

# Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

Registration no. (filled in by MA/JS only) \_\_\_\_\_

## Project Idea Form

Date of submission 02/06/2025

### 1. Project idea identification

Project idea name	Empowering Social Innovators in Small Towns and Rural Areas through Digital Transformation
Short name of the project	EmpowerSI
Previous calls	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>
Seed money support	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>

### 2. Programme priority

1. Innovative societies
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### 3. Programme objective

1.1. Resilient economies and communities
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### 4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Kurzemes plānošanas reģions
Name of the organisation (English)	Kurzeme Planning Region
Website	<a href="https://kurzemesregions.lv/">https://kurzemesregions.lv/</a>
Country	LV



Type of Partner	Regional public authority
	regional council, etc.

#### Contact person 1

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Which organisation(s) in the planned partnership take part in a project within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for the first time? Please list the respective partners.

N/A

### 5.1 Specific challenge to be addressed

In many rural areas, small businesses are more than just economic actors, as they often fill important gaps left by limited public services and declining private investment by creating opportunities, supporting community life, and helping to keep local economies active. These entrepreneurs are usually well embedded in their communities and are often motivated to respond to local social challenges, but the conditions needed for them to take on a stronger, socially oriented role are frequently missing.

A central obstacle is the ongoing digital exclusion that limits access to tools, knowledge, and support systems needed for innovation and growth. Entrepreneurs in rural areas typically have few opportunities to build digital skills, as available training is rarely tailored to their needs, technological tools may not be adapted to small-scale use, and meaningful contact with innovation networks or funding opportunities is often lacking. As a result, it becomes difficult for them to apply digital solutions that could enhance their services, expand their outreach, or test new ideas that would benefit both their business and the wider community.

Despite these challenges, digitalisation holds significant untapped potential for rural entrepreneurs who are willing to align their business goals with a social purpose. With the right kind of support, they

could develop new services that respond to real community needs, improve inclusion, and contribute to greater local resilience. However, without targeted investment in their skills and access to adapted tools, many continue to operate below their potential and remain disconnected from broader innovation processes.

This project addresses these issues by helping entrepreneurs in rural areas take practical steps toward using digital tools to grow their business in ways that also generate social value. Through a mix of hands-on training, co-created solutions, and peer learning formats, the project will support them in becoming active contributors to community development through business. In addition, the project will engage local and regional authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, and young people, recognising that broader involvement is essential to build the enabling environment needed for lasting digital and social transformation in rural regions.

## 5.2 Focus of the call

The project supports the development of rural areas and small towns by helping local entrepreneurs grow their businesses in ways that also respond to social challenges. These entrepreneurs often operate in regions where access to services, job opportunities, or support structures is limited, and where the ability to test new ideas or apply digital solutions remains low.

By offering practical digital training, peer learning opportunities, and co-created tools, the project helps rural businesses not only improve their day-to-day operations but also develop services that bring added value to their communities. This includes locally rooted solutions in areas such as wellbeing, inclusion, and access to information.

The involvement of municipalities, NGOs, educational institutions, and young people ensures that support for entrepreneurs is connected to the wider local context and does not depend on individual efforts alone. Cross-border collaboration, in turn, enables rural regions to learn from each other, test scalable practices, and co-develop ideas that are adaptable, inclusive, and grounded in shared regional challenges.

## 6. Transnational relevance

The challenges faced by entrepreneurs in rural areas are strikingly similar across the Baltic Sea region. Limited access to digital tools, a lack of tailored training, weak support networks, and difficulties in reaching wider markets are not unique to any one country. These issues are shared by many communities that, despite their differences, often face comparable barriers when it comes to using digital solutions to strengthen local initiatives with social value.

Transnational cooperation allows partners to overcome the limits of local resources and build on each other's practical experiences. By bringing together organisations with different perspectives and working contexts, the project creates a space for shared learning and joint problem-solving. Our experience shows that rural entrepreneurs are especially interested in seeing how similar businesses operate elsewhere, particularly within the Baltic Sea region, where conditions often reflect their own. Comparing approaches in such a familiar context helps to generate ideas that feel both relevant and achievable.

