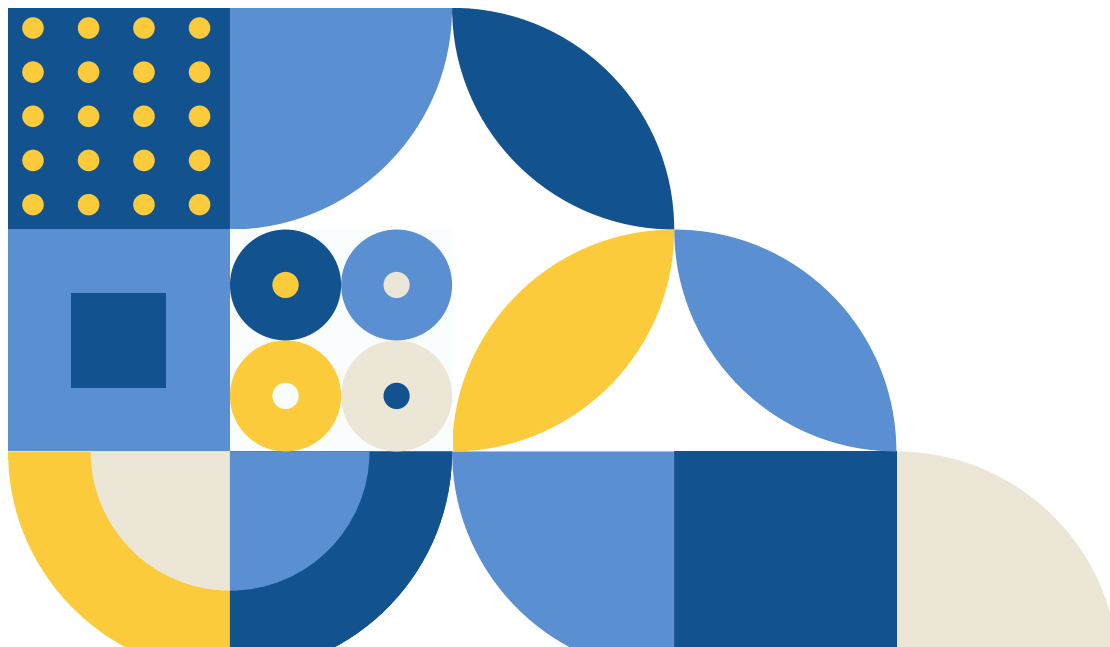


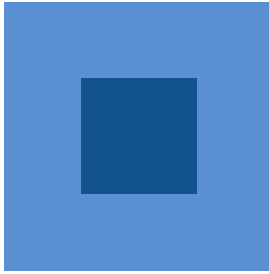
CERF Handbook

As of October 2024



What you will find in the CERF Handbook

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Using the CERF Handbook

The Handbook is a reference tool to find quick answers on the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as well as a guide to applying for and maximizing the impact of CERF funds.

Version history

The CERF Handbook was first published in 2018 and is being updated regularly. Parts were updated throughout 2022 and 2023. In August 2023, a chapter on drought guidance was added and in October 2023, guidance for RC/HCs was integrated into the Handbook.

The CERF Handbook describes CERF as a humanitarian financing tool and the activities involved in all parts of the CERF process, from coordinated prioritization to applying for CERF funds and reporting. You will also find explanations of what is meant by using CERF strategically, and the context-specific relevance of the CERF Life-Saving Criteria in different situations.

Who should use the Handbook

The Handbook is particularly relevant for those involved in any part of the CERF cycle at the country level and at headquarters:

- Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC), prioritizing needs and activities for consolidated CERF applications, endorsing and submitting proposals within the applications, and submitting timely consolidated CERF reports¹

¹ The Handbook refers throughout to RC/HC and clusters as a matter of simplicity; the information applies to countries with other coordination setups as well.

- The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) or UN Country Team (UNCT) and Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) who inform on and analyse humanitarian needs and funding gaps, and make recommendations for CERF support the RC/HC
- UN agencies as primary CERF recipients and their partners
- Cluster coordinators and sector leads
- OCHA Country Office staff and OCHA Regional Office staff providing guidance and support to in-country leadership and coordination mechanisms in the prioritization of needs and the related projects; facilitating inter-cluster needs analysis; guiding the CERF application process or coordinating and consolidating the reporting components
- UN agency CERF Focal Points at headquarters and other interested UN staff
- OCHA headquarters staff supporting country-level processes

Though these are the expected primary users of the Handbook, other parties can also access the Handbook to seek answers to queries regarding CERF.

Intention of the Handbook

The Handbook is a reference designed to provide a broad overview and understanding of what CERF is and how it works, and to point users in the right direction to navigate the CERF process. You are likely to find consulting the CERF Handbook useful when:

- You are part of an HCT or UNCT preparing to recommend that the RC/HC makes an application for CERF Rapid Response funds
- You are already involved in a CERF application process or supporting its development (Rapid Response or Underfunded Emergencies funding window), as OCHA staff, UN agency staff, NGO staff, or staff in the office of the RC/HC
- You have a role in monitoring and reporting on the use of CERF funds
- You are new to the CERF process and want to understand how it works and the actions that are required
- You may start anywhere in the Handbook using the Table of Contents as a guide to the topics or questions you most need to review or through digital search of keywords.
- UN and CERF policy and guidance documents are referenced as sources for the information and for further details you may need. Additional policies, guidelines, procedures, templates and forms are available on the [CERF website](#).



About CERF

CERF is one of the most effective ways to enable the timely provision of life-saving assistance, including supplies, and protection to millions of people in need.

CERF's establishment

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a stand-by fund established by the United Nations General Assembly to enable timelier and more reliable humanitarian assistance to people affected by natural disasters and armed conflict. Originally created in 1991 as a revolving fund of US\$ 50 million providing loans to UN agencies, the United Nations General Assembly upgraded the CERF by adding a \$450 million grant element on 15 December 2005 through the resolution [A/RES/60/124](#) to achieve the following objectives:

- Promote early action and response to reduce loss of life
- Enhance response to time-critical requirements
- Strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises

CERF's functioning is further described in relevant Secretary-General's Bulletins, currently [ST/SGB/2020/5](#).

Since its operational launch in 2006, CERF has proven to be one of the fastest and most effective ways to support rapid humanitarian response. It is also a lifeline for those caught up in the world's most neglected, underfunded and protracted crises.

CERF's achievements

CERF pools voluntary unearmarked contributions from donors around the world into a single fund. Between 2006 and 2022, CERF has enabled UN agencies, funds and programmes as well as implementing partners to provide more than \$8 billion worth of life-saving assistance. This has been made possible thanks to the voluntary contributions from more than 130 UN Member States and observers as

well as regional local authorities, corporate donors, foundations and individuals. Each year, CERF grants help humanitarian partners deliver critical assistance and protection to millions of affected people, as described in CERF's [annual reports](#).

CERF's increased funding target

The ever-increasing scale and intensity of emergencies points to the need for a larger CERF to address the growing needs. During the first ten years of CERF global humanitarian needs have quadrupled while the share of CERF current funding target against the global requirements has declined. In December 2016, the UN General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's call to expand CERF's annual funding target from \$450 million to \$1 billion. GA resolution [A/RES/71/127](#) was adopted in recognition of the significant achievements of the CERF in facilitating life-saving assistance to crisis-affected people. In addition, it calls upon all Member States to consider increasing their voluntary contributions to the fund and invites the private sector and all concerned individuals and institutions to do so.

CERF's management structure

Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)

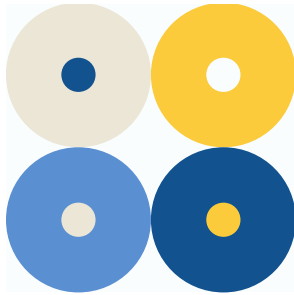
In December 1991, the General Assembly adopted resolution [A/RES/46/182](#) to strengthen the United Nations response to complex emergencies and natural disasters. The resolution created the position of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and [Emergency Relief Coordinator](#) (USG/ERC), to combine the functions carried out by the Secretary-General's representatives for major and complex emergencies and natural disasters. The USG/ERC oversees CERF's operations on the Secretary-General's behalf.

CERF secretariat

The [CERF secretariat](#), which is part of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), supports the ERC in managing both the grant and loan elements. It is responsible for ensuring that the funds are allocated properly, disbursed in a timely manner, and that use of the funds in individual countries is reported transparently.

CERF Advisory Group

Established per UN General Assembly in 2005, the [CERF Advisory Group](#) provides the Secretary-General with policy guidance and expert advice on the use and impact of CERF, through the USG/ERC. Advisory Group members serve in their individual capacity, and not as representatives of their countries or Governments. They include Government officials from contributing and recipient countries, representatives of humanitarian non-governmental organizations and academic experts. Candidates are nominated by Member States and selected by the Secretary-General for two-year periods, reflecting a geographical and gender balance.



Overview of CERF Funding Elements

CERF receives contributions from donors and the money is available in several components for immediate use at the onset of emergencies.

CERF is comprised of a grant and a loan element. Furthermore, the grant element is divided into a Rapid Response (RR) and an Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) funding windows. Approximately two thirds of CERF's annual budget is allocated through the RR window, and one third through the UFE window. CERF manages allocation volumes according to available funds. Each year, CERF funding reaches affected people in some 50 different countries.

Rapid Response

CERF's Grant Element

Rapid Response ([▶▶ Chapter 6](#)) grants are requested by Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC) to provide seed money for life-saving, humanitarian activities in the initial days and weeks when a sudden-onset crisis has occurred, or after a significant deterioration in an existing emergency. CERF RR funds may be used to respond to time-critical requirements and provide early action to minimize loss of life and damage to social and economic assets. CERF RR grants are intended to jump-start or expand the immediate humanitarian response, while additional resources are mobilised. The process is field-driven, in that typically RC/HCs apply based on an on-the-ground joint analysis of priority needs. In urgent cases, the ERC can also initiate an allocation.

Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory Action: CERF funding for anticipatory action falls under the Rapid Response window. It is currently restricted to OCHA-led frameworks, meaning that requests for formal Anticipatory Action funding outside of these initiatives are not possible.

Underfunded Emergencies grants

Underfunded Emergencies ([▶▶ Chapter 7](#)) grants target the world's most underfunded and neglected crises. Countries with significant unmet humanitarian needs are eligible for UFE support. Typically twice yearly, the Emergency Relief Coordinator selects countries based on quantitative data analysis of funding levels and humanitarian needs, risk and vulnerability, and qualitative, contextual information from consultations with UN agency and OCHA headquarters, NGOs and other public source documents.

A country can receive RR, UFE and AA allocations in the same year, should the humanitarian need be present and should the country team demonstrate the complementarity between the allocations. Similarly, if multiple emergencies occur in the same country during a short time span, RC/HCs can request multiple rapid response allocations.

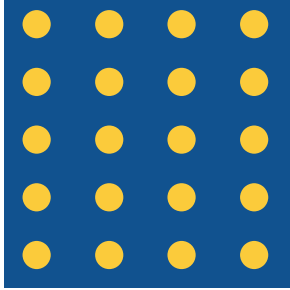
CERF's loan element

CERF Loan Element

As decided by the General Assembly in its resolution [A/RES/66/119](#), CERF maintains a loan facility of \$30 million which acts as a cash-flow mechanism to ensure a rapid and coordinated response to humanitarian emergencies. The utilization of the loan element is also be guided by General Assembly resolutions [A/RES/48/57](#) and [A/RES/56/107](#). The ERC is responsible for determining the amount to be advanced in each situation.

The organization making the request sends documentation, as follows:

1. A formal letter to the ERC, specifying why the loan is needed, and how exactly it will be used by way of humanitarian response. The letter must specify that the loan will be repaid as first charge on contributions received by the agency for the programme or project.
2. A completed Letter of Understanding (LOU) using the template.
3. A budget for the loan amount using the CERF loan budget template.
4. Copies of pledge/commitment letters received by the agency which provide evidence that the operational organization will be able to repay the loan (this requirement can be waived by the ERC).
5. Any other documents required according to the Letter of Understanding (LOU).
6. Loans must be typically repaid within one year from the date of disbursement.



Guidance for Humanitarian/ Resident Coordinators

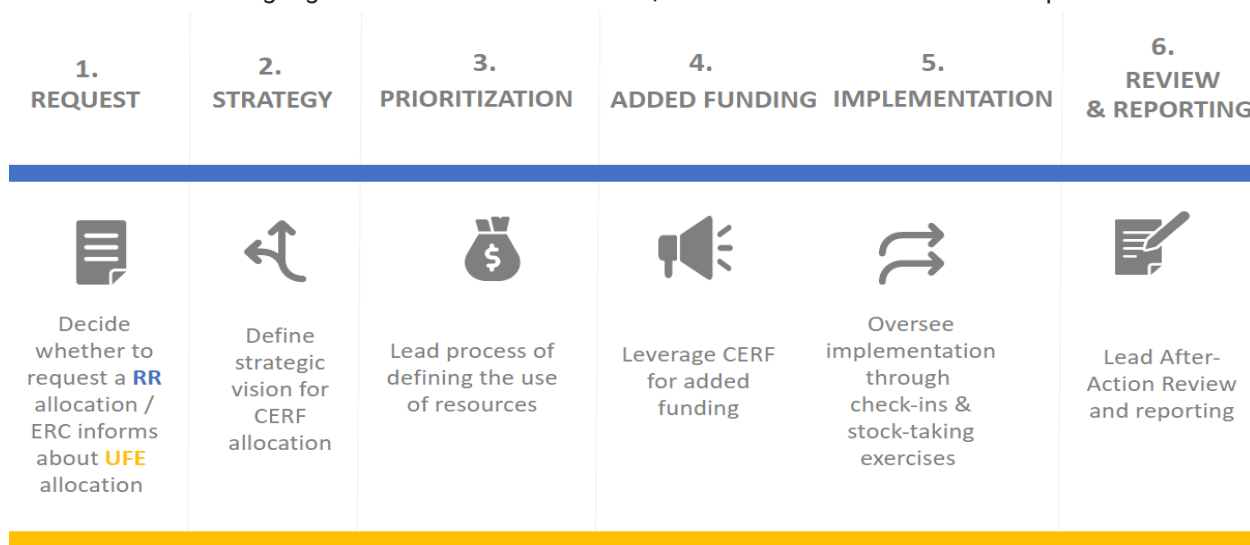
Key Points of Engagement in CERF Processes

This note provides a brief overview of key responsibilities of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) in managing CERF allocations². It highlights key decisions and initiatives to be led by the RC/HC and is applicable to both Rapid Response (RR) and Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) allocations³. The OCHA Country Office will support the RC/HC in managing all aspects of the CERF process, and where no OCHA office exists the relevant OCHA Regional Office will

² Additional detailed CERF guidance relating to different aspects of the CERF process can be found in the guidance section of the CERF website, including the CERF Handbook, the CERF Life-saving Criteria and the CERF Monitoring Guidance.

