belief that the trends identified would not be substantially altered by the additional data if those outstanding surveys were submitted.

The responses provide data for 825 of our 1315 members plus around 90 people who have recently left clubs in this district.



It's hard to spin the above trend any way other than "disappointing". According to official RI figures, our district started the year 29 down on July 1 2014. But that figure is not the most disappointing one. We inducted 137 new members last year, which means to have still achieved a net loss of 29, **166 people left Rotary our district last year** (including deceased).

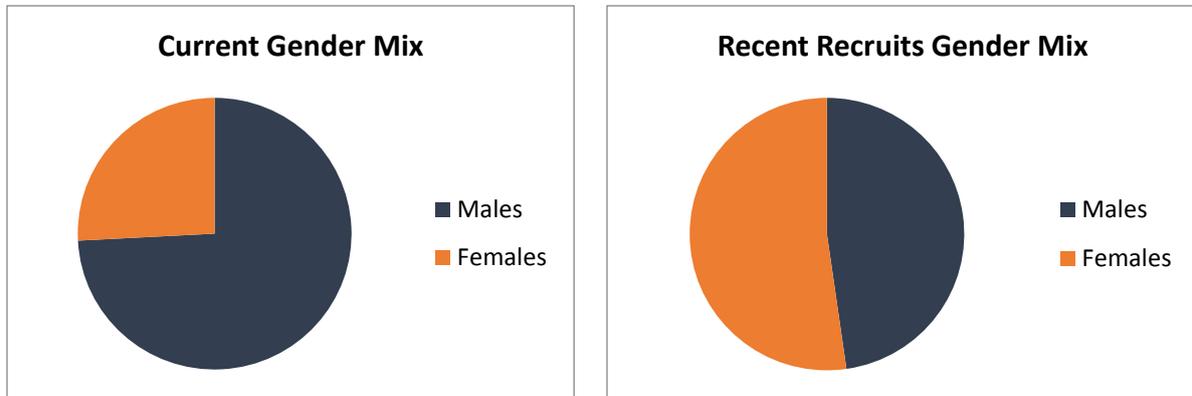
What I can say is that we in Australia belong to a developed segment of the world that is experiencing continual and considerable societal change, and our decline in membership is simply a result of Rotary's failure to keep pace with that societal change. Our membership trends are no different to those being experienced in other parts of the developed world such as USA, UK, most of Europe and Japan.

So we shouldn't beat ourselves up over these results, but nor can we stick our collective heads in the sand and ignore them. Our society is not about to stop and wait for us. Rotary needs to catch up! We need to make Rotary more attractive to an ever changing audience, **AND THAT MEANS CHANGE.**

1. Gender mix

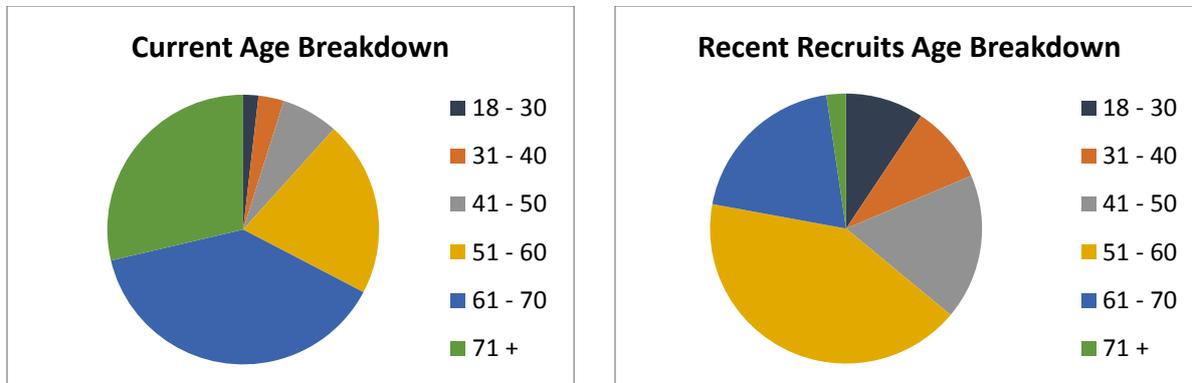
Of 825 members identified in the survey, 612 were males and 213 females. This represents a female percentage of 26%. This is encouraging given current global estimates reflect an overall female membership of 16%.

Clubs were each asked to provide information on the last 3 members to join. We received information on the last 88 people to join clubs in our district. 46 of those 88 were female, equating to 52%.



