

CERF Handbook



United Nations
CERF



What you will find in the CERF Handbook

Using the CERF Handbook	4
About CERF	6
Overview of CERF Funding Elements	8
Strategic Use of CERF.....	10
CERF's Live-Saving Criteria	13
Rapid Response	16
Underfunded Emergencies	20
Linkage: CERF Allocations , Flash Appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans	23
Mechanics of Applying and Navigating the Process	25
Pre-submission Checklist	30
Implementation	32
Oversight and Accountability	35
Telling the story of CERF: Communication and Branding	40
Annex.....	41

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 will be updated regularly. Parts were updated in February 2022.

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.

Target audience

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 reports
- The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) 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
- The UN Country Team (UNCT), and sectors¹
- 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

¹ The Handbook refers throughout to RC/HC and clusters as a matter of simplicity; the information applies to application from any country for emergency response.

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 field 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. Links to policies, guidelines and procedures, and templates and forms are provided throughout the Handbook, and in a compendium ([▶▶ Annex](#)).

About CERF

CERF is one of the most effective ways to enable the timely provision of life-saving assistance, including supplies, basic services 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 adding a 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

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 2021, CERF has enabled UN agencies, funds and programmes as well as implementing partners to provide more than \$7.5 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 on average, CERF grants help humanitarian partners deliver critical health care to 16 million people, food assistance to 7 million people, water and sanitation to 10 million people, protection to 4 million people, and shelter to 2 million. The fund supports services for refugees and displaced people, nutrition programmes, mine action, agriculture in emergencies, emergency education and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) for millions of people in need to mention but a few areas of intervention.

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, while improving the overall effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the field. The resolution created the high-level position of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and [Emergency Relief Coordinator](#) (USG/ERC), to combine into a single United Nations focal point 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 and the DERC in managing both the grant and the 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 instruction of the 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. Members are carefully selected to reflect 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 up to one-third through the UFE window.

CERF's Grant Element

Rapid Response grants

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 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 RC/HCs directly apply based on an on-the-ground joint analysis of priority needs.

Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory Action: CERF funding for anticipatory action complements the fund's core funding functions under the Rapid Response (RR) and Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) windows. It is currently restricted to the OCHA-led pilot initiatives, meaning that requests for 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. Twice yearly, typically, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) 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.

Snapshot of CERF's annual allocations

CERF manages allocation volumes ([▶▶ CERF Allocation](#)) according to available funds. Each year, CERF funding reaches affected people in some 50 different countries.

Frequency of receiving CERF allocations

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.

Determining eligibility for CERF's 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 loan element is aimed at strengthening humanitarian coordination efforts, by ensuring that adequate preparedness measures are put in place to address humanitarian needs. 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.

CERF loan guidance

The organization making the request sends documentation, as follows, in accordance with ST/SGB/2010/5:

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 repaid within one year from the date of disbursement.
7. Send the documents to the ERC with copy to the CERF secretariat at cerf@un.org

4

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 field offices, CERF projects have demonstrated their capacity to make important strategic changes and impacts/ results on the ground.

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 sudden-onset emergencies.

The main consideration the CERF secretariat looks at during the application process is the compatibility with the [Life-Saving Criteria \(LSC\)](#) ([▶▶ 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 (ERC) 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 are typically allowed **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 towards achieving collective outcomes.

This strategic added value is achieved through inclusive CERF application processes lead by RC/HCs and carried out by HCTs 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 achieved. RC/HCs and HCTs/UNCTs describe this strategic use of CERF funds in a 'strategic statement' for each request.

Necessary elements for prioritising activities

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 full applications, 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 life-saving 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 6-month timeframe of a CERF RR response and 9 to 12-month timeframe of a UFE response?
- Who and how many people are to be reached with CERF-funded activities and where?
- What is the impact or change that CERF funds can make?

Additionally, the following factors should be considered throughout the prioritization of activities:

Coherence of proposed activities

The entire package of CERF projects needs to show a strategic rationale, not only individual projects. Projects should be planned in a logical way.

NGOs as implementing partners

The 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.

5

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 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. Where the cluster approach is not in place, these guidelines should be used by the sectors to guide interventions.

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.

