



Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG)
 Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)
 Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
 Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
 Comunità di lavoro delle regioni europee di confine (AGEG)
 Europæiske grænseregioners Arbejdsfællesskab (AGEG)
 Werkgemeinschaft van Europese grensgebieden (WVEG)
 Associação das Regiões Fronteiriças Europeias (ARFE)
 Συνέδαμος Ευρωπαϊκών Συνοριακών Περιφερειών (ΣΕΣΠ)
 Stowarzyszenie Europejskich Regionów Granicznych (SERG)
 Ассоциация Европейских Приграничных Регионов (АЕПР)



Main Office
 Projects' Office
 AEBR Antenna in the EU
 AEBR Info Centre in the Balkans
 AEBR Info Centre in Ukraine

AGEG c/o EUREGIO
 AEBR c/o WeWork
 Office of Extremadura in Brussels
 Institute for International and CBC
 Univ. Simon Kuznets (KhNUE)

Enscheder Str. 362
 Neue Schönhauserstraße 3-5
 Av. De Cortenbergh 87-89
 Terazije 14/14
 pr. Lenina, 9a

D-48599 Gronau (Germany)
 D-10178 Berlin (Germany)
 B-1000 Brussels (Belgium)
 11000 Belgrade (Serbia)
 61001 Kharkiv (Ukraine)

Fourth Call for Proposals under *b-solutions*



Managed by the Association of European Border Regions by an Action Grant (CCI2017CE160AT082, CCI 2020CE160AT014) agreed with the Directorate General of Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission.

Financed by the European Union.

Table of contents

	<i>page</i>
1. <i>Introduction</i>	3
1.1 <i>Background information</i>	3
1.2 <i>b-solutions</i>	4
1.3 <i>Lessons learned from the previous calls</i>	6
2. <i>The present call for proposals</i>	8
2.1 <i>Target of the fourth call for proposals</i>	8
2.2 <i>Award for the selected cases</i>	9
2.3 <i>Thematic coverage for this call for proposals</i>	10
3. <i>Eligible entities – Who can apply?</i>	14
4. <i>Online application form – How to apply?</i>	15
5. <i>Selection process</i>	15
5.1 <i>Eligibility check (eligibility and selection criteria)</i>	16
5.2 <i>Selection of the proposals to receive technical support</i>	16
6. <i>How to get assistance</i>	17
7. <i>Key dates</i>	17

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

Within the 27 EU Member States, its neighbours in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Kingdom, some 40 land borders are eligible under b-solutions. 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 to exploit 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, fewer 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. In 2020, in the aftermath of measures taken by national states closing their borders, it appeared even more clearly how vulnerable border regions are, still, in the European Union.

Taken together, these legal and administrative obstacles put clearly the brakes on developing the endogenous growth potential of border regions. A 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, 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

¹ http://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 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/review/

of different technical 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 directly linked with 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 to reduce 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 *b-solutions* initiative with its four calls for proposals addressing practitioners of cross-border cooperation in European border regions, is yet another specific action proposed in the Communication and now put into practice.

1.2 b-solutions

b-solutions is a 4-year **pilot initiative** promoted by the European Commission's DG REGIO as one of the actions proposed in the referred Communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions*. The Association of European Border Regions⁶ (AEBR) manages the initiative since December 2017.

The general objective of *b-solutions* is to identify and promote sustainable methods of resolving border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature along EU internal land borders.

The initiative consists of four calls for proposals involving practitioners and policymakers to identify obstacles to cross-border cooperation and possible solutions. The first call was launched in 2018 and addressed cross-border

⁴ http://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>

⁶ <http://www.aebr.eu/en/>

partnerships and structures from internal EU and EFTA land borders. The objective was to receive proposals for pilot actions aimed to show how legal and administrative border challenges can be overcome.

Instead, the second and the third calls, opened in 2019 and 2020, had the aim to identify and document further legal or administrative obstacles hindering cooperation and offer legal advice to analyse the normative and administrative framework of these obstacles and outline possible solutions.

A fourth and final call opens on 15 January 2021 and will close on 16 March 2021. Selected applicants will receive support to tackle the difficulties which hinder cooperation with the neighbouring country(ies) in the form of legal consultation.

