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Frequently Asked Questions on *b-solutions*

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With regard to the application:

1. Who is eligible to apply?

Eligible to apply for the call for proposals are:

- 1) **Public bodies** at the national, regional or local level with a national boundary limiting their territory;
- 2) **Cross-border entities** such as *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTCs), *Euroregions*, *Eurodistricts*, *Eurocities* and similar cross-border structures with legal personality, established under public or private law;
- 3) **“Bodies governed by public law”** according to Art. 2(1) no. 4 Directive 2014/24/EU, if fulfilling following criteria:
 - a) they are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;
 - b) they have legal personality; and
 - c) they are financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; and
- 4) "Public equivalent bodies", namely entities under private law which meet the conditions specified in 3) a)-c).

In addition, public bodies and cross-border structures must:

- be located in an EU Member State (or neighbouring EFTA country or IPA country);
- share at least one EU internal land or maritime border with another EU Member State/EFTA country/IPA country;
- have the mandate (legal competence) to intervene in certain areas and territories.

2. Which countries are considered as EFTA countries?

The EFTA Member States are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

3. Which countries are considered as IPA countries?

IPA countries are countries under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) Cross - Border Co-operation. They are: Turkey, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

4. What are the general eligibility criteria?

b-solution's general eligibility criteria are the following:

- the application form has been submitted electronically via the dedicated webpage before the deadline indicated in the present call for proposals;
- the application form is completely filled in in English;
- the applicant corresponds to the applicant's profile detailed under section 3 of the [present call for proposals](#).

5. What is meant by "mandate"?

Mandate is meant as legal competence to intervene in certain areas and territories. Therefore, to apply, public bodies must have legal competence on the legislation or regulatory framework applicable in the field addressed by the specific project, regardless of its source or level.

6. What does it mean that an applicant must have a boundary limiting their territory?

The territory on which the applicant has a legal competence to intervene must share at least one EU internal border with a EU Member State – or with an EFTA or IPA country if it is located in the EU.

If the applicant has mandate on a territory which does not share a border with a EU Member State - or with an EFTA or IPA country if it is located in the EU – it is not eligible.

7. Are Overseas Countries and Territories eligible?

Outermost Regions (OMR) (see Art. 349 TFEU) are part of the EU and therefore eligible, if they meet all the eligibility criteria. *Overseas Countries and Territories* (OCT) (see Annex II to Council Decision (EU) 2021/1764 of 5 October 2021 (OJ L 355, 7.10.2021 p. 6)) are not eligible in the framework of this call.

8. Is the creation of a partner consortium a prerequisite?

No, a partnership is not a prerequisite to apply. If desired, the application can involve one or more co-applicants, preferably from the other side(s) of the border.

Private bodies can participate in the application as co-applicants, but a public body must be responsible for the application.

Please note that co-applicants must be directly involved in the identified obstacle (e.g. a hospital if the obstacle is the access to health infrastructure).

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

There is no maximum limit to the number of partners.

9. Can I apply for more than one proposal?

Yes, you may: any applicant or co-applicants can be involved in more than one advice case proposal, within the same thematic area or not.

10. Can I apply if I already applied in the previous calls for proposals?

Yes, you can – both if your application was successful and if it wasn't. Successful applicants of the previous calls for proposals can apply again, provided they apply on account of a different obstacle.

The new obstacle can either stem from the same thematic area of the previous one or from a different thematic area.

Unsuccessful applicants of the previous calls for proposals are welcome to apply again. As a non-successful applicant to the previous call, you can submit a new case or the same obstacle if still relevant. However, if the applicant had not passed the eligibility check in the previous calls for proposals, please adjust accordingly to the selection criteria.

With regard to the selection process:

11. How does the selection procedure work?

Firstly, AEBR will perform an eligibility check with regard to the following criteria:

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

Secondly, AEBR will perform quality assessments and rank the proposals. If needed, AEBR may receive technical assistance by the European Commission's Border Focal Point to finalise the assessment.

The final list of selected applications will be agreed with the European Commission.

All the applicants will be informed about the result of their application.

A list of successful applications will be published also on the European Commission's online platform "[Border Focal Point Network](#)" and on the [website](#) of *b-solutions*.

12. What are the criteria for the selection?

AEBR, with the support of the European Commission (Border Focal Point) if needed, will select applications according to the following criterion:

- the proposed action addresses real and documented obstacles of an administrative and/or legal nature hampering cross-border cooperation in one of the clusters addressed in the 2021 Report;

Other criteria are:

- the potential increase in cross-border cooperation if the obstacle is solved;

- the applicant's or partners' mandate to devise solutions;
- the replicability potential of the action.

With regard to the implementation:

13. Will the successful applicants receive a grant?

No, the selected applicants will not receive grants. The successful cases will be allocated the support of an expert who will cooperate with them in defining the obstacle and possibly finding a solution to it. The costs of the advice by the expert is covered by the European Commission and AEBR in the framework of *b-solutions*.

14. How will the experts be selected?

The experts will be selected through a [call for expressions of interest](#) that AEBR launched on 31 March 2022 and that will remain open until 31 March 2023. The aim of the call is to identify professionals with sound knowledge of cross-border cooperation practices, competences in analysing a legal text and consultancy skills. Relevant criteria for the assignment will be their expertise, language proficiency and the understanding of specific territories.