³ The main difference is that RR requests are country-driven and linked to new needs, and typically time-critical in nature, whereas UFE country allocations are decided by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) once or twice a year based on a global comparative analysis of humanitarian need and funding levels. It should be noted that this document does not cover “special allocations” from CERF. Also, CERF Anticipatory Action allocations under the Rapid Response window are not covered by this note as these are governed by specific processes and guidance (<https://cerf.un.org/anticipatory-action>).

support along with the RC Office. OCHA therefore plays a key role in facilitating CERF processes under the leadership of the RC/HC. Notwithstanding and as highlighted in the below flowchart, this document outlines some specific areas



where the RC/HC's direct involvement is expected.

Decide whether to submit a rapid response CERF funding request allocation

The first key task for an RC/HC is to determine whether to request CERF funding, based on the humanitarian situation⁴. An RR grant may be requested following a new emergency, a significant deterioration of an existing one, or a change in the operational environment. To determine whether a situation falls within the scope of CERF's RR Window, the RC/HC should consider several key questions⁵, including what the trigger for the CERF request is, what time-critical interventions could be put in place, and the potential comparative advantage of supporting the response through CERF funding.

Should RC/HCs consider pursuing a CERF RR allocation, they are **encouraged to discuss the possible request with the OCHA country/regional office and informally reach out to the CERF secretariat (directly or through the OCHA Office) as early as possible** to establish contact before efforts to assemble an application commence. This will allow the RC/HC to get feedback on the feasibility and

⁴ Application to the RR Window can be made at any time. Eligibility for the Underfunded Emergencies Window is determined through a central process that takes place once or twice per year. In some specific situations the ERC may proactively decide a rapid response allocation from the global level and inform the RC/HC of this.

⁵ Further information is available in the CERF Handbook. (https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/cerf_handbook_2018_en.pdf), Chapter 6 – Rapid Response.

Define the strategic vision for the CERF allocation

potential size of a possible allocation. This initial outreach should happen within days following the event that triggered the request.

A key role for the RC/HCs is to articulate their “strategic statement” on the intended use of a CERF allocation, explaining its focus, and how it will make an impact in the operational context, beyond simply providing additional funding to the response. While the RC/HC consults the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)/United Nations Country Team (UNCT)⁶ in developing this “strategic statement”, it will ultimately remain under the authority of the RC/HC⁷ to set out the strategy for the allocation, with OCHA country office support.

The strategic statement will be presented to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) as a basis for deciding on the allocation. It should therefore be concise and describe in strategic terms the focus and added value of the allocation to the overall response and reflect how CERF resources will be leveraged to maximize saving of lives.

The strategic statement of the RC/HC will serve as the basis for articulating a focused funding proposal – and is the starting point for prioritising how CERF funds should be allocated to achieve greater impact. The strategic statement will also serve as the foundation for reporting on the impact of the CERF allocation at the end of the implementation period and therefore it should be tangible and realistic.

In countries with a Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF), the strategic statement should also clarify how the CERF allocation will ensure complementarity with CBPF funding, based on the comparative advantage of each mechanism and as part of one “joined-up” strategic approach⁸. The strategic statement may also highlight complementarity with other funding sources.⁹

The strategic statement should be submitted to the CERF secretariat as part of the initial funding request for funding and should precede the development of a full application. For the RR window, the initial request, with the strategic statement, should be submitted as quickly as possible following the triggering event to allow for timely funding decisions. For sudden onset shocks, the statement should be submitted no later than a week after the event.

6 The strategy will be based on an assessment of humanitarian need and priorities and of CERF funding’s comparative advantage, and informed by relevant analysis by OCHA, cluster/sectors groups and other key actors.

7 While developed in collaboration with the HCT the statement should ultimately present the RC/HC’s strategic vision for the allocation and it is not meant to be a consensus exercise.

8 Please refer to CERF’s website for further information on CERF/CBPF complementarity

9 Including other funding instruments such as for example the Peace Building Fund

Lead the process for determining the use of resources

Once RC/HCs have set a strategy for the use of resources, they should lead an inclusive process to determine the best possible prioritisation of CERF funding. The RC/HC's leadership on this is critical to shift the focus from the implementing organizations' individual funding goals towards the achievement of collective results.

The RC/HCs should set out the parameters for the allocation of funds and lead discussions with partners on the optimal funding "breakdown" across clusters and agencies to achieve strategic goals. While this should be based on a consultative process, the RC/HC should not "devolve" this decision-making responsibility to the working level, such as to the inter-cluster/inter-sector coordination group. It is also important that the RC/HC ensures that the allocation is focused on a limited number of projects that will have a significant impact towards the achievement of the strategic statement, thereby helping ensure a focus on results and impact and avoiding that the CERF funding is committed across too many fragmented projects, sectors or geographies.

The RC/HC shall ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are considered throughout the CERF process. In this respect, the RC/HC, with support from OCHA, should see that technical experts¹⁰ and leads on cross-cutting programmatic priorities, including on cash and voucher assistance especially multi-purpose cash, gender, GBV, PSEA and disability are engaged in CERF decision-making¹¹ and programme design, and that accountability to affected people (AAP) underpins the CERF allocation design and implementation.

The RC/HC is responsible for ensuring that in-country processes relating to CERF applications are fast, in particular for time-critical RR allocations. A key objective of the CERF's RR window is to ensure that critical, acute and life-threatening humanitarian needs are met through a timely response. Therefore, it is important that RC/HCs avoid lengthy consultations at this stage of the process, as delays may limit the intended impact of CERF funding.¹² For RR requests, the submission of the full application with project proposals to the CERF secretariat is expected within a week of the ERC's initial funding endorsement.

¹⁰ Including ideally local experts or organisations.

¹¹ Including as part of UNCT/HCT CERF discussions.

¹² To help ensure a timely RR process the CERF secretariat sets out timing benchmarks for submissions.

Use the CERF allocation for advocacy and resource mobilisation

Beyond providing rapid and strategic funding, CERF is also meant to highlight the urgency for humanitarian action by signalling critical financing requirements. All CERF allocations are intended to be catalytic in leveraging additional funding from other sources. While this should be done collectively by the HCT, with support from OCHA, the leadership of the RC/HC is required for ensuring that CERF's contribution is actively used to strengthen further resource mobilization efforts.

Even before receiving an allocation from CERF, it is therefore important that the RC/HC considers opportunities to use CERF funding to leverage additional donor resources. Given the importance of this aspect, RC/HCs are expected to outline in their CERF applications how the allocation will be used to support resource mobilisation and to report on related achievements as part of the final narrative report and stock-taking exercises throughout the implementation period.

With support from OCHA and recipient agencies, the RC/HC is also expected to actively communicate and convey the impact of CERF funding to the broader humanitarian community and to the public.

Oversee implementation through check-ins & stock-taking exercises

The RC/HC is responsible for overseeing the overall implementation of CERF funding and ensuring that implementation is on track towards the achievement of the pre-defined strategic objectives. In this respect, the RC/HC should institute periodic "check-ins" with the HCT, and particularly cluster leads to discuss progress of the CERF-funded interventions¹³. This will help ensure collective ownership of the allocation and allow the RC/HC to monitor that the overall implementation is on track, and if not, agree on corrective measures with the HCT as required. These "check-ins" are not intended to be detailed technical reviews but high-level assessments of progress in meeting strategic objectives of CERF allocations. In this regard, they can be handled through an "agenda item" in a standard HCT meeting. It is up to the RC/HC to decide the number of required "check-ins" based on the nature of the grant and its duration, however it is suggested that at least one to two are conducted, in addition to the mandatory interim stocktaking exercise (see below).

In addition to periodic check-ins with the HCT/UNCT, the RC/HC is also required to lead a more substantive "interim stocktaking exercise" halfway through the implementation period. The exercise is intended to review progress against the objectives set out for the allocation and discuss challenges that have/could affect implementation. The objective of the exercise is to give the RC/HC - and by extension the ERC - an update on the implementation of the allocation, and more importantly, to enable corrective actions¹⁴ to be taken if required. The interim

¹³ HCT/UNCT check-ins may be informed by the outcomes of working-level CERF discussions and stock-taking at the inter-cluster/inter-sector level

¹⁴ These may include the decision to pursue a no-cost extension and/or reprogramming of the budget of an ongoing CERF project if considered necessary and justified by the RC/HC.

stocktaking exercise is expected to involve a broader group of participants than the periodic check-ins, to allow for a more in-depth discussion on implementation against the strategic objectives of the allocation. The outcome of the interim stocktaking exercise should be a consolidated interim update report¹⁵ that should be discussed in the HCT/UNCT before being finalised and submitted to the CERF secretariat by the RC/HC.

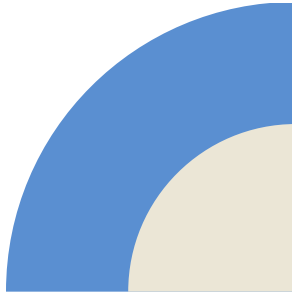
Lead an After-Action Review and reporting

The RC/HC is expected to lead an After-Action Review (AAR), which is essentially a structured discussion at the end of the implementation period that allows the HCT and cluster leads to collectively reflect on what was achieved through the CERF allocation and what lessons were learned. A main objective of the AAR will be to assess whether the strategic objectives set out for the allocation in the strategic statement were met. The AAR will also support a discussion of what was achieved with the grant, what was learned, what follow-up actions should be taken and what corrective measures can be taken in the future. The AAR meeting should take place shortly after the conclusion of CERF grant implementation, with relevant stakeholders, in particular CERF recipient agencies and the HCT/UNCT, as well as cluster leads and other partners as relevant. With the support of the OCHA Office, it is the RC/HC's responsibility to ensure that the AAR is conducted, and that it addresses the strategic and operational added value of the CERF allocation in a manner that enables a strong articulation of impact and achievements. The AAR meeting can be chaired by the RC/HC with support from OCHA, or ideally by an external facilitator if feasible. The AAR is key in informing the final narrative reporting on the CERF allocation.

Three months after grant expiration, the RC/HC is required to submit a final narrative report on the use of CERF funds to the ERC (through the CERF secretariat), that contains strategic reporting at the level of the overall allocation, as well as agency reporting at the project level. The reporting shall be based on the outcome of the AAR. The RC/HC shall personally approve the strategic level reporting¹⁶ that will explain whether and how the strategic statement set out for the allocation was achieved whether operational targets were met and articulate how the allocation has been utilized to meet life-saving humanitarian needs. The final narrative reports are important tools for communicating to the ERC and CERF's donors the strategic results of CERF allocations, their strategic added value and relevant learning obtained through implementation.

¹⁵ The CERF secretariat will advise RC/HCs the on the timeline of the interim report and provide a pre-populated standard template

¹⁶ The reporting guidance and template will explain what parts of the report require direct RC/HC leadership and sign-off.



Strategic Use of CERF

A strategic use of CERF funds to facilitate a jointly prioritized and life-saving component of the response, and to support important strategic goals that will have a longer-term impact, is the optimal way to maximize CERF allocations.

Clear strategic focus

CERF is designed to address the highest priority life-saving needs in a crisis as determined by humanitarian actors on the ground. Due to its speed of response and inclusive allocation processes, CERF adds strategic value to humanitarian action beyond the mere amount of money allocated. Particularly when strongly owned by the RC/HC, UNCT/HCT and OCHA offices, CERF projects have demonstrated their capacity to realize strategic changes, impacts and results.

While CERF is not intended to address root causes, finance preparedness activities or serve as core funding for regular planned programmes, it focuses on providing flexible funding at critical moments, when and where it is needed the most. This makes CERF an indispensable tool of global humanitarian architecture. As such, CERF is often one of the first sources of funding to emergencies.

The main consideration the CERF secretariat looks at during the application process is the compatibility with the [Life-Saving Criteria](#) (▶▶ Chapter 5) within these contextual factors:

- The objectives of an RR application and individual projects are directly related to the trigger causing an acute humanitarian crisis; the projects are not routine programmes.

- The prioritisation is based on the severity and urgency of the need rather than solely on funding gaps in a response plan, for maximum life-saving impact.
- The Emergency Relief Coordinator encourages a strategic allocation of CERF funds, focusing on a limited number of agencies and projects rather than spreading the limited funding too thinly. Typically, CERF projects should not be smaller than \$100,000 and on average have much higher budgets.
- The implementation period for a RR project is 6 months while UFE projects typically last 9 to 12 months. The ERC may decide to grant a longer implementation period for specific allocations or projects. All of the funds must be expended and all activities completed, including those of implementing partners, within the implementation period. Projects or activities that require long lead times to set up and cannot expect to have a life-saving impact within the timeframe are not appropriate for CERF funds.
- CERF allocations are approved by the ERC to support a joint strategy developed by humanitarian partners on the ground. The strategy should use CERF only for highest priority, immediate life-saving activities, while other funds and contributions are used for longer-term needs, such as reconstruction and recovery. The aim is to maximize the impact of resources available through all financing streams by targeting each source, so that together national resources, bilateral contributions, and pooled funding mechanisms, including Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) and CERF facilitate a coherent response.

Coordination & prioritization

Consequently, during the CERF application process, the Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC) provide a brief overview about how CERF and other resources will complement each other. This allows for a better assessment of the requested CERF allocation's contribution to response efforts in the country.

Apart from providing timely and flexible funding, CERF processes are also designed to strengthen humanitarian leadership, improve coordination among humanitarian actors and increase coherence of the response. Unlike most bilateral funding that focuses on agencies' individual outputs, CERF funding is designed to enable the humanitarian community's joint response toward collective outcomes.

This strategic added value is achieved through inclusive CERF application processes lead by RC/HCs and carried out by Humanitarian Country Teams and clusters with the participation of country-level humanitarian actors. The RC/HCs should fully own the CERF allocation, and consult relevant stakeholders – agencies, sectors/clusters, NGOs, local partners, affected people, etc. – to determine the best use of the funds, including how strategic goals can best be

Necessary elements for prioritizing activities

achieved. RC/HCs and HCTs/UNCTs describe this strategic use of CERF funds in a 'strategic statement' for each request. Guidance for RC/HCs is available [here](#).