Equally important is the opportunity to connect rural actors who are often left out of broader



innovation processes. Through cross-border exchange, local entrepreneurs, municipalities, and support organisations can form new networks, exchange ideas, and develop lasting partnerships. These connections not only support the goals of the project itself but also create a foundation for future cooperation in a region where small communities benefit most when they work together.

## 7. Specific aims to be addressed

### Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

The project builds trust by involving rural entrepreneurs, municipalities, NGOs, educators, and young people from the very beginning. Through joint planning, open dialogue, and co-creation processes, participants gain shared understanding and confidence in each other's roles. This collaborative approach helps to create long-term relationships and encourages continued cooperation beyond the project framework.

### Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

By connecting local actors across borders, the project creates new links between regions facing similar challenges. It supports the development of practical networks among entrepreneurs and support organisations that are relevant for rural digital innovation. Regular interaction through peer learning, online sessions, and regional meetings ensures that these networks remain active and useful, even after the project ends.

### Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

The project is rooted in local needs and involves citizens through businesses that are already part of everyday life in rural communities. By supporting these entrepreneurs to deliver better services and respond to social needs, the Programme becomes visible and relevant at community level. Citizens benefit directly from improved access to information, support, and opportunities made possible by digital tools.

### Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

With better digital skills, stronger local cooperation, and access to adaptable tools, entrepreneurs and local actors are better prepared to respond quickly when new challenges arise. Whether it is service disruptions, social fragmentation, or other pressures, the project gives them the capacity to act with greater flexibility, drawing on practical knowledge and connections developed throughout the project.

## 8. Target groups

The project focuses on rural communities where digital exclusion significantly hinders participation in innovation, entrepreneurship, and civic life. The primary target group consists of existing and potential entrepreneurs in rural areas who aim to develop business initiatives that address social challenges and strengthen community resilience. Digitalisation offers them a crucial opportunity to overcome geographic and infrastructural limitations, create innovative solutions, and expand their impact—yet this potential remains largely untapped.

These entrepreneurs often lack digital skills, tailored technological tools, funding opportunities, and access to support networks. As a result, they are unable to fully leverage digital means to grow their activities, increase visibility, or connect with broader innovation ecosystems. The project aims to

bridge this gap by providing knowledge, training, and hands-on support for using digital solutions in the creation of social innovation.

In addition to rural entrepreneurs, the project will engage local and regional authorities, NGOs, educational and training institutions, and young people as key enablers of digital transformation in society. Together, they will strengthen digital competences, co-develop tailored tools, and build cross-border networks to foster digitally driven, community-oriented entrepreneurship.

All target groups will be actively involved in co-creation, training, knowledge exchange, and communication activities. Their practical experience and active engagement will help develop digital solutions that are grounded in local realities but transferable and scalable across rural areas in the Baltic Sea Region.

Please use the drop-down list to define up to five target groups that you will involve through your project's activities.	Please define a field of responsibility or an economic sector of the selected target group	Specify the countries and regions that the representatives of this target group come from.
1. Small and medium enterprise	Social enterprises - Social innovation, local service delivery	Latvia, Sweden, Norway
2. Local public authority	Digital strategy, community development	All partner countries
3. Education/training centre and school	Digital literacy, adult education, entrepreneurship support	All partner countries
4. NGO	Community engagement, inclusion, grassroots coordination	All partner countries
5. Regional public authority	Digital strategy, community development	All partner countries

## 9. Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Please indicate if your project idea has the potential to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (<https://eusbsr.eu/implementation/>).

yes ☒ no ☐

Please select which policy area(s) of the EUSBSR your project idea contributes to most.



PA Innovation

PA Education

The MA/JS may share your project idea form with the respective policy area coordinator(s) of the EUSBSR. You can find contacts of PACs at the EUSBSR website (<https://eusbsr.eu/contact-us/>).

