

# GLOBAL GRANTS COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Use this form to report community assessment findings to The Rotary Foundation when you apply for a global grant.

Assessing the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and assets of the community you plan to help is an essential first step in designing an effective and sustainable global grant project. See [Community Assessment Tools](#) for full instructions and helpful tips.

This form will help you report the results of your community assessment, and it is required when you apply for any humanitarian or vocational training team grant. Complete a separate form for each beneficiary community (e.g., school, health care system, or village), using information that is both current and specific to each community. Remember, you cannot use global grant funds to cover the cost of doing an assessment, but you can use district grant funds.

## COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

**Describe the characteristics (such as geographic information, main sources of income, population size, and access to education and health services) of the specific community where this project will take place.**

### **GENERAL OVERVIEW Global Grant #2572811**

This global grant is Phase 2 of our original grant #2454803 in Costa Rica.

Building on the impact of the first grant, Phase 2 expands the training component of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) by adding a Vocational Training Team (VTT) grant for education and psychology professionals working with children (ages 2-12 years) who are on the Autism Spectrum. ABA trainers will conduct a series of workshops at two locations, San Jose and Turrialba, Costa Rica.

While the Turrialba area includes both urban and rural areas, San Jose, the capitol of Costa Rica covers a forty-mile urban corridor between San Jose and Turrialba. There are about 1.482 million people in the greater San Jose area, and 29,000 people in Turrialba.

As Costa Rica's capital, San José plays a critical role in the nation's economy. The city is home to government institutions including education and medical ministries, financial centers, and a growing technology sector. Costa Rica has positioned itself as a leader in developing sustainable industries and eco-friendly initiatives, and San José has been at the forefront of these efforts. It is an important hub for tourism, education, and healthcare, with a rising number of international companies choosing to establish operations there, attracted by the country's political stability and skilled workforce.

The Turrialba area is home to two universities, farming, light industry, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and software development. This area also enjoys a healthy tourism industry that focuses on “edutourism” (history, culture, nature) and adventure travel (white water rafting, zip-lining, hiking).

Fifty-nine percent of Costa Rica is forest, 8% is urban and 35% is agriculture.

#### The Education System/Special Education Curriculum

The Fundamental Law of Education (#9379) established the constitutional right of students with disabilities to receive an equal education, and the rights of parents to receive information on assisting their child with special education needs. Special education services are available throughout the country under the direction of the Department of Special Education within the nationally centralized Ministry of Public Education (MEP). Headquartered in San Jose, MEP is divided into twenty-seven regions that are administered by staff that reports to a Regional Director. Each region covers about 200-225 elementary schools. Schools have Special Education teachers with degrees in speech, physical and/or occupational therapy. Remote schools have “indirect” Special Education teachers that travel to each remote school two or three times per month to work with students with special needs.

While free and mandatory education is available, special education in schools does not have any teachers who are trained in applied behavior analysis (ABA) or know how to work with children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

#### The Health Care System/Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Diagnosis

Costa Rica has a socialized medical system. It is called the Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social (CCSS), and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CAJA), which provides universal healthcare to all residents. CAJA manages all thirty public hospitals in the country. Citizens and permanent residents have 100% coverage for all hospital appointments, visits, medical procedures, and prescription drugs.

About \$950 is spent annually per citizen on health at state expense. The country provides 1.1 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants. There are 14,400 physicians in the country. That is about 2.77 doctors per one thousand inhabitants. Many families who have children with autism are referred to a psychologist. There are only 2,790 psychologists in Costa Rica. We do not know the percentage of teaching psychologists versus practicing psychologists.

Only two hospitals in Costa Rica are authorized by CAJA to diagnose autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They are the National Children’s Hospital in San Jose and the William Allen Taylor Hospital in Turrialba. While they can diagnose ASD, they provide only basic information to parents about support available. Hospital Max Peralta in nearby Cartago has the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) tool to evaluate children with autism but they no longer have staff who know how to use it.

