

COST Open Call – Applicant Guidelines (Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval - SESA) - Level C

November 2022

Open Call oc-2023-1

**COST 104/21
V2.0**

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Document Change History

Version	Release date	Summary of changes
1.0 (former oc-2022-1)	15 December 2021	<p>Updates to launch oc-2022-1, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - included clear examples of eligible statements on anonymity, - list of information to be provided to evaluators has been modified (deleting those which were not an evaluation criteria), - the amended list of ITCs, - updates of the links to reference documents in the context of Horizon Europe, - change of terminology and definition: Early Career Investigators (ECI) is changed to Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI), and - amendments resulting from the change on the rules for participation of researchers and innovators from NNC and Third States (IPC).
1.1 (former oc-2022-1)	13 April 2022	<p>Minor updates, linguistic and formatting changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - correction of the release date on page 3 (15 December instead of 29 October 2021) - due to the deletion of a chapter in the previous version, a series of references to chapter numbers needed to be updated - the “sections” of the Guidelines were renamed as “chapters” to avoid confusion with the “sections” of the Technical Annex, which are also described in the Guidelines
2.0	18 November 2022	<p>Updates to launch oc-2023-1, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated link to Country and Organisation table - Sentence added for resubmissions to use the correct template - Clarification on outermost regions status for Open Call - Text edits / reference updates - Link added to the European Commission website on gender equality in research and innovation

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides a practical step-by-step guide to the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Open Call rules and procedures for Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) of COST Action proposals, as decided by the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)¹.

Proposers are invited to read the set of COST Implementation Rules establishing the conditions for participation in COST activities and in particular in COST Actions, namely:

- [Annotated Rules for COST Actions \(COST 094/21\)](#)
- [COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(COST 101/21\)](#)

They are available at: <https://www.cost.eu/funding/documents-guidelines/>. These documents are legally binding and take precedence over any guidelines. In case of any contradiction between the COST Implementation Rules and the current guidelines, COST Implementation Rules shall prevail.

1. OVERVIEW OF COST FRAMEWORK, COST ACTION AND SESA PROCESS

The COST Association is the legal entity in charge of the management and implementation of COST strategy, policy and activities towards the achievement of the COST Mission. The overview of the COST structure and its intergovernmental dimension can be found at <https://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/about-cost/>.

1.1. The COST framework: mission and policy

COST is a pan-European intergovernmental framework² dedicated to European-based Science and Technology (S&T) networking activities aiming at allowing their participants to jointly develop their ideas and new initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European coordination of nationally or otherwise funded research activities. COST has been contributing since its creation in 1971 to closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond.

The COST **Mission** is to provide networking opportunities for researchers and innovators in order to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges. There are three strategic priorities:

- promoting and spreading excellence;
- fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science;
- empowering and retaining young researchers.

COST implements its mission by funding bottom-up, excellence-driven, open and inclusive networks for peaceful purposes in all areas of science and technology.

In order to achieve its mission, COST provides support for activities such as:

- the development of European-based scientific and technological networks in any scientific or interdisciplinary domain;
- the exploitation of the research outcomes by integrating all stakeholders, thereby intensifying the links between scientific communities, enterprises, policy makers and society;
- the dissemination of results of such research activities in order to improve their scientific, social and economic impact;

¹ See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval](#)

² See the list of countries and organisations in COST 088/21 Rules and Principles for COST Activities, [Annex I](#).

- the provision for collaboration opportunities to all researchers in order to employ all talented and creative human resources available in Europe overcoming the bottlenecks linked to geographic location, age or gender;
- the facilitation of the international collaboration of the European research networks, thereby increasing their efficiency, effectiveness and impact at global level;
- the appropriate further developments for the European Cooperation in Science and Technology in the context of the European Research Area based on European and global developments.

COST has put in place a policy and a set of rules aiming at fulfilling its mission and specific objectives:

- COST Excellence and Inclusiveness.

The policy on COST **Excellence and Inclusiveness** is built upon two pillars:

- strengthening the excellence through the creation of cross-border networking of researchers;
- promoting geographical, age and gender balance throughout its activities and operations.