A crucial aspect of the *b-solutions* initiative is the capitalisation of the information collected which is relevant not just to EU and regional policymakers but also to all cross-border actors around the EU. In this light, AEBR has regularly informed about the outcomes of the pilot actions developed in the framework of the first call for proposals and about the progress made by the advice cases selected with the second and the third call. Updates and reports can be found on the European Commission's online platform "[Border Focal Point Network](#)".

To conclude the implementation of the pilot actions and advice cases selected within the first two calls for proposals, AEBR and DG REGIO have elaborated a consolidated report (**compendium**) illustrating main findings and proposals. The compendium with the results of the first two calls for proposals launched, respectively, in 2018 and 2019, has been published in Summer 2020 and is available on *b-solutions'* [website](#) for consultation.

Specific attention is dedicated to the lessons learned and the policy recommendations for decision-makers resulting from the analysis of the cases implemented during the first phase of the initiative.

Overall, *b-solutions* aims to provide:

- solutions addressing specific legal and administrative obstacles tested and based on case studies, which should be potentially replicable, made available and promoted to other border regions across Europe;
- innovative proposals that can inform further development and implementation of alternative approaches by national/regional authorities and/or via EU instruments (particularly, but not exclusively, Interreg);
- evidence of increased exchange of information and mutual engagement between the different levels of administration in border areas, and of joint initiatives involving multi-level governance across borders;
- increased understanding of specific obstacles, and potential 'solutions', amongst key stakeholders at local/regional/national/EU level.

With its outcomes, *b-solutions* contributes to overcoming the specific, identified obstacle. Yet, it has a broader impact by inspiring similar solutions to be

implemented in other border regions. In addition, part of the impact will be a substantial increase in awareness of, and knowledge about, various legal/administrative obstacles to cross-border interactions.

To continue promoting raising awareness and mutual learning, to conclude the analyses collected within the third and the fourth calls for proposals, a second compendium of the reports will be produced by AEBR in cooperation with the European Commission. Similarly to the first compendium, the second one will include information taken from the identification, implementation and delivery of these additional cases, as well as on proposed solutions. The potential applicability or not of the European Cross-Border Mechanism⁷ will also be taken into consideration when possible.

Furthermore, other outputs will be a set of 3-4 thematic oriented publications on specific fields of interests for policymaking. Another publication will address a general, non-specialised audience to raise awareness of cross-border obstacles and solutions to overcome them.

1.3 Lessons learned from the previous calls

The analysis of the cases implemented during the first phase of the initiative resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of the hurdles that currently hinder the fulfilment of European integration and of the potential tools at disposal to overcome them.

This enabled to draw relevant lessons learned:

- There are still **many legal and administrative obstacles** to cross-border cooperation within the EU, and they relate to almost all aspects of community life;
- Obstacles of a legal and administrative nature are usually accompanied also by other causes, such as the **lack of coordination** among stakeholders across borders and a higher **complexity** due to the number of actors to be involved to devise solutions;
- Different border regions face **common issues**, but the development of **solutions must be customised** to the specific legal, administrative, institutional, cultural, geographical and technical conditions of each territory;
- Overcoming the barriers is a **lengthy and complex process**, especially when the signing of a bilateral agreement or a change of the current legal provisions are required. These imply, indeed, the involvement of a wide network and multiple competent authorities at various levels and on both sides of the border;

⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A373%3AFIN>

- Overcoming legal and administrative obstacles often requires to **amend the legal and administrative frameworks** within which cross-border cooperation projects are operating;
- Using **complementary types of responses**, such as the development of new approaches or the cross-border harmonisation of already existing methodologies, can be also very effective in mitigating the negative impacts caused by the legal and administrative obstacles;
- The strong **political commitment** of local stakeholders is an absolute prerequisite to implement sustainable, long-term, solutions. Essential is also the commitment of regional and national administrations;
- The involvement of politicians and policymakers at **different levels** (European, national, regional and local) is crucial to implement stable solutions. The role of national authorities is particularly important when changes to the legal and administrative framework are required;
- Performing **thorough researches** and **evidence-based analyses** is essential to understand what the real obstacles preventing or hindering cooperation are. Only this can ensure the outline the most appropriate form of solutions;
- Having **access to detailed and accurate cross-border information** is fundamental to allow exchange and coordination among stakeholders and competent authorities to overcome the obstacles;
- The **lack of capacity** of stakeholders to fully assess the barriers, particularly where these are based on complex legal/administrative issues is a major blocking factor on progress, as it prevents to clearly define possible solutions;
- Certain **instruments and tools** put forward by the **European Union** have proven very useful for local authorities in resolving impediments to cross-border cooperation and in overcoming obstacles (i.e Interreg);
- The proposed **European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM)** is considered as a particularly notable tool to be applied in those cases where the proposed solution would require amendments to the currently applicable legal or administrative framework on one side of the border.

