



**European Union**

European Structural  
and Investment Funds

# **Reserve Fund - England European** **Regional Development Fund**

## **Communications Strategy**

## Contents

1.	Background.....	3
2.	ERDF Reserve Fund and Communications Strategy Overview.....	3
3.	Aims and objectives .....	4
4.	Key Messages.....	5
5.	Audience and Partnership Working.....	6
7.	Channels and Timing .....	7
8.	Budget and resources.....	8
9.	Evaluation, Indicators and Best Practice from Previous Programmes.....	8
Annex A	ERDF Reserve Fund Communications Activity Plan.....	10

## 1. Background

This is the communication strategy for the Reserve Fund of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the 2014 to 2020 England European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme.

Working in partnership with stakeholders, the ERDF Managing Authorities, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is responsible for the production and implementation of this strategy and separate annual activity plan.

The ERDF Reserve Funds communications strategy sets out communications activities for the fund and the desired impacts and results of these activities.

The ERDF Reserve Fund strategy is complementary to the general England ERDF communications strategy. The activity plan (**Annex A**) identifies the main publicity priorities and measures for relating to the ERDF Reserve Funds.

As ESF will establish a similar fund in parallel a coordinated approach will be taken to ensure the that linkages are made between the ERDF and ESF Reserve where appropriate during delivery of the activity plan.

This Communications Strategy and the Activity Plan will be shared with the Performance and Dispute Resolution national sub-committee and the Growth Programme Board at their August and September meetings respectively. Work will continue to ensure the strategy and annual activity plans remain relevant and up to date during the remainder of the programme.

## 2. ERDF Reserve Fund and Communications Strategy Overview

The ERDF Reserve Funds is being established in England to ensure full and effective use of available funding in the 2014-2020 programme. The core objectives of the Reserve Fund are:

- Invest the full value of the programme to ensure that 2023 performance framework expenditure and N+3 targets are met;
- Manage available funding in line with FOREX rate fluctuations, to ensure that the full value of the programmes is spent whilst mitigating the financial risk of over or under spend that is carried by MHCLG as the department responsible for ERDF in England; and
- maximise local growth in line with delivery of Local Industrial Strategy facilitating the transition to a domestic successor fund

The ERDF Reserve Fund will be launched at the start of 2020. Fund calls are likely to be focused on specific priorities and approaches. Calls will be England-wide by Priority Axis with separate Category of Region funding envelopes within each call. Any additional flexibilities that are available in the event of a no-deal on the basis of a domestic framework will be set out as the call is developed.

The current planning assumption is that the Reserve Fund call will apply to all PAs except PA8 (CLLD). In the event that funding envelopes in other financially smaller PAs are below viable thresholds, these may also not feature in the Reserve Fund call.

The Reserve Fund allocation will have no link to local allocation. The amount ultimately spent in LEP areas will be determined by the quality of project proposals and OP level allocations.

The Reserve Fund will prioritise activities that support fresh approaches and which bridge the gap with the ERDF domestic successor's priorities, such as:

- Applications that are EITHER Pan-LEP area, on the basis of existing pan-regional structures, such as the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine, or other pan-LEP area propositions OR community-level initiatives against criteria that will be developed;
- Clear delivery of the Industrial Strategy and (where relevant) Grand Challenges AND multi-Foundation based;
- Innovation, either in substance of activity or mode of service delivery; and
- Links to domestic growth initiatives.

Prioritisation will occur as a national (or call level) exercise taking account of category of region.

The Reserve Fund will therefore ensure that spending decisions continue to be driven by Operational Programme objectives and targets whilst also ensuring that the remaining funding is deployed flexibly across a range of England-wide objectives set out above, in tune with local growth plans.

Applications which deliver these wider growth objectives and their capacity to deliver local growth priorities will be prioritised if demand for funding exceeds the amount available.

### **3. Aims and objectives**

The Strategy's aims are to:

- raise awareness and understanding of the Reserve Fund, with clear information on the timeline and main objectives internally and externally;
- prepare the market to the establishment of the Reserve Fund and the shift in focus towards England wide calls, more multi-LEP activity and projects aligned with the Industrial Strategy; and
- Support clear understanding about the selection process and the delivery of the Reserve Fund.

