

Purpose

This paper provides a general overview of the decision-making process for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Rapid Response (RR) Window. Additional details and technical guidance are further elaborated in *CERF Rapid Response Window: Procedures and Criteria*¹. Understanding that every CERF application is unique and based on country-level needs, the paper describes general factors considered and questions asked to determine the situation's eligibility for RR funding and a suitable allocation amount; it is not meant to serve as a one-size-fits-all decision tree.

CERF's Mandate and Objectives

The CERF was established by the General Assembly in 2005² to ensure a more predictable and timely response to humanitarian emergencies. The three primary objectives of the Fund are to: 1) promote early action and response to reduce loss of life; 2) enhance response to time-critical humanitarian requirements; and 3) strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises. The fund's creation was part of the larger Humanitarian Reform process that aimed to enhance humanitarian response capacity, predictability, accountability and partnership through, among other things, an improved leadership system, a new Cluster Approach for better coordination, and more adequate, timely and flexible financing.

In particular, the CERF RR window provides funding for life-saving humanitarian activities in the following contexts: sudden onset disasters, rapid and significant deteriorations of existing crises, and time-critical interventions. RR grants provide initial funds to start-up or scale-up essential humanitarian activities, and partners are expected to seek other resources to complement the CERF funding.

The application process for an RR grant is similar to that of a CERF Underfunded Emergencies window request, in that, an application is based on a field-driven process that gives the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) overall authority to determine priority activities for funding and submitting a consolidated allocation request to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). Consultations in country with Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and inter-cluster coordination mechanism, if present, are key to identifying needs and priorities for CERF funding.



Step 1: Onset of Crisis and Identifying Triggers for Rapid Response Funding

Typically the RC/HC, or OCHA Country or Regional Office, contacts the ERC or CERF secretariat to inform of the trigger for CERF RR funding (i.e. the new emergency or sudden and significant deterioration of the existing situation). There are instances, however, when the CERF secretariat may proactively reach out to an RC/HC or OCHA field staff when a rapid response trigger is identified to ensure adequate awareness and knowledge of CERF eligibility and guidelines.

¹ http://www.unocha.org/cerf/sites/default/files/CERF/CERF_Rapid_Response_Window_September_2011.pdf

² General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/124 "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations"

While identifying the trigger for most rapid onset emergencies such as an earthquake or hurricane is straightforward, defining the trigger for funding within an existing emergency or a slow onset emergency can be challenging. Triggers in a protracted or ongoing emergency can be, but are not limited to: new needs identified in a community or location that was previously inaccessible; escalation of violence resulting in new and significant displacement; refugee arrivals above initial planning figures; new disease outbreak; etc. While CERF does not fund preparedness and prevention programs *per se*, CERF fund can support early action that provides a time critical response aimed at reducing the loss of life and suffering in slow onset emergencies as supported by evidence – recent assessments, results of indicators – that indicate a significant deterioration in the situation is occurring.

Demonstrating eligibility for CERF RR funding in a slow onset situation is less straight forward than for sudden onset emergencies. For example, for drought, the situation must be significantly worse than usual demonstrated by comparing current data (for example, rainfall, crop production/cross loss, malnutrition prevalence) with a five-year trend and a life-saving niche for CERF needs to be clearly identified. The data should be complemented with recent assessment findings at household level for evidence of humanitarian impact.³ Additionally, CERF RR may support early response to health emergencies, such as a yellow fever outbreak, through emergency vaccination campaigns to prevent the spread of the disease; however, the Fund does not support routine vaccination campaigns. In these cases, evidence of a new outbreak at a large scale requiring international assistance is required.

A preliminary situation analysis from the field should provide the required rationale for the rapid response request with a description of the new or unanticipated needs, as well as an estimate of the scale and scope of the life-saving activities and financial requirements. This allows the CERF secretariat to determine whether the response falls within the mandate of the Rapid Response Window and to carry out a cursory comparison with other similar emergencies supported by the CERF in the past. This analysis can be provided by submitting an optional Concept Note for CERF Rapid Response Funding⁴ or via teleconferences and correspondence between field colleagues and the CERF secretariat. Efforts are made to keep the process as simple and fast as possible, in order not to delay the response.

Step 2: Developing a Joint Strategy for CERF Funds

Once an emergency situation has been deemed eligible for CERF RR funding, the CERF secretariat works with field partners to ensure a high quality submission that maximizes the use of CERF funds. This includes advising RC/HCs and field colleagues on the developing a strategy for the use of CERF funds based on agreed upon collective priorities, eliminating duplication or overlap and avoiding fragmentation of funding amongst several disjointed or small projects. The strategy may include a focus on particular sectors/clusters, a particular caseload or geographic areas. The approach should consider the availability and use of other resources, such as government funds, in-kind contributions, earmarked and unearmarked donor funding, and country-based pooled funding, when available. Lastly, efforts are made to encourage value-for-money, cost consciousness and administrative efficiency in CERF programming. CERF's overall objective with this approach is to maximize the impact of its often comparably limited investment and maximizing complementarity with other funding sources, in particular, the country based pooled funds where such exist.

