

Title	Development of an Online Forum on the e-APP
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Author	PB
Agenda Item	Item 8.iii.
Mandate(s)	Experts' Group on the e-APP and New Technologies
Objective	To propose a model for the development of an online forum to exchange information and experience on the e-APP.
Action to be Taken	For Decision <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For Approval <input type="checkbox"/> For Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> For Action / Completion <input type="checkbox"/> For Information <input type="checkbox"/>
Annexes	N/A
Related Documents	Prel. Doc. No 6 of May 2021 – Report from the Chair on the Experts' Group on the e-APP and New Technologies

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Development of an Online Forum on the e-APP

I. Introduction

- 1 The e-APP was designed to be as flexible as possible. The development and implementation remain entirely the responsibility and discretion of Contracting Parties.
- 2 In light of this, Contracting Parties have found it helpful to contact the PB and other Parties who have implemented the e-APP. To date, this has generally taken place through bilateral or multilateral consultations, as well as at the International Forum on the e-APP.
- 3 The Experts' Group on the e-APP and New Technologies, which met in May 2021, recommended the development of an online forum to further facilitate information-sharing, including the exchange of experience and best practices. The Group invited the PB to assess what form this may take and prepare a Preliminary Document for the attention of the Special Commission.
- 4 The following is the PB's proposal for an online forum on the e-APP.

II. Required Features

- 5 The PB proposes that the platform should have three sections: general information, a discussion forum, and a repository.
- 6 The general information section will be maintained by the PB. It will include advice and best practices as endorsed by the Special Commission and the e-APP Forum. This information will be in addition to the information already available on the Apostille Section of the HCCH website. It should serve as a one-stop location for understanding the baseline of the e-APP. This would not provide any technical solutions, nor provide any information that has not otherwise been endorsed by appropriate bodies.
- 7 The discussion forum section will be designed for interaction between users. It should allow users to post questions and responses, including attaching images and documents. These messaging boards would be sorted by topic and be capable of keyword searching.
- 8 The repository section is an opportunity for Contracting Parties with experience in the e-APP to upload resources. This may include toolkits, domestic feasibility studies, or sample e-Apostilles.

III. Access and Restrictions

- 9 It should be noted that the PB does not have the resources to respond to all queries through the platform, nor moderate its content. Its primary role will be limited to administering the platform to allow Contracting Parties to connect and discuss matters relating to the e-APP.
- 10 Credentials and access will be managed by the PB. It will be restricted to Contracting Parties to the Apostille Convention. By exception, if it is clear that an interested party is developing software, they may also be granted access.
- 11 Each Contracting Party shall be provided at least one set of login credentials. Ideally, there would be no limit on participants to allow all members of a team to have access. Users must be identifiable by name and Contracting Party.
- 12 While users should have the option to message each other privately, email addresses and other contact details will remain private. This means communication is limited to the platform unless users agree otherwise.
- 13 The platform should be accessible through an internet browser or via a freely available software application.

IV. Suggested Platforms

- 14 The first option is to use Microsoft Teams for the online forum. This will be connected to the internal Teams system that is already in use at the PB. It would require no additional expense as the PB already has a license for internal use. It should allow all the functions described above but is not designed for an online forum specifically, and therefore may face some usability challenges. It may also have access and capacity limitations, with a cap on the number of users.
- 15 A second option is to develop a specific platform, similar to that which was designed for the International Hague Network of Judges. This medium would be better suited to the online forum as it would be created for the specific purpose, with access tailored to the needs of Contracting Parties. This option would require additional funding for initial development, estimated at €15,000 to €20,000, but would not give rise to any ongoing maintenance costs as it is hosted together with the HCCH website.

V. Proposal for the Special Commission

- 16 The Special Commission is invited to discuss the proposals and request the PB to develop the preferred solution, with reference to any additional requirements.