

Guidelines

CERF Rapid Response Window: Procedures and Criteria

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A. PURPOSE and SCOPE

This guidance note is intended to clarify definitions and explain the criteria for accessing funding from the rapid response (RR) window of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). It outlines the application process and the roles and responsibilities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), OCHA, Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) and humanitarian country teams (HCTs), sectors/clusters, and UN agencies as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in order to ensure timely and appropriate use of CERF funds. For additional detailed information on the CERF please refer to the CERF website at <http://cerf.un.org>.

B. GUIDELINES

I. Background: The General Assembly¹ upgraded the CERF in December 2005 from a revolving loan mechanism of \$50 million to a fund composed of the existing loan mechanism and an additional grant element with a funding target of \$450 million per year² to ensure more timely and reliable humanitarian funding.

The CERF grant element is divided into two windows: one for **rapid response** (approximately two thirds of the grant element) and the other for **underfunded emergencies** (approximately one third of the grant element). The grant element pools funds from several donors and adopts a decentralized, field-based approach to decision-making. While the ERC serves as the overall manager of the Fund, the RC/HCs act as the principal in-country leaders in the development of a CERF grant request. Consultation among technical experts is facilitated through sectors/clusters. In addition, the CERF contributes to humanitarian reform³ by reinforcing humanitarian leadership and coordination through the RC/HC and the cluster approach.

CERF funds are not a replacement or alternative to voluntary contributions to humanitarian programmes or consolidated appeals processes (CAPs). Rather, CERF rapid response funds are intended to mitigate the unevenness and delays of the voluntary contribution system by providing seed money for life-saving, humanitarian activities in the initial days and weeks of a sudden onset crisis. CERF rapid response funds may also be used to respond to time-critical requirements or a significant deterioration in an existing emergency. The CERF acts as a source of humanitarian funding tool, rather than a strategic planning or resource mobilization tool such as flash or consolidated appeals, which reflect the demand side of humanitarian response.

Overview of the CERF rapid response window

Amount available	2/3 of contributions to the grant element. Normally a maximum of \$30 million per crisis
Purpose	Established by the General Assembly in 2005 in order to provide grants for the following 3 types of situations: (a) sudden onset emergencies, (b) a rapid / significant deterioration of an existing humanitarian situation, (c) time-critical interventions.
Eligible organizations	UN organizations (excluding OCHA) and IOM
Application process	Applications are submitted by the RC/HC following consultations with the humanitarian country team. An application includes a cover letter from the RC/HC to the ERC and a completed CERF application template. Applications may be submitted at any time during the year. The request is reviewed by the CERF Secretariat. The ERC makes the final decision
Criteria for approval	Proposed humanitarian projects should, where feasible, clearly: - respond to the needs of a sudden onset emergency, rapid deterioration of an existing crisis, or time-critical intervention. - be based on recent, coordinated needs assessments, demonstrate access / capacity to implement, be essential for the humanitarian response, and prioritized by the humanitarian country team and the RC/HC through a consultative process. - comply with the <i>Guidance on CERF Life-saving Criteria (26 January 2010)</i> and any sectoral guidelines set by the ERC at the time of allocation. - CERF rapid response funds should "jump-start" rather than fully fund projects. CERF cannot fund 100% of project requirements, except in rare circumstances.
Implementation timeframe	All funds should be committed and project activities completed within six months of the date that the funds are disbursed from CERF to the recipient agency headquarters. In cases where agencies have had to begin expensing funds before this date in order to meet urgent priorities, the agency may specify an earlier start date, not exceeding six weeks prior to the disbursement date and not before the onset of the emergency.

¹ See A/RES/60/124.

² The total target size of the Fund is \$500 million.

³ For more information on humanitarian reform, please see <http://www.humanitarianreform.org>.

