

Project Idea European Trails



Common Ground: A Pre-Competitive Alliance for Trail Quality Organizations

Initiating Organization:

- European Trails e.V.*

The Challenge: Fragmentation of European Trail Quality Frameworks

"The European trail landscape is currently characterized by a high density of overlapping certification systems. While these frameworks provide essential quality benchmarks for specific activities or destinations, their lack of interoperability creates significant administrative and financial inefficiencies for trail managers and DMOs. With diverse for-profit and non-profit providers operating in silos, the sector lacks a unified 'map' of professional standards. This fragmentation hinders the scaling of sustainable trail tourism and complicates the professional path for trail assessors, who must navigate disparate training requirements with little cross-sectoral recognition."

Main Goals and target group(s):

- **Target Group:** Organizations governing trail-related certificates, professional trail assessors, and the primary "consumers" of these labels (Trail Managers and DMOs).
- **Project Goals:** The primary goal is to bridge the information gap between the diverse trail certification systems in Europe. By establishing a pre-competitive alliance, we aim to foster a culture of professional knowledge exchange that has been missing in the sector. This project focuses on professionalizing the landscape through:
 - Transparency: Creating a clear understanding of overlapping criteria to reduce "certification fatigue" for destinations.
 - Quality Assurance: Strengthening the professional standing of assessors by recognizing the importance of formal training and cross-sectoral expertise.
 - Sectoral Upskilling: Leveraging collective intelligence to ensure that certification remains a robust tool for sustainable rural development.

Description of project approach:

To move from a fragmented landscape to an organized alliance, the project follows a four-stage process:

- 1. Mapping & Benchmarking:** A comprehensive research phase to identify European certification systems that impact trails (directly or as part of broader destination labels) and the organizations behind them.
- 2. Technical Analysis:** Evaluating the operational frameworks of these certificates, including their audit processes, assessor training requirements, and renewal cycles, to identify areas for collaboration.
- 3. Strategic Dialogue:** Facilitating a series of Transnational Peer-Learning Sessions where certifying bodies discuss the benefits of a shared network and identify "common ground" in their administrative and educational challenges.
- 4. Formalization:** Co-designing the governance structure of the network, ensuring it remains a neutral platform for long-term exchange without infringing on the unique technical standards of the individual partners.

Expected output/products:

- **The European Trail Certificate Database:** A digital directory documenting the certification landscape, including a registry of qualified assessors and their specific areas of expertise (a "Yellow Pages" for trail quality).
- **White Paper: "The Landscape of Trail Excellence":** A comprehensive report outlining the current state of certification in Europe, identifying best practices and efficiencies for trail managers.
- **The "Common Ground" Alliance Charter:** A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that establishes the network's mission, frequency of exchange, and shared commitment to professionalizing trail management in Europe.

Targeted funding sources:

- Erasmus+

Target region/countries:

- Whole Europe (and eventually globally)

Desired project partners:

- ENOS
- IMBA Europe
- ERA
- EUMA
- EUROPARC
- Responsible Trails
- TourCert
- Green Destinations/ Good Travel Alliance
- ITRS
- ...

Maturity level:

- Rough project plan existing

Why we think a funding application for this project idea will be successful:

This project is highly "fundable" because it addresses the fragmentation of European tourism services, a key priority for the EU's Green and Digital Transition.

- **Multiplication Effect:** By targeting the "certifiers" rather than individual trails, the project's impact is scaled across thousands of kilometers of trails managed by the participating organizations.
- **Innovation through Transparency:** It introduces a digital approach to trail governance by centralizing data that is currently siloed.
- **Sustainability of Results:** Unlike a one-off event, the creation of a formal Alliance and a digital database ensures that the project's results live on as a permanent resource for the European trail community.

* European representative of Green Flag Trails