



BBO Covid-19 Q & A Version 2 (updated 20/04/2020)

We recognise that you, the charities and voluntary sector organisations we fund, have a vital role to play in supporting communities. We are committed to working hard to ensure as much of this important work can continue as possible, and we will be open and responsive to our grantees as you try to adapt to difficult circumstances.

Our priority is to keep money flowing so that you can continue to support people and communities. We've talked about the flexibility we will offer through our statements which you can view [here](#). As we have received a number of questions, on a wide range of issues from concerned BBO projects, we thought it would be useful to share the below Q&A.

We hope that this addresses some of your concerns, however, if you have further questions please do not hesitate to raise these with your Funding Officer and we will try to address them as quickly as possible.

Performance

- 1. Will you be insisting we meet performance targets when it's not going to be possible to meet them?**

We understand the difficulty projects are facing and that progress will be curtailed due to challenges resulting from COVID-19. Whilst targets cannot be changed now, we encourage you to explain changes to progress through the usual route in using progress reports in Annex B. This can include appropriate narrative to explain any issues you have encountered around performance. Whilst we encourage you to think creatively about how to maintain participant engagement during this time, we do appreciate that this is an unprecedented context that may impact on your usual practice.

- 2. What do we need to do regarding recruitment and exit of participants, getting paperwork in order and getting signatures? (Updated 20/04/2020)**

The Managing Authority has now confirmed that from 1st February 2020, in place of wet signatures, participants will be able to provide verification by alternative means such as email.

- 3. Given the current situation, what is the minimum delivery level that you would be willing to accept?**



We do not feel there is a need to set a minimum acceptable performance threshold. We of course understand that grant-holders will have difficulties meeting their targets; these should be explained as set out in question 1 above.

- 4. We currently have participants wanting to volunteer and support those impacted by Coronavirus, is there a way of recognising this volunteering in terms of achievement/performance?**

Whilst this is really valuable in supporting community efforts to cope with the current crisis, that voluntary contribution is not something that is likely to be captured through the ESF 2014-2020 programme. However, volunteering can be recorded in the narrative provided with your claim to demonstrate progress.

Eligibility evidence

- 5. Projects are having difficulties in obtaining and processing eligibility evidence, can participants be supported ahead of receiving full evidence?**

Yes, participants can be supported and alternative means of obtaining evidence should be explored. We would advise projects not to ask participants to email copies of eligibility evidence, as this is not secure. Secure post may also prove problematic at the moment due to issues with safe storage, and people not being in offices to receive.

Secure online portals to allow participants to upload evidence may be a possible option for those participants who are able to do this. We appreciate that engaging participants who are unable to access online services may be challenging for some time - please use the progress report mechanism as a way of noting any challenges you may be having and any attempts you might have made to obtain this information.

Project timescales and closure

- 6. With some projects due to close shortly, can the closure process be extended to accommodate?**

In the first instance all efforts should be made to carry out the closure process remotely. However, we appreciate that this may not be possible if projects have resource issues. In these instances, we will consider requests for project closure timescales to be extended.

- 7. Can the Fund consider extending delivery timelines, due to the impact of Coronavirus on performance?**



We are here to support you where we can, we will of course consider extensions to timescales if necessary and within the timeframes of our agreements with the Managing Authority.

Project delivery

8. Can the Fund provide advice/input as to what projects should be doing under these circumstances, for example remote working?

We would urge all of our grant holders to follow Government guidelines on Covid-19. We appreciate there will be serious difficulties delivering under these circumstances and are therefore willing to consider proposals from grant holders around different ways of delivering their projects.

9. How should projects record phone/skype contacts?

Projects must ensure that detailed notes are made of calls that take place and these are in the participant file. Please confirm with project participants that they are content with your record of your engagement with them. This is required by the Managing Authority to satisfy audit purposes.

Signatures and documents

10. What can we do if we are unable to get wet signatures on participant documentation? (Updated 20/04/2020)

Ideally Annex J's should be signed by participants, however, given the current circumstances we appreciate that this may not be possible. In this instance we would ask that signatures are completed electronically, and the original electronic copy kept. For example, the email that the signature is attached to.

Annex I's or similar used to log remote interaction with an explanation as to why not signed. If possible, held to be signed retrospectively when possible.