II. Objective and Main Principles:

CERF rapid response grants are provided for critical emergency activities to promote early action and response to reduce loss of life; and to enhance response to time-critical humanitarian requirements. CERF-funded projects should be consistent with basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Humanitarian partners implementing projects funded by the CERF should take into consideration the following:

- Partnerships: UN agencies and humanitarian actors at large are at the heart of planning, prioritization and decision making in regards to the CERF. They are encouraged to maximize the interaction and collaboration with governments and national and international non-government organizations in order to effectively respond to emergencies and to ensure that the basic principles and priorities of the CERF are followed and effectively applied. UN agencies who are recipients of CERF funds should continue to engage with clusters/sectors and strive to ensure that funds are transferred to implementing partners in a timely manner and base their interactions on the “Principles of Partnership”.
- Supports the Principles of “Good Humanitarian Donorship” and “Do No Harm”: Agencies will make all efforts to ensure that assistance funded by the CERF empowers local communities and promotes self-sufficiency; under the auspices of their own mandates conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of impact; avoid contributing to conflict and inequity; contribute to recovery and sustainable interventions; and take steps to actively create opportunities for effective participation of civil society and local governments.
- Empowerment of affected populations: Focusing on the immediate aftermath of emergencies, the CERF expects agencies implementing programmes and projects to take into consideration the project activities integration into future programming, with special consideration to gender and marginalized groups, who may be particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises.
- Vulnerability of particular groups: Children and women represent the largest group of individuals affected by emergencies. Particular attention should be paid to the situation of boys and girls (including adolescents), women and the elderly in all emergency situations. The situation of marginalized and other groups particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises, such as persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, the elderly, persons belonging to minorities, indigenous groups and trafficked persons, are also of special concern in humanitarian crises. The CERF emphasizes the importance of ensuring that principles provided in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁴, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁵, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, together with the CRC’s Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (adopted in 2000)⁶, and other related Resolutions such as Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in October 2000, be pillars to the implementation of CERF funded programmes and projects. In all sectors of response, agencies should ensure the application of gender equity principles that will promote the empowerment and protection of women and girls. In this regard, the CERF Secretariat will use the IASC gender marker whenever appropriate.
- Environment: Given the acknowledged fragility of the natural environment and possibly irreversible deterioration of soil and water quality, agencies are requested to give maximum attention in the use of funds to averting negative effects on the environment.
- Cross-cutting issues: Particular attention should be given to integrating and giving due consideration to other cross-cutting issues including human rights and HIV.
- Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: The cornerstone of the Sphere Project is the Humanitarian Charter, which is based on the principles and provisions of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and on the principles of the Red Cross and NGO Code of conduct. The Minimum Standards are organized into initial chapter that details process standards for the planning and implementation of programmes, together with technical chapters covering water, sanitation and hygiene promotion; food security, nutrition and food aid; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health services. The Sphere Project handbook has been recently updated and the 2011 edition is available. Reference should also be made to the companion documents to the Sphere such as the MSEE.

⁴ CEDAW Text

⁵ CRC Text

⁶ OP Text

III. Eligibility Criteria

- **Eligible grant recipients** include UN operational funds, programs and specialized agencies, and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) (referred to as “agencies”). NGOs are able to receive funding indirectly as implementing partners of agencies. As manager of the CERF, OCHA cannot receive grant funding but may apply for a loan. UN agencies may not pass on CERF funds to other UN agencies. When several UN agencies or IOM collaborate on a project, separate budgets should be presented for individual agency components of the project.
- Only grant requests submitted by **Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators** (RC/HCs) will be considered. RC/HCs have the overall authority to determine funding priorities in country following an inclusive and transparent consultation process.
- **Eligible humanitarian activities** for CERF grant funding are those that adhere to the *Guidance on CERF Life-saving Criteria (26 January 2010)*. Exceptions to this are rare and would require strong justification. Common humanitarian services (e.g. humanitarian air support) that are necessary to implement life-saving activities or to improve access to affected populations are also considered as life-saving. Activities such as disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness, economic recovery, and poverty reduction, are not suitable for the CERF grant element, but may be considered under the loan element if they are linked to humanitarian response. Adherence to the life saving criteria is a necessary condition for funding but does not in itself guarantee funding. Each project proposal will be reviewed within the specific emergency context.
- Applications to the CERF must be based on recent, coordinated and where possible, joint **needs assessments**⁷, and ensure that minimum safety conditions are in place for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Where relevant, CERF submissions should be based on the existing humanitarian strategic planning frameworks (i.e. CHAP, CAP, and Flash Appeals, country strategies).