At this stage, the CERF secretariat can provide feedback to the RC/HC and in-country partners regarding the overall strategy and the individual projects, which may include the need for further details on the proposed activities or budget, or the ineligibility of specific activities or costs. The CERF secretariat provides continuous support to field colleagues during CERF process.

Step 3: Submitting the Request

The speed of the CERF submission process relies heavily upon the efficiency of leadership and coordination mechanisms in country. While consultation is essential, a CERF rapid response request should be submitted as soon as possible and generally within two weeks of the identified trigger in order to achieve mandated objectives of saving lives and kick-

³ Basic Guidance on Drought Submissions for CERF Rapid Response can be found at: <http://www.unocha.org/cerf/resources/guidance-and-templates>

⁴ Concept Note for CERF Rapid Response Funding can be found at <http://www.unocha.org/cerf/resources/how-apply/rapid-response-0>

starting immediate response activities. The CERF secretariat provides guidance and feedback throughout the development of the CERF strategy and project proposals.

Step 4: Review and Refinement of Rapid Response Requests

Once the consolidated CERF RR application is submitted by the RC/HC, the CERF secretariat reviews the request and formulates recommendations to the ERC on the overall RR allocation to the emergency and on individual projects. During this phase the CERF secretariat continues to liaise with relevant country level actors as necessary to clarify or revise aspects of the submission. Concerted efforts are made to minimize and streamline requests to the field to reduce transaction costs and processing time.

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

- available funds in CERF and forecasted income;
- scale and severity of the needs;
- overall funding requirements and the proportion requested from CERF;
- current and historical comparison with other emergencies or applications;
- operational capacity;
- activities proposed for funding; and
- potential complementarity with other resources.

In consultation with country desk officers at OCHA's Coordination and Response Division, a preliminary assessment of the proposed strategy for CERF funding and operational capacity is undertaken. In regards to operational environment, the CERF secretariat reviews recent prior recent CERF allocations to the country to determine whether delays were experienced and no-cost extensions requested. If this is the case, the CERF provides relevant lessons learned to the RC/HC and relevant country-level partners to ensure mitigating measures are considered. An additional factor is whether humanitarian partners are able to access the affected populations. The CERF secretariat will also consider UN agencies' presence in country and their implementation capacity via NGO and/or government partners. Information will be sought to determine if any such potential operational challenges may impede effective utilisation of CERF funding and this information will form part of the ERCs decision making. Given the competing global demands on the fund, as well as CERF's immediate life-saving mandate and short six-month implementation period, it is critical that rapid response requests are made based on operational realities to ensure that CERF funds are targeted effectively across the globe.

Additionally, the CERF evaluates the proportion of the overall requirements that are requested from the CERF based on the understanding that the CERF should jump-start or expand activities and not serve as the sole or primary donor. The CERF's added value is enhanced when CERF funding complements other resources. Thus, the CERF looks at how well the HCT and individual agencies proposed seeking and/or utilizing other funds—country-based pooled funds, bilateral grants, in-kind contributions, etc.—in concert with CERF funding.

After reviewing the overall strategy for CERF funds and the humanitarian community's capacity to respond, the CERF secretariat narrows in on the individual projects proposed for funding. In particular, the actual activities proposed must adhere to the established CERF Life-Saving Criteria⁵, as well as support in a coherent manner the collective objectives outlined in the CERF strategy while avoiding duplication and/or overlap.

The CERF secretariat also reviews project budgets to ensure these comply with UN rules for trust fund management and budget inputs are commensurate with the planned activities and expected outputs while recognizing that CERF funds support a portion of a UN agency's overall programme.

⁵ CERF Life-Saving Criteria can be found at: <http://www.unocha.org/cerf/resources/guidance-and-templates>. The Life-Saving Criteria does not seek to define which humanitarian activities are life-saving per se, rather it provides a sector based eligibility criteria that defines CERF's specific niche in responding to humanitarian need.

Step 5: ERC Decision on Funding

Following the review of the application at the strategic and project levels, the CERF secretariat presents recommendations for funding to the ERC for decision. While the overall submission is assessed as a consolidated CERF allocation, each individual project is processed individually once its scope and objectives have been approved within the overall agreed allocation. This ensures that individual projects can be approved and grants disbursed as soon as they are cleared without having to wait for 'slower' projects.

Once all project grants are disbursed the ERC will officially communicate to the RC/HC the details of the overall allocation and related implementation timeline and reporting requirements.

CERF secretariat
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Please refer to the “Partner Resources” section of the CERF website (www.unocha.org/cerf) for relevant templates and guidance documents.

For further information, please contact the CERF secretariat at cerf@un.org.