The selection process of the experts will be carried out by AEBR, with support of the EU Commission's Border Focal Point if needed.

15. How will experts be assigned to the single cases?

AEBR will allocate an expert to each selected case and inform the applicant accordingly, taking into consideration the thematic area of the advice case and its local/regional/territorial specificities, the specialised knowledge and background of the expert as well as his/her language(s) proficiency.

16. How will the expert be paid?

The expert will be paid directly by AEBR upon signature of a service contract between him/her and AEBR.

17. How long is the implementation process?

The general implementation period lasts up to a maximum of three months after the assignment of an expert.

Approximately, experts will advise selected cases for a maximum of 9 days during these 3-months implementation periods:

- June to August 2022 for cases selected in May 2022;
- August to October 2022 for cases selected in July 2022;
- December 2022 to February 2023 for cases selected in November 2022;

Participants will coordinate with the expert and provide him or her with the necessary information, organise and hold the necessary meetings in the region where the obstacle to be analysed is detected, in the premises of the applicant or online, and receive a report from the expert.

18. How will the experts provide help to the advice cases?

The main purpose of the present call for proposals is to address cases where interactions across the border are more difficult either because of lack of legislative coherence applicable on both sides of the border, or because of inconsistencies in terms of administrative procedures.

In light of this, the experts will grant support in defining and documenting the legal or administrative obstacle clearly and systematically, namely in identifying its legal root causes, as well as in providing a possible solution from which to proceed. Solutions might entail amendments to the current legal framework or the creation of the pieces of legislation by the conclusion of new agreements, i.e.

The legal expert for each advice case prepares a report which underpins conclusions of their work relating to options for resolving the identified obstacle. This will include a description of the obstacle with indication of the legal/administrative provisions causing the obstacle; a description of possible solutions; a full list of all legal provisions relevant to the case with the correct citation both in original language and in English; and an executive summary.

19. What kind of reporting activities are envisaged in this call for proposals?

Successful applicants will be required to provide one final report.

This final report shall be composed of two parts:

i) An "Information sheet", compiled by the applicant, providing an opinion on the cooperation with the expert assigned, giving information on the entities that were involved in the analysis and informing about next steps that the applicant plans to undertake for implementing the proposed solution.

ii) The report of the obstacle prepared by the expert (further described in the question "How will the experts provide help to the advice cases").

With regard to the results and sustainability stemming from *b-solutions*

20. What are the expected results of *b-solutions* and *b-solutions 2.0*?

b-solutions and *b-solutions 2.0* are expected to provide:

- Analyses of a maximum of 120 cases of cross-border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature;

- Solutions addressing specific legal and administrative obstacles which should be potentially replicable, made available and promoted in other border regions across the EU;
- Innovative proposals that can inform further development and implementation of new approaches by regional/national authorities and/or via EU instruments;
- Evidence of increased exchange of information and mutual engagement in border areas;
- Increased understanding of specific obstacles and potential solutions at local/regional/national and 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. This knowledge is disseminated through the publications prepared within the scope of *b-solutions*, and namely:

- [two compendiums](#) and an [annex](#) showcasing the details of the cases collected and a first analysis;
- three thematic oriented publications on specific fields of interests for policymaking ([Cross-border Public Services](#), [labour market and education](#), [the European Green Deal](#));
- a [story-telling publication](#) addressing a general, non-specialised audience to raise awareness of cross-border obstacles and solutions to overcome them.

In 2023, new publications will be released in the framework of *b-solutions*.

21. How will AEBR disseminate *b-solutions 2.0* results?

AEBR will constantly disseminate and communicate the progress and the results achieved by the applicants through the online platform “[Border Focal Point Network](#)” and through its main channels (*b-solutions*’ [website](#), AEBR’s [website](#), AEBR’s [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts and newsletter).

One compendium (the *third b-solutions* compendium) illustrating the main outcomes and relevant analyses of the findings will be published and disseminated via *b-solutions*’ communication channels. Two story-telling publications will be delivered after the 2022 and 2023 Calls for proposals. Finally, a publication of a more academic nature, doing an in-depth analysis of the different impact of the initiative and most relevant aspects on the challenges raised by the obstacles, will be published. It will be addressed to the academic community and practitioners.

22. What is the Border Focal Point Network?

The [Border Focal Point Network](#) has been established under 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. It is composed of Commission experts and provides border stakeholders with a platform to discuss and present border issues and solutions. The Border Focal Point is part of the 10 measures proposed by the adopted Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions" which aims to highlight ways in which Europe can reduce the complexity, length and costs of cross-border interaction and promote the pooling of services along internal EU borders. The present call for advice cases under *b-solutions* is yet another concrete action proposed in the Communication and now put into practice.

An online professional network to present and discuss legal and administrative obstacles and possible solutions has been created and it is operational since January 2018. You can [register here](#).

AEBR's team will regularly upload information on the Border Focal Point Network to inform the community of actors of cross-border cooperation about novelties related to *b-solutions*.