IV: Steps in the application process

1. Preparing for an application to the CERF rapid response window: Rapid response grants are intended to provide initial funds to start-up essential humanitarian activities. In parallel, agencies will be looking for others sources of funding to complement the CERF. The maximum amount applied to a crisis in a given year typically does not exceed \$30 million, although higher allocations can be made at the discretion of the ERC in exceptional circumstances. The CERF provides rapid response funding for life-saving, humanitarian activities in the following contexts: sudden onset disasters, rapid and significant deteriorations of existing crises, and time-critical interventions.

2. Informing the ERC of a rapid response emergency: If a crisis meets the criteria of the rapid response window and the RC/HC considers it necessary to access CERF funds, it is recommended that the RC/HC signal the need for rapid response funds as soon as possible by contacting the ERC via letter or email. The RC/HC can also decide to directly initiate the prioritization process and submit a complete CERF application package along with a cover letter to the ERC.

In situations where a Flash Appeal is planned, the development of both the Flash Appeal and CERF requests should start immediately and proceed in tandem. CERF funds should be requested for the most time-critical life saving elements of the flash appeal and those that have the potential to make the greatest impact within the six month timeframe of the rapid response window. All CERF-funded projects should be included in the Flash Appeal (please refer to the [Flash Appeal Guidelines](#) for additional details)

V. Complementarity with other Humanitarian Pooled Funds

The existence of a Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) or an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in a country does not preclude the CERF from providing rapid response funds. Employing the CERF in combination with in-country pooled funds (i.e. ERFs or CHFs) provides the Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator (RC/HC) and the humanitarian country team with a powerful toolbox of humanitarian financing options for responding quickly to emergencies within a given country.

To achieve a high degree of complementarity between the pooled funds and to maximize impact of the funding available through these mechanisms, it is recommended that a common framework is used at country level to

⁷ The [IASC Needs Assessment Task Force](#) has developed an [Operational Guidance for Coordinated Needs Assessments in Humanitarian Crises](#) to enhance the quality of humanitarian response. These are mainly geared to the first phases of a crisis, but can be useful for planning a well-timed campaign of needs assessment in a protracted crisis.

prioritize funding from the different channels. Where CHF and ERFs exist these funds have established a standardized framework for prioritization and allocation of funds at the country level, a framework that should be supported by a well-defined management structure and based on strong sector/cluster participation. In order to improve overall coherence and effectiveness it is strongly recommended that the RC/HC utilizes these structures to identify needs and to undertake prioritization of activities if/when applying for CERF funding for the country. This will help to ensure that CHF, ERF and CERF funds are used to complement each other as much as possible, that both UN and non-UN partners are actively involved in CERF prioritization, and that sectors/clusters are playing a lead role in identifying needs and priorities for all funding streams.

VI. Project prioritization and selection

A CERF grant request is based on a field-driven process, which gives the RC/HC overall authority for determining priority activities for funding and submitting the grant request to the ERC. The grant development process should be inclusive and transparent, involving UN agencies, IOM, national and international NGOs, government partners, and any other relevant in-country humanitarian actors. If NGO or government partners are not part of these established coordination forums, every effort should be made to engage them through ad-hoc arrangements. Reference to the consultation process and stakeholders involved, the tools/criteria used to establish funding priorities and select activities for funding, and the arrangements for the implementation of activities forms part of the application package for CERF funding.

While the use of the humanitarian country team and the sectors/clusters is highly encouraged, the RC/HC is responsible for determining the process, tools, and entities involved in the establishment of funding priorities and the selection of proposals for funding based on the context and coordination forums in country. In countries where OCHA is present, the OCHA office may provide support including provision of guidance and technical support, providing relevant information for the prioritization process, organizing consultative meetings, and consolidating the request in the CERF template. In countries with no OCHA presence, the relevant regional OCHA office⁸ can provide technical support and in some cases may deploy a staff member on a surge capacity basis to support the prioritization and application process. In addition or alternatively, the RC/HC may decide to form an interagency task team including agency staff with CERF experience to support the prioritization process and the development of the CERF submission.