Based on these lessons, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) identified some indicative recommendations for policy measures addressing policymakers involved in cross-border cooperation at all levels.

These are available for consultation at the dedicated section of the compendium on *b-solutions'* [website](#).

In consideration of the main aim of the initiative, the lessons learned are meant to raise the overall awareness of cross-border practitioners and might serve to inspire organisations willing to participate in the next calls for proposals.

2. THE PRESENT CALL FOR PROPOSALS

AEBR, in cooperation with DG REGIO, opens the fourth call for proposals on 15 January 2021 under the pilot initiative *b-solutions*. The objective of this fourth call is to identify further cases where a legal or administrative obstacle hinders cooperation amongst border regions. The call will stay open until 16 March 2021.

The fourth call for proposals will open in a political and administrative context marked by the pandemic of Covid-19 and by containment and de-escalation measures taken by Member States to control the spread of the virus. Although AEBR and DG REGIO acknowledge that the closure of national borders in Spring 2020 that has ensued as containment measure by some Member States has created new obstacles to cross-border cooperation, the present call for proposals aims to collect cases of **structural obstacles** of a legal or administrative nature that exist beyond the temporary measures that have been put in place. In this sense, obstacles subject of the present call for proposals should target structural deficiencies rather than those arising due to temporary restrictions.

The present document sets out the requirements and the process to follow in order to submit a proposal. As such, it should be read together with the *b-solutions* "Guidelines" published on *b-solutions'* website⁸.

2.1 Target of the fourth call for proposals

The main purpose of the fourth call for proposals is to address **cases** where interactions across the border are more difficult because of the following structural reasons:

- **lack of coherence** of legislation⁹ applicable on the different sides of the border;
- **inconsistencies** and overlapping of the different **administrative procedures**;
- applicable European, national or regional legislation does not take into account the **specificity of cross-border interactions**.

These advice cases are neither meant to solve problems associated with a lack of infrastructures nor to be the source for significant investments in the border regions. Similarly, advice cases will address structural obstacles, not transitory situations arisen in the context of measures taken to contain the pandemic of Covid-19.

Beyond describing the documented obstacles, applicants should outline the potential increase in **cross-border cooperation** if the obstacle is solved; the

⁸ <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/call-for-proposals>

⁹ Legislation in here seen in a broader context, including all regulatory framework, regardless of its source or level, applicable in the field addressed by a specific project on that territory.

applicant's or the partners' **mandate** to devise solutions and the **replicability** potential of the action.

Proposed advice cases should bring tangible, durable, effective and, possibly, replicable solutions to address cross-border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature along EU internal land borders.

The advice cases applied for in the current call must focus on one of the thematic areas addressed in the Communication and accompanying *Staff Working Document*¹⁰, namely (1) **employment**, (2) **health**, (3) **transport**, (4) **multilingualism**, (5) **institutional cooperation**, (6) **information services**, (7) **eGovernment** and (8) **evidence and data**. Each case will have the objective of exploring one specific obstacle encountered in one specific land border between EU Member States, EFTA countries and the United Kingdom.

2.2 Award for the selected cases

Within the present call, successful applicants will be assigned the **support** of legal experts with knowledge of cross-border instances who will cooperate with the participants in *b-solutions*.

Experts to consult the cases are selected by AEBR in cooperation with the EU Commission's DG REGIO. Experts will be matched with each case based on their expertise, their language skills and understanding of specific territories¹¹.