The main objectives of the strategy and communication activities to be delivered are to:

- raise awareness of the transition to the Reserve Fund and how it will work towards the delivery of the Industrial Strategy, Local Industrial Strategies and contribute to local growth;
- provide accurate and clear information to publicise to potential applicants the funding opportunities provided by the Reserve Fund and give details regarding accessing and obtaining funding ensuring transparency at all levels;
- ensure MHCLG staff are fully informed on the Reserve Fund and the impact that this will have on the way we do our business;
- keep staff informed and insight of the messages being communicated to partners;
- provide a clear description and reassurance to all partners on the transition to the Reserve Fund as support to broader local growth; and
- establish mechanism(s) to facilitate two-way communication with partners, answering queries, gathering feedback, and instigating changes to our approach as necessary.

#### **4. Key Messages**

Key messages to be used when publicising the Reserve Fund will be as simplified as possible so that the process, timeline and opportunities are clearly understood – they will include, but will not be restricted to;

Key Messages to all Partners:

- The **Reserve Fund** objectives are to realise the full value of the programme, manage the financial risk associated with FOREX fluctuations and maximise local growth in line with delivery of Local Industrial Strategy facilitating the transition to a domestic successor fund;
- The Reserve Fund will operate in a deal or no-deal and support smart, sustainable and inclusive local growth in line with the Industrial Strategy;
- The Reserve Funds will still be subject to the objectives, targets and spending plans of the Operational Programme, including funding envelopes at Category of Region by Priority Axis;
- The Reserve Fund will be established by the end of 2019 and will prioritise multi-LEP projects and innovation, either in substance of activity or mode of service delivery;
- England-wide calls will be published early 2020 and will be focussed on specific priorities and approaches; and
- There will be no link to residual local allocations. The amount ultimately spend in LEP areas will be determined by the quality of project proposals and OP level allocations.

Key messages for staff:

- The Reserve Fund will be based on existing business process and use the existing business process material as far as possible;
- Lessons learned from previous England-wide call activities will be used to inform the final approach;
- Applications will be assessed using the existing project selection criteria; however,
- A national moderation exercise will be undertaken after the outline application stage to prioritise projects where demand for funding exceeds the amount available. This will take account of categories of region.

These key messages will be developed further as and when more detail is agreed regarding how the Reserve Fund will operate.

## 5. Audience and Partnership Working

The messages will be targeted to the appropriate audience and appropriate media will be used to reach and engage each audience. The target audience(s) for each measure will comprise one or more of the following groups:

Category	Audiences
European	European Commission; other EU institutions
England	Programme Monitoring Committee (including EC rep); sub committees / group (including EC rep); other government departments; applicants providers and professionals involved in employment government policy makers; opinion formers such as LGA and LEP networks; <u>GLA; MCAs and CAs.</u>
Local	General public; project beneficiaries; potential applicants; Local Enterprise Partnership area sub-committee members; BEIS local teams; local authorities; social media; trade and industry organisations; businesses; research institutions; voluntary and community organisations (including LEADER Local Action Groups); other local partners
Internal	European Programmes Directorate; CLGU.

A collaborative approach will be taken whereby the appropriate audience(s) will be targeted, many of which in turn will further disseminate the message to help ensure the right audiences are communicated with. MHCLG will promote England-wide programme opportunities whilst also supporting LEPs and local partners in delivering more local communications as required. LEPs and local partners will in-turn provide relevant local input and engage with MHCLG as relevant, ensuring a joined-up approach to communications. Where appropriate MHCLG will also work with DWP to coordinate and convey coherent messages around the establishment of ESF and ERDF Reserve Funds. CLGU communications team will also be approached to further disseminate the message, increase level of awareness and broaden the audience.

The ERDF Policy team will lead on coordinating the Reserve Fund communications drawing from the expertise of the ERDF programme communication leads. This will lead to activities, such as those carried out through social media and direct email, providing consistent messaging, increasing levels of understanding among our target audiences and increasing the impact of our communications.

## 7. Channels and Timing

A number of different communication approaches will be used to publicise the transition to the Reserve Fund. The approach will depend on the message being communicated and the target audience to be reached.

Communication activities will be issued in three phases:

- a first phase of soft communications to raise awareness internally and then externally;
- a second phase of detailed communications to clarify the Reserve Fund priorities and as required, business process; and
- a third phase to publicise the calls.

These activities will be developed proactively to ensure visibility and transparency of the funding streams at local and national level. Where appropriate these will be implemented in coordination with DWP to ensure coherent communications around the simultaneous establishment of the ERDF and ESF Reserve Funds.

Details of the activities to be delivered and channels to be used for the ERDF Reserve Funds can be viewed in the 2019 Reserve Fund Communications Activity Plan (**Annex A**).