The Managing Authority has now confirmed that from 1st February 2020, in place of wet signatures, participants will be able to provide verification by alternative means such as email.

11. When unable to get wet signatures on staff timesheets, can electronic signatures be accepted?

In the current circumstances, signatures can be used in conjunction with an e-mail declaration from the staff member confirming they completed or authorised the timesheet.



Again, we are currently working with the Managing Authority in order to provide grant holders with further clarity.

12. What can be done when we are unable to certify documents where we can't see the originals?

Where documents cannot be certified, good practice would be to have an e-mail from the person assuring the document that it is genuine. We are currently liaising with the Managing Authority in order to provide further clarity on the matter.

Payments

13. Would the Fund still pay in circumstances where key project staff are unable to process and supply us with the required quarterly evidence and would the Fund consider paying against forecasted amounts in such instances?

Payments will not be withheld by the Fund and in turn lead organisations should not withhold advance payments to partners. We will make payments as usual and expect underspends, though the extent of these will vary depending on the changes that grant-holders need to make to delivery models.

14. Can the Fund provide reassurance that they will still make payments even if claim not received as planned?

To ensure cash flow to projects, we will make payments to grant holders at the start of the next quarter based on your forecasted spend. Your Funding Officer will discuss any concerns with you on project forecasts. In turn, we expect lead organisations to pay their partners in advance to maintain cash flow.

15. Are grant holders obliged to make payments if partners fail to deliver in line with expectations, given the unexpected circumstances?

During this difficult period projects should continue to pay their partners in accordance with whatever contract / arrangement they currently have in place. We would encourage lead organisations to follow our process of paying in advance where possible.

16. Can projects receive payment earlier than usual so they can ensure they're covered for salaries etc?



To ensure cash flow to projects, full payments based on project forecasts will be made at the start of the next quarter and we expect lead organisations in turn to pay their partners in advance to maintain cash flow.

Project Change Requests

- 17. Can the Fund comment on the concerns that some projects have about signed contracts for extensions still not being in place?**

We can confirm that extensions to the agreements we have with the Managing Authority have now been signed. Projects can be assured of the validity of their TNCLF Funding Agreements. Additionally, projects have already received written confirmation of extensions via e-mail from their Funding Officer which we hope will provide further reassurance.

Claims

- 18. Can there be flexibility around the claims deadline for 14 April?**

Funding Officers have the discretion to extend claims deadlines. We do not want to put undue pressure on projects and partners when they are likely to be struggling with resource to pull the claims together. Also, if projects cannot get everything into the claim from the quarter, they can defer items to go into the next one instead.

- 19. Can personal expenses such as home printer costs be accepted? (Updated 20/04/2020)**

We expect that project staff may need improved facilities at home to continue supporting participants. The Managing Authority recognises that projects are urgently needing to find alternative methods to ensure they can continue to deliver support, which necessitate buying additional items such as IT equipment. The current ESF Eligibility Rules already allow for the purchase of single items up to £1,000. Projects are reminded that any items purchased are for the sole use of project staff (not for use by participants) and will be required to provide evidence of any additional items purchased.

- 20. Is there contingency for unfinished admin claims due to staff working from home and being unable to gather the evidence?**

Where a project has a good track record of compliance and the admin claim size comes in as planned, we are unlikely to carry out compliance testing. However, in instances where we have had previous compliance concerns, or where the admin claim is significantly larger than expected, we may do a compliance check and it



may take place after the Covid-19 situation has been resolved. Please use the narrative section of the claim to explain any difficulties you have had in obtaining and processing evidence.

Staffing and Sick Pay

21. **Given 1720 has an allowance for leave built into the methodology, can exceptions be made to pay some or all of these staff costs if they are not working?**

At the moment the usual rules will apply, however, the issue is currently being discussed by us and the Managing Authority, and we hope to provide an update in due course.

22. **Can we claim for the relevant sickness period for staff off sick or unable to work as a result of COVID-19, or will this be subject to any limitations?**

At the moment the usual rules will apply, however, the issue is currently being discussed by us and the MA, and we hope to provide an update in due course.

For staff that work 100% or a fixed percentage on BBO, grant holders can claim sick pay in line with organisational policy or backfill, but not both. We have asked the Managing Authority for further clarity regarding 1720 but the current policy is that you cannot claim for hours not worked.