#### COLLECTING COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT DATA

**When you conducted the assessment, who in the community did you speak to? At least two different community representatives and beneficiaries who are not involved in Rotary (such as teachers, doctors, or community leaders) should be included in the discussions.**

1. Turrialba – The Turrialba region (MEP) Director of Special Education. Dr. Odette Loaiza Sanchez and three of her Special Education teachers travelled with us to schools and provided a spreadsheet showing with the number of children in her region with autism, and broken down by school. (4 meetings)
2. Pavones -Blas Solano Perez Elementary School - A round table discussion with school administrators, teachers, the Regional Director of Special Education and four of her staff.
3. University of Costa Rica, San Jose Campus: Two professors in the School of Psychology. We wanted to learn what was being taught in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders including ASD. (2 meetings)
3. Pinares - Costa Rican Association for Psychology Professionals (CPPCR) – Meeting with the President of the association and head of their “Life Guild” logistics department. Representatives from Rotary and UCR requested consideration for conducting the VTT workshops at their facility.
4. William Allen Taylor Hospital – To learn how many children with ASD (diagnosed and undiagnosed) they see monthly, where the children come from and what the family does to help the child. (3 meetings)
5. Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) – CATIE has been a Rotary partner since 2018. This is CATIE’s fourth global grant project with Rotary. General Director, Dr. Luis Pocasangre and Dr. Eliecer Vargas, Coordinator of International Partnerships. (5 meetings)
6. Turrialba - Jorge de Bravo School – Special Education Administrator and Associate Administrator. Private school, grades 1-10. This is a private school. Fifteen percent of students in the school are on the autism spectrum. (2 meetings).
7. Curridabat - University of Santa Paula, San Jose – By Zoom: interview with department head for Occupational Therapy. Discuss including faculty in the VTT program with the consideration that an ABA curriculum be included in his department.

**When in the last year did the discussions occur?**

April, May, August, September, November, December 2024. January 2025.

**What methods did you use to collect information from community members (such as community meetings, interviews, or focus groups)?**

1. Direct observation: Children with autism in classroom settings. (kindergarten, second grade)
2. Focus Groups: University/Hospital/Education Professionals in Behavior Sciences
3. Interviews: Regional Director Education/General Director Hospital/Department Chair University
4. Asset Inventory: Tapping into the relationship between the University of Costa Rica UCR) and the Costa Rican Association for Psychology Professionals (CPPCR), Rotary has benefitted from being able to include both parties in the design of the VTT workshops.

**TARGET POPULATION**

**Who will benefit directly from the project? List the groups that will benefit (such as schools, hospitals, vocational training centers, cooperatives, or villages).**

**1. Direct Beneficiaries:**

- a. The Special Education teachers in elementary schools will directly benefit most from what they learn and practice in the VTT workshops.
- b. University of Costa Rica/Department of Psychology teaching faculty. By attending the workshops on ASD, they will be able to create a curriculum to teach graduate students about neurodevelopmental disorders in children.
- c. William Allen Taylor Hospital: Is preparing an independent program of therapies for children with autism and their families. The Physical and Occupational therapists will become equipped with knowledge of what causes negative behaviors in children during the therapy sessions and how to manage various conditions for successful outcomes.
- d. Costa Rican Association for Psychology Professionals (CPPCR): This is the licensing and monitoring organization for Psychologists in Costa Rica. By both hosting and attending the all the workshops, they will be able to administer certifications to psychologists who train in the field of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and collect data on ASD in children.

