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Guidelines for Application

Working Document

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1. b-solutions

b-solutions is a 4-year **pilot initiative** promoted by the European Commission's DG REGIO and managed by the *Association of European Border Regions*¹ (AEBR) to solve border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature along EU internal land borders.

Since the beginning of 2018, a total of 43 border obstacles have been addressed in the framework of *b-solutions*. Participants have brought forward sustainable methods to overcome hindrances of a legal and administrative nature hampering cross-border cooperation, according to the general aim of the initiative.

Different schemes were applied to the three calls opened between 2018 and 2020.

In 2018, **10 pilot actions** submitted by cross-border partnerships and structures from EU and EFTA internal land borders were selected by AEBR and DG REGIO to overcome border challenges. They implemented their solutions independently, having at disposal a sub-grant to act during one year and a half.

In 2019, through a second call, **33 advice cases** were selected to document further obstacles of legal and administrative nature and to receive technical consultation by external experts on possible solutions.

Following the same scheme, in July 2020 the third call for proposals was opened and **23 additional advice cases** were selected to receive specialised legal support.

Until now, support was granted to a great variety of public bodies and cross-border structures, in particular: to **18 EGTCs, 8 Municipalities, 5 Euroregions and 29 different public or public-equivalent bodies such as Municipalities, Provinces, Regional Authorities, chambers of commerce, associations, universities and ministries**.

In the light of the success achieved until now by the initiative, administrative bodies and cross-border entities are now given a final possibility to address border obstacles by taking part in the **present fourth call for proposals** of *b-solutions*.

Once again, successful applicants will receive **external support** to tackle the difficulties which hinder their cooperation with the neighbouring country. **Legal experts** with sound knowledge of cross-border cooperation will be contracted by AEBR and allocated to single cases to **outline possible solutions** by identifying the legal or administrative framework from which to proceed.

Findings of the third and the fourth calls for proposals will be included in a new final consolidated report (**compendium**) and in a set of other publications that will be elaborated by AEBR in cooperation with DG REGIO.

These will be distributed Europe-wide to **raise awareness** and promote **mutual learning** among practitioners of cross-border cooperation and policymakers at a regional, national and European level.

¹ <http://www.aebr.eu/en/>

2. Apply to *b-solutions*' fourth call for proposals

To take part in the *b-solutions*' 4th call for proposals you simply have to fill out an application form which is available [here](#).

Applicants are invited to address obstacles of a legal or administrative nature arising because of incompatible legislations² or of different administrative procedures on the different sides of the border, or because the applicable legislation does not take into account the specificity of cross-border interactions.

By participating, you can inform us of the obstacle you face when cooperating with your neighbours. By doing so, you will contribute to increasing awareness on the context of your and other border regions that might experience the same issues.

From the first phase of *b-solutions*, we have learned that the legal/administrative obstacles hindering or preventing cooperation across border regions are still various and, in many cases, they present similarities – even if they arise on different boundaries.

Analyses of the previous cases proved that there are no ready-made solutions usable for all of them, as the legal and administrative frameworks that are causing them are different. Similarly, the type of actors involved in the implementation of a possible solution or the cultural context influencing legal and administrative provisions are bound to the specific region or country.

However, processes leading to the removal of the hurdles are similar and can be applied the same way in different territories (i.e. through the introduction of an amendment to a specific provision or the execution of a bilateral agreement).

In case you have doubts concerning the type of information requested, please check the “FAQs” on *b-solutions*' [website](#).

In case you have further questions, the *b-solutions* team would be glad to assist you anytime during the application process. Don't hesitate to contact us.

Finally, [here](#), you can find the full compendium of the 43 cases analysed in the course of the first phase of the initiative. This might be of inspiration but also a helpful tool to understand which kind of obstacles are consulted in the framework of *b-solutions*.

We now guide you step by step through the online application process.

² 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.

3. The online application form

The link to the online application form is:

<https://www.bsolutionsproject.com/apply>.

The process is 100% paperless.

All fields with "*" are compulsory.

The application form must be compiled in English.

The final deadline for the submission of your application is: 16 March 2021.

3.1 Introduce yourself and your co-applicants

— YOUR ENTITY

The applicant is the organisation taking care of the application process. In case the application submitted is considered successful, the applicant will become the contact point for AEBR.

Applicants must:

- be **public or public equivalent bodies** (national, regional or local) or cross-border entities with legal personality (EGTCs, Euroregions and similar CB structures, also if ruled by private law);
- be **based in an EU or EFTA country or the UK**;
- share at least one EU internal **land border with another EU Member State/EFTA country/United Kingdom**;
- have the **mandate** (legal competence) to intervene in certain areas and territories. The territory, in this case, is not limited to the one where the applying entity is located.



In this section, you need to tick the option that corresponds to your status.