Once the strategic priorities are defined and activities are prioritized, they are compiled into a consolidated application to the ERC for CERF funding on behalf of the country level humanitarian community. This is characterized by the development of a strategic prioritization and operational prioritization, followed by the development of a full application, including projects. This process ensures that CERF funds are implemented by humanitarian actors in a coordinated manner according to a coherent strategy. Furthermore, the implementation of CERF funding is later reviewed and reported on jointly by implementing organizations. CERF gives incentives to humanitarian actors to participate in these forums that prioritize CERF funding requests and strengthens the lead roles of RC/HCs and cluster leads.

The following questions should be addressed when preparing a CERF application:

- Has the RC/HC or their office considered whether a CERF loan or a CERF grant is suitable before proceeding with the application?
- Has the RC/HC, with the UNCT/HCT, built a coherent and focused approach to address humanitarian needs taking contextual factors into account?
- Has CERF's niche for maximum impact been identified, and are CERF funds to be used to complement other available or expected resources?
- What are the priority life-saving needs and gaps to be addressed with a CERF-funded response? Can the needs and gaps be addressed within the timeframe of a CERF project?
- Who, where, and how many people are to be reached with activities?
- What is the impact or change that CERF funds can make?

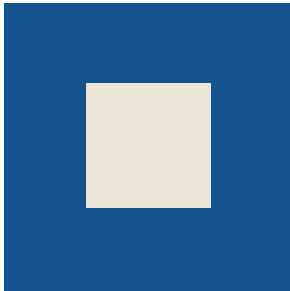
Implementing partners

CERF strongly encourages localization. Partnerships with implementing partners (national and international NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and/or government counterparts) should ideally be in place, and there should be adequate access and capacity among the partners to implement the activities within the timeframe. When designing the CERF project's implementation calendar, consideration should be given to the time it will take to sign agreements and transfer the funds to the implementing partners, as this has proven to sometimes be time-consuming leaving less time for actual implementation.

Advocacy

When the ERC communicates to the international community that CERF is allocating funds to an emergency, messages about the need for additional resources should be ready to leverage the attention generated by the CERF

funding. Similarly, the RC/HC should use a CERF allocation for advocacy purposes, to draw attention to an emergency and encourage further donor funding.



CERF's Life-Saving Criteria

To achieve its mandate to enable timelier and more reliable humanitarian assistance to people affected by disasters and emergencies, CERF follows the "CERF criteria for eligible life-saving humanitarian action," or in short, the Life-Saving Criteria (LSC), which is a document that codifies activities that are eligible under CERF funding.

The concept of the Life-Saving Criteria

CERF funding aims to prioritize life-saving assistance to people in need. To ensure adherence to its mandate, CERF focuses on those most in need. CERF-funded humanitarian programming must be provided in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, International Refugee Law and International Human Rights Law, and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

CERF's [Life-Saving Criteria](#) clarify definitions and determine criteria for the CERF grant elements. The current version of the Life-Saving Criteria was developed through a collaborative process with humanitarian partners and the Global Cluster Leads, and was endorsed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in 2020. The current version of the LSC codifies important systemic updates on anticipatory action, gender, people with disabilities, accountability to affected people (AAP) and other important areas.

Application of the Life-Saving Criteria

The inclusion of an activity in the LSC does not guarantee its inclusion in a particular CERF application, nor approval for funding. Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) have the overall authority to determine funding priorities in country following an inclusive and transparent

consultation process, and the ERC makes the final decision on whether to fund specific activities.

The LSC guidelines cover general as well as sectoral criteria for both the Rapid Response (RR) and Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) windows of the CERF, and thereby also apply to anticipatory action and special allocations.

Contextual issues to be considered

The LSC were developed with a range of crises in mind and should be interpreted in relation to the specific emergency context. The LSC are not an exhaustive list of activities that may qualify for CERF funding; humanitarian activities not reflected in the LSC may be considered for CERF funding based on the specific context. The context on the ground will guide the determination and an appropriate degree of flexibility will be exercised regarding funding decisions. Typically, CERF funds will not be used to address issues that require long-term interventions, or are not situated in a humanitarian emergency context. However, the ERC has the authority to make allocations that go beyond the scope of the LSC.

Grey areas

The CERF secretariat may sometimes follow up with RC/HCs on “grey areas” – activities that need more explanation in terms of how the requested activities are “life-saving” in the particular context. Providing a rationale grounded in the field perspective of the context can strengthen a request that initially might appear to be outside the remit of the LSC.



Rapid Response

With CERF Rapid Response (RR) grants, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) allocates funds for sudden onset emergencies or to address a rapid deterioration within existing crises, in various contexts.

Determining CERF Rapid Response eligibility

Through the RR funding window, CERF can make funds for life-saving assistance available within a short time. RR grants may be requested following a new emergency or a significant deterioration in an existing situation, allowing UN agencies and implementing partners to start work right away. As CERF allocations aim to meet urgent, immediate needs, they in turn kickstart operations that would otherwise remain on hold until other resources are mobilized, while the critical window of opportunity to save lives following a disaster quickly closes. In summary, three main conditions can be considered for RR eligibility:

- Rapid or sudden-onset emergency
- Sudden or significant deterioration in an on-going crisis
- Time-critical situation

Developing a joint application

The process of applying for a RR grant is usually a country-driven process that gives the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) overall authority to determine priority activities and submit a consolidated funding request to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). Consultations in country with United Nations Country Team/Humanitarian Country Team (UNCT/HCT) and inter-cluster coordination mechanism, if present, are key to identifying needs and priorities for CERF funding.

Typically, the RR process has two parts: First, the RC/HC and country team write a short request and send it to the CERF secretariat. In urgent cases, this can be a light request without the project breakdown. If the ERC decides to make an

Procedures & criteria for application

allocation, the RC/HC and country team then develop a full-fledged application, with a strategy and agency projects. In particular urgent cases, the ERC may decide to allocate funds without a prior request.

Every CERF application is unique and based on country-level needs. Early consultation is recommended between the RC/HC and the CERF secretariat on the possibility of rapid response funding, *before* sending a funding request.

CERF aims to alleviate needs that have been triggered by an emergency, and not: root causes, chronic or underlying issues or activities that can be done through routine programming. To determine whether the potential request falls within the mandate of CERF's Rapid Response window the following key question might help to take a decision:

Rapid or sudden-onset

- **What:** Response to new rapid onset humanitarian situations where fast action is critical.
- **Trigger:** What is causing an acute humanitarian situation?

Examples of triggers include:

- *Conflict: new conflict, new displacement*
- *Health-related: new disease outbreaks, such as cholera or Ebola*
- *Natural disaster: earthquake, storm, tsunami, floods, volcano eruption*
- *Human-made disaster: explosion or fire*
- **Rationale:** What information can be provided to demonstrate the humanitarian nature of the new crisis (how many people are affected, where, when, how severely)?

Significant deterioration in an-ongoing crisis

- **What:** Response to a significant deterioration of ongoing humanitarian crisis.
- **Trigger:** What event happened, when (must be recent), that caused the significant deterioration?

Examples of a deterioration include:

- *Escalation of violence resulting in new and significant displacement including projected displacement*
- *Refugee arrivals, including projected refugee arrivals, above planning figures*

- *New disease outbreak within a complex emergency*

- **Rationale:** Present information that demonstrates the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and timing of the event.

Time-critical intervention

- **What:** Response actions that need to take place during a specific window of opportunity to address out of the ordinary humanitarian needs (i.e. not core programming or regular seasonal planning).
- **Trigger:** What is the trigger or event for time-critical needs?

Examples of time critical needs include:

- *New access that allows humanitarian partners to identify new needs within a community or in a location that was previously inaccessible*
- *Drought or food insecurity: the situation must be, or projected to be, significantly worse than usual, demonstrated by comparing current data or projections (for example, rainfall, crop production/crop loss, malnutrition prevalence) with a five-year trend and a lifesaving niche for CERF needs to be clearly identified.*

- **Rationale:** What is the assessment or information that shows an immediate response is required to out of the ordinary needs?

Navigating the application process

A RR allocation is requested and managed by a country's RC/HC and may be done at any time a crisis meets the criteria of the RR window and the RC/HC considers it necessary to access CERF funds.

1. **Contact the CERF secretariat:** The first step is for the RC/HC to inform the ERC of a rapid response emergency or early warning indicators of an imminent emergency—done at the working level by the RC/HC or OCHA office contacting the CERF secretariat. This should be done as soon as possible.
2. **Provide the rationale:** Develop an initial CERF request outlining the rationale for and objectives of a request for CERF funding, including the RC/HC's vision for the use of a CERF allocation in the form of a strategic statement. The CERF request will be presented to the ERC for initial decision-making.
3. **Initiate the prioritization process:** When the ERC decides to make an allocation the RC/HC leads the process to prioritize activities and projects that will be included in the CERF application package.

As RR grants are for new, deteriorated or time-critical emergencies, timeliness and speed are crucial. RC/HCs should send a request as soon as possible after the onset of an emergency or, if possible, even before. Under its Rapid Response

window, CERF supports the full spectrum of emergency humanitarian assistance, from anticipatory action (thorough AA frameworks) via early action to rapid response. Broadly speaking, there are four scenarios:

- **Before a shock:** This applies to situations where there are high-quality, high-confidence forecasts that an event will happen imminently with a very high probability, or projections from renowned institutions and based on a rigorous methodology that a trend will worsen critically. This could include, for example, tropical cyclones forecast to make landfalls, the IPC's food insecurity projections showing a severe deterioration, or projections for further displacement. In these cases, the ERC may consider a request for CERF funding before the shock occurs.
- **After a shock, before the impact:** A shock has occurred, but the peak humanitarian impact has not. For instance, the rainy season has failed but food insecurity is only expected to significantly deteriorate in several weeks or months. If there are high-quality forecasts or projections for significant humanitarian consequences due to the shock, the ERC may consider a request for CERF funding before those consequences fully materialize.
- **After the shock and impact:** Some shocks are difficult or impossible to foresee, such as conflict, earthquakes or volcano eruptions. In situations where a shock has occurred and has caused humanitarian consequences, RC/HCs should send a CERF request as quickly as possible. Time is of the essence so that affected people can receive assistance as quickly as possible. The RC/HC does not have to wait until full needs assessments have been conducted or a flash appeal published. Instead, CERF can make rapid response allocations even based on preliminary, incomplete information, as long as there is a good-enough picture of the scope, scale and severity of the humanitarian situation.

These first three scenarios can be combined. For instance, people have already fled their homes but more are expected to flee in the coming weeks. Or food insecurity has already worsened but is expected to further deteriorate in the coming months. There is a fourth scenario:

Contingency requests: In some cases, a future shock may occur, but the probability of this happening is either not clear or not very high. In this case, the country team can work with the CERF secretariat to prepare for a potential CERF request should the shock occur. There should be a solid basis for such a contingency request, ideally a contingency plan developed by the country team with clear scenarios including the number of people who could be affected and the amount of funding that would be required for the overall humanitarian response to each scenario.

Once the consolidated CERF RR application is submitted by the RC/HC, the CERF secretariat reviews the request, and makes recommendations to the ERC on the overall RR allocation amount, and on individual projects. During this phase, the CERF secretariat continues to liaise with relevant country-level actors as necessary – directly or through the OCHA Country Office – to clarify or revise aspects of the submission.

Early start dates

Once the ERC has decided to allocate funds, the full application including project proposals should be submitted within a week. CERF encourages agencies to make use of the opportunity of choosing an **early start date** for their CERF projects, up to 6 weeks before the disbursement date but not before the onset of the emergency. This will allow agencies to start implementing CERF funds as early as the date of a new emergency and as soon as they are certain funding will come, prior to actual disbursement.

The standard start date of a CERF-funded project is the date of disbursement of funds by CERF, which is available in OneGMS and the allocation module on the CERF website. If an agency has begun expending funds before the disbursement of CERF funds, it should opt for an early start date.

To cover the costs incurred between an early start date and the disbursement of CERF funds, agencies typically use funding available from other sources, including agency-internal advances.

For anticipatory action frameworks, humanitarian action takes place before a predicted shock. Early start dates can be used for AA projects, up to 6 weeks before the disbursement date.

Replenishment

Agencies can also make use of the **replenishment** option, whereby they use their existing supplies and emergency stocks for immediate distribution (also possible prior to the CERF project start date) and use CERF funding to replenish their stocks afterwards. Existing supplies must be used for the same emergency for which allocates funding.

Allocation amount

CERF RR grants are meant to ‘jump start’ responses or support the rapid scale-up of current responses rather than fully fund a response or target all the needs of the affected population. Similarly, CERF RR funds are not meant to fill funding gaps or pipeline breaks in ongoing programs. Sectors, projects and activities should therefore be identified and prioritized by the country team.

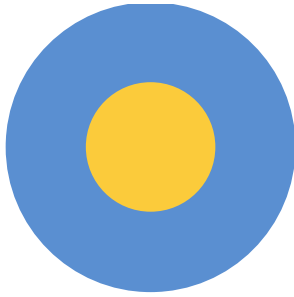
CERF cannot fund 100% or a large share of project requirements. Normally, CERF contributes to a limited amount of the total requirement to meet the most time critical and life-saving requirements, but this may vary depending on the context and situation. The requested amount should reflect the urgent life-saving

humanitarian requirements for the *new* crisis that triggered the application to CERF.

When evaluating the amount for a RR allocation, the CERF secretariat considers several factors including, but not limited to:

- **Scale and severity of the needs**
To estimate the scale and severity of needs, CERF consults a wide range of stakeholders, both in OCHA and outside, and sources, including sitreps, press releases, media reports and specialized organizations that provide information on the scale and severity of current or forecasted humanitarian needs.
- **Overall funding requirements and the proportion requested from CERF**
As noted above, CERF can only fund a portion of the overall funding requirements for the response to a specific humanitarian emergency.
- **Comparison with other emergencies or allocations**
In 2021, CERF improved its ability to compare new funding requests with past allocations by developing a real-time dashboard and a group of statistical models. The dashboard that allows the CERF secretariat to quickly filter and find the best comparison list (e.g., allocations to past droughts in southern Africa) and that provides relevant summary statistics (e.g., allocated amount per person targeted). The multi-variate regression models allow the CERF secretariat to calculate a historical reference average range for a new allocation based on four factors: the emergency type, overall funding requirements for the response to the specific humanitarian emergency, the number of people targeted, and a country's overall humanitarian situation measured by the CIRV score (see chapter on Underfunded Emergencies). These comparisons provide one of many inputs for the decision-making, they never determine new allocation amounts as each emergency is unique.
- **Operational capacity**
This includes, as proxy indicators, implementation delays and no-cost extensions associated with previous CERF allocations.
- **Activities proposed for funding**
Activities must be within the scope of the life-saving criteria and directly linked to the new or deteriorating emergency.
- **Complementarity with other resources**
Especially OCHA-managed country-based or regional pooled funds, other funds such as the Peacebuilding Fund or the Education Cannot Wait fund, and other funding sources.
- **Available funds in CERF and forecasted income**

CERF prudently manages its cash balance and continuously plans its cash-flow for the short and medium term based on income and expenditure projections, and in addition, always aims to keep a reserve for large, unforeseen emergencies.