The expert's consultation aims to grant support in **defining the obstacle** clearly and systematically, as well as in **identifying a possible solution** to it and outline the legal framework from which to proceed. The legal expert's analysis attributed to successful applicants would lead, in each advice case, to a case report that will include:

- i) a clear description of the legal obstacle,
- ii) a clear indication of the legal dispositions causing the obstacle and
- iii) a roadmap towards a possible solution
- iv) with an indication of the entities to be involved in the possible solution; and
- v) an indication of the potential role of the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM)¹² to solve the obstacle.

The period to receive the consultation will last for three months, spanning from April to June 2021. To guarantee an effective adaptation to the current situation in light of the pandemic of COVID-19, which might otherwise affect the successful

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/boosting_growth/swd_boosting_border_en.pdf

¹¹ Experts can apply via a call for "[expressions of interest](#)" open from 17 June 2020 until 30 June 2021. They are selected based on their proven legal background and knowledge of cross-border matters

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/boosting-eu-border-regions/european-cross-border-mechanism-practical-explanation>

implementation of the initiative, experts are now given the possibility to decide whether to carry out the analysis online.

At the end of the consultation period, experts will produce a report according to the indications listed above.

2.3 Thematic coverage for this call for proposals

The European Commission has decided to closely align the topics of this pilot initiative to those defined in the framework of the Communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in European Border Regions*. For the present call for proposals, applicants can submit advice case proposals addressing the following topics: (1) employment, (2) transport, (3) health, (4) institutional cooperation, (5) multilingualism, (6) eGovernment, (7) information services and (8) evidence and data.

Public bodies applying in the framework of the present *b-solutions* call for proposals are requested to select only one of the topics proposed.

The following sections provide detailed descriptions for the thematic areas of the present call for proposals.

Employment

Labour mobility is a very important area directly affected by border obstacles. This particularly concerns cross-border workers who live on one side of the border and travel to work on the other side of the border on a daily or weekly basis (cross-border commuters). A number of tools and coordination mechanisms exist at European level to facilitate cross-border work such as the *European Network of Employment Services* (EURES), rules for the coordination of social security systems, the *European Qualifications Framework* which supports understanding and comparison of qualifications, the *Europass* Framework which enables individuals to communicate their skills and qualifications, the European classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations and the *European Professional Card*, an EU-wide digital procedure for the recognition of professional qualifications.

Obstacles related to employment can refer to a lack of cooperation between public employment services in border regions; difficulties in accessing general information and vacancies in the cross-border labour market; the recognition of diplomas and skills; taxation, social security and pension rights issues.

Public Transport of passengers

Transport is a key enabler of exchanges between regions across national borders. Especially public transport services not only help integration processes but also enhance the sustainability of cross-border connectivity. Lacking, insufficient or low-quality public transport services are still a reality for many citizens in border

regions. This concerns three levels: 1) infrastructure connections, 2) service provision, and 3) the quality of services.

Applicants can include obstacles in providing public transport services and related aspects, for instance, the coordination of transport planning, transport pricing, integration of timetables, easy and multilingual access to information, joint smart ticketing across the specific border, etc.

Health, including emergency services

Encouraging cooperation between the Member States to improve the complementarity of their health services in border regions is a priority for the EU. This means focusing not only on pure health care services but also on other health-related infrastructures and procedures. For instance, different structures and principles exist for the reimbursement of cross-border healthcare resulting in e.g. different and complex procedures for prior authorisation of health services and their reimbursement; the administrative burden for patients dealing with cross-border specialised consultations; incompatibilities in the use of technology and the sharing of patient data; and lack of unified accessible information, which also includes a lack of information in the patients' language. In addition, limited accessibility from both sides of the border often hampers the full use of the health care facility. Emergency and rescue services are also sometimes impeded in carrying out cross-border interventions.

There are some excellent examples of cooperation in this field but, as explained above, there are still many issues to solve in order to achieve consolidated and fruitful cooperation which deliver better healthcare for border citizens, and more efficient use of health facilities and other resources, in particular emergency services.

Under this topic, applicants can outline obstacles related to access to health services in cross-border areas; access to facilities providing health service; access to emergency services, and other cases.