The CERF Secretariat recommends the following series of steps:

Step 1: The RC/HC and the humanitarian country team review current needs and gaps in the overall humanitarian response, taking into consideration the funding situation of different sectors/clusters and up-to-date needs assessments.

Step 2: The RC/HC, in consultation with the humanitarian country team, determines priority sectors/clusters and/or geographic areas or beneficiary groups based on Step 1 for inclusion in the CERF request. Taking into consideration the unmet humanitarian needs, the funding situation of prioritized sectors/clusters and specific emergency programs therein, the RC/HC may suggest preliminary funding amounts for each prioritized sector/cluster. For countries with a Flash Appeal or CAP, this document should form the basis for priority setting and project selection.

Step 3: Based on the guidance and overarching priorities provided by the RC/HC, sectors/clusters identify priority projects/activities for CERF funding. Projects should be selected based on available needs assessments data, their funding situation, compliance with the *CERF Life-saving Criteria (26 January 2010)*, as well as agencies' operational capacity. In addition, expertise and comparative advantage as well as the ability to implement CERF grants within the timeframe of the CERF rapid response window should also be taken into account. In Parts I and II of the CERF submission template sector/cluster leads are expected to provide a brief explanation of the strategy for identification of priorities for inclusion in the CERF proposal. Where more than one project is submitted within a cluster, the prioritization approach applied and the complementarity between the projects should be explained.

Step 4: Agencies prepare CERF grant proposals for prioritized projects. The suggested minimum amount requested per project is \$100,000. As a general recommendation, funding should not be spread too thinly among many projects, but rather be focused on fewer high impact priority projects. To ensure coherence with

⁸ Detailed guidance on the role of OCHA regional offices and OCHA country, review and management of CERF Grant Requests is available on the CERF website (<http://cerf.un.org>)

the agreed strategy and priorities for the sector/cluster it is recommended that projects are submitted to the relevant sector/cluster lead for review, and that, when feasible, the sector/cluster lead submits a consolidated proposal package to the RC/HC on behalf of the sector/cluster.

Step 5: The RC/HC with support from OCHA and / or the interagency task team, (as relevant) ensures that drafted proposals meet the necessary requirements. The RC/HC also validates the specific amount requested by each proposal and agency. This should include an appraisal of pledges or contributions received including funding information from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) where available. Other available resources, such as internal agency reserves and un-earmarked funds should also be taken into account.

Step 6: The RC/HC office with support from OCHA where present consolidates the application package and completes Parts I and II of the application template.

Step 7: The RC/HC endorses CERF submission and submits it to the ERC and the CERF Secretariat (cerf@un.org) along with a cover letter.

The CERF secretariat can be contacted at any point in the process for technical support and guidance.

VII. The CERF Grant Application

Agencies should submit CERF grant applications on the standard CERF application template available on the CERF website (<http://cerf.un.org>). The CERF application template is comprised of a consolidated sections (all sections under II: Overall Grant Request) and individual agency project proposals (all sections under part III: Agency Project Proposals). The humanitarian country team is expected to provide inputs for the completion of all consolidated sections of the template including the humanitarian context and response; the grant request justification and the project allocation table. Requesting agencies must also complete a project proposal for each project they are submitting. Inputs will be consolidated by the OCHA or RC's office in support of the RC/HC into one document.

Each CERF project proposal must include a budget which details the costs to be funded by CERF and which strictly adheres to the CERF budget template and CERF budget guidelines. The budget should reflect activities described in the project narrative, and include sufficient detail to provide a transparent overview of how CERF funds will be spent. Budget lines should be itemized wherever possible, including quantity and unit prices of items to be procured whenever possible. Budgets should not include government staff salaries, recurrent costs for regular agency operations (e.g. maintenance costs), prevention activities, or stockpiling. Capacity-building and training should not be included, unless related to direct implementation of emergency response, and then only at minimal levels. Staff and travel costs should be kept to a minimum.