2. Age breakdown

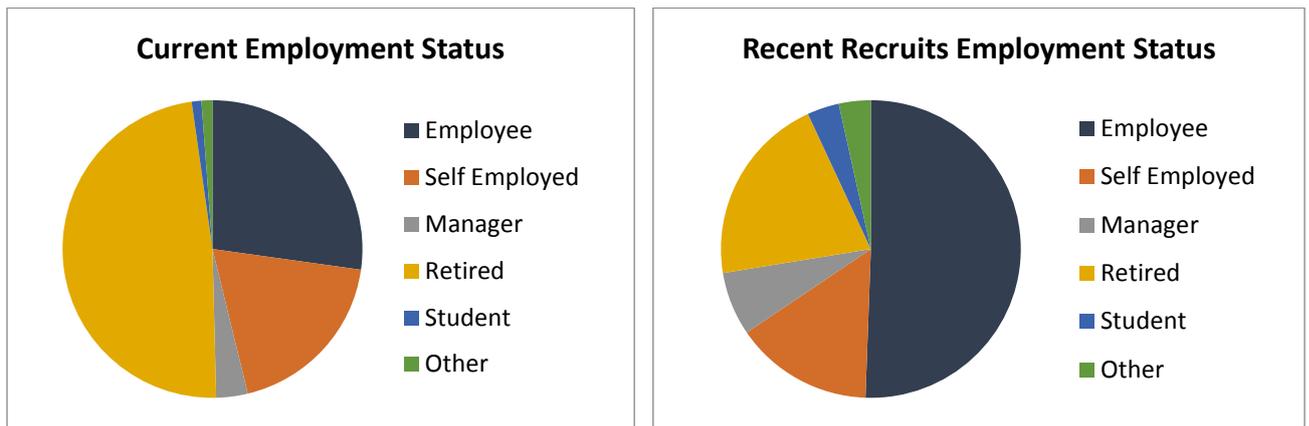
Our age profile results are both unsurprising and disturbing. 29% of us are over 70, 68% are over 60 and a massive 89% over 50. My concerns have never been with the *number* of 60+ members in our organisation, but the *percentage*. We have far too few people under 40 (5%) and in my opinion that needs to change, **and it needs to change now.**



As was the case with the gender mix of new recruits, the age profile of our newest recruits is encouraging. 42% of our recent recruits fall into the 51-60 age group, and 18% are 40 or younger. When it comes to targeting potential members, it would be reasonable to say that the 51-60 age group is the most likely to join, and therefore should be targeted. But in my opinion the easiest option is not always the best option. The fact that the 40 and under group is well represented in new recruits gives us hope that if we work hard to promote Rotary to this group, and make our organisation more relevant and attractive to this group, we can fully realise this opportunity.

It is my belief that our organisation can only reach its full potential by bringing our average age down and having an equal spread of members across all age groups. There is significant change required in order to achieve this end, but bringing our average age down will itself bring about considerable change in our organisation.

3. Employment Status



I posed the question of employment status primarily in an effort to give us some indications as to where we should target our recruitment efforts, but also to dispel a few myths.

One of those myths is that Rotary is an organisation of CEOs and powerful business people. The statistics would suggest in fact that we are an organisation of retirees, although it's reasonable to assume that some of those retirees were once from big business.

Retirees are an extremely valuable group within our organisation. They generally have the spare time to contribute to a service organisation, and also the life experience to act as mentors to younger members, but they often lack the business and professional networks to further our recruitment efforts.

Executives, CEOs and managers of big business seem to lack the available time to contribute to Rotary.

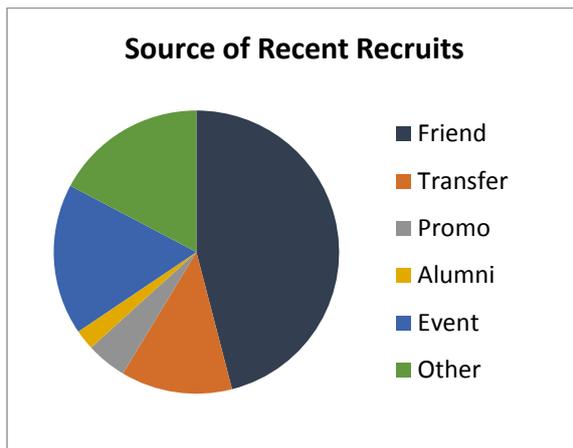
When looking at our recent recruits, the retirees have dropped off, and the "regular" employees have filled that void. Perhaps the best lesson to learn from this is that rather than targeting specific groups in this field, we should be targeting the sort of people that will make the best Rotarians, i.e. recruit on personality type and motivation, rather than employment status. There has been much commentary on the appropriateness of our "classification" system in a progressive organisation. I believe the classification system was always intended to guarantee diversity within our ranks, but there are some who hold up the classification system as some sort of benchmark, and even a barrier to entry. I would prefer we start using terms such as "vocational diversity" to reflect a changing organisation that values students, stay-at-home parents and budding entrepreneurs alongside of CEOs and leaders of big business.