Institutional Cooperation

The EU Member States have different administrative cultures and systems. This diversity can be a constraint when different systems meet. Most administrative procedures tend to be of a national nature and cross-border procedures are less widespread. However, border stakeholders may well require non-domestic procedures on a regular basis. The lack of common approach or understanding and the limited existence of mutually recognised documents can lead to lengthy and costly procedures, even for key life events.

Actions under this topic can touch upon various fields of activity, for instance, mutual recognition of qualifications, data, information, etc.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a European integration goal. The ability to speak foreign languages is also increasingly important to boost employability, mobility and competitiveness, which is of particular relevance in border regions. Many examples of bilingualism projects are already available as a source of inspiration.

Obstacles related to multilingualism can include difficulties in promoting multilingualism and failed attempts in making a multilingual approach easier (e.g. mainstreaming bilingualism or life-long language learning) in the specific border region.

eGovernment

Promoting ongoing and future eGovernment projects to engage the stakeholders of the border regions to deliver cross-border public services that meet the needs of individuals and businesses in border areas can bring positive results in terms of open, efficient and inclusive public administrations. eGovernment could also support the provision of borderless, personalised end-to-end digital public services.

Under this thematic focus, applicants can present obstacles related to various aspects related to e-solutions, for example looking at specific cross-border needs: Interactions is difficult when two systems working at different speeds meet, interoperability of public authorities is limited, interfaces are only programmed in one language, etc.

Information Services

Resolving border obstacles will take time and sustained effort. In the meantime, access to available and reliable information and problem-solving services on life or work on the other side of the border is vital. Preparatory work for the European Commission's Communication has highlighted concerns by individuals and businesses at the lack of reliable information services which can lead to legal uncertainty that hampers cross-border interaction or makes the implementation of cross-border projects longer and more costly.

Under this thematic area, applicants can present obstacles in providing shared reliable information and services on relevant issues in the border region and the neighbouring region.

Evidence and Data

Collecting data and evidence on border obstacles is the first necessary step towards resolving them but only limited resources are invested in collecting and analysing information on border difficulties and complexities. Similarly, the limited availability of statistical and geospatial data on cross-border flows reduces the scope for genuine cross-border policy development and decision-making. A few regional efforts have been made that other regions could build upon. Statistical

and geospatial data describing cross-border flows and phenomena is not always sufficiently available or standardised to allow policymakers to make informed decisions.

Applicants are invited here to describe obstacles in promoting a shared collection of data and failed attempts in endeavouring this sense in the specific border region. Specific actions could be the comparison of data, the dissemination of data in all languages required, the creation of common databases, the collection of administrative and census data, etc.

In addition to the information included in the European Commission's Communication, applicants can access the list of the obstacles identified with *b-solutions'* previous calls for proposals on the dedicated [page](#) on the initiative's website.

3 ELIGIBLE ORGANISATIONS – WHO CAN APPLY?

Eligible organisations are:

- **public and public equivalent bodies** (national, regional, local) **with a national boundary limiting their territory**; and
- **cross-border entities** such as *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTCs), *Euroregions*, *Eurodistricts*, *Eurocities* and similar cross border structures with legal personality, even if they are not public bodies.

The concept of territory, as applied in this call for proposals, covers the **territory** for which a given public institution or body has a **mandate**, meaning the legal competence to intervene in certain areas and territories. As such, the territory is not limited to the territory in which one entity is located.

The application can involve one or more partners, possibly from the other side(s) of the border, but this is not a prerequisite. There is no maximum limit to the number of partners, though the feasibility of the proposals should be taken into account when defining the consortia.

Partners may be private actors, too.

A natural person cannot be, in any case, considered as a partner.

Successful applicants of the previous calls for proposals can apply again, on condition that the obstacle subject of the application is a different one. There are no restrictions as for the thematic area the hurdle should be categorised in.

Unsuccessful applicants of the previous calls for proposals are welcome to apply again, possibly also with the same obstacle if still relevant, unless they had been excluded because the application was deemed as not eligible.