If more than one agency will implement a project, separate budgets must be completed for each agency. There will be a separate disbursement to each agency, as CERF funds may not be passed from one agency to another.

VIII. Grant Request Submission, Approval and Fund Disbursement

All CERF requests must be transmitted to the ERC and CERF Secretariat (cerf@un.org) by the RC/HC. UN agencies and IOM may not send proposals directly to the ERC.

Following the submission of the grant request, the package is reviewed by the CERF Secretariat in consultation with other branches of OCHA, including the Coordination and Response Division (CRD), and recommendations are prepared by the CERF Secretariat for the decision of the ERC. Applications are reviewed in relation to the mandate of the CERF, the quality of the request based on needs assessments and the field-based prioritization process, availability of funds from other sources, compliance with the *CERF's life-saving criteria*, and feasibility given the implementation period for the RR window.

If necessary, the CERF Secretariat may request further clarification or revisions to the proposals to ensure that the projects meet CERF criteria and include an adequate level of detail. The most common causes of revision requests are insufficient detail in the budget, a lack of direct linkage between the proposed activities and the budget, a lack of clarity on the strategy or rationale for prioritization and selection of projects or inadmissibility under the life-saving criteria.

For those projects approved by the ERC, the recipient agency's headquarters will receive an approval letter to

be counter-signed by an authorized representative of the recipient agency and returned to the CERF Secretariat to reconfirm implementation according to the terms of the duly signed umbrella LoU. The approval letter sent to agency headquarters will be accompanied by the final approved version of the agency proposal.

Once the CERF Secretariat receives a counter-signed approval letter from the recipient agency, funds are disbursed to the agency headquarters within approximately five working days. If joint projects are proposed and approved, individual disbursements to each participating agency will be made for multi-agency projects. Funding commitments with dates of approval and disbursement are posted on the CERF website (<http://cerf.un.org>) and reflected in the Financial Tracking Service to ensure transparency of funding decisions.

When all projects within the submission have been processed and either approved, withdrawn or rejected, and when allocations have been accepted by agency headquarters, the ERC will officially communicate in writing to the RC/HC the total amount approved and listing the individual amounts approved for each project.

The RC/HC shall inform the HCT, sector/cluster leads and other relevant stakeholders at country level of the decision of the ERC. Sector/cluster leads shall in turn communicate information on relevant CERF allocation decisions to all sector/cluster members.

IX. Implementation period.

The implementation period for rapid response grant is six months from the date of disbursement⁹. During this period all funds should be committed and project activities completed. In cases where an agency has begun expensing funds prior to the date of disbursement in order to respond to urgent needs at the onset of an emergency, an earlier start date may be specified in the agency project proposal. This date cannot exceed more than six weeks prior to the date of disbursement and not earlier than the onset of the crisis. Justification for the earlier start date should be provided in the project proposal.

A no-cost extension can be requested only in cases where the inability to implement are clearly documented to be outside of the control of the recipient agency (See section XI).

X. Reporting

1. Narrative Reporting: Agencies headquarters as well as RC/HCs have to provide an annual narrative report detailing the use of CERF funds for life-saving and/or core humanitarian activities. Reporting at country and agency levels offers two perspectives on how CERF funds have made a difference in the agencies' capacity to respond as well as in the humanitarian community's timely and coordinated response to a crisis.

Headquarters level: Agencies should submit an annual headquarter-level report by **20 April**, which follows the UNDG or agency standard reporting format. As part of the report, agencies should provide a global perspective on lessons-learned on accessing funds from the CERF and an analysis on the impact of CERF on the agencies' capacities to respond to humanitarian needs. Agency reports will serve as input for the Secretary-General's report on the use of the CERF. Reports are due two months prior to the submission of the Secretary-General's report and should be based on CERF funding received in the previous calendar year.

