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Guidelines for Application

Working Document

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1. Background Information

Within the 28 EU Member States and its neighbours in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) there are some 40 land borders. This means 448 NUTS-3 territories located alongside at least one national boundary. Around 150 million Europeans live in these regions, almost one third of EU population.

In the early 1990s, with the introduction of the *Single Market*, the *Interreg*¹ initiative was established to enable border regions to cooperate more closely with the objective of exploiting their common potential in order to alleviate the possible losses linked to the disappearance of certain border-related jobs. This initiative has now become a fully-fledged objective under the Union's **Cohesion Policy**. Thousands of projects have received financial support since 1990 to better exploit border regions' potential and to overcome existing difficulties such as reduced accessibility, lack of cross-border public services, less incentives for SMEs, etc.

Despite these efforts, border stakeholders voice their concern at the existence of persisting challenges—notably of a legal and/or administrative nature—faced by border citizens and businesses when interacting across the border. These have direct and indirect impacts on their daily life: certain activities are still more complicated to perform across an internal EU border than they are inside a Member State. For instance, it is still difficult to take up a job on the other side of the border or to get treated in a hospital there even if there is very close proximity.

Taken together, these legal and administrative obstacles are a clear brake to the development of the endogenous growth potential of border regions. A recent study has shown that border regions could become on average 2% richer if 1/5 of legal and administrative obstacles were removed². Thousands of jobs could also be created.

Taking action to promote the prosperity and quality of life in cross-border regions, which are a sort of 'minilabs of European integration', has become a political imperative.

So far, work undertaken by the Commission services has highlighted a number of legal and administrative obstacles along many EU internal borders. The European Commission's *Cross-Border Review*³, launched during the 25th Anniversary of Interreg, has unveiled evidence to demonstrate that significant obstacles negatively affect life in border regions. Legal and/or administrative difficulties affect many aspects of life in border regions such as access to employment, access to healthcare, access to education and training, use of different technical

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

² Politecnico di Milano (2017) "Quantification of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions". <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/evidence-and-data/quantification-effects-legal-and-administrative-border-obstacles-land-border>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/review/

standards, non-recognition of qualifications, lack of local cross-border public transport. Even in sectors where there is a comprehensive European legal framework or where coordination mechanisms exist at European level, obstacles appear which can be clearly linked to the presence of a national border.

On the other hand, there are in Europe numerous examples of institutional cooperation across borders that have made cross-border activities simpler, less costly and altogether more attractive. Cooperation associations such as the *Benelux Union* or the *Nordic Council of Ministers* aim at reducing the negative border effects between their members. At regional level, there are also examples such as the *Upper Rhine Conference*, and many euroregions, working communities, eurodistricts and EGTCs which have dotted European borders with more or less strong platforms to promote mutual knowledge and cooperation. However, the picture is rather patchy and is far from covering the entire EU territory.

The EU needs to build upon these good practices from different border regions in order to address legal and administrative barriers more effectively and more comprehensively. Through the Communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in European Border Regions* (COM(2017)534 of 20 September 2017)⁴, the European Commission commits to promoting deeper cooperation and new mechanisms to remove obstacles or prevent their emergence. A **Border Focal Point** has been established in the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) to coordinate the implementation of the proposed action plan and to provide Member States and other players with support to address border issues. An **online professional network**⁵ to present and discuss legal and administrative obstacles and possible solutions has been created and it is operational since 16 January 2018. The initiative **b-solutions** with its two calls, the first one addressing pilot projects opened in 2018 and the present one for advice cases, is yet another specific action proposed in the Communication and now put into practice.

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2017/boosting-growth-and-cohesion-in-eu-border-regions

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/border-regions>

2. The Online Application Form Step by Step

The link to the online Application Form is: <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/apply>

Please note that all fields with “*” are compulsory.

The application process is 100% paperless through the use of the *b-solutions* website (<https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/>).

The application consists of an online Application Form. Annexes can also be uploaded electronically if additional information is relevant to contextualise the application.

All applicants must fill in the Application Form in English.

The final deadline for the submission of the Application Form and Confirmation sheet is 12/04/2019 18h00 CET.

We will now guide you step by step through the online Application Form.

2.1 Introduce Yourself and Your Partners

— TITLE OF THE PROPOSED ADVICE CASE

Please try to find a catchy, pertinent and “easy-to-read” title. There is no need to come up with an acronym, unless you wish so.

— APPLICANT

The applicant is the organisation taking care of the application process and, in case of a partnership, is the leader of the project partnership. If the project is approved, the applicant will also be the contact point for AEBR.

Please note that only public bodies with mandate at the national, regional or local level or cross-border entities with legal personality (EGTCs, Euroregions and similar CB structures, also if ruled by private law) can submit an Application Form in the framework of the *b-solutions* Call for Proposals.

Only if you are based in an EU or EFTA country AND you share EU internal land border(s) – including also EFTA countries - you can apply. Moreover, as written in the Call for Proposals (page 10), “*Eligible public bodies (national, regional, local) should have a national boundary limiting their territory (...). The concept of territory is not limited to the territory in which one entity is located. It covers the territory for which a given institution or public body has a mandate to intervene on.*” “Mandate” is indeed the legal competence to intervene in certain areas and territories.

Here you - as applicant - need to tick the option that corresponds to your status. For example, if you are a regional government then you should tick "Public Body"; if you are an EGTC then you should tick "EGTC"; etc.