Guidance on common services

CERF funding can be requested for common or enabling services that will be provided to the full humanitarian community, inclusive of NGOs. This section clarifies questions that repeatedly come up in submissions, and explores broader contextual issues that impact the funding decision. The example activities presented here are not exhaustive:

Multi Agency Assessment

Multi-agency assessments are considered only for new emergencies, and only under the RR window, and must be endorsed by the RC/HC and UNCT/HCT. CERF will not fund sector-specific assessments.

Coordination efforts in new disasters

Funding for cluster coordination is only supported in new emergencies under the RR window, where there is a demonstrated need for support. Cluster coordination staff and costs must be part of a larger agency project which has been prioritized by the RC/HC and HCT. Coordination will not be supported in a stand-alone project.

UN Humanitarian Air Service

According to [CERF’s Guidelines for Funding for UN Humanitarian Air Service](#) (UNHAS), air operations (persons and cargo) that are essential to deliver life-saving activities in difficult to reach locations, or where ground transportation to distant areas is unsafe, may be considered.

Emergencies
Telecommunications

As outlined in [CERF's Guidelines for Funding for Emergency Information and Communications Technology Equipment and Services](#), networks for new emergency operations or the upgrade of existing equipment in a deteriorating humanitarian situation with a changed security risk assessment may be considered.

Safety &
Security of
Humanitarian
Community

Based on [CERF's Guidelines for Funding for Common Emergency Safety and Security](#), extra-ordinary security programmes and equipment may be considered to close critical security gaps for common security services at the onset of a natural disaster, a severe outbreak of disease or new complex emergency. These services must be provided to the entirety of the humanitarian community; not a single agency. Traditionally, this role is played by the UN Department of Safety and Security.

Activities outside
of CERF's scope

The CERF mandate is clear about activities that are **not eligible for CERF support**:

Disaster risk
reduction

Activities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, or to prevent or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards within the context of sustainable development. *For example:*

Earthquake or flood resistant housing; sandbar cropping to prevent riverbed erosion

Preparedness

Activities and measures taken in advance to ensure effective response to the impact of hazards, including the issuance of early warnings and the temporary evacuation of people and property from threatened locations. *For example:*

Capacity building of national emergency management agencies; operation of early warning systems

Prepositioning

Regular stockpiling or pre-positioning of relief goods as a *contingency measure* is typically not eligible. *For example:*

Pre-positioning of relief supplies in a regional warehouse prior to cyclone/hurricane season

In the case of a new emergency, if an agency starts to respond using emergency stocks or diverts stocks intended for other operations, the replacement of these stocks can be included in their rapid response submission.

6

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 of a disaster. 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 field-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 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. There is no one-size-fits-all decision tree. Early consultation is recommended between the RC/HC and the CERF secretariat on the possibility of rapid response funding, *before* sending a

funding request.

Procedures & criteria for application

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. Review the [Basic Guidance on Drought Submissions for CERF Rapid Response](#)

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

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.

- 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 office contacting the CERF secretariat. This should be done as soon as possible by phone or email.
- 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-making¹.
- 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

¹ The content of the CERF request may vary depending on the given situation.

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.

- **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 ERC has decided to allocate funds, the full application including agency 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 soon as they are certain funding will come, and prior to actual disbursement. 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. Concerted efforts are made to minimize and streamline requests to the field, in order to reduce transaction costs and processing time.

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, with only a portion of new or additional needs requested from CERF. *For example:*

In nutrition, UNICEF may include activities related to the immediate treatment of severe acute malnutrition (rapid procurement and distribution of RUTF) rather than large scale sensitization campaigns for nutrition/WASH. WFP may consider including general food distributions for the first few weeks or months rather than asset creation activities, and FAO may consider quick impact activities such as distribution of fast-maturing seeds rather than activities focusing on the uptake of drought tolerant crops.

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. For example:

In May 2018 a \$2 million RR grant contributed to fight and contain a new outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Equateur Province). While the full response plan amounted to \$26 million to scale up response activities, CERF funding helped UN agencies and partners to kick-start the immediate response, including time-critical and life-saving activities such as surveillance, treatment, community mobilization and sensitization, safe and dignified burials as well as supporting logistics services.

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 five factors: the emergency type, overall funding requirements for the response to the specific humanitarian emergency, the number of people targeted, a country's overall humanitarian situation measured by the CIRV score (see chapter on Underfunded Emergencies) and the national coping capacity (approximated by GDP per capita). 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

CERF provides funding for OCHA-facilitated **anticipatory action** frameworks that have been endorsed by the RC/HC and ERC. Today, it is possible to predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and humanitarian impact of certain shocks. By combining different analytical approaches, out-of-the-ordinary events can not only be predicted, but their projected humanitarian impact can proactively be mitigated based on pre-identified anticipatory actions. This has proven to be faster, more dignified and more cost-effective than traditional humanitarian response.