Field level: At country level, it is the responsibility of the office of the RC/HCs to report on behalf of the humanitarian country team on CERF allocations through an annual report, which will be based on inputs prepared and submitted by the recipient agencies. The report provides a field level analysis of the challenges faced when prioritizing needs, project implementation arrangements, results achieved, and lessons learned. This will help to determine the added value of the CERF. An emphasis on lessons-learned contributes to the Fund's continual improvement. The RC/HC will be assisted by the OCHA country office, if there is one.

The annual country reports are essential to ensure accountability to CERF donors, stakeholders and to beneficiaries. Please refer to the CERF website <http://cerf.un.org> for the current reporting template. Countries that do not meet reporting requirements risk not being selected for new CERF funds in the future.

The deadline for the submission of annual CERF country reports is **15 March of the following year**. Should a project start towards the end of the calendar year, please state that the project has started and is on-going. A preliminary account of the results to date should be included in the March report. A full report of the project would then be expected in the annual report of the following year.

⁹ The implementation timeline for rapid response has changed from 3 to 6 months to six months with the introduction of the new umbrella LoU.

2. Financial Reporting: Financial reports on CERF grants are provided by agency headquarters for all projects received from the CERF. An interim financial statement should be provided by **15 February** and a final report by **30 June** of each year (financial status as of 31 December of the prior year) for all grants received the prior year and for all outstanding balances (amounts of the grant for which expenditures have not been reported) on grants received in previous years. For rapid response projects with an implementation-period *end date* between 1 January and 30 June of a given year, an interim report should be provided by **15 August** (status as of 30 June) of the same year.

XI. No-cost Extensions and Budget Modifications

1. No-cost Extensions: Within six months from the date of disbursement to the agency headquarters, CERF funds received through the rapid-response window must be committed (i.e. obligated) and related project activities completed.

Project extensions are only permissible, if the reasons for the inability to implement are clearly documented to be beyond the control of the recipient agency. Compelling reasons for project extensions include unforeseen and increased access restrictions, unforeseen changes in government policy, or a fundamental change in the humanitarian situation underpinning the application for CERF funds. Please note that with the implementation of the new Umbrella LOU no-cost extensions (NCE's) will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

A request for a project extension must be submitted to the ERC by the RC/HC as a formal request on behalf of the recipient agency prior to the expiration of the project implementation period. If such a request affects more than one CERF project implemented by different agencies, the request for project extension should come in a consolidated letter from the RC/HC. The CERF has a template for NCE requests that should be completed for each project requiring an extension (the NCE template can be found on the CERF website).

Project extensions for CERF funds are granted at the discretion of the ERC. If the ERC finds that the request is not adequately substantiated, or if the proposed revised commitment period is found not to be feasible, the remaining funds will have to be returned in accordance with umbrella LoU. Extensions are usually not given if it becomes evident that the project is suspended for the foreseeable future.

2. Budget Modifications: CERF funds have been approved on the basis of specific proposals and as such any substantial changes in CERF funded activities need the prior approval of the ERC. Still, to retain a level of flexibility in project implementation minor adjustments of existing CERF budgets are considered acceptable, and budget modifications that involve a cumulative shift of less than 15% of the direct project costs (i.e the project total less project support costs) will not require the prior approval of the ERC. However, in cases where modifications are expected to result in any increase in staff costs or a change in programme support cost (PSC), formal approval must always be sought from the ERC.

The ERC may on an exceptional basis approve larger changes (beyond the 15%) within existing projects, if these are due to external circumstances affecting project implementation and provided that the original project objective is retained. Such revision requests should be submitted by the RC/HC to the ERC explaining and justifying the changes.

In the case of major changes of scope (target beneficiaries, sector, or geographic area), recipient agencies are requested to return unused funds and to prepare another grant requests for the new emerging situation.

Please refer to the 'How to Apply' section of the CERF website (<http://cerf.un.org>) for relevant templates and guidance documents.

Direct link:

<http://ochaonline.un.org/cerf/HowtoApply/HowtoApply.aspx>

For further information please contact the CERF:

CERF mailbox CERF@un.org

or

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