For example, if you are a regional government then you should select the option "Public Body"; if you are an EGTC then you should tick "EGTC"; etc.

In case of cross-border entities, an extra field called "Members of the cross-border structure" will appear.

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 other members that compose your cross-border structure that will also be involved in your *b-solutions'* advice case.

— **NAME OF THE APPLICANT**

Write the full name of the organisation responsible for the participation in *b-solutions*.

— **ADDRESS OF THE APPLICANT**

Simply write the full address of your organisation as “applicant”.

— **CONTACT PERSONS**

Simply write the title (Ms/Mr), the first name and last name of the lead applicant’s contact persons. The contact person is the main contact point between the applicant organisation and AEBR.

Possibly, please indicate two people who are familiar with the specific issue subject of the application.

Please include his/her email address and phone number in the corresponding fields (“**EMAIL**” and “**PHONE NUMBER**”).

— **NUMBER OF CO-APPLICANTS**

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

There is no maximum number of co-applicants, though the 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.

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



In this field, you simply need to indicate the total number of your co-applicants.

For example: if you only have one co-applicant, click on "1"; if you have 2 co-applicants, click on "2"; etc.

If you apply 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.

3.2 Your advice case

— **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.

— **TOPIC OF THE ADVICE CASE**

In this section of the application form, you simply need to choose the thematic area of your obstacle.

As specified in the call for proposals (page 9), applicants must submit advice case proposals in one of the following thematic areas, following the topics addressed by the Communication *Boosting Growth and Cohesion in European Border Regions*:

- Employment;*
- Public transport of passengers;*
- Health, including emergency services;*
- Institutional Cooperation;*
- Multilingualism;*
- eGovernment;*
- Information Services;*
- Evidence and data.*

Each advice case will have the objective of exploring a legal/administrative obstacle in one specific border and under one of these topics.

If an obstacle that you have identified touches on more than one thematic area, please select the one you consider the most relevant.

Moreover, as stated in the call for Proposals (page 15), "*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.

For example, 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.

A detailed explanation of each thematic area can be found in the call for proposals (pages 10 to 13) and in the EU Commission's [*Communication Boosting Growth and Cohesion in European Border Regions \(COM\(2017\) 534 final\)*](#).

— DESCRIPTION OF THE OBSTACLE

Here you should explain what obstacle of an administrative and/or legal nature you have encountered.

The obstacle may arise because of the following reasons:

- **lack of coherence** of legislation³ 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**.

Obstacles caused by a lack of infrastructures or investments in the border regions are not the target of the present call for proposals.



When filling out this section, try to be as precise as possible in documenting the hurdle you have identified in your border region.

Following questions can guide you through the description of your obstacle:

- What is the general context in which the obstacle arises?
- From which legal or administrative provisions do you think the obstacle is caused?
- How is the cooperation with your neighbour(s) affected by the obstacle?
- Which kind of actions or services is prevented or limited by the obstacle? (i.e. it obstructs cross-border mobility of citizens and/or workers, it poses limits to the accessibility to healthcare services to citizens residing on the other side of the border, etc)

Here you can add more information on the obstacle if you have any (previous studies, documentations, general data and others)

Following is an illustrative list of obstacles identified in each thematic area that might help you to evaluate if the hurdle(s) that you face in your border region can be part of the present call for proposals:

- **Employment:** citizens residing close to the border have been discouraged from considering work in the neighbouring country because the current legislative framework does not contain any provision that clearly regulates cross-border employment or related social security issues. [Here](#), you can

³ 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.

take a look at the obstacles selected within this thematic area under the third call for proposals.

- **Public transport of passengers:** administrative bodies face difficulties in setting up bus lines covering the cross-border territory because of intricate administrative procedures and additional provisions included in EU Regulations. [Here](#), there are the obstacles selected under the third call for proposals in the field of transport.
- **Healthcare, including emergency services:** regulatory obstacles included in already existing agreements prevent ambulances from crossing the border and hinder the joint cross- border provision of emergency services. See more examples from the third for proposals [here](#).
- **Institutional Cooperation:** cumbersome administrative procedures prevent the organisation of cross-border exchanges of minors between schools located across the border. Get inspired by the [cases](#) submitted in this thematic area during the third call for proposals!
- **Multilingualism:** copyrights enforced by national laws combined with the use of technologies, such as the “geoblocking”, represent an obstacle to enhancing bilingualism in the border region. More examples are available [here](#).
- **eGovernment:** calls for tenders addressing businesses located on both sides of the border are prevented by digital platforms for public procurement that use different national standards.
- **Information Services:** frontier workers and/or citizens willing to start an activity on the other side of the border are limited by a lack of reliable and clear information provided in systematic ways. [Here](#) you can read the description of a case selected in the course of the previous call for proposals.
- **Evidence and Data:** non-harmonised spatial data pose many difficulties to implement cooperation project at a regional level, as the agencies responsible for producing cartographic data not only work independently in different countries but also following different legal, organisational and technical principles. More information on the obstacles selected under this category is at your disposal at this [link](#).