This policy aims to provide collaboration opportunities to all researchers and innovators in COST Full or Cooperating Members³ and to overcome the bottlenecks that prevent the use of all talented and creative human resources available for European science. It has the following objectives:

- encouraging and enabling researchers from less research-intensive countries across Europe to set up or join COST Actions. These countries are denominated Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC) (see [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations table](#));
- counterbalancing research communities' unequal access to knowledge, infrastructures, funding and resources;
- providing a strong means to increase the visibility and integration of researchers to the leading knowledge hubs of Europe, as well as to acquire their necessary leadership skills, regardless of their location, age or gender;
- smoothly contributing to trigger structural changes in the national research systems of COST Members;
- identifying excellence across Europe to contribute to ERA widening objectives.

Through COST Global Networking, COST encourages the participation of researchers and innovators affiliated in non-COST Members and Specific Organisations in COST activities on the basis of mutual benefit. The participation of researchers from Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) is particularly encouraged, according to the provisions related to eligibility for both participation and reimbursement set in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

Further, COST aims at enabling fruitful collaborations between researchers, innovators and other stakeholders and business by providing a platform for them to meet and build mutual trust. It also aims at increasing impact of research in the industrial sector. With this purpose, COST promotes the use and development of technologies, as well as the exploitation⁴ of COST Action results and outcomes through dedicated dissemination and exploitation activities targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large companies in Europe.

1.2. COST Actions

COST **funds networking activities** to the benefit of nationally or otherwise funded research activities.

COST Actions are Science and Technology (S&T) networks open to researchers and innovators affiliated to universities, research centres, companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as other stakeholders and relevant legal entities. All the relevant information to manage

³ See the list of countries in COST 088/21 Rules and Principles for COST Activities, [Annex I](#)

⁴ See [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#), section 5.5.2 on Intellectual Property Rights on Action results"

a COST Action is presented in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#). COST Actions are set up to achieve specific objectives within their four-year duration based upon the sharing, creation, dissemination and application of knowledge. These objectives can be reached through COST networking activities:

- Meetings (Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings);
- Training Schools;
- Mobility of Researchers and Innovators (Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobility (VM));
- Presentations at conferences organised by third parties (ITC Conference presentation and Dissemination presentations).

Further, COST Actions can receive funding for other expenses supporting the Action:

- Dissemination and Communication Products
- Expenses incurred for the benefit of the network (OERSA and Virtual Networking Support (VNS)).

COST Actions are:

- **Pan-European:** the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 41 Full Members, one Cooperating Member, and one Partner Member;
- **Bottom-up:** in terms of S&T fields and topics, COST welcomes any novel, original and innovative idea;
- **Open:** in terms of participation, COST Actions can grow in size;
- **Unique:** as a platform to coordinate national research funding and resources within a well-defined framework;
- **Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinary:** bridging different research communities, disciplines, fields and methodologies;
- **Output and Impact-Oriented:** COST Actions are monitored against their expected output and impact.

COST Actions are **bottom-up** in two ways: their topics are chosen by proposers and the scientific management decisions are entrusted to the Action Management Committees. They are **open** throughout their lifetime to new members and are **adaptable** in terms of internal organisation and strategy. They shall promote actively the participation of the next generation of researchers and innovators. Thus, COST Actions are especially well-suited to pursue **new ideas through collaborative efforts** and/or to **build communities** around emerging S&T topics and societal questions.

1.2.1. COST ACTION STRUCTURE

The intergovernmental dimension of COST is reflected in the structure of a COST Action.

The **Action Management Committee (MC)** is the decision-making body. The Action MC is responsible for the coordination, implementation and management of the Action activities and for supervising the appropriate allocation and use of the grant with a view to achieve the Action's scientific and technological objectives. It is composed of:

MC Members: up to two representatives of the COST Full or Cooperating Member. Nomination of MC Members is a national prerogative, follows national procedures, and is performed by the COST National Coordinator (CNC)⁵.

MC Observers:

⁵ Before the start of the Action (date of the first Management Committee meeting), persons nominated by the CNC will automatically become Action MC Members. After the Action's first MC meeting, new Action MC Members need to be validated by the Action MC.

- up to two representatives of the COST Partner Member. Action MC Observers from the Partner Member are nominated by the COST National Coordinators (CNCs);
- up to one representative of the Specific Organisation that joined the Action. Action MC Observers from Specific Organisations are nominated by the Specific Organisation.

