



THE HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS  
ERDF & ESF PROGRAMMES 2007–2013



For Decision

HI/PMC/07-13/029

**IMPLEMENTATION: “FAST-TRACK” & “RAPID RESPONSE” ARRANGEMENTS**  
**Report from the Scottish Government**

**Purpose**

1. To consider arrangements and procedures for dealing with:
  - (i) strategic and time critical projects outwith the approved application timetable; and
  - (ii) projects that are not strategic but where a rapid response is nevertheless required in order to help combat the effects of the economic downturn.

**Recommendation**

2. Members are invited to:
  - (i) consider the proposed “fast-track” procedures to take account of strategic and time critical projects; and
  - (ii) the arrangements for processing and appraisal.

**Background**

3. As a consequence of moving the Programmes on to an annual application cycle, whilst seeking to retain flexibility in the timing of decisions, there may be particular circumstances where project applications require to be pursued outwith the normal cycle. Notwithstanding, the Strategic Delivery Bodies and Community Planning Partnership arrangements allow for such flexibility, however exceptional arrangements or “fast-tracking” needs to be established to deal with projects which respond for example to economic hiatus, large scale redundancy or market exploitation.
4. Projects brought forward for “fast-tracking” therefore require to be both strategic and time critical and deliver a significant impact. “Fast-tracking” will not be an alternative for projects that have failed to meet the normal planned cycle.

**Procedures**

5. Following recent discussions at a meeting, the Programme Review Group highlighted the need for a further arrangement to allow for a “rapid response” which may not always be justified in strategic terms and which may be limited in scale. Applicants however would still be required to demonstrate time criticality.



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6. Any request for “fast-tracking” requires in the first instance that the applicant be registered for the 2007-2013 Programmes in the usual way through the Eurosyst on-line system. Once registered, the applicant must then submit the standard Stage 1 application form to the Intermediate Administration Body (IAB) under Eurosyst. Applicants will be required to make clear in the application (and separately by e-mail to HIPP) that they are requesting a “fast-track” procedure. Failure to do so will result in the application being dealt with as a Stage 1 for the next bidding round.
7. In addition to the usual criteria for projects, the applicant must address and justify in full the following issues:
  - (i) Time Criticality: The applicant must justify fully why the project application was not brought forward in the previous round and why it cannot wait until the next round. If the issue relates to match funding the applicant must demonstrate that the failure of match funding to be in place at the previous deadline was outwith their control. The inability to gain statutory approvals, including full planning permission by the submission deadline is not an acceptable justification.
  - (ii) Strategic Nature of the Project: The applicant must demonstrate that the project is of strategic significance in terms of the overall objectives of the Programme.
  - (iii) Impact: The applicant must clearly demonstrate that the implementation of the project will deliver significant impact in relation to the relevant Priority, in addition to the specific targets, outputs and results to be achieved.
8. The Managing Authority (supported by the IAB) will consider the request for “fast-tracking” based on the Stage 1 submission including full justification. Approval to submit a Stage 2 application will be made at a senior level within the Managing Authority (normally the Advisory Group Convener).

#### **Application and Appraisal: “Fast Tracking”**

9. Following acceptance, a full Stage 2 application is required. This should be completed in full and submitted to the IAB within ten working days. A longer delay will undermine the time criticality of the project. The Stage 2 application will undergo the standard technical checks including eligibility prior to proceeding further. If the application can be appraised by the relevant Advisory Group with other projects, this should be the preferred option. If the timescale precludes the former (i.e. consideration of the Fast tracker along with other projects), a Special Advisory Group will be convened by the Managing Authority to develop appropriate recommendations.
10. The application will be appraised and scored using the normal evaluation criteria for project appraisal. The timescales and procedures for appraisal will be set out by the Managing Authority as required, thereafter a recommendation will be made to the Programme Monitoring Committee (by Written Procedure if outwith the meeting cycle). As with all Structural Fund projects, the final decision rests with Ministers. Nevertheless, agreement to “fast-track” should not be taken to assume approval.
11. The “fast-tracking” procedure should normally take no more than thirty working days from the date of submission of the Stage 2 application form to decision.
12. The appeals procedure involves a written submission to the Convener of the Programme Monitoring Committee.

**Procedures: “Rapid Reaction”**

13. Applicants would require to bring forward ideas for “rapid response” in the form of a Stage 1 Application. Assessment would be undertaken by the Scottish Government assisted by the IAB. Thereafter applicants would be informed whether the “rapid response” might be dealt with by any existing mechanism e.g. Community Planning Partnership/Strategic Delivery Body. Alternatively a Stage 2 application will be invited.
14. For “rapid response” projects requesting grants of up to £500k, delegated authority be given to the Managing Authority and IAB, supported where necessary by individuals from the relevant Advisory Group. For requests of grant in excess of £500k, full appraisal from Advisory Group or sub-group followed by Written Procedure to the Monitoring Committee in the same way as fast track applications (see 10 above).

**Conclusion**

15. These arrangements comprise additional tools in the Structural Funds toolbox. It is not anticipated that either arrangement will support projects that have failed to meet the normal bidding criteria, nor is it anticipated that they will be utilised extensively. Nevertheless they provide valuable cover and additional flexibility.