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Guidelines Working Document



SOLUTIONS



EUROPEAN UNION

European Regional Development Fund

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

European Union

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 8% richer if 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. Over the past 18 months, the European Commission's *Cross-Border Review*³, launched during the 25th Anniversary of Interreg, has unveiled evidence to

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/

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 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 present call for pilot projects (**b-solutions**) is yet another concrete action proposed in the Communication and now put into practice.

2. The Application Form

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

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

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>

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 clear English.

The final deadline for the submission of the Application Form and Confirmation sheet is 30/04/2018 14h00 CET.

The Application Form is outlined as it follows:

1. TITLE OF THE PROPOSED PILOT ACTION

Please try to find a catchy, pertinent and “easy-to-read” title.

2. NAME & ADDRESS OF THE LEAD APPLICANT (in full)

Please remember that only eligible public bodies and cross-border structures can submit an Application Form in the framework of the b-solutions Call for Proposals. Eligible public bodies (national, regional, local) should have a national boundary limiting their territory and involve a co-applicant from the other side(s) of the same border, which territory should be contiguous to that of the lead applicant.

The concept of territory, as applied in this call for proposals, 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.

Cross-border entities such as *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTCs), *Euroregions*, *Eurodistricts*, *Eurocities* and similar cross-border structures with legal personality can also apply (even if they are not public bodies). If the applicant is a cross-border entity the above mentioned conditions (contiguity to the border; at least one partner from each side of the border; at least one public body) must be met within its own structure. This is to say, the applicant cross-border entity must be composed by at least one public body and at least one member from each side of the border which territory is limited by the national border. If these conditions are met a co-applicant is not required.

3. NAME & ADDRESS OF THE CO-APPLICANT (in full)

The co-applicant(s) must also be a public body at the national, regional or local level. At least one co-applicant must be an entity from the other side(s) of the border, preferably a peer of the main applicant. There is no maximum limit to the number of applicants, though

feasibility of the proposals should be taken into account when defining the consortia.

4. NAME & ADDRESS OF AFFILIATED ENTITY(IES) (if applicable)

Affiliated entities of other nature can also be included in applicants' consortia, but only if it can be demonstrated that they are directly involved in the identified obstacle and that their engagement is vital to designing and implementing a solution (e.g. one hospital if the obstacle is the access to health infrastructure). A natural person cannot be, in any case, considered as an affiliated entity.

5. TOPIC of the PROPOSED ACTION

You can only choose one single topic among the following ones:

- i. Employment
- ii. Health (including emergency services)
- iii. (Public) transport of passengers
- iv. Multi-lingualism
- v. Institutional Cooperation

6. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PILOT ACTION

In this section, you should clearly and shortly present:

- what obstacle of a legal and/or administrative nature along EU internal land borders you have identified and under which of the five topics;
- the foreseen solution to such an obstacle in accordance with the authority on the other side of the border;
- a good quality, result-oriented and transferable solution.

7. DESCRIPTION OF THE OBSTACLE

Here you should clearly explain what administrative and/or legal obstacle you have identified & its relevance for the general objective b-solutions initiative, i.e. to identify and promote sustainable methods of resolving border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature along EU internal land borders.

8. PRESENTATION OF THE EARLY SOLUTION PROPOSED

Here you should clearly explain how you intend to investigate about concrete, effective and replicable solutions to the obstacles previously identified. To increase their replicability, and to facilitate that the solutions found can inspire other solutions to similar problems in other border regions, projects should foresee how to explore and disseminate and communicate the results achieved.

9. Have you found any already existing link of the obstacle you have identified, or any potential spill-over effect of the proposed solution in relationship with a different topic and/or policy area?

Public authorities applying in the framework of the b-solutions Call for Proposals are requested to select only one of the topics proposed. However, as an integrated approach should be developed in order to tackle effectively the challenges identified, in the Application Form applicants have the possibility to describe the links and spill-over effects with other topics and policy areas.

10. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Here you should attach up to 3 documents useful to support your application (i.e. geographical, thematic or other type of relevance)

11. CALENDAR OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

Here you should clearly outline the calendar for the start, implementation and conclusion of the activities under your proposed pilot action

12. ESTIMATED BUDGET

Here you should clearly present how you intend to use the budget available for your proposed pilot action (i.e. 20,000 EUR). You can also upload a document (.doc, .xls, .pdf) with your budget overview

Expenditure related to the implementation of the b-solutions projects shall be eligible according to the **b-solutions "Guidelines"** (information will follow soon) and budgeted in the appropriate budget lines.

Each project can receive a grant up to a maximum of € 20,000 paid in two instalments: a first payment amounting 40% of the total amount requested and approved for the grant after signature of the agreement; and a final payment amounting 60% of the total requested

and approved after submission and approval of the final report, and a corresponding payment request.

The eligibility of expenditure in every grant will be limited to the following items:

- travel and accommodation costs and corresponding per diems. In particular:

Information will follow very soon.

- procurement of external services and expertise; and
- an overhead for indirect costs up to a maximum of 7% of the direct costs.

Expenditure related to the non-EU partners (neighbouring EFTA countries) is not eligible, even if it is paid by one of the EU partners (e.g. travel costs of staff of partner in EFTA paid by a partner in an EU country).

Expenditure with remuneration and related staff costs are not eligible.

The action cannot be simultaneously financed by other sources from the EU budget. Applications must include a declaration from applicants that the proposed action is not being financed under other schemes.