Anticipatory Action

Today, we can predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and humanitarian impact of certain shocks. By combining different analytical approaches, out-of-the-ordinary events cannot only be predicted, but their projected humanitarian impact can be proactively mitigated based on pre-identified anticipatory actions. Since 2019 OCHA and CERF have been supporting the development of anticipatory action (AA) frameworks for various climate hazards and infectious diseases. After the initial pilot phase proved that collective AA at scale is feasible, AA has become a core part of OCHA's work.

For more detailed information on AA, including a definition of anticipatory action, please refer to the [OCHA AA website](#).

CERF and Anticipatory Action

In line with CERF's [mandate](#) "to promote early action and response to reduce loss of life" and "enhance response to time-critical requirements", CERF has provided funding for collective OCHA-facilitated anticipatory action frameworks since 2020. AA frameworks consist of 3 main building blocks and an additional learning component:

The trigger

A trigger mechanism with clearly defined thresholds based on available data as well as agreement on roles and responsibilities in trigger monitoring and activation. Trigger mechanisms vary between frameworks and for different types of sudden- and slow-onset hazards. Seasonal forecasts serve as useful tools to monitor the likelihood of shock occurrence but do not replace validated trigger mechanisms.

The action

Life-saving activities that can mitigate the impact of the hazard. These activities must be implemented once the trigger indicates that a hazard is imminent but before it materializes or its peak impact is felt which in the case of sudden-onset shocks may be within a few days. The action plan is complemented by a crisis timeline that elaborates concrete humanitarian impacts and relevant humanitarian assistance to get ahead of these impacts. General preparedness activities such as pre-positioning of items, registration of people, or capacity building are not eligible for CERF funding (see CERF's [Life-Saving Criteria](#)).

The financing

AA relies on the automatic release of funds once a trigger is reached. Frameworks therefore serve as tools to pre-arrange funding, including from CERF. Co-financing is highly encouraged.

The learning

Evaluations, reviews and other learning efforts are important to be able to investigate and demonstrate the added value of AA. A commitment to the learning agenda by all partners of an OCHA-facilitated framework is essential.

Eligibility criteria

OCHA has developed a set of principles and considerations to guide and foster consultations on the selection of countries for the development of OCHA-facilitated and CERF-funded collective anticipatory action. Requests for new frameworks are reviewed between country teams, OCHA country and regional offices and headquarters, and should rest on several factors, including:

Hazard

CERF will generally consider requests to support AA frameworks for **predictable hazards**, especially droughts, floods, cyclones, and certain disease outbreaks. Other hazards will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Given CERF's mandate to provide funding for out-of-the-ordinary humanitarian crises, the shocks that are targeted in the framework should have a **high severity**, often defined in terms of their return period. CERF generally provides pre-arranged financing for AA frameworks with a return period typically between 1-in-3 and 1-in-5 years.

Trigger

CERF-funded AA frameworks must demonstrate that, based on available data and forecasts, it is possible to design a **rigorous trigger** to accurately predict the selected shock. The envisioned trigger threshold must reflect the severity of the event.

Action plan

The action plan outlined in the framework must be in line with CERF's [Life-Saving Criteria](#) and must pursue **multi-sectoral** outcomes. When designing the individual

package of assistance, agencies and their partners are encouraged to consider the available time between the moment when the trigger activates and the moment when the shock occurs and assistance needs to be delivered. For sudden-onset shocks this time may only be a few days. As is the case with all CERF applications, the action plan should be strategic in nature and focused on a small number of projects and agencies, rather than seeking to include many partners and sectors.

Commitment and capacity

CERF generally funds anticipatory action as part of OCHA-facilitated AA frameworks. Recipients of CERF funding must commit to participating in the framework development. Country teams must also demonstrate the capacity to plan, for example through AA working groups, and implement anticipatory action.

Co-financing

Similar to traditional responses, where CERF usually covers a portion of an appeal, partners under OCHA-facilitated AA frameworks are expected to mobilize additional resources for the implementation of activities (“fuel funding”). This is in addition to the preparedness costs, which CERF is not able to fund (“build funding”).

Learning

Country teams that develop an AA framework commit to participate in dedicated and tailored learning activities to systematically generate and capture evidence of the effectiveness and impact of anticipatory actions. This may include agencies sharing beneficiary lists, in line with relevant data protection guidelines, to enable rigorous evaluation.

Main-streaming

Wherever feasible, AA frameworks should be integrated into the country-level emergency planning or humanitarian programme cycle.

Process

1. Before beginning to develop new or expanding existing AA frameworks, country teams should consider the established eligibility criteria for CERF support (see also the summary checklist below). OCHA is available to provide technical assistance on the different aspects, including the development of triggers and action plans, and exploring funding support. OCHA country offices should reach out to the CERF secretariat early on to receive further guidance on eligibility, the process, and funding prospects.
2. After initial consultations and preliminary analyses show that the eligibility criteria are met, the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) submits a

formal request for CERF support to the CERF secretariat. If approved by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), framework development, which may take several months, commences.

3. Once the CERF-funded framework is approved by the RC/HC it is submitted to the CERF secretariat for endorsement by the ERC. The CERF funds for the framework are usually endorsed for 2 years, with the possibility of an extension by the ERC.
4. After framework endorsement, the CERF project proposals are developed and pre-approved prior to the monitoring season of the relevant shock. AA projects fall under CERF's Rapid Response window.
5. If a trigger threshold is reached, funds are disbursed automatically (i.e., without the need for additional approval) unless otherwise specified in the framework. If the trigger is not met, there is no disbursement of CERF funds.

Summary checklist

Before developing a collective OCHA-facilitated AA framework country teams are encouraged to consider the following questions.

1. Have we agreed on a hazard?
2. Is the hazard we have selected predictable?
3. Do we regularly receive CERF funding for this hazard?
4. Are we focusing on out-of-the-ordinary events rather than problems that occur every season?
5. Do we have capacity to develop an AA framework (e.g., in the form of an AA working group)?
6. Are we committed to investing the necessary time and resources for the development of a framework?
7. Do we have the data to develop and monitor a trigger?
8. Have we identified collective, multi-sectoral anticipatory activities and are we able to implement them within the required timeframe?
9. Are we committed to supporting learning efforts as part of the framework?
10. Can we cover the preparedness costs from other funding sources?
11. Is additional financing available to support the framework?



Underfunded Emergencies

With CERF Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) grants, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) allocates funds for emergencies that have not attracted or are unlikely to attract sufficient and timely funding for life-saving activities.

Determining CERF Underfunded Emergencies eligibility

Typically twice each year, through the CERF UFE funding window, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) allocates CERF grants for life-saving activities in the least funded and forgotten humanitarian emergencies. The selection of humanitarian emergencies for the two UFE allocation rounds is made up of two components: (1) a quantitative analysis of data on humanitarian needs, funding levels, risk and vulnerability, and (2) qualitative, contextual information collected from consultations with UN agency and OCHA headquarters, NGOs and various documents. The UFE window usually accounts for approximately one third of CERF grants annually.

Launch of the Underfunded Emergencies round

Each UFE round begins with the circulation of the CERF UFE Guidance Note, typically in October or November for the first round and in May or June for the second round. The UFE Guidance Note specifies the amount of funding to be allocated; provides the selection criteria; and provides a timeline for the round.

As explained in the [Underfunded Emergencies Methodology Notes](#), the CERF secretariat begins by identifying the most underfunded emergencies with severe humanitarian needs among the countries with a Humanitarian Response Plan or

equivalent appeal, known as “HRP countries.” Simultaneously, the headquarters representatives of the UN agencies and OCHA that participate in the Underfunded Emergencies Work Group (UFEWG) identify and recommend a specific number of countries without an HRP or common appeal plan, referred to as “non-HRP countries.”

Quantitative & qualitative data analysis

The selected emergencies are those that have not attracted or are unlikely to attract sufficient and timely funding for life-saving activities, as judged by:

1. Degree of funding shortfall¹⁷

The funding analysis identifies emergencies with the highest levels of underfunding, the primary criterion for inclusion in a UFE round. The data for the funding analysis of HRP countries comes from the Financial Tracking Services (FTS).

In the analysis, available funding for humanitarian programming is compared to funding requirements to calculate the funding level. The funding level of each eligible HRP country is compared to the average funding level. Emergencies whose funding level is below the average will be considered for UFE funding.

2. Analysis of risk, vulnerability, and severity of humanitarian needs and type of programs/activities

For the emergencies defined as underfunded during the funding analysis, the level of risk, vulnerability and severity of humanitarian needs is assessed. Data on all aspects of risk, vulnerability and humanitarian needs are combined into a single index – the CERF Index for Risk and Vulnerability (CIRV).

3. Consultations

The draft funding, risk and vulnerability analysis is shared with the UFEWG, NGO partners through relevant consortia, and other parts of OCHA. CERF holds consultations with each group before finalizing the analysis.

Based on the funding, risk and vulnerability analysis, the headquarters representatives of the UN agencies and OCHA that participate in the UFEWG recommend a long list of countries to the CERF secretariat. Taking the analysis, consultation and nomination process into account, the CERF secretariat recommends countries for selection to the ERC. The recommendation to the ERC may include one or several scenarios depending on the outcome of the analysis

Allocation decisions

¹⁷ Refers to funding received against total annual requirements.

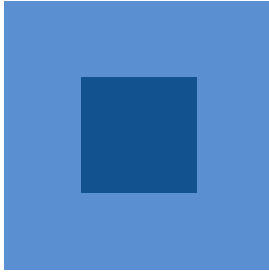
and consultations and will help ERC decision-making. The final country selection can differ from the scenario(s) proposed by the CERF secretariat as it may be informed by additional ERC considerations that complement the analysis by the CERF secretariat. The ERC's final decision includes both which countries will be included in the UFE round and the funding apportionment.

The ERC decides on and announces CERF UFE country allocations, usually in December for the first round and July for the second round. The total allocation amount per round depends on the resources available for the CERF grant component. The objective is to frontload emergency funding, by disbursing a larger proportion of the annual amount set aside for the CERF UFE window in the first round.

Prioritization process

The ERC asks the RC/HCs of the selected countries to develop a clearly prioritized, implementable and focused strategy for the CERF allocation in collaboration with their HCT/UNCT. The prioritization strategy is the basis for the UFE country submission and should provide a brief overview of the needs and gaps while identifying the critical activities, target groups and geographical locations that will be addressed with CERF support. It should also explain how the CERF funds will contribute to strategic goals. The prioritization strategy provides an opportunity for the RC/HC and the HCT/UNCT to build a coherent and focused approach to address specific humanitarian problems within a complex context. The CERF secretariat will provide feedback on the strategy and ensure that it meets CERF's criteria. Once the strategy is finalized UN agencies begin drafting proposals in line with the agreed strategy.

For countries with a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and with an HRP or similar humanitarian strategy, the RC/HC may use the HNO's needs assessment and the HRP's strategic priorities, cluster objectives and projects to inform the CERF application. However, it's important that the CERF allocation has a clear strategic focus within the broader HRP priorities.



The CERF Climate Action Account

Launched in late 2023 at the 28th Conference of Parties (COP), the Climate Action Account strengthens and expands CERF's climate action portfolio.

CERF's climate action portfolio

Climate change is a major driver of global humanitarian needs. In addition to extreme weather and climate-related disasters becoming more frequent and more intense, climate shocks and stresses exacerbate existing vulnerabilities of individuals and communities in already fragile settings, who are often hit the hardest and who benefit the least from climate action.¹⁸

CERF is at the forefront of the response to the climate crisis and fills an important niche in the global climate financing architecture, complementing other instruments. Since its inception, CERF has allocated over a quarter of its funding to address climate-related hazards such as droughts, floods and storms. CERF's speed and reliability have saved countless lives and reached people when and where they most needed support in facing the climate crisis.

¹⁸ Wong, C. (2022). How can climate finance work better for fragile and conflict-affected regions? <https://www.undp.org/blog/how-can-climate-finance-work-better-fragile-and-conflict-affected-regions>

CERF not only enables much-needed rapid response to climate shocks but also spearheads innovative finance solutions to climate-related emergencies. CERF is the world's largest investor in anticipatory action to mitigate humanitarian impacts before climate-related disasters strike (>> [Chapter 8](#)). Moreover, CERF routinely funds life-saving activities that enhance community adaptation and resilience to climate shocks and stresses. For instance, CERF partners often distribute drought-resistant seeds and conduct trainings on climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies during droughts, which address immediate needs but also strengthen the capacity of communities to better withstand future shocks and stresses resulting from climate change.

A dedicated Climate Action Account

OCHA launched the [CERF Climate Action Account](#) at COP28 in December 2023. The Account is a swift and impactful avenue to channel additional finance through the coordinated humanitarian system to reach the world's most vulnerable communities suffering from climate-related crises. The Account enables CERF to grow its climate action portfolio by:

- Supporting and incentivizing life-saving actions that also reduce exposure or vulnerability to future climate shocks and stresses, thus helping to build communities' adaptive capacities and resilience to climate change;
- Scaling anticipatory action for predictable climate shocks; and
- Boosting humanitarian responses to climate-related disasters.

The Account ensures that CERF evolves to keep pace with new demands. Importantly, it helps catalyze the systemic change needed in a reality characterized by increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters. The aim is that as the Climate Action Account grows, it will increasingly drive innovation and generate best practices on climate-smart humanitarian action in fragile contexts, including by building adaptive capacities and resilience of the most vulnerable communities.

How does the Climate Action Account work?

Overarching Parameters

The Climate Action Account allows donors to channel additional finance through CERF for humanitarian action to mitigate and address losses and damages of climate-related disasters and to promote climate-smart humanitarian action that builds local resilience to future climate shocks. This additional funding complements the traditional humanitarian finance already generously provided to CERF.

Contributions to the Climate Action Account are pooled and the funds flow through a replenishment principle exclusively towards CERF's climate action portfolio. The Account operates within CERF's current administrative and operational framework.

The introduction of the Climate Action Account upholds the Fund's life-saving mandate (>> [Chapter 6](#)) and preserves its established, needs-based decision-making processes, and administrative and operational frameworks as set out by the General Assembly in Resolution [A/RES/60/124](#) and the Secretary-General's Bulletin [ST/SGB/2006/10](#). The ERC maintains flexibility to allocate the resources of the Fund according to humanitarian needs and risks – be they driven by climate or other factors.