Action MC Members and Observers may nominate their **substitute ad hoc** for a specific event or a specific period. The substitute shall be appointed among the Working Group (WG) members (see hereafter) affiliated in the same COST Member or Specific Organisation.

The MC takes decisions by simple majority vote. MC Observers have no voting rights.

Working Groups (WGs) are in charge of developing the scientific activities needed to achieve the Action objectives, in line with the Action strategy defined by the Action MC. The composition is based on WG applications submitted via the Action page on the COST website, the leadership is subject to the Action MC vote, and the activity of the WG is defined by the MC and the MoU.

COST Actions are funded via yearly **Action Grant Agreements (AGAs)** based on annual **Work and Budget Plans (W&BPs)**, detailing the activities designed to achieve the objectives defined in the MoU. The Action's activities are decided by the Action MC, taking advantage of the full range of the COST **networking activities**. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

The research and development activities needed for the achievement of the Action objectives rely on nationally or otherwise funded research projects and resources (e.g., employees' time, infrastructures and equipment) and are not funded by COST. COST Actions aim at leveraging national or other sources of funding towards efficient trans-European research cooperation.

1.2.2. PARTICIPANTS

COST Actions are open to all researchers and innovators who are committed to work on and achieve the Action objectives and are affiliated to a legal entity⁶. Action Participants are defined as any person being an Action MC Member, an Action MC Observer, a Working Group member or an ad hoc participant:

Action MC Members and Observers: their role is to represent and benefit their national community and pro-actively participate in the implementation of coordination and management decisions in the Action.

WG members: any individual affiliated to a legal entity in any country in the world may become a WG member. Their participation needs to be approved by the Action MC, based on an application submitted through the Action page on the COST website. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives through their participation in WG.

Ad hoc Participants: Individuals selected, as necessary, by the Action MC to contribute to the COST Action activities towards the achievement of the COST Action Objectives. Ad hoc participants can be STSM grantees, trainees and trainers in Training Schools, and invited speakers at COST Action Workshops and Conferences.

All Action Participants must be affiliated to a legal entity located in a COST Member or in any NNC or Third State (IPC⁷).

⁶ For more detailed information, please check [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

⁷ International Partner Countries (IPC) – Third States: States that are neither COST Members nor COST Near Neighbour Countries (e.g. Argentina, Japan, US, etc.).

A **legal entity** can be (non-exhaustive list) a public entity (national, regional, local public authority or any other kind of public entity), a university, a research centre, company, association, Specific Organisation or any other form of legal entity recognised under a national or international framework⁸.

The eligibility for reimbursement and the rules for participation depend on the status of country or specific organisation the participant is affiliated to according to COST rules (see [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#) and [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations table](#)).

The procedures to participate in a COST Action may be found in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

1.3. COST Open Call and SESA process

COST Open Call is a one-stage submission process. Proposals may be submitted at any time through a dedicated secured online tool, the e-COST Submission Tool (further details are provided in Chapter 2).

COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on [Funding Documents & Guidelines](#) with the Collection Date, the schedule, the description of the procedure and reference to the evaluation criteria.

The proposal evaluation and selection follows a three-step process further described in Chapter 3 of these guidelines:

Step 1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts

Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Evaluation Reports by ad hoc Review Panels

Step 3 – Proposals' Selection by COST Scientific Committee (SC)

The shortlist of proposals selected by the SC is submitted to the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) for approval. Further details about the three-step process and the approval are provided in Chapter 3.

Proposals are evaluated and selected on a competitive basis, taking into account the available funds for the particular Open Call Collection.

COST reserves the right to involve observers to assess and provide feedback on the Evaluation and Selection process.

2. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL FOR A COST ACTION

2.1. Registration for submission

Proposals shall be submitted by a network of proposers, represented by only one Main Proposer affiliated to an institution located in a COST Full or Cooperating Member, or affiliated to a European RTD organisation or EU body, office or agency, as described in Table 1.