## **8. Budget and Resources**

The communications strategy and activity plan will be developed and delivered through existing resources from within MHCLG, including existing officials from the ERDF Policy Team, the Growth Delivery Teams and the Centre of Excellence will take responsibility for the implementation of the communications strategy and activity plan.

These resources will ensure that partners and project beneficiaries understand clearly the Reserve Fund process, timeline and the available opportunities and promote this fund in line with the contents of the communications strategy and activity plan.

Additionally, support from other departmental communications team (e.g. CLGU), the press offices and digital communications will be called upon to support the delivery of this strategy and the annual activity plans. Support for various communications activities will also be provided by locally based Managing Authority staff.

## **9. Evaluation**



Best practice, lessons learnt and existing evaluation activities from the delivery of the current European funding programmes will be used to inform the evaluation activities and help select and plan out the most effective tools and channels for use.

As such the evaluation activities will include:

- a review of the communication strategy and activity plan and its effectiveness on an ongoing basis;
- an annual survey (as part of the existing internal and external annual surveys) which will be presented and carried out through established communication channels seeking quantitative information on the effectiveness of activities; and
- activity based evaluation and feedback mechanisms, such as data on GOV.UK website use, including hits and news coverage as well as Google analytics.

Further details on the specific evaluation activities for each measure are detailed in the separate activity plan in **Annex A**.

## Annex A

### 2014 to 2020 England European Regional Development Fund - ERDF Reserve Fund Communications Activity Plan

This ERDF communications activity plan sets out the planned communication activities for the Reserve Fund. The plan uses a number of different established communication channels already used for the 2014 – 2020 ERDF Programme. The activities are split into 3 phases for delivery. The plan is a working document and will be reviewed regularly and updated as appropriate. A summary follows with the full details are provided below.

Communications Activity	Timing	Audience
<b>PRE-PHASES SET UP</b>		
Prepare RF comms strategy & plan. Set up dedicated to RF email address	Mid July 2019 (10/7 completed)	External
<b>PHASE 1 – SOFT COMMUNICATIONS – AWARENESS RAISING</b>		
Face to face meeting with CLGU	Mid July 2019	Internal
Julia Sweeney's Directorate Update – high level message to staff	26 July 2019 (26/7 completed)	Internal
All staff telekit – general update and warm up	1 August 2019 (1/8 Completed)	Internal
Hub – new page created and live to house lines and Q&A and other documents	16 August 2019 (16/8 Completed)	Internal
ESIF Programme bulletin – warm up article	End August 2019 (23/8 Completed)	External
ERDF Practitioner bulletin – warm up article	End August 2019 (22/8 Completed)	External
<b>PHASE 2 – DETAILED COMMUNICATIONS</b>		
Groups Meeting Papers / Correspondence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PDR NSC</li> <li>NLM</li> <li>GPB</li> <li>EC</li> </ul>	28 August 19 (PDR NSC/ EC) 4 Sept 19 (NLM) 19 Sept 19 (GPB/ EC) 14 Nov 19 (PDR NSC) TBC, Dec 19 (GPB)	External & Internal
Spotlight edition	10 September 2019 (4/9 Completed)	Internal
Telekit with LEP RMs – detail and principles	17 September 2019	Internal
All staff telekit – share the details and next steps	25 September 2019	Internal
Lines and Q&A for staff – supporting material post telekit including defensive media lines	27 September 2019	Internal
Performance wall – feature slide	30 September 2019	Internal
Policy attend team meetings – explain detail	During September 2019 (as per meetings arranged)	Internal
Telekit with LEP RMs – call development	Early October 2019	Internal
GOV.UK – Investment Framework and supporting mini guidance on Reserve Fund	TBC, October 2019	External
Twitter – promotion of GOV.UK content and bulletin articles	TBC October 2019	External
ESIF Programme bulletin – detailed article	End October 2019	External

ERDF Practitioner bulletin – detailed article	End October 2019	External
ESIF sub-committee comms – letter (Ministerial)	<b>Xx</b> October 2019	External
<b>PHASE 3 – LAUNCH OF CALLS AND PROMOTION</b>		
GOV.UK – calls published	January 2020	External
ESIF Programme bulletin – promotion of calls	January 2020	External
ERDF Practitioner bulletin – promotion of calls	January 2020	External
Twitter (national and local) – promotion of calls	January 2020	External
Julia’s Update – article to share calls published	January 2020	Internal
Local roadshows (RF + local growth developments TBC) – GDT staff with local partners	January 2020	External