Recognizing the merits of targeted anticipatory action, over the past few years, the CERF has taken on an increasing role in supporting the set-up and financing of anticipatory action pilot initiatives that are led by OCHA and designed for and in close collaboration with the broader humanitarian system. More information is available on the [CERF](#) and [OCHA](#) websites on AA.

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

Twice each year, typically, 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 public source 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 Technical Methodology](#), 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”.

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:

a) Degree of funding shortfall²

The funding analysis identifies emergencies with the highest levels of underfunding, the primary criterion for inclusion in a UFE round. The data for

Quantitative & qualitative data analysis

² Refers to funding received against total annual requirements.

the funding analysis of HRP countries comes from the Financial Tracking Services (FTS) while members of the UFEWG provide information for non-HRP countries.

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.

b) 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).

c) 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.

Allocation decisions

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 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 the "story behind the story" i.e., 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. In countries with an HRP, the CERF Underfunded Emergencies window can normally only fund HRP projects.

8

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

Who is involved in the CERF process?

The field-based activities in the CERF process start with a crisis trigger in RR, or with the selection of the crisis as underfunded in an UFE round. In both grants, essential responsibilities 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) participates in the strategic prioritisation process. In countries where there is no HCT, this role will be played by the UN Country Team.

Clusters advise the RC/HC and HCT on needs, the strategic use of funds and the adherence to CERF's Life-Saving Criteria (LSC). (Where clusters do not exist, this role will be played by sectors.)

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

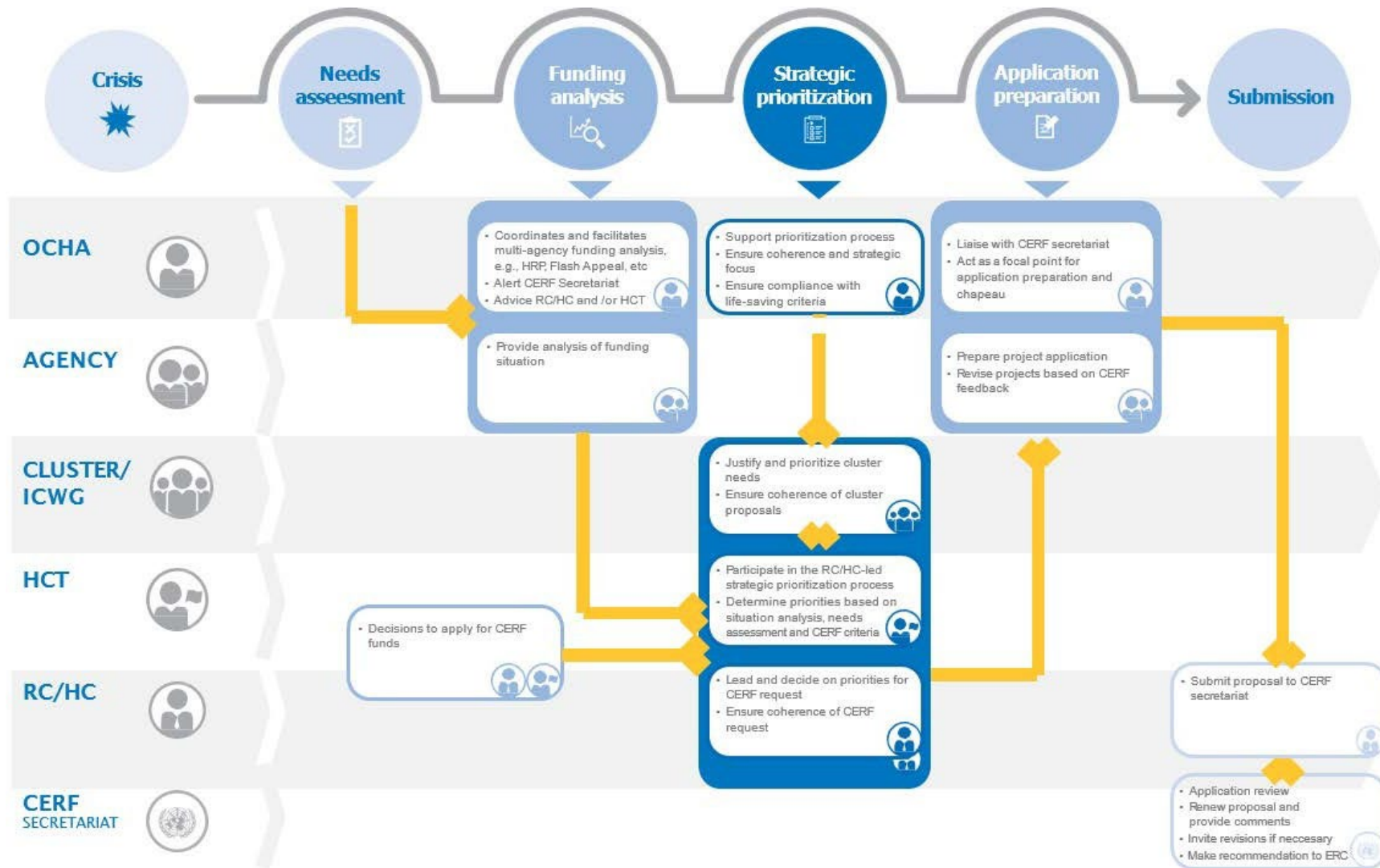
NGOs actively participate in the cluster/sector structures, serve as members of the HCT, provide inputs to the prioritisation, and implement projects in partnerships with UN agencies and IOM. Relevant government partners (e.g., health personnel under the Ministry of Health) and Red Cross/Red Crescent 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. For the UFE window, OCHA provides analytical inputs to the country selection process.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities in the CERF Process