⁸ Section 4.1.1.1.1 in the [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

Table 1: Eligibility to participate in the Network of Proposers by Affiliation

Proposers affiliated in	Eligible as	
	Main Proposer	Secondary Proposer
A legal entity in a COST Full/Cooperating member	✓	✓
A legal entity in a COST Partner Member	✗	✓
A legal entity in a Near Neighbour Country (NNC)	✗	✓
A legal entity in a Third State (IPC)	✗	✓
EU Institutions, Bodies, Offices and Agencies (EC/EU)	✓	✓
European RTD	✓	✓
International Organisations	✗	✓

✓ = Yes

✗ = No

Independent workers are ineligible as Main or Secondary Proposer.

To submit a proposal to the COST Open Call, the Main Proposer has first to create an account (if not registered yet) in e-COST i.e. e-COST profile (<https://e-services.cost.eu/>). The Main Proposer will be able to create, manage and submit their proposal before the Collection Date, by logging into e-COST and selecting the e-COST Submission Tool, by clicking “Open Call”, “Proposals”, “Create New proposal” (<https://e-services.cost.eu/sesa/quickAccess>).

The proposal has a **draft** status until it is **submitted**. Once it is submitted, it may still be revised as many times as needed before the Collection Date. **N.B.: when being revised, the proposal loses its “submitted” status. In order to be evaluated, it needs to be submitted again before the Collection Date.** Proposals that are not submitted will not be evaluated. The draft proposal is saved in the system and may be accessed and retrieved by the Main Proposer until the Collection Date. Please note that after the Collection Date the proposal data are only available in read mode and none of its sections is transferable to another collection.

In order to avoid possible congestions of the e-COST Submission Tool, it is highly recommended to avoid submitting the proposal just before the Collection Date.

All enquiries concerning the Open Call can be addressed directly from the “contact us” link in e-COST or by sending an e-mail to opencall@cost.eu.

A submitted proposal may not be identical, not even in part, to another one submitted during the same collection. Should this occur, only the proposal which is submitted first shall be considered.

Re-submissions should take into account the evolution of the state of the art as well as the comments of the reviewers from the previous collection. Note that the latest template must always be used.

2.2. Eligibility criteria

Please pay particular attention to this chapter and to each one of the following eligibility criteria⁹.

COST Action proposals must:

- represent a Network of Proposers from **at least 7** different COST Full or Cooperating Members **among which at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in the Annex of this document**;
- respect fundamental ethical principles as described in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#) (COST 094/21) and in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity¹⁰, with particular emphasis on **originality** of findings and ideas, and on **peaceful** purposes of the addressed S&T challenges;
- respect **word and page limits** as described in chapter 2.4.2 of this document. Do not change in any way the compulsory format of the “Technical Annex” (font, margins, line spacing, etc.) and make sure any added figures or tables are readable. Furthermore, do not provide links or references to any additional information about the proposal (web link to pages describing the proposal, audio-visual material, etc);
- be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association;
- be **anonymous**, in order to comply with the double-blind principle of the evaluation:

proposals may **not contain any direct or indirect reference** to people and/or their institutions participating in the Network of Proposers (Main or Secondary Proposers). This means that names of proposers or their institutions should **neither be explicitly mentioned, nor be potentially identifiable** through links to web pages or through references to their role and/or participation in existing or ended projects, grants, networks, ...

Note on “References”:

- In the “References” section of the proposal, you may quote proposers’ own publications, provided that:
 - a) there is no emphasis that the publication is authored by one or more of the proposers and
 - b) it is only one or a few of the references in the reference list provided.

Table 2: Examples of statements resulting in ineligibility and statements that are eligible

Statements resulting in ineligibility	Eligible statements
“Several members of the proposers’ network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and institutions/organisations/networks/COST Actions, such as FP0901” (direct reference)	“The Action will seek contact with / reach out to / draw on the expertise of / build on / ... previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and institutions/organisations/networks/COST Actions/..., such as FP0901.”
“Among government-run public services we have the Department of Health of Catalonia on board” (direct reference)	“The Network of Proposers already includes a / several government-run public service(s).”