In case of cross-border entities, an extra field will appear – "Members of the cross-border structure". Here you are asked to "***clarify the composition of your EGTC, Euroregion, Eurodistrict or Eurocity by clearly listing the full name of the (public and/or private) organisations/bodies/institutions belonging to your cross-border entity.***" This field has been added to gather information about the organisations/bodies/institutions that compose your cross-border structure and that will also be involved in your *b-solutions* advice case.

— **NAME OF THE APPLICANT**

Simply write the full name of your organisation as "applicant".

— **ADDRESS OF THE APPLICANT**

Simply write the full address of your organisation as "applicant".

— **CONTACT PERSON**

Simply write the title (Ms/Mr), the first name and last name of the lead applicant's contact person. The contact person is the main contact point between the applicant organisation and the AEBR. The following fields ("**EMAIL**" and "**PHONE NUMBER**") do not need a specific explanation.

— **NUMBER OF CO-APPLICANTS**

You may involve co-applicant(s) in the application.

There is no maximum limit to the number of co-applicants, though feasibility of the proposals should be taken into account when defining the consortia. It is important that each co-applicant has a relevant role within the project partnership and its presence is pertinent for overcoming the cross-border obstacle identified.

In this field, you simply need to indicate the total number of your co-applicants (e.g. if you only have one co-applicant, click on "1"; if you have 2 co-applicants, click on "2"; etc.). If you submit the application alone, please select "0".

— **NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE CO-APPLICANT**

- According to the number of co-applicants you have indicated in the previous field, you will be asked to insert the full name and address (street, city, postal code, country) of each of your co-applicants.

2.2 Your Advice Case

— TOPIC OF THE ADVICE CASE

As written in the Call for Proposals (page 7), the applicants *“can submit advice case proposals addressing the following topics: (1) employment, (2) health, (3) transport, (4) multi-lingualism, (5) institutional cooperation, (6) information services, (7) eGovernment and (8) evidence and data”*. Each projects (advice cases) will have the objective of exploring one specific problem in one specific border under one of these topics.

If an obstacle touches on more than one thematic area, please select the one which is the most relevant.

Moreover, as stated in the Call for Proposals (page 10), *“any applicant or partner can be involved in only one advice case proposal within the same thematic area in the framework of the present Call for Proposals”*, meaning that the same organisation (applicant or co-applicant) can apply more than once as long as the topic is different, e.g. you can submit an application with consortium X under topic “transport” and an application with the consortium Z under topic “health”. Moreover, the same consortium can apply for another case on a different topic, if its members are not taking already part with a different partnership on that same topic.

In this field, you simply need to choose one single topic among the following ones:

1. Employment
2. Health (including emergency services)
3. (Public) transport of passengers
4. Multi-lingualism
5. Institutional Cooperation
6. Information services
7. eGovernment
8. Evidence and Data

A detailed explanation of each of the topics can be found in the Call for Proposals (pages 7 to 9).

— DESCRIPTION OF THE OBSTACLE

Here you should explain what obstacle of an administrative and/or legal nature you have encountered. Here you can add more information on the obstacle if you have any (previous studies, documentations, general data and others).

— **POTENTIAL INCREASE IN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION**

Here you should outline the consequences you expect to see in cross-border cooperation if the obstacle you present with this application were solved.

— **APPLICANT'S OR PARTNER'S MANDATE TO DEVISE SOLUTIONS**

Here you must provide information on the authority you or your partner(s) have to act on the territory to implement potential solutions to the obstacle identified or to propose policies. The mandate can derive from the legal constitution of the applicant (or partner) or from its statutes.

— **REPLICABILITY**

Here you need to explain how the case you present here could serve as an example for other similar instances and, as such, the solution could be replicable for a similar case on another border.

— **BORDER**

Please, clearly define here which border you are addressing. You can also provide additional general information on geographical data on the region.

— **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

You can submit additional documents in support of your application if you wish to do so. This could be a map of the territory, previous data or studies documenting the obstacle, as well as possible solutions already identified or other information considered relevant to contextualise the application. As written in the Call for Proposals (page 10), *"These could be a map presenting the area of intervention, a graph, an infographic, etc."*

— **Background Information - File Upload**

Here is where you can attach additional documents. Please notice that you can upload a maximum of 3 files for 5 MB in total. Documents should not be longer than 10 pages each.

You can upload the files in the following formats: .doc .docx .pdf .jpeg .jpg .xls .xlsx .ppt .pptx .zip

— **AGREEMENT**

Here there are three boxes to tick.

The first one is a compulsory step of the Application Form where you declare that your proposed advice case will not be simultaneously financed by other sources from the EU budget.

— **DECLARATION OF VALIDITY**

This is a compulsory step of the Application Form where you declare that all the information you have included in this application form is real, valid and true.

— **PERMISSION TO USE THE INFORMATION PROVIDED**

By ticking this box you give permission to AEBR and the European Commission to utilise the information you have included in the application form even if the case is not selected as an “advise case” for purposes linked to research.

3. How to Get Assistance

AEBR staff is ready to assist applicants with any technical and procedural questions they may have during the Call for Proposals. Contact details can be found on the *b-solutions* website (<https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/>).

A set of FAQs is available in the present document and online⁶. The present document is being constantly updated with practical questions posed by applicants through the *b-solutions* functional mailbox (b-solutions@aebr.eu).

4. Key Dates

- Call opening: 30 January 2019
- Call closing: 12 April 2019
- Selection of successful proposals: second half of April 2019
- Implementation period: May-August 2019 (up to 4 months)

⁶ <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/info-kit>