

Best Practices to Accelerate Implementation of CERF Projects

IASC Task Team on Humanitarian Financing

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With support from InterAction and UNICEF, a small group of NGOs and UN agencies from the IASC Task Team on Humanitarian Financing came together to identify and document *Best Practices to Accelerate Implementation of CERF Projects*. This short paper identifies effective, replicable practices in UN-NGO partnership throughout the grant cycle of CERF funds. The paper is a work-in-progress and can be updated to add new ideas as agencies review their own policies and procedures in utilizing CERF and other funding streams.

In the Field

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 L3 emergencies, CO 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.

At Headquarters

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 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.

Points for Discussion

- *How do we balance the need to expedite the distribution and implementation of CERF funds with ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place?*
- *Differing UN agency requirements adds complexity.*
 - NGOs must treat each UN agency's onward disbursement of CERF funds as a separate donor.
- *Relationship Building and Communication*
 - How do we incentivize relationship building with potential partners so that the right relationships are in place when a crisis/escalation occurs? How can UN agencies contribute to greater awareness of CERF allocations at the field level?
- *Local vs. International NGOs.*
 - CERF funding can be a powerful way to increase the capacity of national and local NGOs.

¹ Using the agreed upon supply and financial maximums.

² Detailed budgets for sub-grants are not required for CERF proposals.