I recently heard a quote that I think applies well to a Rotary context: ***"We define our leaders by the way we think, not by our title."***

Unsurprisingly, "students" is a much underrepresented group. Whilst full membership can be challenging for numerous reasons, including affordability and time commitment, this group is well connected, socially conscious, and often willing to give back to Rotary as a result of a previous Rotary connection.

Rotary membership is somewhat binary in nature – you're either a member or you're not. In a changing world, there are so many levels at which we struggle to adapt because of our rules. There seems no room for genuine associate membership. Many clubs support "friends of Rotary" groups which encourage participation by those who are not willing or able to commit to Rotary membership. We now have our first Rotary Community Corps, and a number of Rotaract Clubs which are now marketed at "Partners in Service". But genuine flexibility in membership remains unattainable.

4. Where are our members coming from?



Asking a friend or colleague to join will probably always remain the most reliable way to find members. This method accounts for 46% of recent recruits.

17% of recent recruits joined as a result of seeing Rotary in action at an event or project. This is really encouraging and reinforces not only the need for clubs to be active in the community, but also the importance of maximising the promotional opportunities that such events create by having appropriate signage and information available at the event, then recording the event and advertising via social media and other methods.

Picking up former Rotarians from other clubs (transfers) is often a matter of luck, and cannot be relied upon as an effective recruitment technique, but it's reasonable to assume that former Rotarians are somewhat selective and know what sort of club they wish to join. Sometimes this will come down to geography if there is only one club in the region in question. Sometimes it will come down to meeting time, and what suits the member's schedule, but attractive clubs will always attract members, and unattractive clubs will not, regardless of whether those new members have previous Rotary experience.

The two most disappointing categories are "alumni" and "promotions". The fact that only 2% of recent recruits were previously involved in a Rotary program reflects very poorly on our capacity to maintain positive relationships with this group. This is definitely an area for concern.

It seems inconceivable that only 5% of recent recruits have joined as a result of promotion or advertising. Three words come to mind, **"Our Marketing Sucks"**. Perhaps we still don't understand the purpose of our advertising. Is it to inform, to persuade or to recruit? There are complex differences the strategies required to bring about these differing objectives, and I would suggest many Rotarians don't get it.

In hindsight, it may have been wise to ask for more information for the "other" response, because 17% is a sizeable segment of the pie, and to be unclear on how it is made up is somewhat frustrating.

Whilst not revealed by this survey, I have recently been made aware of concerted campaigns by isolated members in a number of clubs to actively prevent recruiting. No single member should wield so much power. All members in good standing already have an opportunity to oppose the induction of proposed members on a case-by-case basis. But this is extremely rare.

5. Who are you targeting for membership?

Clubs were asked if they were targeting any specific groups for membership. 24 of 32 respondents answered this question positively.

- The word "young" or "younger" appeared in 9 responses
- The word "professional" or "business people" appeared in 9 responses
- 40 – 50 was the most targeted age group
- The word "female" or "woman" only appeared in 4 responses
- There were only 2 references to the word "family" or "family friendly"
- "Enthusiastic", "motivated", "active" were fairly uncommon terms

6. Promotional Initiatives

I asked a number of questions about basic promotional initiative, and to be frank, the responses are a little disappointing. In my opinion, the below initiatives are “no brainers” when it comes to promoting your club.

Does your club have a tailor made website, independent of “rotarynews.info”?

Yes, 56% No, 44%

An informative and up-to-date club website is essential for club promotion. Whilst the “rotarynews.info” service provides basic meeting and contact details for free, clubs expecting this service to act as a recruitment tool are likely to be disappointed. Rotary clubs are all unique, and a “one size fits all” website platform just doesn’t cut it. I would suggest the overwhelming majority of people who view the “rotarynews.info” pages are other Rotarians.

Does your club have a Facebook Page?