**Describe the process of how the beneficiaries were identified.**

**Special Education Teachers:** During the application for global grant #2454803 (the first phase) our partner, CATIE, introduced Rotarians to the Regional Special Education Director at MEP. At the time, the grant proposed 10 ABA (master's degree level) and 3 IBA (Doctorate Degree level) scholarships for 12-month (ABA) and 270 hours (IBA) of online training in Spanish. This Director is responsible for 237 elementary schools in her region. Once she saw the presentation about the scholarship program, she sent an email to all Special Education teachers in her region letting them know about the program. We do not know how many replies of interest she received, but from those, she selected about thirty-five educators and passed their names to us. A Rotarian then reached out to a member of the Board of Directors at the International Behavior Analysis Organization (IBAO). Dr. Mapy Chavez conducted two one-hour Zoom sessions called "*Introduction to ABA Parts 1 and 2*" for the thirty-five educators being considered for a scholarship. Scholarship applications were sent to those who attended the sessions (32 applicants). The local Rotary club formed a Scholarship Committee, and the applicants were selected by a "point system" and notified. Training launched on August 14, 2024.

*It should be noted that the MEP Regional Director of Special Education applied for one of the 3 IBA scholarships, was accepted and is currently completing her 270 hours of training.*

During the VTT workshops, the Special Education teachers, currently in this program, will volunteer as assistants to the workshop leaders.

**William Allen Taylor Hospital Medical Professionals:** CATIE also introduced Rotarians to the General Director of the new local hospital. We met three times with pediatricians and specialists that the General Director invited. From that group of twelve, three medical professionals applied for and received ABA scholarships. The hospital is now building a dedicated "Sensory Room" for children with

neurodevelopmental disorders. One doctor will be doing special training during the VTT to be certified to use the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS). This is the global standard for autism diagnosis.

**University of Costa Rica/Department of Psychology:** Rotary had learned that the University of Costa Rica (UCR) used to have a course called “Introduction to ABA.” We were able to identify the instructor. He was still at UCR as Dean of the Department of Psychology, but the course no longer existed. We reached out to him with the VTT proposal and then met him in person to describe the course curriculum. Another member of the Psychology Department, who taught Behavior Science joined the meeting and an outline for training UCR faculty as ABA professionals was created. From there we brought on current and former ABA faculty from the University of North Texas who will be supporting the VTT and assisting with the development of the program. The program will be included in the graduate program for psychologists who will work either in the schools, hospitals, or private practice.

**Costa Rican Association for Psychology Professionals (CPPCR):** This organization is the certification and licensing board for all Psychologists in Costa Rica. Our contacts at UCR are also licensed by CPPCR. It was with their help that we were able to have a meeting with the President of CPPCR and the person who oversees the license and renewal process. We presented the VTT program to them and asked if they would be able to host the workshops. They agreed to host Rotary at their main office. They also agreed to provide a unique certification to those who attended all the workshops under the VTT. Because they know who is licensed and certified in the entire country, with the help of Rotary, they will send out invitations for the VTT training.

## COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, NEEDS, PRIORITIES, AND PROJECT DESIGN

**Describe what members of the community said matters to them during the assessment.**

### **Education:**

1. All the Special Education teachers have said they deal with children with autism every day. They want the tools that applied behavior analysis provides because they know it is a proven science and that it works. Without ABA tools, teaching is more stressful and creates a difficult atmosphere for children with challenging behaviors. It disrupts classroom learning for all the children. They also must deal with the parents who expect the school to “fix” their child.
2. The Regional MEP Director in Turrialba now understands the importance of her Special Education teachers receiving continuing education. She said she plans to request more funding from MEP for her region and share information about ABA with her counterparts in the other twenty-six regions.
3. The administrators at University of Costa Rica Psychology Department said that the time has come to (re) introduce ABA into the graduate curriculum. Using their partnership with CPPCR, they want UCR to be part of the educator community to design ABA certification programs in Costa Rica. CPPCR would play a significant role in licensing and certifications.

### **Medical Professionals:**

1. Medical personnel want to serve families of children with ASD. They say it is not enough to simply diagnose the child but to not offer options for therapy.

2. The hospital director wants to launch a hospital wide program to train all hospital personnel (from cafeteria to sanitary workers) in basic ABA. She sees this as both educational and for the safety of behavior challenged persons while they are on the hospital campus.
3. She wants her medical people trained so they can conduct hospital-wide workshops to identify autism and other neurodiverse behaviors as a way to spread knowledge and hope throughout the communities.

