

# My Perspective on Increasing Global Grants Inter-District Partnerships

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Rotary Global Grants provide one of the best ways to “Do Good in the World.” They give individual Rotarians the ability to develop, initiate, and execute needs-based projects which have high sustainable and measurable outcomes and make an impact on individuals and communities.



My name is Narayan Murarka, Barrington Breakfast Rotary Club, District 6440. I had the privilege to sponsor on my club’s behalf six major global grants in Guatemala in partnership with Club Rotario Guatemala Sur, District 4250. The total budget for these grants is \$1.2 million over the last seven years. I had also an opportunity to serve as Global Grants Chair for District 6440 Rotary Foundation Committee for five years. As a result, I have gained some experience from the ground level about the global grants related matters.

I have written this article to give my perspective about the issues that affect a typical Rotarian who may venture to sponsor a global grant. My hope is that this article will generate dialogue resulting in improvements in the global grants process within the districts and zones. I welcome comments, critic and constructive suggestions. Thanks

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There are three major top-level requirements for any global grant to succeed: They are

- Lead Rotarian – Power of One
- Available resources to navigate the grant application process
- Financing

## 1. Power of One:

For the successful execution of such projects, it is critical for Rotarians to lead with passion, persistence and perseverance. These individuals should be recognized and commended for their initiative and commitment to fulfill the Rotary Foundation motto.

Though there are many Rotarians who venture to undertake and implement these projects, there are too many who stay on the sidelines – some because they are influenced by a barrage of negatives relative to the Rotary Foundation and global grants. These negatives include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Rotary Foundation is a very difficult entity to understand. This seems to be universally believed in spite of its existence for so many decades?
- Navigating a global grant application is extremely difficult.
- Adequate “How to” help is not generally available.
- Rotary Foundation Grants Officers are generally not helpful.
- Finding financing partners is a very hard road to travel.

Admittedly, processing a global grant application is not a piece of cake and it requires some effort. However, we also know that anything we may try in life is likely to be difficult. As Rotarians, this should not be the reason to not try, particularly if driven by a passion to help others. There are many examples of Rotarians succeeding in implementing substantial global grants. These examples provide reasons to bring those who are on the sidelines to be engaged in grants by providing proper support and help.

The challenge is to combat negativism and create a positive image of the Rotary Foundation and global grants particularly among Rotarians.

Rotary Foundation has dual role. It collects funds and in turn partly finances projects. There is significant emphasis (rightfully so) for promoting contributions to TRF. These numbers are tallied by clubs, districts, and zones in a variety of ways, and awards are made for the top performing districts and clubs.

What about the importance of promoting results of how these funds benefit communities? Let me offer a quote from Paul Harris and another more contemporary quote from our own PRID Mike McCullough.:

“Whatever Rotary may mean to us; to the world it will be known by the **results** it achieves.”  
- Paul Harris

"It's not about the money, it's about what the money can do!" - PRID Mike McCullough

The message is to implement projects that produce sustainable and measurable outcomes that have an impact on the community. In turn, these projects need to be advertised with an active Public Relations (PR) campaign. The lead Rotarian needs to be recognized for his/her efforts. Much needs to be done in this respect.

Unfortunately, the lack of wide knowledge of these results is one of the reasons that TRF is not well understood by Rotarians. Even Rotarians within a district are not aware of the projects implemented by their fellow Rotarian within the same district.

The situation calls for an evaluation of our current practices and placing equal emphasis on project results in conjunction with contributions to the foundation. Successful stories about global grants, if properly promoted, may begin to start fading away the negativism about the foundation and global grants.

## **2. Available resources to navigate the grant application process**

District leadership always talks about the district's role as “helping” clubs and, by extension, their members. Training is one of the primary responsibilities of the district who conducts many seminars for the purpose. The Grants Management Seminar (GMS) is related to the Rotary Foundation and global grants. It generally runs about four or so hours once each year and covers all aspects of foundation programs. By necessity, this is a very high-level overview.

Unfortunately, such a seminar does NOT dispel the notion that Rotary Foundation is a difficult entity to understand. Also, due to its nature, it does not train anybody about the “how to” aspects of global grants. As such, the status quo about TRF being difficult to understand and global grants difficult to implement remains in place. *Unfortunately, there just are not any voices to counter this notion among Rotarians.*

The problem is compounded due to lack of individual Rotarians within the district with knowledge of the detailed process and aspects of global grants. There are a very few individuals with some knowledge, but their help does not go very far in alleviating the needs of a lead Rotarian.

It would be immensely helpful if a cadre of individuals were available in each district who could guide the lead Rotarian in real time through the entirety of the process. These individuals need to be those with “hands-on” experience as opposed to those who have many titles.

The districts need to make “global grants” as a priority much the same way as “membership” is. In turn, develop a robust ongoing training program beyond GMS for navigating grants through the process.

### **3. Financing**

Finding financing partners is a major challenge for the lead Rotarian wishing to sponsor a global grant. It is a frustrating and very time-consuming process. Within the Rotary’s existing system, there are ways these concerns may be alleviated with proper management of resources and policies. We offer some ideas for consideration.