The Climate Action Account is not a new funding window. It is a virtual account within the United Nations Secretariat common banking system which ensures that funds are used exclusively for responding to climate-related emergencies. CERF does not intend to fund climate-related responses solely through the Climate Action Account. CERF continues to respond to climate-related shocks as needed, consistent with current practices.

Contributions to the Climate Action Account may be allocated through either of CERF's funding windows, provided they address climate-related emergencies and/or fund climate-relevant humanitarian programming. This ensures that contributions to the Account are used to enable timely and effective climate action in emergencies.

Incentivizing and supporting climate-smart humanitarian action

CERF routinely supports life-saving humanitarian actions that also build vulnerable peoples' and communities' adaptive capacities and resilience to climate shocks and stresses. Given the increasingly important role of the humanitarian community and CERF in responding to climate disasters and protecting crisis-affected communities against future climate shocks and stresses, including through the Climate Action Account, it is crucial for CERF to better identify, track, incentivize and analyze such activities within CERF-funded projects. CERF therefore now requires grant recipients to provide information on whether planned life-saving activities support climate adaptation and resilience. This incentivizes improved humanitarian programming in the future in support to climate-vulnerable communities.

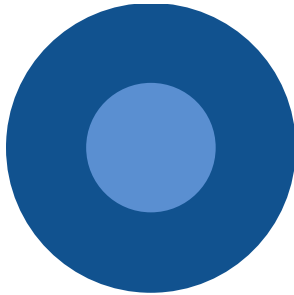
Reporting on CERF's climate action

CERF has committed to enhanced reporting on its climate action portfolio on an annual basis. As a first step, OCHA in 2024 published the inaugural [report on CERF-funded climate action](#), covering 2023 allocations.

Donor attribution

Contributions to the Climate Action Account are attributed proportionally to CERF's overall climate action portfolio on an annual basis, not to individual

allocations, projects, or activities. This is in line with CERF's existing method of attributing results to donor contributions.



Navigating the Application Process

Collaboration takes place under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) within the existing coordination structure at field level and with the CERF secretariat.

Who may submit CERF requests?

The RC/HC has the overall authority to determine funding priorities in the country. UN agencies do not submit requests directly. Only grant requests submitted by RC/HCs are considered for both RR and UFE.

Who is leading the CERF process

The CERF process is a collective effort by in-country humanitarian partners under the leadership of RC/HCs. That leadership is critical to shift the focus from the implementing organizations' individual funding goals toward the achievement of collective humanitarian outcomes, through a coordinated and coherent response.

The CERF secretariat reviews the prioritisation for evidence of the leadership, collaboration, inclusiveness, consultation, participation, and engagement of the humanitarian actors in the field. The best placed actors to deliver the response should be selected for CERF funding.

Who is eligible to receive CERF funding?

United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are eligible for CERF funds for life-saving activities in emergencies around the world.

CERF Grant: UN operational funds, programmes and specialized agencies may be direct recipients of CERF grants, while OCHA cannot receive CERF funding. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and governments may receive funding as implementing partners of agencies that receive a CERF grant. CERF encourages localization.

Who is involved in the CERF process?

CERF Loan: UN operational funds, programmes and specialized agencies, including OCHA, may apply for a CERF loan.

Essential responsibilities for CERF allocations are managed at the country level.

The HC or RC/HC leads and manages the CERF submission process, ensuring the strategic use of CERF funds through rigorous prioritisation. They have the authority to include or exclude activities/projects in the submission package.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), or UN country team when there is no HCT, participates in the strategic prioritisation process.

Clusters (or sectors where there are no clusters) advise the RC/HC and HCT on needs, the strategic use of funds and the adherence to CERF's Life-Saving Criteria.

UN Agencies draft their own projects proposals and implement CERF-funded projects in line with the objectives of the CERF application.

NGOs including local NGOs actively participate in the cluster/sector structures, serve as members of the HCT, provide inputs to the prioritisation, and implement projects in partnerships with UN agencies and IOM. Relevant government partners (e.g., health personnel under the Ministry of Health) and Red Cross/Red Crescent societies can also implement UN agencies' CERF projects. But agencies cannot transfer CERF funds to another UN agency.

OCHA **Country Offices (and Regional Offices)** provide guidance and support to the HC and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to advise on rules and procedures of the CERF, facilitate inter-cluster coordination to organize joint needs assessment, provide information on funding status of sectors and specific projects during the prioritization of needs and the related projects.

The OCHA Country and Regional Offices also play a key role in compiling information and preparing an application for CERF funding, reviewing draft project proposals, and liaising with the CERF secretariat to ensure revision of applications as per the comments for time-efficient project approval.

OCHA **Operations and Advocacy Division (OAD)** desk officers use their knowledge of the country situation to provide advice and guidance to the OCHA Country Offices on the CERF process at country level, and can advise the CERF secretariat about the humanitarian needs in the country context to justify CERF funding for projects under consideration. Country submissions are reviewed by the CERF secretariat in liaison with OAD. OAD alerts CERF as soon as a new crisis emerges or significantly deteriorates.

How to complete the application template?

The CERF application template, which is available in English and French, is comprised of the [Strategy](#) and individual agency [Project Proposals](#).

The strategic and operational prioritization should be drafted by OCHA or the RC's Office based on guidance and decisions by the RC/HC and the contributions provided by the UNCT/HCT, cluster or sector leads, agencies and their implementing partners.

The project proposals should be completed by the requesting agencies in line with the agreed strategy. The OCHA or RC's office consolidates inputs into one joint document.

Standard Indicators

In 2021, CERF introduced standard indicators. In their project proposals, agencies should use these standard indicators wherever possible. Only where these indicators are not relevant should agencies develop custom indicators. The standard indicators are available on the [CERF website](#).

How to complete budget tool?

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 budget guidelines. The CERF budget template is in line with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) budget categories. The budget should reflect activities described in the project narrative, meaning that it should be relevant and eligible, and include sufficient details to provide a transparent overview of how CERF funds will be spent.

CERF typically does not fund the cost of existing or established offices or structure or staff unless costs have increased in relation to the implementation of CERF projects.

As each UN agency prepares its own budget, UN agencies cannot pass on CERF grants to other UN agencies as implementing partners. If an agency will implement activities in several sectors, it should ideally submit one single project proposal covering all relevant sectoral interventions to be funded by CERF.

CERF has developed an Excel [budget tool](#) for preparing CERF proposal budgets, that is designed to compile the correct calculations of various budget items. The calculations can then be transferred to the CERF application for submission.

People targeted

The CERF secretariat tracks people targeted directly, who are defined as first-hand recipients of goods or services funded by the CERF. The CERF secretariat tracks people indirectly targeted separately. These are people whose situation may have improved due of the implementation of CERF-funded interventions.

The CERF secretariat tracks people targeted and people reached at project, sector, application and global levels.

- Planned people targeted are estimated by country-level partners in CERF funding applications
- People reached are reported against planned figures by country-level partners in RC/HC reports on the use of CERF funds.

Since CERF applications usually include several projects in several sectors, these projects often provide assistance to the same people. Therefore, CERF undertakes measures to avoid double counting of people targeted and reached. This is done in two steps:

- First, in CERF applications and reports, sector leads are asked to remove duplications at sector level if targeted groups overlap between respective projects.
- Second, at application and report level, focal points are asked to remove duplications if targeted groups overlap between sectors.

Figures aggregated following this methodology are entered into CERF's Grants Management System, which allows for generating various types of overviews. Given the complexity of this tracking, this methodology will never be an exact science and can only lead to best possible estimates.

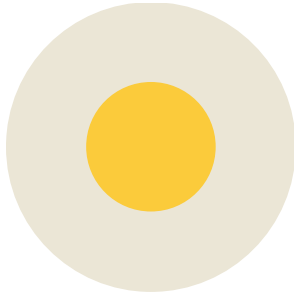
Submission

Proposals for both UFE and RR are sent as an email package to the CERF secretariat (please copy cerf@un.org).

For the timeliest response to emergencies, CERF aims to disburse funds as soon as possible. Upon receipt of a project approval by the ERC, the grant-requesting agency must submit the signed project approval letter immediately—CERF aims to receive the counter-signed project approval letter within no more than two working days. Submissions of counter-signed letter should be sent to the ERC and copied to the CERF secretariat (cerf@un.org).

Pre-submission checklist

- The RC/HC has signed off on the application, in particular the strategic statement
- Projects adhere to the overall strategy and agreements; the proposals and the chapeau match
- Beneficiary figures add up and are consistent throughout the project proposal
- Beneficiary figures between the chapeau and project proposals are consistent
- Geographic locations are consistent with agreed priorities and across projects
- Standard indicators are used in the results framework, wherever possible
- Duration of activities is consistent with agreements
- Cluster/sector and project narratives complement each other; synergies are apparent
- Monitoring plan is included in proposals
- How the agency plans to implement is clear (implementing partners, timeline)
- Results framework matches budget
- Cost effectiveness of the intervention is clear
- Costs in budget are reasonable according to context
- Costs in budget are eligible as per CERF budget guidance
- Mainstreamed elements are apparent (protection, gender, age, AAP, etc)
- Do No Harm is considered
- Documents are clean with no comments or tracked changes



Guidance for Drought Requests

This section provides basic guidance for country teams that want to request funding from CERF’s rapid response window for drought, especially in the early stages of the response or for early action to get ahead of the expected impact of drought. Understanding that every CERF application is unique and based on country-level needs, this guideline outlines some standard parameters on eligibility for CERF rapid response funding, and what may or may not be suitable for CERF funding. While these basic situational parameters can help field partners determine whether a situation may potentially qualify for CERF support, meeting the criteria carries no guarantee of funding as many other factors determine whether a CERF grant is provided in a given context. Country teams and Humanitarian or Resident Coordinators – or OCHA country or regional offices on their behalf – should contact the CERF secretariat as early as possible to discuss the situation.

Definition of Drought¹⁹

Drought is the absence of water. It is a creeping phenomenon that impacts many sectors of the economy and operates on many different time scales. There are four types of drought:

4. Meteorological drought happens when dry weather patterns dominate an area
5. Hydrological drought occurs when low water supply becomes evident, especially in streams, reservoirs, and groundwater levels, usually after many months of meteorological drought
6. Agricultural drought happens when crops become affected
7. The concept of socioeconomic drought relates to the supply and demand of various commodities to drought

Meteorological drought can begin and end rapidly, while hydrological drought takes much longer to develop and then for the situation to recover. Its first impact will usually be on agriculture.

Humanitarian consequences of drought

Drought is among the most devastating of natural hazards – crippling food production, depleting pastures, disrupting markets and, at its most extreme, causing widespread human and animal deaths. Drought can also lead to increased migration from rural to urban areas, placing additional pressures on declining food production. Herders are often forced to seek alternative sources of food and water for their animals, which can create conflict between pastoral and farming communities.²⁰ Affected households often employ negative coping mechanisms (such as selling assets, child/forced/early marriage, selling children, begging, prostitution, etc.) to cope with the impact of drought.

19 NOAA – National Centers for Environmental Information

20 FAO - Drought

Eligibility requirements

In contrast to rapid-onset emergencies, droughts develop slowly. Thus, additional steps need to be taken to show the severity of the humanitarian situation, and explain how the situation is exceptional, as opposed to the regular seasonal cycle in a specific context.

Measuring drought: The country team should compare actual data, forecasts or projections – for example rainfall measurements, seasonal precipitation forecasts, crop production crop loss data, food prices – against a comparable time (such as a 5-year average or, at a minimum, the previous year) to show that the current or projected situation is significantly worse.

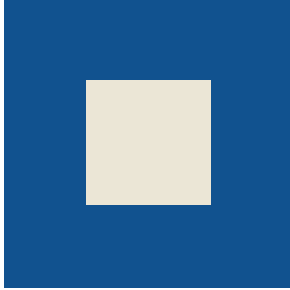
Measuring humanitarian impact: Where a drought is already occurring or predicted to occur, the country team should present information, including actual data, forecasts or projections, to show that the humanitarian situation has or is expected to deteriorate substantially. This is important to demonstrate the humanitarian impact of the drought and to show that a time-critical response can help mitigate a humanitarian crisis. This should include a comparison both to the situation before the drought and to a comparable time (such as a 5-year average or, at a minimum, the previous year). Aspects of the humanitarian impact that could be covered include food security, malnutrition prevalence or admission rates, water availability, diseases outbreaks that can be linked to the drought, or negative coping mechanisms.

Capacity to respond to the crisis: The request should demonstrate that the emergency is beyond the capacity of the Government and local actors to respond and that UN agencies and their partners have the capacity to implement programmes quickly.

Additional guidance

- **Response linked to current drought:** All sectors, projects and activities must directly respond to the needs arising from the drought, whether it is unfolding or has already occurred. The country team should not prioritize sectors or activities that respond to pre-existing needs or those that address chronic issues – these activities should be funded through regular programme funds. The CERF request should be based only on new or additional needs, resulting from the drought.
- **Timing:** CERF's niche is in the earliest part of the response (funding for Rapid Response is usually given for a 6-month implementation period. Agencies can use an early start date for their projects, up to 6 weeks before the disbursement date.

- **Prioritize and focus:** The scope of the application should be restricted to prioritized outcomes and sectors. The country team and agencies should be highly selective when prioritizing activities for CERF projects with a focus on interventions that align with CERF's niche and comparative advantage, and they should ensure strategic linkages to longer-term programmes supported through other funding. For example, in the Food Security sector, consider including general food or cash distributions rather than asset creation activities; consider quick-impact activities such as distribution of quick maturing seeds rather than activities focusing on the longer-term uptake of drought-tolerant crops. The objective is to maximize the impact of the CERF grant for drought-affected people where feasible.
- **Ensure coherence in the application and the response:** Describe how projects are interrelated and complement one another. Are the same affected people being targeted by multiple sectors for maximum impact? Do the short-term CERF-funded interventions align with other planned or ongoing humanitarian or development programmes with a longer time horizon?



Common Services Safety and Security

Guidelines

Proposals to CERF should convey critical security gaps that have to be addressed in order to carry out emergency humanitarian activities. CERF funds for common safety and security will only be considered under two circumstances:

1. A new emergency where there are critical security gaps for common safety and security services
2. In on-going complex emergencies, on an exceptional basis, when there is a deterioration of the situation and when humanitarian activities are hampered by insecurity

CERF funding for common safety and security generally falls under two basic categories:

1. Security equipment to achieve UN MOSS compliance: Only security equipment, which are part of the approved country MOSS or a specific Security Risk Assessment may be funded. Funding for other equipment must be funded by other donors or by the agency itself.
2. Specific security projects, e.g., Security Information Operations Cell, which can benefit all UN field agencies and INGOs/NGOs; surge deployment of security officers (but no new recruitment); management of emergency communications system; and quick refresher trainings to enhance the safety and security of UN Personnel as part of a larger project.