Yes, and it is very active 48% Yes, but it is not very active 31% No 21%

If your club does not have an **active** Facebook page, your club might as well not have a Facebook page at all. I’m concerned that less than 50% of clubs have an active Facebook presence despite continually promoting Facebook and offering training across the district. Facebook is fun, free and effective.

Does your club have custom made (club specific) banners and/or signage for display at community events and projects?

Yes, 81% No, 19%

This is an encouraging response. Hopefully clubs that have these items are using them effectively. We have learned earlier that 17% of recruits are joining as a result of seeing Rotary clubs active in the community.

Does your club have a professionally printed flier for distribution to guests and the general public?

Yes, we have professionally printed fliers	31%
We have fliers printed on a member's printer	25%
No	44%

Whilst I’m very concerned that 44% of clubs do not have a flier, I’m encouraged that 56% do. But sometimes our promotional initiatives are counterproductive. A flier that is printed on a member’s printer can look amateur, and can potentially undermine a club’s promotional campaign. This choice is often made for cost reasons, but the costs of professional printing have come down considerably over recent years, and it is quite likely that quantities of 1,000 or more actually cost less when professionally printed. It is also worth paying for professional artwork and finishing to give the final product a little polish. Your club flier is what guests take away from a meeting or event for future reference. It needs to make a lasting impression. Will that lasting impression be professional, or amateur?

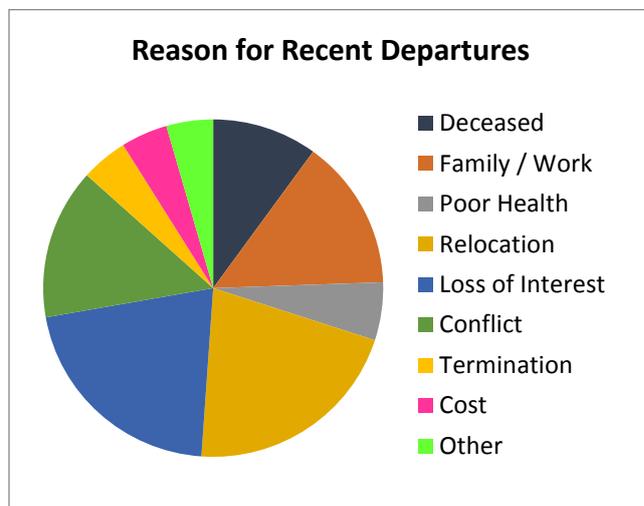
Do you have Rotary Business Cards for your members?

Yes, 28% No, 72%

Business cards are a simple and cost effective way to promote your club. One simple design can be printed for all members, with a space for members to write their name and phone number.

7. Why are people leaving?

Clubs were asked to provide information on the last three members to leave. Whilst the line has to be drawn somewhere, these findings unfortunately cannot accurately account for clubs which have suffered considerable losses. In this case the figures can be somewhat unrepresentative of issues present in these clubs. For example, if the 3 most recent members all died, but the 5 prior resignations were as a result of conflict, the survey responses won't reflect this.



With the exception of the light green “other” segment, the left half of the pie represents the “controllable” reasons people leave, and the right side represents the “uncontrollables”.

There are a few surprises in these results. I expected we would have lost more members to poor health, but perhaps more people are remaining members throughout their illness and falling into the category of “inactive” than resigning.

When asked “How many of your members would you describe as inactive?” the response averaged across the district was **15.75%**.

I also would have expected more people citing the cost of membership as the reason they left, because I hear a lot of people complaining about the cost of membership, and suggesting they won't be able to afford to be a member forever.

Conflict remains at concerning levels. Perhaps of more concern was that this was a common theme in some clubs.

8. Exit interviews

I asked if exit interviews were conducted when each of those last three members left. This is not applicable reasons such as “deceased”, “poor health” or “termination”, so I have only included responses on only the remaining reasons for leaving.

Yes	45.33%
No, but we intend to	5.33%
No	49.33%

Assuming the “No, but we intend to” responses eventually turn into a “Yes”, this indicates roughly a 50/50 split. I would imagine in many cases, club leaders either know exactly why a member left, or feel that nothing productive will come from an exit interview.

9. Growth Expectations

Clubs were asked about recent growth and expected growth

Your club's growth over the last 5 years		Your anticipated growth over the next 5 years	
Significant Growth	0%	Significant Growth	15.6%
Modest Growth	34.4%	Modest Growth	65.5%
About the same	31.3%	About the same	15.6%
Modest Losses	21.9%	Modest Losses	3.1%
Significant Losses	12.5%	Significant Losses	0%