☐ If you disagree, please tick here.

## 10. Partnership

Kurzeme Planning Region (KPR) is a regional public authority representing the interests of all 8 local municipalities of Kurzeme region, with the aim to facilitate socioeconomic development of the region. KPR has vast experience in participating in and/or managing EU co-financed projects. We have developed a well-functioning project implementation system, with detailed implementation schemes on each project. We've got experience in implementing different type and scale projects with budget up to more than 1 million EUR, being supported by the EU and other funds.

Our Partner in this Project will be Agder County Municipality in Norway. We have great experience in cooperation with this Municipality as we are partners in the project No.: C037 "Regional Ecosystems for Social Innovation and Social Transformation" within Interreg Baltic Sea Region Program 2021-2027 and we have organized common activities before.

Another Partner will be Coompanion Kalmar County in Sweden. The economic association Coompanion in Kalmar County is politically independent and aims to promote the economic interests of its members by providing education and advice on cooperative entrepreneurship, the idea, the economy and its distinctive nature, as well as its history. This also includes initiating and supporting research on a cooperative basis and participating in regional, national and international development processes within the Coompanion's areas of interest. Coompanion is present throughout Sweden, with 25 independent regional organizations that are owned and governed locally.

## 11. Workplan

The project will deliver a set of practical activities that build digital capacity among rural entrepreneurs who want to address social challenges in their communities. All activities will be tailored to the scale and context of the small project format, while aiming to create meaningful, long-term value for participating regions.

The starting point will be the real needs and experiences of entrepreneurs working in rural areas. Through collaboration with education providers, municipalities, and civil society organisations, the project will offer learning opportunities and support that help participants explore how digital tools can strengthen their business models, improve outreach, or expand access to services for specific community groups. These activities may include in-person workshops, simple digital formats, and informal mentoring, depending on the needs and capacities of those involved.

A key principle throughout the project will be to work with entrepreneurs, not just for them. They will be involved in shaping the content, identifying relevant tools, and testing ideas in practice. Instead of offering ready-made solutions, the project will create space for joint exploration and co-creation, where rural business owners can take the lead in finding what works in their own settings.



For example, in the small village of Ance in Latvia's Kurzeme region, a librarian informally helps elderly residents pay bills online, as they lack the digital skills to manage this independently. With the right support, such basic services could be turned into small-scale business initiatives, where entrepreneurs apply simple digital solutions to improve daily life in their communities and become active social innovators.

The project will also support mutual learning between regions by organising regular knowledge exchange and informal network-building activities. These will help participants see what others are trying, identify common ground, and adapt practices that could work in their own context. Local and regional authorities will be involved in discussions on how to reduce barriers to digital access and make use of the lessons learned through the project.

Target groups will be actively involved throughout the process – not only as participants, but as equal partners in shaping the direction and content of the work. Letting results grow from real needs, the results will grow from this collaboration – ranging from digital learning content to lightweight tools or models for continued cooperation. All results will be designed to be easy to adapt and apply in other rural communities, with guidance and support from the project partnership.

## 12. Planned budget

ERDF budget (planned expenditure of partners from the EU)	EUR 350,000.00
Norwegian budget (planned expenditure of partners from Norway)	EUR 150,000.00
<b>Total budget (including preparatory costs)</b>	<b>EUR 500,000.00</b>

## 13. Project consultation

Please indicate if you wish to have a consultation (online meeting) with the MA/JS to discuss your project idea

yes ☒ no ☐

## 14. Questions to the MA/JS

Questions related to the content of the planned project *(max.1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

Questions related to budgeting and expenditure *(max.1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

Any other questions *(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)*



## 15. Additional information

*(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

### **Your account in BAMOS+**

Please remember that to officially submit your application you need to access our electronic data exchange system BAMOS+. More information about the process of applying for your account in BAMOS+ you will find here:

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/gateway/bamos-account>