The following principles apply to all eligible applicants in the framework of the *b-solutions* initiative:

- All applicants shall be located in an **EU Member State (or neighbouring EFTA country or the United Kingdom)** and their territories share at least **one EU internal land border** with another EU Member State/EFTA country/United Kingdom.
- Only **eligible public and public equivalent bodies or cross-border structures** as "applicants" may submit an application form in the framework of the present call for proposals.
- 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.

During the eligibility check, in case any applicant's status as an eligible candidate is uncertain, AEBR will seek clarifications with all relevant partners to determine eligibility.

4 ONLINE APPLICATION FORM – HOW TO APPLY

The link to the online application form is:

<https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/apply> (accessible from 15 January to 16 March 2021)

Please refer to the “Guidelines” and the “Frequently Asked Questions” documents which contain detailed instructions on how to fill in the online application form and detailed information.

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

The application consists of an online application form. Annexes can also be uploaded and attached to the application form. These could be a map presenting the area of intervention, a graph, an infographic, etc. The type and size of the accepted files to be annexed are specified in the dedicated webpage.

All applicants must fill in the application form in English.

The final deadline for the submission of the application form has been extended to 16 March 2021.

5 SELECTION AND AWARDING PROCESSES

Following submission, each application is subject to a selection process organised along with the following steps:

1. Eligibility check
2. Assessment by AEBR and the European Commission (Border Focal Point).

Selection procedure in short:

- Application forms will be received in electronic format, and confirmation of receipt will be sent to applicants. Eligibility checks will be performed by AEBR.
- The main selection criterion will be: “the proposed action addresses real and documented obstacles of an administrative and/or legal nature hampering cross-border cooperation in one of the thematic fields addressed in the Communication”. Other criteria will be:
 - the potential increase in cross-border cooperation if the obstacle is solved;
 - the applicant’s or the partners’ mandate to devise solutions;
 - the replicability potential of the action.
- AEBR and the European Commission (Border Focal Point) will perform quality assessments and rank the proposals.

- AEBR will prepare an evaluation report to be submitted and discussed with the Commission, with a proposal of a maximum of 27 selected applications to be implemented. The final list of selected applications will be agreed with the European Commission.

b-solutions is funded with Technical Assistance of the European Regional Development Fund. Therefore, successful applicants shall not fund similar activities like the ones offered by *b-solutions* for the same obstacle subject of the application with funding issued by the European Union. These services would include a legal report outlining a description of the obstacle, an indication of the legal dispositions causing it, preparation of a road map toward possible solutions and the (potential) role of the ECBM.

5.1 Eligibility check

Upon closure of the call, AEBR will carry out an eligibility check on all submitted advice cases' applications. The purpose of the eligibility check is to verify compliance of the received applications and their annexes with the formal eligibility criteria.

b-solutions **general eligibility criteria** are the following:

1. the application form has been submitted electronically via the dedicated webpage before the deadline indicated in the present call for proposals;
2. the application form is completely filled in English;
3. the applicants correspond to the applicant's profile detailed under section 3 of the present call for proposals.

If any of the eligibility criteria set out above is not complied with, the application will be deemed ineligible and no further assessment will be undertaken.

5.2 Selection of the proposals to receive technical support

Criteria for the selection of *b-solutions*' advice cases are:

1. the proposed action addresses real and documented obstacles of an administrative and/or legal nature hampering cross-border cooperation in one of the thematic areas addressed in the Communication;
2. the potential increase in cross-border cooperation if the obstacle is solved;
3. the applicant's or the partners' mandate to devise solutions;
4. the replicability potential of the action.

The assessment will check the quality of the proposals.

After the assessment, AEBR will submit an evaluation report (including the list of cases proposed to be selected as advice case) to the Commission, which will make the final decision as to which advice cases are selected.

All applicants will be notified at the end of this process of the decision taken on their proposals.

6 HOW TO GET ASSISTANCE

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

A set of FAQs is available online¹³, which will be updated regularly with practical questions posed by applicants through the functional *b-solutions'* s mailbox (b-solutions@aebr.eu).

7 KEY DATES

- Call opening: 15 January 2021
- Call closing: extended to 16 March 2021
- Selection of successful proposals: end of March/beginning of April 2021
- Implementation period: between April 2021 and end of June 2021

¹³ <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/call-for-proposals>