⁹ See also [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation Selection and Approval](#), Section 5

¹⁰ European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (<https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>), Berlin, ALLEA – All European Academies

<p>Some of the Proposers' names are emphasised in the references section, e.g., "Smith A & Jones B (2020), Journal of Physics", where A. Smith is a proposer (direct reference)</p>	<p>No emphasis on proposers' publications in the references section in any way, e.g., "Smith A & Jones B (2020), Journal of Physics"</p>
<p>"The Network of Proposers has already generated some output¹", with in the footnote a link to a YouTube video or webpage in which Secondary Proposers can be identified (indirect reference, potentially identifiable)</p>	<p>"The Network of Proposers has already generated some output", without links to a YouTube video or webpage in which Secondary Proposers can be identified</p>
<p>The Technical Annex referring to the expertise of the network members through specific publications (the authors of these publications come from an institution participating in the proposal: indirect reference)</p>	<p>The Technical Annex referring to the expertise of the Network of Proposers, possibly also mentioning the field, sub-field and expected contribution to the respective WG(s) / activities but without mentioning specific publications</p>

Proposals may be declared ineligible at any stage of the SESA process, whenever a breach of the above eligibility criteria is identified. Proposers will be informed by the COST Association of the ineligibility of their proposal.

2.3. Network of Proposers: requirements

The Network of Proposers must fulfil the following requirements:

- The Network of Proposers must include at least 7 different COST Full or Cooperating Members i.e. countries (one country where the Main Proposer has its entity of affiliation located, plus at least 6 other countries for the Secondary Proposers) amongst which at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations Table](#) and in Annex of this document. There can be more than one proposer from the same institution, as long as it is clearly beneficial for the proposed Action. Similarly, there is no limit on the maximum number of proposers from the same country.
- It is important to note that for the participation of the network of proposers, the ITC status of researchers and innovators from EU Member States Outermost Regions will be counted as the EU Member State they are linked to¹¹ (see [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations Table](#)).
- The European Commission and EU bodies, offices or agencies, European RTD Organisations and International Organisations do not count as COST Full or Cooperating Members, even if they are geographically located in the territory of one of the COST Full or Cooperating Members. No letter of intention is required from any of the institutions involved in the Network of Proposers (Main or Secondary Proposers);
- The Main Proposer acts as representative and contact point for the COST Association and is also in charge of inviting and accepting Secondary Proposers to the Network. Please do not underestimate the time necessary to complete this task as acceptance implies completion of e-COST profiles;
- All proposers must have a registered and updated e-COST profile (<https://e-services.cost.eu>) and specify their scientific expertise. Proposers should be aware that completing an e-COST profile may require some time.

¹¹ For example, researchers affiliated in a legal entity in e.g Guadeloupe will be counted as France (non-ITC), researchers affiliated in a legal entity in Azores will be counted as Portugal (ITC).

See also Table 1, summarising the eligibility for participation as Main and Secondary Proposers by affiliation.

2.4. Proposal template

Proposals for COST Actions have the following sections:

- **General Features;**
- **Technical Annex;**
- **References;**
- **COST Mission, Policy and rules;**
- **Network of Proposers.**

All these sections are to be completed online with the exception of the Technical Annex. The instructions related to each section are given below.

2.4.1. GENERAL FEATURES

This section should be completed online in the e-COST Submission Tool. It contains mandatory fields that need to be filled in by the Main Proposer.

General Features
<p>Open Call Collection identifier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatically assigned
<p>Proposal reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatically assigned
<p>Title</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory • Max. 12 words • The title of the proposal should describe at a glance what the proposal is about
<p>Acronym</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory • Only original acronyms should be adopted, i.e., not in use by any other public or private entity or research group, even if they are part of the Network of Proposers. • Acronyms may only contain letters and numbers. The use of symbols is not accepted, with the exception of “-” and “@”.
<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory • Max. 250 words • Short abstract used to illustrate the challenge that the Action is proposing to address. A revised version of the text of this section will be used as a summary of the Action to be published on the COST website, should the Action be approved. <p><i>Be brief, clear and “to the point”: illustrate your ideas in a concise manner and include what is the main S&T and/or societal Challenge the proposed Action aims to address.</i></p>
<p>Key expertise needed for evaluation</p>

- Mandatory
- Minimum 1 key expertise and maximum 5 (recommended: 3) must be indicated. Multiple choice selection of sub-fields to be chosen from six main S&T fields: natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Please be aware that the Independent External Experts will be selected on the basis of the key expertise(s) you provide in this section.