How to complete the application template?

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

The strategic and operational prioritization and 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 in Part I. Inputs will be consolidated by OCHA or RC's Office 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.

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.

How to determine the number of beneficiaries?

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 targeted indirectly separately, who are larger groups of 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.

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 duly 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).

To whom to submit the application?
To whom to submit the counter-signed letter?

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 are consistent with agreements
- Cluster/sector and/or 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, etc.)
- Logframe 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
- Documents are clean with no comments or tracked changes

Implementation

Agencies provide information on implementation of CERF projects to the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), the Humanitarian or UN Country Team and cluster/sector coordinators. OCHA, where present, manages CERF related processes and facilitates flow of information.

Implementation on roles & responsibilities

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.

HCT/UNCT monitoring agreement

When the CERF request is submitted, the application includes the HCT/UNCT's agreement on how the overall CERF allocation will be monitored, including:

- CERF recipient agencies' plans for project-level monitoring, and how information on individual CERF projects will be provided to the RC/HC
- Focal points within each CERF recipient agency who will act as OCHA's contact for information related to CERF monitoring
- Whether any collective monitoring will be undertaken through clusters or through

Monitoring the implementation of CERF grants

monitoring systems of country-based pooled funds where these exist.

Monitoring is the systematic collection, analysis, communication and use of information from projects and programmes during the project cycle. Recipient agencies are responsible for monitoring the implementation of individual CERF projects and providing the requested information on the implementation status to the RC/HC, the HCT/UNCT, OCHA and relevant cluster coordinators, according to the HCT/UNCT agreed schedule.

Agencies are expected to integrate the CERF projects into their programme monitoring arrangements in the country. It is especially important for agencies to track and take action for any challenges or delays in the projects, keeping the RC/HC informed.

CERF's contribution to the response should ideally also be reflected through system-wide monitoring processes that are in place at sector/cluster level. The RC/HC in consultation with the HCT may decide to complement agencies' own regular monitoring efforts with collective monitoring of CERF projects, led by clusters or using monitoring frameworks from country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) where these exist.

Review the full guidance for [Monitoring of CERF Allocations](#).

Mandatory interim project status update

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. The template has been developed based on best practices from the field.

To make the process as light as possible for field partners, when each CERF allocation is approved, the CERF secretariat provides the RC/HC with the interim update template, pre-populated with key information from project proposals.

The template is used by agencies to provide project updates at agreed milestone(s) during the implementation period (typically halfway through the cycle). The various agency inputs 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.

Moreover, relevant project 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. However, CERF's policy on NCEs is to only grant them based on unavoidable country level factors- such as COVID-19, access, insecurity etc. 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](#).