Considerations for CERF submissions and specific explanation for narrative and budget lines

Beneficiary of the service: Provision of safety and security services must benefit the wider humanitarian community.

Sustainability: The requesting agency should ensure that the project is sustainable. The overall management and all operational costs of the deployed infrastructure and personnel should be described in the project. The activities should be financially sustainable beyond the contribution from CERF, e.g., with all participating agencies agreeing to cost-sharing in the future.

Staff costs: CERF will typically only support security as a common service. CERF does not cover personnel at the regional or headquarters levels.

Training: CERF only funds quick refresher training. Training costs should be limited.

Initial safety and security assessments: As per other sectors, CERF will not fund initial assessments for provision of safety and security services. Consideration will only be given to exceptions for inter-agency assessments including initial safety and security requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Funding arrangements

UNDSS cannot receive CERF funding directly. Thus, UNDP (in rare instances WFP) submits CERF project proposals on behalf of UNDSS, countersigns the approval letter and receives funding. As a result, UNDP (or WFP) is responsible for the implementation of the project, accountability and oversight, and financial reporting. Where UNDSS does not have a presence, other agencies that provide common security and safety measures can also apply for CERF funding.

All CERF project proposals need to be cleared by the Designated Official (DO) and UNDSS headquarters, prior to the RC/HC submitting the proposal to CERF.²¹

The DO has the responsibility to ensure that security requirements and initiatives are an integral component of humanitarian operations. The DO is responsible for ensuring the efficacy and appropriateness of the overall security sector.

²¹ UNDSS is responsible to ensure that the clearance is obtained as quickly as possible so as not to impede the RC/HC's submission.

Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS)

Guidelines

CERF allocations can provide funding for UNHAS to support the response of the humanitarian system or core humanitarian activities under specific requirements.

Support Humanitarian Action: The proposed inclusion of UNHAS in a CERF allocation should be based on an assessment of the benefits of UNHAS to the humanitarian response, taking into consideration factors such as availability of safe and reliable commercial air services, security concerns, distances, etc. Per UNHAS mandate, the provision of air services for passengers and cargo should benefit the entire humanitarian community, including national and international UN staff members and NGOs present in the operational areas.²²

Coordination Requirements: Where applicable, UNHAS submissions should be endorsed by the local UNHAS Users Group Committee, before endorsement by the RC/HC. The submission should clearly outline the reasons for the service and be in line with WFP's Air Transport Manual. It should include, as much as possible, information on the number of organizations using the service, destinations to be served, estimated passenger figures and cargo tonnage, expected flight hours, a resource plan, including user fees and a sustainability or exit strategy.

Resource Mobilization (catalytic effect): The CERF allocation is a complementary financial mechanism that should be leveraged to advocate for and mobilize additional resources. In addition to WFP's resource strategy which may include cost-recovery schemes, donations or cost-sharing by agencies, country teams and the local User Group Committee who request UNHAS common air services should support the mobilization of sustainable funding for UNHAS.

Sustainability: WFP and the country team should ensure that the UNHAS project is sustainable. The overall management and operational and recurrent costs of the deployed infrastructure and personnel should be described in the project.

Clearances: WFP must have all necessary clearances for the UNHAS services to be fully functional.

Requirements for RR funding

Rapid Response grants should address the need to deliver life-saving assistance in a timely manner. They should assist humanitarian organizations to quickly access areas and safely deliver life-saving assistances to beneficiaries.

²² For further direction on passenger definition see WFP Air Transport Manual.

Therefore, CERF Rapid Response funds can normally be made available for UNHAS operations in the following three situations:

1. The establishment of new air operations for transport of supplies and humanitarian personnel. This will include parts of the start-up costs and service for the initial phase of the operation. It should be a timely intervention and serve as a springboard for other donors to come on board.
2. The expansion of existing services if there is a need for additional locations or higher frequency of flights due to deterioration in the humanitarian situation. The need to expand should be documented and justified along the criteria mentioned above.
3. The need for increased operational capacity due to a change in security phase in an ongoing humanitarian operation. The need for these flights will have to be carefully evaluated by the Designated Official in coordination with UNDSS and the wider humanitarian community.

Requirements for UFE funding

If there are UNHAS operations in a country selected for an underfunded emergencies allocation, the RC/HC can propose those operations in the submission to the ERC. If the operation fits within the CERF Life-saving Criteria. However, the application should explain the reasons for underfunding and describe the fundraising efforts already undertaken and outline how the CERF allocation will be leveraged to support resource mobilization efforts.

Emergency Telecommunications

Guidelines

CERF-funded emergency telecommunications services must directly support the response of the humanitarian system. Below are the circumstances under which CERF funds could be made available for emergency telecommunications equipment and services:

- **Establishing new services:** The setup of new basic telecommunication networks for new emergency operations. This can include parts of the start-up costs and service for the initial phases of the operations. It should be a timely intervention and should serve as a springboard for other donors to come on board.
- **Expansion of services due to context changes:** Upgrade of existing equipment and services due to a deterioration in the humanitarian situation. The need for these services will have to be carefully evaluated by the local Emergency Telecommunications cluster, the UN Designated Officer (DO) in coordination with United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the wider humanitarian community.

Considerations for CERF submissions

Sustainability: The ETC services should be sustainable. The overall management, operational and recurrent costs of the deployed infrastructure and personnel should be described in the project. The activities should be financially sustainable beyond the contribution from CERF, e.g., with all participating agencies agreeing to cost-sharing in the future.

Cost-sharing among agencies: Proposed projects should include a description of existing in-country telecommunications capacity and confirm that common services are required by partners.

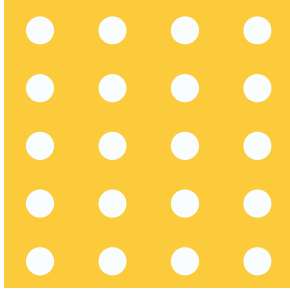
Type of equipment: Only basic telecommunications equipment needed for the common network infrastructure will be funded. Other equipment will need to be funded by other donors or by the agency itself.

Staff costs: Staff costs can only be considered for the first three months of the intervention in ongoing emergencies (to give agencies enough time to work out a suitable cost-sharing mechanism for sustainability), or can be considered in case

of a new emergency. CERF does not cover personnel at the regional or headquarters levels.

Training: CERF only funds quick refresher training. Training costs should be limited.

Initial telecommunications assessments: Like for other sectors, the CERF will not fund initial assessments for provision of emergency telecommunications. Exceptions will only be granted for inter-agency assessments, including initial telecommunication requirements, on a case-by-case basis.



Implementation

The implementation roles and the monitoring actions are agreed upon and documented in the CERF application.

Recipient agencies have full responsibility for the use of and reporting on all funds disbursed under the fund, and for compliance with the reporting requirements.

The RC/HC oversees that CERF-funded activities are implemented as intended.

The HCT/UNCT is collectively accountable for a CERF allocation and is expected to keep the CERF implementation on the HCT/UNCT agenda and jointly follow the implementation of CERF projects.

OCHA, where present, manages CERF-related processes and facilitates flow of information. The OCHA office supports the RC/HC by managing the agreed CERF monitoring and reporting processes, collecting the required information, updates and reports related to CERF project implementation from recipient agencies, and consolidating and communicating the reports.

Agencies shall provide updates according to agreed frequency and timing to the RC/HC and the HCT/UNCT on the implementation of CERF-funded humanitarian action, including the progress toward achievement of project targets, early detection of potential challenges, and actions taken or planned to adjust the project activities to meet the designated CERF implementation period.

To facilitate this process, the CERF secretariat has developed a light template for organizing the interim update from recipient agencies on the implementation of CERF grants. CERF provides a template pre-populated with key information. The template has been developed based on best practices from country teams.

Implementation roles & responsibilities

Mandatory interim project status update

The template is used by agencies to provide project updates halfway through the cycle (or at other agreed milestones). The various agency inputs, including materials on the impact of CERF-funded humanitarian action, are consolidated by the OCHA or RC's office and shared with the RC/HC, the HCT/UNCT, cluster coordinators and other relevant humanitarian partners.

Implementing partners should be involved in cluster, inter-cluster and HCT meetings where regular updates on the progress of implementation of CERF projects are discussed.

No-cost extensions

Based on the consolidated information, the status of CERF implementation should be presented to and discussed by the HCT/UNCT and the completed template shall be sent to the CERF secretariat. If significant challenges or delays are emerging for one or several CERF projects, the need for a no-cost extension or reprogramming should be discussed. CERF's policy on NCEs is to only grant them based on unavoidable factors. Inadequate planning, HR or procurement delays are not good reasons for NCE requests, and can be rejected.

Project revision requests should highlight circumstances that are preventing implementation outside of the control of the recipient agency. Compelling reasons for project extensions might be situations like increased access restrictions, changes in government policy, or a fundamental change in the socio-political climate that was underpinning the application for CERF funds. Technical and procedural details are outlined in [CERF's Guidelines for No Cost Extensions, Reprogramming and Redeployment of Funds](#).

Requests should be submitted by the RC/HC to the CERF secretariat explaining and justifying the changes, keeping within the life-saving mandate of the CERF. Approval must be given before any changes are made. If a request is not approved, the agency must return unused funds.

A project extension request should be submitted by the RC/HC to the CERF secretariat on behalf of the recipient agency as soon as the need for an extension is detected and at the latest 10 days before the end of the implementation period.

Re-programming & re-deployment of funds

If external circumstances or important changes of scope (targeted people, sector, activities, or geographic area) are affecting the objective or targets of the approved project make it unlikely that the original programming can proceed, a reprogramming request may be made to the CERF secretariat to approve changes within existing projects on an exceptional basis.

A formal request is also required when the adjustment pertains to a cumulative shift of more than 15 percent between budget categories of the direct project costs or any change to staff costs or programme support costs. Approval of the entire budget change must be requested prior to implementation of the change.

Efficient partnerships

At country-level

Based on a 2014 paper by the IASC Task Team on Humanitarian Financing, this section identifies effective, replicable practices in UN-NGO partnership throughout the grant cycle of CERF funds.

Preparedness

- **Map potential NGO partners:** Map potential NGOs and CSOs for emergency partnerships.
- **Conduct annual NGO consultation:** Facilitate annual consultations with current and potential NGO partners to prepare for the year ahead inclusive of likely scenarios.
- **Plan for contingencies:** Prepare contingency agreements with current/well-known NGO partners complete with clear parameters that outline what programming the NGO should implement under relatively specific circumstances and the support they will receive from the UN agency. Contingency agreements are reviewed and renewed annually. Once the agreement is activated, the NGO provides a detailed budget during an initial rapid assessment, and the agreement can allow for reimbursement of expenses relative to a specific date or event. Contingencies can also be built in to existing agreements with language that specifies when the contingencies are activated.

Early in Emergency/ Escalation

NGOs, via clusters, the inter-cluster group and the HCT, should participate in CERF prioritization processes. UN agencies should engage partners early in identification and prioritization of projects for a CERF submission. The following steps can help speed up project implementation.

- **Consult early and often with partners:** Ensure projects are planned jointly. Clarify CERF requirements and project selection process.
- **Share agency-NGO agreement template:** For international NGOs that require HQ approval of agreements, share blank agreement template with NGO for onward distribution with their HQ to help expedite the review process.
- **Start projects before CERF approval:** Projects can be initiated with non-CERF funds while waiting for CERF fund approval.

CO negotiates Agency-NGO Partnership Agreement

- **Short form Agency-NGO Agreement:** During Level 3 or IASC scale-up emergencies, Country Office Representatives can authorize a shortened form of the Agency-NGO Agreement.

- Initial contracting mechanism: Use a simpler partnership contracting mechanism for the initial response period to kick-start implementation while longer-term arrangements are negotiated.
- Amend existing Agency-NGO Agreements with current partners: If activities are in the same sector, these will not need an additional technical assessment.
- Track disbursement rates: Track speed of disbursement of CERF sub-grants. Set benchmarks to reduce the number of working days for sub-grant disbursement.

Project implementation

- Provide detailed budget: For contingency agreements, NGO provides detailed budget¹ to UN agency² after initial rapid assessment. This allows for the activation of the Agency-NGO Agreement and the start of project activities before the detailed budget is available.
- Reimburse emergency expenses: Contingency agreements can allow for reimbursement of emergency expenses that were incurred prior to activation of Agency-NGO Agreement.

Preparedness

- Create e-resource toolkit: Create a toolkit to assist field offices with best practices to respond rapidly to emergencies, including guides and sample contingency agency-NGO agreements.
- Training: Train all UN Country Office Representatives, cluster coordinators and program officers on CERF and country-based pooled fund guidance and best practices.
- Develop a short form grant application process for Level 3 or IASC scale-up emergencies. Once developed, train field teams on its use.

UN HQ disburses CERF funds to UN CO

- Streamline UN HQ processes: delegate signature authority, set clear steps for the approval process, and involve fewer people.
- Pre-financing: Allow agency to advance money to the NGO as soon as the CERF approval letter is received in HQ before the money is actually received by the agency in-country. Agency can work with donors to use incoming contributions to offset internal advances. Implementation of CERF projects can start up to six weeks before disbursement.

At Headquarters



Reporting, Monitoring and Accountability

Roles & responsibilities

Reporting from country level is the basis for giving an accounting of the use of CERF funds to the Secretary-General and donors.

The Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) has the overall responsibility at country level to oversee the activities implemented with CERF funds, and to report on the use of CERF funds when project activities are completed.

This section provides an overview of the monitoring and reporting requirements for recipients of funds from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and clarifies roles and responsibilities in the interim and final reporting process. The objective of CERF monitoring and reporting is to give the RC/HC and the HCT, as well as OCHA Senior Management and its donors assurance that CERF-funded activities are implemented as intended, and to enable corrective actions to be taken if necessary.