23. **What can staff not working on the project during shutdown or self-isolation claim? Are timesheets required?**

Staff can be paid as per their employers' policy for such circumstances, where timesheets are required, they need to be completed as usual with hours worked.

24. **As staff are working from home, new referrals and related paperwork has either slowed down or stopped, meaning workloads have decreased. Would there be any flexibility to utilise staff time to support other areas of the employing organisation? Would this require a timesheets process?**

Yes, this is possible, but the staff member would need to be moved to the 1720 hourly rate option and keep a timesheet or move onto the fixed percentage split option. In both cases a letter notifying the employee of this would be needed.

Audits and compliance checks

25. **What is happening with A127 and A125 verification and audit activities? (Updated 20/04/2020)**



We have received confirmation from the Government Internal Audit Agency that the current round of A127 visits will be postponed, with one exception which is trialling this remotely. The situation will be monitored, for future audits.

Article 125 visits which have been postponed will be conducted when the restrictions on movement and travel have been lifted. Although, a number of these are planned to take place remotely.

26. What happens if we are unable to gather evidence for compliance checks?

If you are unable to gather or provide evidence for claims compliance testing, then we would urge you to discuss this with your Funding Officer. It is possible that different financial transaction lines can be sampled, or you may need to decide to defer the checks until the current situation is resolved.

Contingency plans

27. Could the Fund provide information on plans for the programme, particularly in light of the number of participants with underlying health conditions?

We would urge all grant holders to follow Government advice regarding Covid-19. The Fund and the Managing Authority will monitor the overall situation of the BBO programme. We do expect that projects will need to adjust delivery models to support their communities and keep participants engaged, though urge for this to be done in line with current Government Covid-19 guidelines. Please discuss any plans with your Funding Officer.

Additional questions and answers 20/04/2020

Participant costs

28. Will costs for event bookings such as participant course costs and room hire be eligible expenditure?

From 1st February 2020, where the activity was cancelled, costs can be considered as eligible expenditure and will need to be evidenced.

However, the following must be considered:

- The expenditure will not be considered eligible if there is an insurance contract in place and the project can claim the cost
- If a credit note has been issued, costs are not eligible
- The project should have exhausted all possibilities to claim the expenditure incurred by other means e.g. travel insurance



- If the project can obtain a partial repayment, only the remaining costs are eligible.

29. Is it possible to purchase phone top up cards to allow participants who have pay as you go mobile phones to access online project support?

It is possible to buy pay as you go top ups as a participant incentive. Please remember though, an individual participant cannot receive incentives totalling over £50 throughout their involvement in a project.

As it would be difficult to show that it had been used for ESF use only, mobile phone top ups are unlikely to be considered eligible participant expenses. However, considering the current circumstances, we are discussing this question with the Managing Authority.

30. Can we buy technology (IT equipment/internet connections/smartphones) for participants to continue to access the programme?

We have raised this question with the Managing Authority, given the current unprecedented situation, and will update this response as soon as we can.

31. Can we expand our delivery and scope of support to deal with participant's immediate needs, for example food or electricity?

Financial support for this is generally beyond the scope of the ESF programme. However, it is acceptable to help participants to continue to take part in a BBO project by supporting them to overcome any barriers they have and to help them to access the means to meet these needs. Any support must be carefully assessed on a case by case basis.

Participant's utility bills are not eligible costs.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Redeployment

32. How will government incentives/allowances impact upon programme claims?

Currently we do not have sufficient information about the furlough scheme to know what the impact is, other than costs for those staff cannot be reclaimed from both the Government and BBO.



33. We have furloughed project staff, can we use the grant to pay for the 20 per cent employer contribution?

No. Where employers are seeking to access support under the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, ESF funds cannot be used to contribute towards salary costs.

34. Could qualified care and medical staff be released from BBO projects to help with the Covid-19 response and still be paid through the BBO project?

Based on current rules, if staff are released to work on something else, they cannot be paid by BBO. We have raised this with the Managing Authority and will let you know if there is any change to this position.

Staff expenses

35. We have opted to pay our staff a £6 weekly 'working from home' allowance to cover their additional household expenses. Can we claim this as a direct cost?

As the requirement to work from home has become substantially more prevalent due to Covid-19 we are currently discussing this question with the Managing Authority. We will provide you with any updates as soon as we can.