A project extension request should be submitted by the RC/HC to the ERC (with the CERF secretariat in copy) on behalf of the recipient agency as soon as the need for an extension is detected and at the latest two weeks before the end of the implementation period.

Reprogramming of activities & redeployment of funds

CERF funds generally cannot be re-programmed because they are bound by the specific proposals that were approved based on analysis of the situation as detailed in the original application package.

If external circumstances and/or important changes of scope (target beneficiaries, 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 ERC to approve changes within existing projects on an exceptional basis.

Requests should be submitted by the RC/HC to the ERC (by sending an email to the CERF secretariat) explaining and justifying the changes, keeping within the life-saving mandate of the CERF.

The RC/HC's email should include the CERF No-Cost Extension and/or Reprogramming Request Form completed by the agency, as well as his/her endorsement of the change in scope. Approval by the ERC must be given before any changes are made.

The ERC will decide either to ask the agency to return unused funds, or to consider the changes within the existing scope and intent of the original request.

A formal request for redeployment of funds must be sent by the agency to the ERC through the RC/HC 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 from the ERC prior to implementation of the change.

Oversight and Accountability

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

Overseeing CERF grants: roles & responsibilities

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.

The HCT or UNCT should regularly discuss implementation progress and should collectively take stock at the time of preparing the interim report. At the end of the implementation of each CERF allocation the HCT/UNCT and other relevant partners should gather together for an After-Action Review (AAR) to reflect on results achieved and lessons learned, and to lay the ground work for the final narrative report (RC/HC CERF report).

Recipient agencies should provide complete, high-quality, and timely inputs to the RC/HC report on the use of CERF grants. CERF recommends that agencies collect and incorporate inputs from their implementing partners.

The OCHA office, where present, or the RC office, supports the RC/HC by gathering and compiling agencies' inputs and managing the process (including the AAR) to complete the narrative CERF report according to the guidelines and template.

Detailed CERF reporting requirements are outlined in a brief [overview](#).

Narrative reporting

The [recommended in-country process](#) for preparing the report is based on CERF's experience and feedback from the field. It is a collective effort by all relevant stakeholders at country level that aims to produce both a quality report as well as a collective reflection on the CERF process and lessons learned for improving future allocations.

Notifications

The report is due within three months after expiration of each grants package. The report is due within three months after expiration of each grants package. Any delays in submission of the report should be discussed with the CERF secretariat. The first notification from the CERF secretariat will go to the RC/HC 12 weeks before the expiration. This notification includes a reminder to check whether any of the receipt agencies may need to request a no-cost extension.

At that time, the RC/HC appoints an in-country focal point for the CERF reporting process and sends the contact details [to the CERF secretariat](#). In most cases, the in-country focal

point is from OCHA (where present) or from the RC's Office. However, there are instances where one of the recipient agencies may take up

the report focal point role (single sector or single agency allocations, refugee responses coordinated by UNHCR, etc.).

The RC/HC uses the *official reporting tool* to explain whether set targets have been met and how funds have been prioritized and utilized to meet life-saving humanitarian needs. RC/HC reports are published on CERF's website.

Preparation of report inputs should start as soon as possible after grant expiration. Four weeks prior to expiration of each grants package, the CERF secretariat sends a reporting package to the RC/HC's office that contains a tailored template (including the Annex) and guidelines. To reduce the reporting burden, key information from the grant proposal package is inserted in the tailored reporting template by the CERF secretariat.

After Action Review

The HCT/UNCT reflects on the overall CERF process, whether the strategic objectives of the CERF allocation were met, how the CERF recipient agencies and the broader humanitarian community worked together, lessons learned, achievements with the grant, required follow-up actions and recommendations for the future. The timing of the AAR should be determined by the RC/HC with the aim to maximize participation and promote meaningful and informed discussion. It should be held during the initial stage of the reporting process, when the institutional memory of CERF processes, implementation and achievements is still fresh with the recipient agencies. Experience from several countries indicates that the ARR tends to be more successful when preliminary inputs from agencies are gathered in advance and used as a basis for discussion and common reflection. The detailed process of the AAR is outlined in the [CERF Monitoring and Reporting Guidance](#). Information collected during the AAR is key to inform certain sections of the RC/HC report.

Reporting time after grant expiration

Informed by the outcomes of the AAR and the preliminary agency inputs, the RC/HC's appointed in-country focal point drafts basic elements of the report.