**Describe the community’s strengths and resources.**

**Education:**

1. Strong backing from the Turrialba Region Minister of Education to support the Special Education Regional Director and the Special Education teachers. She has agreed to provide paid leave for 40 Special Ed teachers in her region to attend the VTT workshops. These are four intensive, three-day workshops spread over 12 months.
2. Educators interviewed clearly grasp the limitations and challenges of teaching children with autism as well as supporting the families. Rotary has a source to obtain e-books called “social stories” that we circulated to teachers and parents through, MEP, to use to teach positive reinforcement behaviors in children.
3. The University of Costa Rica is the oldest and largest public learning institution in Costa Rica, with eleven campuses across the county. Graduates of UCR are politicians, Nobel Peace Prize winners, famous sports figures, leaders of women’s rights and members of the United Nations. Their endowment fund makes it possible to consistently innovate with research grants. It is the breeding ground for Costa Rican’s agents of change. Our partners at UCR believe it is the best institution able to launch an autism training program in the country.
4. The University of Santa Paula (USP) is a private teaching university that is for physical and therapeutic medicine. In January 2025 we reached out to their Director of Occupational Therapy to inquire if they had an interest in bringing ABA into their curriculum. We explained the VTT process and the workshops that will be at the CPPCR which is near their campus. The Director indicated he was very interested in exploring adding an ABA curriculum and would like to send 3 faculty to the training. For Rotary, this could be a good opportunity to introduce a formal ABA curriculum in Costa Rica. As a private university they are able to bypass government regulations and can create an ABA program more quickly than UCR. This may be outside the scope of this VTT but it addresses the “next steps” and sustainability for those attending the VTT workshops if the desire is to become licensed in one of the ABA categories.

**Psychology Professionals**

1. Professionals in the field of Psychology have potential to have the biggest impact to ABA therapy programs in Costa Rica. Because the number of practicing psychologists is so small (2,790), their organization (CPPCR) is the perfect platform for training. CPPCR supports this because it will increase the number of psychologists working in schools, public outpatient clinics, private clinics as well as college faculty that teach psychology courses.

2. When the new construction insurance for William Allen Taylor hospital was approved (January 2025), the General Director agreed to have a dedicated space for a Sensory Room. Her team is working with one of our ABA partners on how to equip the room. One of her doctors (Dr. Shirley) will take the ADOS training in September. Shirley is also one of our scholarship awardees who will complete the course in August. She will lead the autism diagnostic team at the hospital.

**Other Strengths:**

1. Rotary Clubs in the US and Costa Rica have already pledged support for this project, with significant investment and engagement from The Rotary Club of San Pedro-Curridabat.
2. Through connections, and introductions, MEP and hospital medical professionals have been generous with providing information about autism in Costa Rica. They are eager to participate in the VTT and to host workshops.
3. Extraordinary support from the leadership at CATIE, that is willing to partner extensively with Rotary to implement this project and be one of the host organizations for the VTT workshops.

**Describe any challenges and gaps in the community's behaviors, skills, and knowledge.**

**Education:** The Costa Rican education system is challenged by lack of Special Education teachers to meet the needs of children with autism in the classroom.

When children with neurodevelopmental disorders are mainstreamed into a traditional classroom, teachers are expected to manage all the children in the same environment.

The Special Education Department faces space, staffing and funding challenges such that special needs professionals are not a priority.

**At the University of Costa Rica**, there was one course in Behavior Science Studies. It was called "The Theory of Autism." It is no longer part of the curriculum as there was no faculty who could teach it.

**Medical Professionals:** The Director of the Hospital recognizes that diagnosing autism and not being able to provide support to parents with guidance or education has no value. In fact, it perpetuates the stigma of autism and drives families apart.

**What issues will the project address, and how does the community currently address those issues?**

**Education:**

Provide educators with training in the science of applied behavior analysis.

