



FOUR QUESTIONS

Beyond borders

Intercountry committees form a framework for promoting peace and service

Cyril Noirtin experienced the value of international friendship when he went to Hartland, Wisconsin, as a Rotary Youth Exchange student in 1989. Upon returning home to Nancy, France, he joined a Rotaract club and eventually became president of the European Rotaract Information Center, where he learned about intercountry committees (ICCs). Established in 1950, ICCs help build friendship and cooperation among Rotary clubs in different countries and improve relations among Rotary members in regions historically affected by conflict. There are now some 400 ICCs around the world.

In 2001, Noirtin and several Rotaract friends established the Rotary Club of Paris Agora, which he served as charter president. He is the primary RI representative to UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as well as the chair of the intercountry committee executive council.

1 What's the story behind intercountry committees?

Reaching across borders to promote peace, international understanding, and goodwill is an integral part of Rotary's message and is reflected in its fourth Avenue of Service. In the early 1930s, Rotarians in Germany and France created a *petit comité franco-allemand* to promote

peace and understanding between the countries. The committee had to stop its activities when the Nazis banned Rotary clubs in Germany.

After the Second World War, at a Rotary District 70 conference in Strasbourg, France, in 1950, Robert Haussmann (Stuttgart, Germany) and Roger Coutant (Lille, France) created a new intercountry committee between France and Germany, with the aim of reestablishing bonds of international friendship and promoting peace. Based on that example, other ICCs were developed by clubs worldwide, but in Europe in particular. ICCs help strengthen international understanding and social, economic, and cultural relations, and they provide a mechanism for the efficient promotion of peace. They have traditionally served as a catalyst for international service and are frequently the framework through which many international service projects are carried out.

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2 How do ICCs advance Rotary’s peacebuilding goals?

ICCs help Rotarians and Rotaractors to learn about other cultures and to work together on Rotary programs and build international partnerships, including for projects funded by global grants. They also promote the image of Rotary in general and help establish new clubs.

ICCs have been a major factor in the expansion of Rotary in Eastern and Central Europe since the end of the Cold War. In the 1990s, French Rotarians formed ICCs with Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. This helped to reintroduce Rotary to Poland and Ukraine, and encouraged the proliferation of Rotary clubs in Russia after the end of Soviet rule.

3 What is the process for forming an ICC?

ICCs involve districts in two or more countries. Rotary members in each country form a planning committee whose responsibilities include obtaining the endorsement of the district governors, organizing planning meetings, and identifying potential projects and activities for clubs from the ICC’s participating countries to jointly undertake. For an ICC to be a national relationship between two countries, all districts from both countries need to agree to the relationship. An ICC can also be subnational if a handful of districts from each country decide to formalize the international relationship.

4 What will be the focus of your 2021 preconvention event?

Intercountry Committees: Opening Opportunities for Peace is a one-day preconvention event that will explore how ICCs can promote Rotary’s mission and strategic vision. We hope to raise awareness about ICCs and their peacebuilding potential by highlighting successful relationships and accomplishments, including between countries that have been at war or are in permanent conflict. The event will be an interactive networking opportunity aimed at inspiring the formation of new ICCs. Breakout sessions will explain how to organize and manage ICCs and how to focus on service areas where ICCs can have the most impact. The event will offer different tracks: All interested participants are welcome regardless of experience with intercountry committees. — PAUL ENGLEMAN

Learn more at rotary-icc.org.