Frequently asked questions

Basic guidance

What guidance should be followed to make an application for Accelerated Funding for Covid-19?
The Guidelines for the COVID Accelerated Funding Window.

Is there a deadline to submit an application for COVID Accelerated Funding?
Applications are expected to be received between April and September 2020.

Is there an application form or program document template?
There is a cover note for COVID accelerated funding applications. There is no template for the program document – the Grant Agent can use their own, but should include all information needed for the Secretariat to assess the proposal in light of the program standards.

Given approved ESPIGS are slowing or stopping implementation, from a country perspective, is it better to go ahead and ask for COVID Accelerated Funding rather than restructuring existing programs?
Countries should determine their needs related to COVID and apply for COVID Accelerated Funding where it would be useful to address those needs. In the medium to longer-term, we encourage countries to look at the impact of COVID on their ESPIGs.

Eligibility and amount

Which countries are eligible?
All ESPIG-eligible countries, with the exception of Syria. In total 67 countries are eligible.

What was the Board’s rationale for limiting funding to 67 countries?
It is a question of available funding. Only $250 million can currently be allocated from the GPE Fund. More than US$600 million would be needed to cover allocations to just the 67 countries if they all request for funds.

How much is available from the COVID Accelerated Funding Window in total?

How much is available per country?
Allocations are based on the country’s school aged population. Countries with larger populations are allocated a higher amount. The allocations range from US$1 million to US$20 million per country.
Is the window first-come first-served?
The first US$125 million out of the US$225 million for country-level grants is demand-driven. The next US$100 million will be reserved for distribution according to needs-based criteria (to be developed), if demand exceeds supply. Opportunities to provide grants beyond the available US$225 million would depend on additional funding to be provided by GPE donors.

Is there a possibility that funds will become unavailable while a country is still preparing its application? In other words, once a country communicates that it intends to apply, will the allocation be set aside while the country prepares the program?
Yes, it is possible that funds will become unavailable. The Secretariat will make available information on the countries that have applied and amounts that have been approved.

Any guidance on the GA fees – will these be taken from the AF amount or be in addition?
Agency Fees covering GA indirect cost recovery will be the same as our normal approach and therefore additional to the grant allocation. All other GA costs including supervision fees come from within the grant.

Grant Agent selection

Which agencies are already accredited as Grant Agents for an ESPIG (have a Financial Procedures Agreement in place)?
1. Asian Development Bank (ADB)
2. Agence française de développement (AFD)
3. Enabel (Belgian Development Agency)
4. CARE USA
5. Concern International
6. Department for International Development (DFID)
7. Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)
8. Save the Children UK
9. Save the Children USA
10. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
11. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
12. UNESCO
13. UNICEF
14. The World Bank Group

All the above entities are eligible to become grant agents. The Board of Directors has waived the requirement for a formal grant-level assessment of INGOs (CARE USA, Concern International, Save the Children UK/USA) for allocations above US$5 million, noting the Secretariat will assess risk as part of the review of any such allocations.

Does the Grant Agent have to be the same as the GA for ‘regular’ Accelerated Funding’?
If a grant agent has been selected for the ‘regular’ Accelerated Funding window announced in December
2019, the government can decide to maintain this grant agent for the COVID-19 accelerated funding, provided that said grant agent is available and has the capacity to serve in this role.

**Program development**

**What reference framework should the application be based on?**
A publicly available government response/recovery plan related to COVID-19. This plan will need to be submitted as part of the application package.

**Is there a template for the response/recovery plan?**
No.

**Can the program be based on the Education Cluster’s COVID response plan?**
Yes, if that plan was developed together with government.

**Will GPE provide a PDG to develop grants?**
No.

**What are eligible expenditures?**
All activities related to mitigate and recover from the impact of COVID 19 on the education system. They could for example include:

- Production of learning continuity programs broadcast through radio, tv, and online, and the provision of resources such as radios, textbooks, study guides and equipment to the poorest. This can be accompanied through free call-in numbers for asking questions, or through establishing a remote tutoring service using toll-free numbers at a local level.
- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and teachers; make sure that children with special educational needs and disabilities are included in continuity of learning programs. Provide appropriate psycho-social support to children and teachers.
- Conducting sample assessments at different grade levels to track progress in key areas like early grade literacy and numeracy and key subjects at secondary. This is essential to know who is being reached and how well students are learning so that interventions can be adapted accordingly.
- The poorest will be affected the most by economic shocks (household income in Sierra Leone fell from US$336 to US$131 during the Ebola epidemic and there was an increase in girls getting pregnant). Interventions will likely be needed to protect the poorest and most vulnerable and enable them to continue learning, such as conditional cash transfers.
- Officials and teachers may have been on other duties or forced to leave their jobs. Crisis and post-crisis education budgets will be under pressure but for rapid and effective recovery national systems must keep their teachers. It is essential to support them through the crisis, enable them to support continuity of learning and prepare them for recovery and reopening as well as addressing recruitment gaps if these emerge.
- Schools may have been used for other purposes and may need refurbishing and require new
supplies of books and equipment. Reopening will need to be planned and prepared for with health and wellbeing ensured.

