

EU Pledges \$9.5M to Study, Promote RFID Business Applications

The funding will help support a three-year \$16.5 million initiative dedicated to the use of RFID systems, primarily those based on EPCglobal standards.

By Jonathan Collins

July 13, 2006—The European Union (EU) has pledged €7.5 million (\$9.5 million) in funding for a three-year initiative dedicated to the research, development, training and demonstration of the effective use of RFID systems. This endeavor will focus primarily on systems based on [EPCglobal](#) standards.

The Building Radio frequency IDentification solutions for the Global Environment project, or [BRIDGE](#), is being funded by the EU's Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP6) and 31 contributing organizations. Global data standards group [GS1](#) will coordinate the project. GS1's operations, which include [EPCglobal](#), account for seven of the 31 participating organizations. Other members are drawn from universities in Europe and China, three of the Auto-ID Labs, RFID vendors and end users.

The initiative is the result of a proposal GS1 and the other organizations presented to the EU last year. That proposal set out a detailed plan of the work that would be carried out, along with its value. BRIDGE project participant organizations will be able to get EU funding for a percentage—either 35, 50 or 100 percent—of the cost of their work on the project. In total, the project is expected to cost €13 million (\$16.5 million), All BRIDGE projects are due to be completed by June 30, 2009, but the first results of work being carried out are expected before the end of the year.

According to GS1, the EU's backing will allow participants to pursue research, in a more detailed and efficient manner, regarding a range of areas related to the business applications of RFID within Europe. "Probably about 60 to 70 percent of this research would have been carried out by the participating organizations anyway, but the EU funding means it will be better, completed quicker and with higher quality and will receive more recognition," says Henri Barthel, project coordinator of BRIDGE and technical director of EPCglobal and GS1.

The BRIDGE project agenda consists of 15 different work packages, each involving a number of participating organizations. Seven groups will look at industry-specific application development, while three will examine hardware and software development. The remaining groups will study the technology's security, the management of RFID projects, how to promote the technology, its impact on EU policy and the potential long-term impact on business and society.

The project will include pilots, deployment and reports covering the use of RFID in a variety of business sectors, as well as some laboratory-based research. This work will primarily cover UHF and HF RFID applications using the EPCglobal numbering and network infrastructure, although it does not have to be limited to that technology.

"The work will clearly be based on EPCglobal standards, but there is no binding statement not to look outside EPC," says Barthel. "In research, there has to be an open mind to consider alternative technologies."

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