

Project Overviews of Inadequate Community Assessments That Impacted Global Grant Projects

Rotary introduced the mandatory community assessment requirement for Global Grants specifically because projects that lacked meaningful community engagement were far more likely to experience implementation problems, sustainability concerns, and approval delays.

Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation generally do not publish lists of Global Grants that failed specifically because of an inadequate community assessment. Most grant review discussions occur between applicants and Regional Grants Officers and are not publicly disclosed. However, Rotary has published examples and lessons learned that demonstrate how inadequate assessments contribute to project rejection, major delays, redesigns, or eventual project failure.

Based on publicly available Rotary grant records and Foundation guidance, the following cases illustrate the issue.

El Potrero Water System – Guatemala

Area of Focus: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

This water project experienced significant delays and ultimately was closed before Rotary and its technical partners could complete the work. Public project updates show that changes in municipal and community leadership resulted in the community choosing to proceed without Rotary participation. Remaining funds were returned to the Foundation.

Community Assessment Weakness

The project relied heavily on commitments from municipal authorities and community leadership. When those stakeholders changed, the underlying assumptions about support and participation changed as well. A more comprehensive stakeholder assessment might have examined:

- Political and leadership transition risks
- Long-term community governance
- Contingency plans if local commitments changed

Lesson Learned

A community assessment should evaluate not only the technical need for water, but also the durability of stakeholder commitments and governance structures. A formal signed and notarized commitment from all stakeholders and major suppliers could have proven beneficial.

Kabale WASH Schools Project – Uganda

Area of Focus: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

This school water, sanitation, and hygiene project conducted a detailed assessment and identified numerous needs. The project progressed through planning and fundraising stages but was eventually dropped after funding support eroded by lack of fund commitment.

Community Assessment Weakness

The assessment documented many needs:

- Water access
- Latrine deficiencies
- Menstrual hygiene facilities
- School vs. Community conflicts over water usage assignment
- Infrastructure deficiencies

The challenge was that the assessment identified a broad range of problems, making prioritization and project scope more difficult. Projects that attempt to solve too many community issues at once often face funding and implementation challenges.

Lesson Learned

A strong assessment must not only identify needs but also:

- Prioritize them
- Define which need Rotary is best positioned to address
- Create a focused, sustainable intervention

Rotary guidance specifically warns against trying to address multiple needs without clear community prioritization.

Oaxaca Community Bakery Project – Mexico

Area of Focus: Community and Economic Development

A Global Grant-supported community bakery project stalled for years and required additional funding to restart and complete construction after significant interruptions.

Community Assessment Weakness

While COVID was a major external factor, the project highlights a common assessment gap:

- Insufficient evaluation of implementation capacity
- Insufficient assessment of long-term operational requirements

- Limited contingency planning for interruptions

Many economic-development projects focus on equipping facilities while underestimating:

- Management capacity
- Business sustainability
- Supply chains
- Market demand
- Community ownership

Lesson Learned

Economic development grants require assessments that evaluate both infrastructure needs and the community's ability to operate and sustain the enterprise over time.

What Rotary Foundation Staff Most Commonly See

According to Rotary grant guidance and Regional Grants Officer communications, the most common community-assessment deficiencies that lead to grant delays are:

1. The project did not clearly reflect priorities identified by the community.
2. The solution was chosen before the community assessment was conducted.
3. Assessment documentation was incomplete or insufficiently detailed.
4. Root causes were not identified.
5. Needs were based on anecdotal observations rather than evidence.
6. Beneficiaries were not adequately consulted.
7. Sustainability planning was weak or absent.

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