Finally, to have a broader understanding of the type of obstacles selected and consulted in each category, we invite you to read the full compendium of the cases analysed in the course of the first phase of the initiative available on <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/>.

— **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 is solved.

For example:

- with the removal of the obstacle, hiring doctors from a neighbouring country would be quicker, resulting in better functioning of a cross-border hospital. This has a clear impact on the lives and health condition of the citizens residing in the border area;
- starting to cooperate in the field of emergency services would be easier for stakeholders from both sides of the border once the obstacle is removed. This will provide quick and more effective help to the citizens residing in the region;
- coordinating between all the relevant actors dealing with youth welfare in the border area would be easier if the obstacle were overcome. In turn, this would guarantee more protection and help to local families and kids.

— **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 its statutes.

For example:

- you are a regional public body and you are one of the signers of a cross-border convention or agreement regulating the provision of healthcare emergency services on both sides of a certain border;
- you are a border municipality providing a certain service to the local population (i.e. the supply of drinkable water) and you are entitled by the law to sign agreements to manage such service.

— **REPLICABILITY**

Here you need to explain how the case you present could serve as an example for other similar instances and, as such, if the solution could inspire, or benefit, stakeholders in other border regions to find solutions to similar instances.

The following questions could guide you in assessing the replicability:

- Is the obstacle(s) that I have identified present on other borders (according to your knowledge)?
- Is the group of people or the type of institutions affected by the obstacle present on other borders?

Here are some instances that can have an impact on other borders if solved:

- Solving the fiscal problems that limit the hiring of personnel coming from the other side of the border where an EGTC is located can be potentially replicated to many other borders where similar structures operate;
- Solving the hurdle(s) that prevent the creation of an interoperable digital public procurement platform to be used by economic actors located on both sides of the border can be replicated on all the boundaries where there are cross-border structures entitled to launch a call for tenders on both sides.

— **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.

For example:

- *“these could be a map presenting the area of intervention, a graph, an infographic, etc.” (page 16 of the call for proposals)* or also previous data or studies documenting the obstacle, as well as possible solutions already identified or other information considered relevant to contextualise the application.


— **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 the obstacle you propose to receive advice for will not be subject to similar action, simultaneously, also financed by sources from the EU budget.

In particular, the same obstacle that is the subject of the application should not be the subject of other legal reports outlining a description of the obstacle, an indication of the legal dispositions causing it, the preparation of a road map toward possible solutions, and the (potential) role of the ECBM, funded by the European Union.

— 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 permit AEBR and the European Commission to utilise and publish 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.

4. Tips and recommendations

Here you have a list of tips and recommendations that might be useful to bear in mind with filling out the application form:

- Make sure to fill out **all the sections** included in the form;
- When describing the obstacle(s) state clearly the **legal or administrative nature of the obstacle**. Obstacles to be addressed are not technical difficulties in implementing single projects or should not simply derive by the political will to act in a certain way. They are to be found in the legislative framework (regional, national, European);
- Make sure to highlight **the impact on cross-border cooperation**. In case the obstacle is solved, the results should be beneficial to both sides of the border: statistics, facts and figures to prove this are very welcome!
- Make sure that the border you are addressing is an **EU internal land border, or it involves an EFTA country or the UK**. Obstacles identified on external or maritime borders won't be taken into consideration;
- Make sure the applicant or a partner has the mandate on the territory.

5. Special note on the current exceptional context

The present call for proposals opens in an exceptional context in which, during the past Spring, some Member States have, often unilaterally, closed their national borders to contain the pandemic of Covid-19. AEBR and DG REGIO acknowledge that the closure of national borders has created new obstacles to cross-border cooperation, but obstacles arisen in this exceptional context are not in the scope of *b-solutions*. This call for proposals aims to collect cases of structural obstacles of a legal or administrative nature that exist beyond the temporary measures currently put in place. You can apply with issues related to the current situation, but please make sure these address structural deficiencies of the cross-border condition. Transitory obstacles that do not persist in the normal legal and administrative context (including Schengen) cannot be regarded in the present call for proposal.

6. How to receive assistance

AEBR staff is ready to assist applicants with any technical and procedural questions they may arise during the application process.

You can contact us anytime at the *b-solutions* functional mailbox: b-solutions@aebr.eu or calling at +49 30 72 62 19 763.

A set of FAQs is available [online](#).

The present document is being constantly updated with practical questions posed by the applicants.

7. Key dates

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

A more precise timeline will be communicated to the participants in due course.