Zero draft

Within seven weeks after grant expiration, the in-country focal point consolidates all inputs and circulates a zero draft to recipient agencies and cluster/sector-leads for review and comments. Cluster/sector-leads are expected to circulate the draft within the cluster/sector and consolidate relevant comments

Reporting meeting

Within 9-10 weeks after grant expiration, the RC/HC brings key stakeholders together to discuss the draft CERF report, clarify any outstanding issues or missing information, and ensure that the report reflects the common understanding.

Final draft & submission

After the meeting the draft report can be finalised and circulated to the HCT/UNCT for endorsement, before final review and approval by the RC/HC and submission to the CERF secretariat.

CERF secretariat review & clearance

The CERF secretariat reviews the draft RC/HC report, providing comments and requesting clarifications or missing information from the RC/HC whenever required. Once all comments are addressed and missing information provided, the RC/HC report is cleared and published on the CERF website. Key information and data from the RC/HC reports is systematically extracted and used to produce analysis, statistics and public information/communication material.

CERF Financial Reporting

To comply with the reporting and accountability requirements, recipient organizations must submit two to three financial reports a year to the CERF secretariat and to the Director, Accounts Division of the United Nations, using the format in the [CERF Income and Expenditure template](#).

- An interim financial report for each grant as at 31 December, certified by the duly authorized designated official(s) of the organization as accurate and complete shall be submitted by 15 February of the following year.
- A final financial report for each grant as at 31 December, certified by the duly authorized designated official(s) of the organization, shall be submitted by 30 June of the following year.
- For rapid response projects with an implementation end date between 1 January and 30 June of a given year, the organization submits an interim report by 15 August of the same year.

Submission of financial reports discontinues when the financial report shows full completion of the project financially, including full refund of any unspent balance.

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.

Annual Agency HQ CERF Report

Organizations receiving CERF resources submit an Annual Headquarter (HQ) Report on the overall strategic impact of CERF funding within their global emergency programmes.

The reports focus on the overall impact of CERF funding on each agency's global emergency programmes, linking the agency's results to CERF's mandate of facilitating the swift implementation of time critical, life-saving activities in new emergencies and strengthening the core response activities of underfunded emergencies. The procedural and technical details are outlined in the [Annual Headquarter Report Guidelines](#).

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.

Audits

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.

The CERF secretariat commissions a [variety of studies](#) and supports evaluations that promote transparency, accountability and learning, including the General Assembly-mandated evaluations of CERF and regular assessments of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and added value of select CERF allocations. All evaluations and studies are conducted by external evaluation experts.

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.

Reviews & studies

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.

Fraud communica- tions & case follow up

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](#).

**CERF
Performance &
Accountability
Framework**

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.

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 [allocation-level 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, but may also 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 results of CERF-funded activities. The CERF secretariat encourages 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.

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 communication digital and

print material, as well as on items related to CERF-funded activities, including stickers and banners.

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.

Complex Emergencies are characterized by: extensive violence and loss of life, massive displacements of people, widespread damage to social and economic assets, widespread violation of rights, and multi-faceted humanitarian responses, requiring an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency. (IASC, December 1994).

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.

Disasters are serious disruptions of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human suffering, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. They can be caused by natural hazards or be induced by human processes. (UNISDR, May 2009)

The **Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (USG/ERC)** is responsible for the oversight of all emergencies requiring United Nations humanitarian assistance and also acts as the central focal point for governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental relief activities. The ERC manages CERF and also leads the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian partners.

The **Financial Tracking Service (FTS)** is a centralized, web-based source real-time data and information on humanitarian funding flows managed by UN OCHA.

The **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)** is an inclusive governance structure at the field level, led by the RC/HC. The HCT should be broad-based and representative, to include all relevant humanitarian actors from UN agencies the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement or NGOs.

The **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance established in June 1992 in response to [Resolution 46/182](#). It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

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.

Life-saving and/or **core emergency humanitarian interventions** are those actions that within a short time span remedy, mitigate or avert direct loss of life, physical and psychological harm or threats to a population or major portion thereof and/or protect their dignity.

The **CERF Life-Saving Criteria (LSC)** ([▶▶ Chapter 5](#)) defines 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).

Time-critical response refers to necessary, rapid and time-limited opportunities for rapid injection of resources to save lives either in complex emergencies or after natural disasters, to minimize additional loss of lives and damage to social and economic assets.

Further guidance and templates are available on the CERF website.