CERF allocations are collectively prioritized under the leadership of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) who therefore has the main responsibility to ensure quality and timeliness of monitoring and reporting of CERF-funded activities. However, the humanitarian country team or UN country team (HCT/UNCT), sector/cluster leads, other actors in the humanitarian community, and especially agencies receiving CERF funds are collectively accountable for a CERF allocation and should jointly oversee project

implementation. Regular updates on the progress and potential challenges around the implementation of CERF projects should be provided in cluster, inter-cluster and HCT/UNCT meetings, with involvement of implementing partners. In this, the RC/HC is supported by a designated CERF in-country focal point (hereafter CERF focal point), usually from the OCHA country office, regional office or the Resident Coordinator's Office.²³

Monitoring

The HCT/UNCT should agree on monitoring arrangements at the beginning of the CERF process, communicated by the RC/HC to relevant stakeholders and documented in the CERF application to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). **The HCT/UNCT is collectively accountable for a CERF allocation, and is expected to jointly follow the implementation of CERF projects.** To enhance accountability and transparency, updates by recipient agencies on implementation of CERF projects should be included in the HCT/UNCT agenda. Regular updates on progress of implementation of CERF projects should be provided in cluster, inter-cluster and HCT/UNCT meetings, preferably with the involvement of implementing partners when relevant.

Collective Monitoring

Since funding from CERF and other pooled funds is collectively prioritized by the humanitarian community at country level under the leadership of the RC/HC, it is different than funding from other sources. In humanitarian operations where system-wide monitoring processes are in place at sector/cluster level, CERF's contribution to the response should also be reflected through these processes. Assessing CERF's contribution through overall response monitoring will help promote strategic assessment of CERF's added value, ensure adequate visibility and enhance collective accountability for CERF allocations. In addition, if feasible and relevant, the RC/HC in consultation with the HCT may decide to complement agencies' own regular monitoring efforts with collective monitoring of CERF projects. Such collective CERF monitoring could be led by clusters or use monitoring frameworks from country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) where these exist. When collective monitoring takes place, agencies shall also allow site visits to CERF-funded projects when deemed necessary and with prior consultation and agreement. If collective monitoring of CERF projects is undertaken, the objective

²³ In countries without OCHA presence, the OCHA regional office usually provides a focal point or the RC designates a focal point in the RC Office. Under exceptional circumstances, a specific lead agency may be asked by the RC/HC to support the reporting process. A focal point is assigned at the beginning of the CERF application phase and supports the allocation through the implementation and final reporting phase.

should be to gather additional information that will help foster joint learning, advance good practices, inform future allocations, and enhance accountability.

The responsibility for monitoring of individual CERF projects lies with the recipient agencies. CERF recipient agencies shall describe their plans for project-level monitoring in the relevant section of the CERF submission template. CERF projects should be monitored as part of agencies' overall programme monitoring arrangements in a given country. Monitoring of CERF projects is necessary for agencies to report on the achievement of project targets and the number of people reached, and it should enable early detection of potential challenges, allowing agencies to take timely corrective measures and ensure completion of activities within the CERF-specific implementation period. During the implementation period, agencies are required to keep the RC/HC informed about the status of project implementation, including any challenges or delays in the projects. As part of reporting on CERF projects, agencies should share any **evaluation reports** that include CERF-funded projects or activities with the RC/HC and the CERF secretariat. CERF regularly commissions independent reviews of the Fund's added value at regional or country level. During these reviews, and any other kind of review, evaluation or audit related to CERF, agencies should provide relevant information on CERF projects to the evaluators or auditors. This may include relevant non-public information from agencies' internal monitoring systems, including monitoring reports. With prior consultation and agreement, agencies shall also allow site visits to CERF-funded projects when deemed necessary.

The RC/HC is responsible for overseeing the overall implementation of CERF funding, and ensuring that implementation is on track towards the achievement of the pre-defined strategic objectives. In this respect, the RC/HC should institute periodic check-ins within the HCT to discuss progress of the CERF-funded interventions. This will help ensure collective ownership of the allocation and allow the RC/HC to monitor that the overall implementation is on track, and if not, agree with the HCT on corrective measures if required. These check-ins are not intended to be detailed technical reviews – but a high-level assessment of progress/ability to meet the strategic objectives of the CERF allocation. It is up to the RC/HC to decide the number of required check-ins based on the nature of the grant and its duration, but it is suggested that at least one to two of these are conducted during the grant implementation period.

Reporting

In addition to these informal check-ins, reporting on CERF allocations includes four elements:

1. Country-level Interim Update
2. Country-level Allocation Report, including After-Action Review
3. Agency Headquarters Financial Reports
4. Agency Headquarters Annual Narrative Report

The CERF secretariat provides tailored templates for the interim update and the final narrative report of each allocation to the RC/HC who, supported by the CERF focal point, is responsible to distribute these templates to all relevant partners, to collect quality inputs and to send the interim update and allocation report to the CERF secretariat.²⁴ For the final report process, the RC/HC holds an after-action review (AAR, see guidance below).

The CERF secretariat assumes the following responsibilities when reviewing interim updates and final reports, and if necessary, returns submitted reports with requests for clarification or additional information:

- Ensure that all required sections of the report templates are completed with clear, succinct information
- Ensure that in case of substantial under-achievement against the number of people targeted or indicators in the results framework, a justification is provided
- Verify the completeness and coherence of all quantitative information in the report
- Follow up with the country focal point on challenges highlighted in interim updates
- Ensure that all relevant information from final reports is recorded in CERF databases for accountability and reporting purposes

1. Interim Update

The **interim update** is a light report undertaken at the halfway mark of the grant implementation, and the **main tool for the RC/HC to assess the implementation status of projects under a CERF allocation, including challenges**, and to communicate this information to the CERF secretariat. The template features

²⁴ For non-standard CERF allocations, reporting requirements, timelines and templates may be adjusted and communicated by the CERF secretariat accordingly.

project-specific sections for which agencies provide inputs and an overview at allocation level. This is then consolidated by the RC/HC with support from the CERF focal point. The objective of the interim update is to give the RC/HC and the HCT assurance that CERF-funded activities are implemented as intended and to enable corrective actions to be taken if necessary.

The in-country monitoring process through the interim update is led and overseen by the RC/HC. The tailored template for the update is usually shared along with the Emergency Relief Coordinator's (ERC) 'allocation summary email' after the application has been approved and funds for all projects have been disbursed. The RC/HC, supported by the CERF focal point, coordinates the process and ensures all relevant partners are well informed of timelines and requirements. **Agencies** are responsible for completing and submitting their part of the interim update with meaningful, high-quality inputs in a timely fashion to the RC/HC. These should include links to materials demonstrating the immediate impact of the funding such as photos, video, stories and social media posts. Agencies are requested to give CERF due visibility when publishing and promoting the content, by sharing or co-creating it with OCHA; by tagging the relevant social accounts; and by specifically acknowledging the CERF funding. To consolidate the interim update, the OCHA or RC's office adds relevant information (a summary of implementation status, and potential actions and follow-up) before discussing the report with the HCT **and sharing the finalized update with the CERF secretariat** by the deadline indicated in the ERC allocation summary email.

The deadline for the interim update is calculated for every allocation and set half-way between the first project start date and last project end date. Four weeks before the interim update is due, the CERF secretariat sends a reminder to the RC/HC and the CERF focal point.

2. Final Report

CERF allocation reports (final reports) are the RC/HC's **primary narrative reporting document on the use of CERF** funds. The information in the report may be quoted or otherwise used in CERF advocacy, communications, reports and publications. For this reason, the **accuracy of the inputs from all relevant partners is very important**, and the leadership of the RC/HC of the reporting process is crucial to ensure a quality and timely report. Final reports are published on CERF's website upon review by the CERF secretariat.

At allocation level, the report highlights whether the original strategic vision and response objectives have been achieved and targets met, describes CERF's added value, and explains how funds have been used for life-saving action to respond to

humanitarian needs. At project level, recipient agencies should report programmatically to the RC/HC, and by extension to the ERC and CERF secretariat, on results achieved with CERF funds.

The RC/HC, supported by the CERF focal point, consolidates and submits the report to the CERF secretariat. However, the preparation of the report should be a collective effort by all relevant stakeholders at country level. The process should not only aim to produce a quality report on the use of CERF funds and the results achieved, but also help foster a collective reflection on the CERF process and establish lessons learned for improving future allocations.

The RC/HC or CERF focal point on their behalf shares the templates with the recipient agencies at country-level and coordinates the submission of inputs from all partners. Recipient agencies are requested to provide quality and timely inputs. These should include links to materials illustrating the impact of the CERF-funded project, such as photos, video, stories and social media posts. Agencies are also requested to give CERF due visibility when publishing and promoting the content, by sharing or co-creating it with OCHA; by tagging the relevant social accounts; and by specifically acknowledging the CERF funding. However, the RC/HC remains overall responsible for adherence to the CERF reporting requirements and should therefore specifically oversee the consolidation of strategic and operational inputs at allocation level and should chair the after-action review.

CERF allocation reports are due within three months after expiration²⁵ of a CERF allocation. After the interim update is completed, the CERF secretariat shares the tailored reporting templates for the final allocation report.²⁶ Four weeks before the final report due date, the CERF secretariat sends a reminder to the RC/HC and the CERF focal point.

While the management of the reporting process lies at the country level, there are key steps that support the preparation of high-quality reports. Based on CERF's experience and informed by feedback from country teams, it is recommended to structure the process as described in the next section.

25 If one or more approved no-cost extensions (NCEs) exceed this original due date, the due date is rescheduled for one month past the latest NCE. Other extensions may only be granted in consultation with the CERF secretariat if clearly justified by the RC/HC.

26 Should any project revisions, such as amended figures of targeted people or added/removed indicators and activities, not be properly represented in the tailored template, agencies should update the prepopulated information in the template in tracked changes for review by the CERF secretariat.

Proposed Reporting Process

1. Distribution of tailored template and confirmation of project end-dates:

After the interim update process is completed, the CERF secretariat shares a **tailored report template** and the final report due date along with a list of all project end-dates²⁷ and an overview of the reporting requirements:

In case of already approved no-cost extensions,²⁸ the CERF secretariat also clarifies if these will affect the reporting deadline

Following the notification from CERF, the RC/HC informs recipient agencies about the upcoming project end-date for CERF grants, and asks for confirmation that all CERF projects will be implemented by the deadline. **If implementation is delayed, the RC/HC informs CERF as soon as possible** and, if relevant, no-cost extension requests are prepared and submitted no later than 10 days prior to grant expiration

2. Process Preparation (around project end-dates):

For a thorough preparation, the RC/HC and CERF focal point prepare a schedule that:

- includes deadlines for cluster/sector-leads and recipient agencies for their provision of inputs (narrative and data) to be submitted to the RC/HC
- accommodates the time required by the RC/HCs' offices for drafting and consolidation of narrative inputs and data following the submission of these inputs

3. Preparation of Report Inputs and After-Action Review (within 5 weeks after project end-dates):

The RC/HC, supported by the CERF focal point, **sets up an After-Action Review (AAR) meeting** and shares an agenda (see guidance below). To use the AAR to its fullest potential, it should be clarified to all stakeholders which **inputs** are to be **submitted to the CERF focal point already before the meeting**. This may include:

²⁷ Project start and end-dates are also available on the CERF website: <https://cerf.un.org/what-we-do/allocation-summaries>

²⁸ No-cost-extensions (NCEs) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and only if the request is submitted a minimum of 10 days prior to the expiry date of the grant.

- **Recipient Agencies:** Information on project results and information on sub-grants to implementing partners (this is part II – project level in the report template)
- **Sector/Cluster Leads:** Best estimates on ‘people reached’ at sector level per project and suggestions for aggregations at allocation level (if there is more than one project per sector)
- CERF focal point: Drafts basic elements of the report informed by the provided inputs from partners (part I – allocation level)

4. Zero Draft following the AAR (within 7 weeks after project end dates):

Based on the submitted inputs and the outcome of the AAR the CERF focal point prepares and circulates a zero draft to the HCT/UNCT (or similar forum), recipient agencies and sector/cluster leads for review and comments. Sector/cluster leads circulate the draft within the sector/cluster and consolidate relevant comments. Feedback should be provided within two weeks.

5. Final Report Reminder

The CERF secretariat sends a final reminder to the RC/HC and CERF focal point on the upcoming deadline for the report. The RC/HC, in turn, confirms the deadline as the report should be close to finalization at this time, or informs the CERF secretariat of any challenge or delay encountered in the process.

6. Draft 1 Circulated (within 11 weeks after grant expiration):

The CERF focal point prepares the final draft based on the comments and the RC/HC circulates it to the HCT/UNCT (or similar forum), recipient agencies and sector/cluster leads for a final review.

7. Report Finalization and Submission (within 12 weeks after grant expiration):

The RC/HC finalizes and submits the final report to the CERF secretariat.

8. CERF Review and Publishing

The CERF secretariat reviews the report and, if necessary, seeks additional information from the RC/HC on issues that need clarification. Once the report is finalized it is published on CERF’s website. The RC/HC shares the final report with all relevant stakeholders at country-level.

CERF After-Action Review

The CERF After-Action Review (AAR) is a meeting to reflect on the overall CERF allocation, including the cooperation of the HCT/UNCT with the broader humanitarian community during planning and implementation stage as well as achieved results, challenges and CERF-added value for the overall response. **AARs are a routine part of managing any CERF allocation at country-level and a key component of the in-country final narrative reporting process.**

Value

1. AARs provide an opportunity to collectively analyze the results achieved with CERF funding and assess CERF's strategic added value:

The AAR should be a light and informal exercise that allows for open and frank discussions focused on learning. With the objective of identifying key inputs for the CERF final report, it should function as a forum where the HCT/UNCT (or similar) and other CERF stakeholders can jointly reflect on strategic and operational aspects of the allocation. **The core objective of the AAR is to assess how well the strategic vision for the allocation has been achieved, and to reflect on collective performance in meeting the agreed response objectives.** AARs are not performance reviews and should not be conducted to allocate blame or credit, but rather to encourage honest reflection by practitioners.

2. ...facilitate joint learning in benefit of future CERF processes:

Discussion during the AAR should focus on identifying strategic achievements and the added value of the CERF allocation. Best practices and challenges from the prioritization and implementation stage should be transferred into actionable recommendations on improving the efficiency and effectiveness on the use of future CERF allocations. Recommendations should be directed to the CERF secretariat as well as to the country team.

3. ...provide a basis for the CERF final allocation report and a roadmap for the reporting exercise:

The AAR is the cornerstone of the CERF final reporting process in that it helps to identify strategic considerations and key results to be highlighted in the final report, and as such provides the foundation for drafting part I (allocation overview) of the report. The RC/HC, supported by the designated CERF country focal point, should use the AAR to collect meaningful contributions and accurate data. A well-

executed AAR provides a sound foundation for the preparation of the final CERF final allocation report.

Timing

The AAR should be conducted soon after the expiration of all grants under a CERF allocation. This helps ensure involvement of grant implementation stakeholders while the relevant experiences are fresh in memory. It also places the AAR as the starting point for the preparation of the CERF final report due about three months after grant expiration.