Through the VTT, the MEP Special Education teachers will attend four, three-day workshops with ABA Spanish speaking professionals from the US over a period of 12-14 months. Attendees will be introduced to ABA theory, the function of a behavior, undesirable behavior identification, how to use assessments

and more. As they progress, they will learn about ethical and medical considerations that arise in “real world” behaviors in children with autism and identify behaviors that can be targeted for change.

None of this is currently being done.

When the teachers and special education teams are working together, the student becomes the winner as they progress further during their time at school. The teachers also win by having additional tools to manage the challenges that arise in their classrooms.

### **Psychology Professionals:**

VTT workshops will be held at an easily accessible location. This is to make it convenient for psychology educators and psychologists to attend with minimum disruptions to their daily schedules. Workshops have been designed to address the specific and unique needs of psychologists who deal with children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders. This workshop will be led by a psychologist with experience in both teaching and working with children with autism.

All workshops will be in Spanish and taught by native speakers.

### **Provide the specific details of the project design and how it will solve these issues.**

#### *VTT Autism Training Program:*

Specific in-person training program in Spanish by US licensed/certified ABA instructors from respected universities.

Curriculum will be developed specifically for the VTT program by ABA instructors with one or more of the following degrees:

Board Certified Behavior Analyst-Doctor level (BCBA-D),

Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA),

International Behavior Analyst (IBA),

Registered Behavior Therapist (RBT).

These professionals will lead workshops on specific topics that address neurodevelopmental disorders.

#### **Each VTT will consist of:**

- One Rotarian with a background in either the medical or education profession
- One lead instructor with ABA certifications (see above)
- Two or three assistants who are therapists. They can be or the women taking (or have graduated from) the current Rotary scholarship training who are teachers or medical professionals taking the course: ABA Levels 1,2,3.

#### **Proposed Topics for Each Workshop**

**Workshop 1-** Autism (characteristics, co-morbidities, diagnosis- DSM-5 and M-CHAT) & Intro to ABA (treatment) – Three days.

**Workshop 2-** ABA II (how to find the function of a behavior, create a treatment plan, implement intervention & learn reinforcement and visual strategies). – Three days.



**Workshop 3-** ABA III (how to use standardized assessments to identify skill deficits & curriculum to teach- (VB MAPP & ABLLS). – Three days.

**Workshop 4-** ABA IV (putting it all together with hands-on experience, what's working, what's not, planning for future and how to train others- implement train the trainer). -Three days.

**Workshop Attendees:**

- For educators, the workshops will be held on the campuses of CATIE in Turrialba. Workshops are limited to forty educators.
- For psychologists and psychology educators, the workshop will be held at CPPCR in Pinares. Workshops are limited to fifty psychology professionals.
- The same attendees will participate in each of the workshops over a 12–14-month time frame.
- CPPCR will issue special certificates to psychology professionals who attend all workshops.
- MEP will issue special certificates to Special Education professionals who attend all workshops.

**Describe the long-term plan for the project (such as oversight, financial responsibilities, and expected behavior change) after Rotary's involvement ends.**

Members of our Costa Rican Host Rotary Club own social media/advertising companies and know how to promote large events. They are also familiar with Rotary's branding guidelines and will assist CPPCR to promote the VTT grant and a public information campaign.

Six members are medical professionals and educators and make up our global grant team. Their resources and connections to stakeholders and changemakers at CAJA and MEP are instrumental to the success of this program.

It is not lost on us that, with these connections, Rotary will be looking to access influential people in Costa Rica with the intent of encouraging the drafting of policies both in the teaching of ABA curriculum and adding ABA therapies to what the CAJA will allow payment for under the medical system.

Of course, as Rotary builds on these relationships, invitations to attend/observe the VTT will be extended to MEP and CAJA executives. Seeing the training in action and the number of people attending the workshops can only strengthen the appetite for bringing ABA to Costa Rica.

Local Rotary may need to provide support at the Ministerial levels of government, but we feel confident that we will be able to hand off the programs used in the VTT workshops to those who were trained to continue the work. The goal for a successful VTT grant will result in Costa Rica funding a national ABA therapy implementation plan.