- The closure of schools, even with mitigation measures, will result in slower learning progress. The poorest are likely to fall further behind their richer peers. When schools reopen, large-scale assessment can identify learning gaps and inform remedial programming and learning opportunities so that all children catch up to grade level rapidly.

**Do we exclude non-basic subsector (senior secondary/higher education institutions) from the COVID-19 response, or is it intended to be a system wide response support?**

As per the country level guide: GPE “provides funding for the implementation of the national (or federal) ESP/TEPs, more specifically national priorities and strategies related to basic education, defined as pre-primary, primary, lower secondary education and second-chance learning opportunities. (The ESPIG does not provide funding for higher education nor technical and vocational training.) It may be possible to support early childhood care and education and upper secondary education in certain cases. (Especially for countries that have achieved high levels of access and retention in basic and lower secondary education.)”

**What is the expected implementation period for programs?**

The implementation period for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding is 12 to 18 months. It is expected that resources are used for activities to mitigate and recover from the COVID crisis.

**What is the role of the LEG in the program development process?**

As with ‘regular’ Accelerated Funding, the grant agent works with the government, LEG and Education Cluster to develop the program. There should be evidence that LEG and Education Cluster have been consulted and that they endorse the program.

**Will the Education Cluster play its usual role in program development, seeing that it is Accelerated Funding?**

Yes, where an Education Cluster has been activated.

**Will these be entirely new grants or is there a possibility of topping up existing ESPIGs specifically for COVID-19 response?**

It really depends on what is the most efficient approach for the country. The Secretariat wants to be flexible.

**If the country decides to top up an existing grant, how is it processed by the Secretariat?**

As a COVID accelerated funding, using the simplified program standards and rapid process.

**Could COVID Accelerated Funding support sector-pooled programs?**

Yes, if the education sector plan includes interventions to support COVID needs and Accelerated Funding is earmarked towards that end.

**How does this link with the Grant provided to UNICEF for COVID response? What is the thinking around the alignment of these two different funding allocations?**
The multi-country ESPDG, managed by UNICEF, provides funding to 87 countries to kick start an education system response to COVID-19. Funding can be used for activities including coordination and preparation of contingency and response plans; supporting implementation of safe school guidelines; and design and preparation of alternative education delivery systems (list is not exhaustive). As such, the grants from the COVID Accelerated Funding Window will be able to build on some of the work funded by the multi-country ESPDG.

Quality Assurance

How does the Secretariat quality assure COVID Accelerated Funding programs?
The Secretariat quality assures the program once the application has been submitted by partners, using simplified quality standards that have been tailored for COVID Accelerated Funding programs. The Country Lead can share these standards with the Grant Agent and other partners to guide program development.

If a country submits a joint application for “regular” accelerated funding (envelopes announced in December 2019) and COVID accelerated funding, the Secretariat will also refer to the regular AF standards.

Does the Secretariat quality assure or provide guidance to draft program documents?
There is no mandatory quality assurance of draft program documents. The Secretariat is available to provide feedback to drafts if requested by partners but this is not encouraged.

How will the rush to apply be balanced with taking the time to develop a quality application?
We trust governments and our partners to develop quality programs.

Approval

Who makes a decision on the application?
CEO of GPE Secretariat has been delegated authority to approve all COVID Accelerated Funding applications until 30 September 2020.

How quickly is a decision made?
The Secretariat takes 2-3 weeks to review the COVID application and make a decision from when the country submits an application.

Transfer of funds

How quickly are funds transferred?
When the Grant Agent sends a request to the Secretariat to transfer funds, it is generally processed the following month. However, under exceptional circumstances, and specifically relating to the COVID-19 funding and accelerated funding, transfers can happen faster than the usual 1-month turnaround. Once an application is received, the COVID review team will flag these to David Glass to
facilitate smooth transfer.

Communications

Are there any guidelines on communications related to Accelerated Funding programs?
Yes, there is a protocol for media outreach, which applies to media and general outreach in GPE partner countries related to GPE grants and to any other GPE-supported program. It includes, but is not limited to, press releases, grant signings and/or related ceremonies, press conferences, media interviews, publications, training programs, seminars, symposia, public information materials, and items purchased with GPE funds.