Participants

The participation in the AAR is at the discretion of the RC/HC. It is, however, suggested that the meeting is facilitated by the RC/HC or an external facilitator, and that participants should include all recipient UN agencies, cluster/sector leads and implementing partners. While considered mandatory, AARs are owned by country-level teams and should not be considered a compliance exercise for the benefit of CERF.

Format

The length of an AAR meeting can vary, depending on the scope of the allocations (number of grants) and the number of partners involved. It is important that participants come prepared. It is recommended that the RC/HC, supported by the CERF country focal point and a potential external facilitator, develops questions on strategic and operational achievements and challenges applicable to the country context and the scope of the overall response and distributes these questions along with the template and guidelines to all AAR participants prior to the meeting.

It is suggested that the AAR starts with a recap by the RC/HC of the background for the CERF allocation where after each recipient agency provides project reports on the status of CERF grants, the achieved results and any challenges or lessons learned. To make the meeting more efficient, CERF recipient agencies could be encouraged to submit project reports in advance of the AAR, or if not possible to provide full reports, to prepare and share a brief update with key point and issues related to the implementation of their CERF projects.²⁹

To ensure maximum synergy with the CERF reporting process, the remainder of the AAR meeting can be structured around the sections of the final allocation report. As per the template, key discussion areas should include:

- Achievement of original strategic vision of this CERF allocation
- Various aspects of CERF strategic added value as a collective funding mechanism, as indicated in the report template

²⁹ Ideally this status update would follow the format of the individual project report templates under part II of the CERF allocation report template (the project sheets) and thus serve as a first draft of the project inputs for the CERF report.

- Appropriateness of prioritized activities (in retrospect, was the prioritization and selection activities appropriate to achieve the strategic vision for the allocation, and are there any lessons learned in this respect for future CERF submissions)
- How well CERF funds strategically complimented other funding, including bilateral donor funds and other pooled funding, in particular Country-based Pooled Funds, where applicable
- Strategic consideration of achievements through the CERF allocation related to cross-cutting priorities, including the 'ERC Underfunded Priority Areas' (gender, people with disabilities, protection, education)
- Reflection on overall results achieved, including people reached (versus planned), with focus on reasons for potential under- or over-achievements.

It is suggested to nominate a notetaker who summarizes AAR discussion and captures all learnings and action points. The notetaker, in liaison with a potential external facilitator, should share the notes with the RC/HC and team members to ensure that all inputs are accurately reflected. To maximize the synergy with the CERF narrative reporting exercise, the AAR note could mirror the structure of the CERF final report.

3. Agency Headquarters Financial Report

All financial reports are submitted in standard templates provided by the CERF secretariat, which are also available on the CERF website. The financial reports are normally prepared by the headquarters of the implementing agencies. In line with the [Secretary-General's 2020 Bulletin on CERF](#), the following reports are required.

- Interim financial statements are due by 15 February for all CERF grants received the prior year, and for all outstanding balances on grants received in previous years.
- Final financial statements (i.e. an update of the interim statement of 15 February) are due by 30 June for all CERF received the prior year, and for all outstanding balances on grants received in previous years.
- Interim financial statements are due by 15 August only for CERF rapid response grants with implementation periods that expire between 1 January and 30 June for the same year.

Refund of Unspent Balance

Unspent grant funds should be returned to CERF, taking into consideration extensions approved by the ERC. Agencies should reflect refunds in their certified financial reports.

75% of the uncommitted portion of the unspent funds, including any interest accrued on the funds, should be returned by:

- 15 August for projects with an implementation end date between 1 January to 30 June of the same year, or, alternatively, immediately following the implementation deadline and
- 15 February of the subsequent year for projects with an implementation end date between 1 July to 31 December

Any remaining unspent balance, including any accrued interest on unspent funds, shall be refunded by 30 June of the year following the end of the implementation period.

In conjunction with the refund schedule, it is reasonably expected to submit completed financial report by 15 February of the following year after one year from the project end date.

Communicating the Fraudulent Use of CERF Funds

Background

At its meeting in November 2014, the CERF Advisory Group discussed the mechanisms and processes in place to deal with cases of potential fraudulent practice³⁰ in the use of CERF funds (hereafter simply referred to as fraud), and the challenges associated with communicating potential cases of fraud to CERF's donors. The Group reiterated that fraud poses a serious risk to humanitarian action, to the reputation of CERF and to the United Nations. They reaffirmed that fraud related to CERF funds should be treated in accordance with the existing oversight rules and mechanisms of the recipient agencies and be informed by the on-going system-wide efforts to ensure coherence of treatment of fraud within the United Nations. The Advisory Group also requested that the CERF secretariat develop guidelines for its procedures relating to sharing fraud-related information with its donors.

In line with this request, this guidance note sets out procedures for communicating potential cases of fraud under CERF funded projects implemented by recipient agencies and their implementing partners. The guidance outlines communication responsibilities of CERF recipient agencies and of the CERF secretariat.

The note was endorsed by the CERF Advisory Group at its meeting in May 2015.

This guidance shall be considered in the context of broader system wide processes associated to risk and fraud management. This includes the work by the Risk Management Task Force established by the UN Development Group (UNDG) to develop a system-wide harmonized risk management and approach to fraud, and the discussion by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of common standards for risk management and treatment of fraud cases across UN Agencies. The CERF secretariat is following these initiatives closely.

³⁰ "Fraudulent practice" is here defined as any act or omission, including misrepresentation, that knowingly or recklessly misleads, or attempts to mislead, a party to obtain a financial or other benefit, or to avoid an obligation. [Definition by the International Financial Institutions (IFI)]

Anti-Corruption Task Force:

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDOII/Resources/FinalIFITaskForceFramework&Gdlines.pdf>

Information-sharing with CERF

Recipient agencies shall inform the CERF secretariat in the event they open an investigation into possible fraudulent use of CERF funds under a project supported by CERF.

When: Unless agencies' investigation units finds that it may harm the investigation or be in violation with the agency's due process, CERF shall be informed at three points during the process: as soon as a formal investigation is opened by the recipient agency; once an investigation is finalized and once potential follow-up actions are concluded (including actions regarding the recovery of funds).

What: Upon opening of an investigation: In order to avoid jeopardizing the conduct of the investigation, the content of the briefing to CERF upon opening of an investigation should be at the agency's discretion. **Upon finalizing an investigation:** The investigation report and information relevant to the CERF project(s) implicated. If some recipient agencies' internal regulations will not allow them to share investigation reports, the information sharing upon finalization of an investigation should be a summary including key findings of relevance to CERF. The information shared with CERF must adhere to the following minimum standards: country, project, amount at risk (if possible to assess), nature of allegations and management actions planned or taken after completion of the investigation.³¹ **Upon conclusion of follow-up actions:** Information deemed to be directly relevant for CERF and CERF's donors, including information on recovery or loss of CERF funds.

How: The investigation service³² of the respective agency will inform by letter or email the ERC and the Chief of CERF. The CERF secretariat will log each case and follow up with the respective agency until conclusion of the case. Fraud cases involving CERF funds will be a standing agenda item in the annual consultations between the Chief of CERF and recipient agencies. The consultations will focus on reported allegations resulting in investigations being launched and in results of completed investigations reported. The consultations will also address trends in reported allegations, effectiveness of communication on the matter and outcome of CERF communication with its donors on cases.

Information-sharing with donors

The CERF secretariat shall inform donors in the event that information regarding potential fraudulent use of CERF funds is formally submitted by a recipient agency to the CERF secretariat. In order to minimize any risk to the confidentiality and integrity of investigations and violations of an agency's due process, CERF's

³¹ Should the policies and procedures of the recipient agency prevent sharing of some of this minimum information this shall be communicated to CERF.

³² If another entity within an agency will be responsible for this communication the CERF secretariat should be advised accordingly.

communication on investigations to donors should only be made by CERF with clearance of the investigative unit of the respective agency.

When: Once information for communication (as per the above) is shared with the CERF secretariat and cleared for onward communication.³³

What: The cleared information provided by the recipient agency.

How: By letter to interested donors to CERF (see below) and/or by access-restricted pages of the CERF website.

Who: Donors that are interested in being informed. Donors should sign up for this service by informing the CERF secretariat.³⁴ Hereby it is ensured that only interested donors are contacted and unnecessary administrative work is eliminated for all parties.

Additionally, the CERF Advisory Group will be notified at its regular meetings of potential fraud cases that have been communicated to CERF and the status of these. Relevant information on concluded cases may also be referenced in summary form³⁵ in the Secretary-General's annual report on CERF to the General Assembly and on CERF's website.

³³ I.e. when agencies inform CERF that an investigation is opened, that an investigation is finalized and that follow-up actions

³⁴ Only donors to CERF in the year the relevant allocation was made will be eligible to be informed through this process.

³⁵ Following clearance by the investigative units of the recipient agencies who reported the potential fraud instances to CERF.

4. Agency Headquarters Annual Narrative Report

The annual narrative HQ reports are the recipient agencies' reporting tool for informing the ERC about the overall strategic impact of CERF funding for each organization's global emergency programmes. They describe how CERF programme results fulfil the mandate of the fund to facilitate the timely implementation of time-critical, life-saving activities in new crises or strengthen humanitarian response in underfunded emergencies. The reports feed into the annual Secretary-General Report on CERF that is shared with the General Assembly and the CERF annual report.

The reports are due during the first quarter of every year. CERF will send out a template and information on the deadline during January each year.

Audits

Agencies will receive a tailored template for the annual reporting. Details on what will be asked for in the report are found in the guidelines.

Recipient organizations must comply with internal and external audit procedures as set out in their financial regulations and rules. If an external audit report contains observations specific to the contribution of the CERF, the organization must communicate the recommendations and the organization's responses to the ERC through the CERF secretariat.

Reviews & studies

Fraud poses a serious risk to humanitarian action and efforts to support people in need. Agencies have committed to keep the CERF secretariat informed of any investigation into potential fraud cases involving CERF grants, and the CERF secretariat contacts relevant departments within agencies at least twice a year to ensure that no cases go unreported.

Fraud reporting

The CERF secretariat has likewise committed to keep interested CERF donors informed of investigations by agencies into potential fraud cases involving CERF funds and the outcome of such investigations.

The CERF secretariat has developed procedures for communicating potential cases of fraud under CERF-funded projects which are outlined in a [Guidance Note on Communicating the Fraudulent Use of CERF Funds](#).

Potential cases of fraud related to CERF grants are handled through the regulations and rules and oversight mechanisms of the recipient agencies and of the United Nations. In each case, the investigation service of the respective agency informs OCHA who logs each case and follows up with the respective agency until conclusion of the case. Donors are kept updated throughout the life-cycle of a

case in accordance with the fraud communication guidance and CERF's Standard Operating Procedures for such cases.

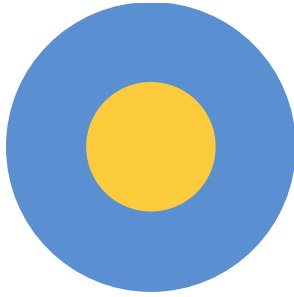
PAF

The accountability mechanisms and reporting processes that ensure CERF funds are being used and managed appropriately are described in the [Performance and Accountability Framework \(PAF\)](#). The PAF details the CERF process elements, and the links between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact, and the associated indicators.

The PAF stipulates [reviews](#) as an oversight tool that provides the ERC with an appropriate level of independent assurance about the achievement of key performance benchmarks and planned results for CERF.

The reviews are conducted by external consultants and managed by the CERF secretariat. The first such review was piloted in 2009 and since then CERF has conducted a number of reviews each year.

Reviews can cover a single CERF recipient country or have a regional or thematic perspective. Reviews include recommendations aimed at improving specific operational aspects of CERF and may identify policy issues which need to be addressed at a global level.



Telling the story of CERF: Communication and Branding

Photographs, stories, quotes and profiles telling the story of CERF to strengthen the global visibility of CERF and demonstrate achievements as well as results of CERF-funded activities.

Visibility of CERF

Telling the story of CERF is vital to strengthening the global visibility of CERF and demonstrate achievements and impact of CERF-funded activities. The CERF secretariat requires implementing partners to share content, including photographs, stories, quotes and profiles, from CERF-funded activities, that can be featured on CERF's digital platforms or in one of CERF's flagship publications.

CERF may use these materials for additional public outreach and visibility efforts, ahead of key milestones, including the annual high-level pledging event. Due credit will be given to each individual agency or organization.

CERF informs stakeholders by email of every new allocation as soon as the ERC makes a funding decision.

Digital platforms

[CERF's website](#) is the fund's digital portal; it conveys the global identity of the fund, and showcases CERF to the public. The website is the resource for crucial information and data for partners, donors, recipient agencies and others who want to know about CERF.

OCHA has set up data hubs for [CERF](#), the [country-based pooled funds](#), and both types of funds [combined](#).

CERF's social media platforms such as Twitter ([@UNCERF](#)) and [Facebook](#) reach a wide range of partners globally. RC/HCs, country teams and agencies are encouraged to publicize CERF allocations and in particular whether these have made a difference for affected people. Agencies should always tag [@UNCERF](#) in their relevant social media posts.

Donor visibility

Donor visibility is a key priority for CERF and is central to all advocacy and communication efforts across all communication platforms. This includes press releases, flagship publications, communication assets for digital outreach and specific initiatives on results for donors.

CERF branding & use of logo

CERF encourages implementing partners to make use of the CERF logo for the purposes of identification and branding, by placing the logo on relevant digital and print communication material for the public, donors or other humanitarian partners. The CERF logo is available [here](#).

Stories from the field

Many [examples of CERF's life-saving impact](#) in the field are posted on the CERF website. Most stories have been created jointly by CERF and implementing partners.



Annex

Terms and Definitions

A **CERF Allocation** is an allocation to a specific new or underfunded emergency. An allocation usually consists of multiple project grants for the same emergency approved by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).

A **CERF Application** is a consolidated funding request from a country/emergency, including a strategy and individual agency project proposals submitted by the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC).

A **CERF Grant** is funding for a project to be implemented by a UN agency.

Request refers to a summary of the justification for a CERF application and the intended strategic use to inform the ERC's initial funding decision. If approved, a request is turned into a full-fledged application by adding further information.

Interim Update is the main tool used by the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) to monitor and report on the status of implementation of projects under a CERF allocation. The update highlights challenges that may affect implementation, corrective actions (to be) taken and expectations of meeting the planned targets.

The **CERF Life-Saving Criteria (LSC)** ([▶▶ Chapter 5](#)) define interventions eligible for CERF funding and ensure that CERF only funds those activities that within a short time span remedy, mitigate or avert direct physical harm or imminent threats to a population or major portion thereof (CERF Life-saving Criteria, 2020).

Further guidance and templates are available on the CERF website.