**3.1 Power of Partnerships:** Global grants require partnership to raise funds. It is critical to bring together multiple clubs and districts to partner and raise funds. There are several potential relationships that can be fostered and developed. Under this mechanism, several clubs should be able to pool their club cash together and then apply for DDF and TRF matches. This can be done in the following ways:

***Club to club intra-district partnership:*** A club sponsoring a global grant within a particular district should be able to attract other clubs within the same district to contribute club cash. While this scenario does take place, it is not as prevalent as it could be. This is because most of the other clubs within the district do not have knowledge of a particular in-district grant being in progress. The lead Rotarian does not generally have the outreach to approach the other clubs for support. Most clubs do budget a few thousand dollars for participation in international projects. Due to lack of knowledge of such in-district projects, they are unable to do so, pointing out the need for some sort of information exchange vehicle.

***Club to club inter-district partnership:*** This is truly a major challenge. We are missing a great deal of potential participation within, for example, the districts in a given zone. Each zone consists of over 15 districts. This amounts of over 1000 clubs. Imagine, if only 10% - 20% of these clubs were to join together with cash contributions, there will be tremendous boost in financing of a global grant. This does not generally happen due to lack of information about projects from outside-district clubs. This issue also calls for some sort of information exchange vehicle.

**3.2 Power of Matching:** The Rotary Foundation (TRF) has devised a unique system that provides matching dollars at the District level via District Designated Funds (DDF) and at the TRF level approved by the Trustees. These matches have a multiplier effect, providing a substantial boost to the cash committed by Clubs and/or Districts for the project.

***DDF support for intra-district clubs:*** This is a very straight forward way to provide the power of matching to a grant generated within the district itself. Assuming that the lead Rotarian is able to generate support and partnerships from other intra-district clubs, the district should be able to match the combined club cash with DDF in a 1:1 ratio or even higher if there is enough available DDF. Hopefully, such a matching mechanism can be universally formalized by each district within the zone and widely announced as a standard policy. By making the policy transparent, the lead Rotarian will have one less issue to worry about.

***DDF support for inter-district clubs:*** As stated above, inter-district club to club partnership is a very healthy way to finance global grants. It will be highly desirable, if a club in district A supports another

club in district B, district A should be able to provide matching DDF for its own club's cash contribution. The reverse should also be true in that a club in district B supports a club in district A with club cash, district B should provide matching DDF. This means that districts provide DDF match to all clubs within their own district if they contribute funds to intra- or inter-district clubs. This seems to be a very fair and equitable way to support clubs undertaking global grants. The impact of this policy will be significant.

Districts have different policies related to this matter. We suggest that the districts should make its policy fair and transparent and publicize it so that there is no ambiguity in this matter.

**Inter-district DDF partnership:** This matter is complicated and above my "pay grade." It is also highly political (WUT – politics in Rotary?). However, *I see no reason why a fair and transparent policy can't be developed to address this aspect. I am an idealistic person.* I understand that districts are sitting on tons of uncommitted and unspent DDF. Would it not be better to put that money to help others? After all, our overall goal should be to help Rotarians who sponsor and implement global grants for the good of humanity. Rotarians undergo a lot of stress in raising funds. Anything that can be done to alleviate this problem will bring Rotarian participation.

Districts have different policies related to this matter. In many cases, the problem is compounded due to the expectation of reciprocity when one district provides its DDF to another. As I recently learned, this practice is against the TRF policies quoted below from Article #52.050, Rotary Foundation Code of Policies, January 2019:

*"Districts with local projects which seek to trade or swap district designated funds which are then utilized in a global grant are not meeting the Trustee standard ....."*

*"It is inappropriate and unacceptable for districts to trade or swap DDF as sponsor contributions for global grants with the purpose of simply securing funding for local projects."*

I wish and hope that the Rotary Foundation Trustees will take up this matter and at least facilitate increased awareness of the above policy among DGs, DGEs, DGNs and DRFCs. They are well aware of the tremendous amount of unspent and uncommitted DDF held by districts.

Imagine an **ideal** situation where districts contribute their DDF to finance grants based on the quality (impact, sustainability, measurable outcome, etc.) without any reciprocity and irrespective of the sponsoring club/district. The effect will undoubtedly be substantial increase in impactful global grants that change the lives of others for the better.

#### **4. Summary:**

The next progressive step is to promote and formally establish a multi-district and multi-club partnerships mechanism perhaps under the zone umbrella. There are a large number of clubs in each district that do not participate in global grants. Partnering offers them the first entry point and an opportunity to be engaged. Clubs with limited cash resources can be engaged in international projects, which builds membership, public image, and service opportunities. Partnerships also help clubs to further fellowship and friendships with other Rotarians in other clubs.

Project development and implementation could be additional components of partnerships beyond just financing. Country coordination is another area where sharing information about prospective host clubs and their local knowledge could be beneficial for the success of a project.

Relationship, trust and mutual respect are key components of partnerships. It's logical to think clubs and districts within a zone are more likely to have trust as a result of many interactions between them.

My suggestion is to establish a zone wide system to at least increase partnerships between clubs within its 15+ districts. An appropriate structure/mechanism needs to be created that makes it easier for clubs to know about upcoming opportunities for partnerships.

One reason for writing this article is to seek out other comments, ideas and suggestions to address the following types of questions:

- What type of organizational entity could be the focal point for initiating and sustaining such a structure?
- What kind of structures, entities and policies could be put in place?
- What kind of electronic and multi-media platforms could be created?

I hope that constructive dialogue will emerge, and inter-district global grant partnerships will be the beneficiary.

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