Keywords

- Mandatory
- Minimum 3 and maximum 5 keywords
- Each keyword not exceeding 60 characters
- These should exclusively refer to the S&T content of the proposal, including techniques or methodologies used or developed and/or infrastructures involved. Keywords are separated by commas. Keywords may be composed by multiple words. Generic keywords, such as “interdisciplinary”, “research coordination”, “science” or “networking”, as well as their combinations, should be avoided as they bring no information on the specific expertise needed to evaluate the proposal.

2.4.2. TECHNICAL ANNEX

The Technical Annex is composed by the following sections:

Section 1. S&T EXCELLENCE

Section 2. NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

Section 3. IMPACT

Section 4. IMPLEMENTATION

To prepare the Technical Annex of your proposal, you must use the template available at http://www.cost.eu/technical_annex_template and follow the instructions thereby provided.

N.B.: The length of the Technical Annex must not exceed **fifteen (15)** pages (eligibility criteria; see chapter 2.2). The first page with instructions has to be deleted when saving the proposal to PDF.

The template provided **must not be modified and the formatting must be kept** (COST standard style: Arial font, size 10, line spacing 1 – choose “Normal, Text” style option from the ribbon styles gallery). When figures or tables are added, they must be readable.

The instructions to complete each section are listed below. Chapter 2.6 provides the definitions of key concepts useful for the preparation of the proposal.

Section 1 – S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1 SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

Demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field.

1.1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

Describe the research question(s) your proposal addresses. Explain the relevance and timeliness of the identified challenge(s).

1.2 PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

1.2.1 APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

Describe how the challenge will be approached and emphasise the innovativeness of this approach and how it will advance the state of the art in the field.

1.2.2 OBJECTIVES

1.2.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

1.2.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

Describe clear and ambitious objectives clearly showing their relevance to the identified challenge. Please formulate the objectives in a “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely) way. Objectives are not COST Action networking activities (e.g. meetings, training schools), milestones or deliverables; please refer to chapter 2.6.3. OBJECTIVES for explanation and examples.

Section 2 – NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

2.1 ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

2.1.1 ADDED VALUE IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Describe the added value of the proposed COST Action in tackling the challenge in relation to former and existing efforts (research projects, other networks, etc.) at the European and/or international level.

N.B: Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check chapter 2.2 of these Guidelines!). In particular, do not link projects, networks, etc. with specific participants or institutions within the network of proposers (e.g. do not make statements such as “several members of the proposer network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and COST Actions, such as FP0901.”)

2.2 ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1 SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE AND GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE WITHIN THE COST MEMBERS AND BEYOND

Demonstrate that the proposed network contains the critical mass and expertise for achieving the objectives and thus addressing the challenge; and/ or present a credible plan for securing the critical mass and expertise for achieving the objectives.

Explain why your Network of Proposers can address the identified challenge and objectives of the proposed COST Action: make a case for the critical mass, expertise and geographical distribution needed for addressing the challenge and the objectives, both in the COST Members and, if applicable, NNC, Third States (IPC) and Specific Organisations.

If your Network misses any of the critical mass, expertise or geographical distribution needed, present a clear plan for overcoming the identified gaps.

N.B:

- ***Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check chapter 2.2 of these Guidelines!).***

- **COST Policy should not be addressed in this section. See chapter 2.4.4.**

2.2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them in the Action.

Section 3 – IMPACT

3.1 IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGHS

3.1.1. SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS (INCLUDING POTENTIAL INNOVATIONS AND/OR BREAKTHROUGHS)

Describe in a clear way the relevant scientific and/or technological and/or socio-economic impact envisaged by the proposal in the short- and long-term perspective. Clearly identify relevant and realistic impacts for science, society and/or competitiveness, including potential scientific, technological and/or socioeconomic innovations and/or breakthroughs.

3.2 MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Clearly describe the contribution that the proposed Action would make to knowledge creation, transfer of knowledge and career development.

3.2.2. PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY

Present a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results, including IPR, if relevant¹². Describe a plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results that is clear and attainable and contributes to the dialogue between science and the general public and/or policy.

Section 4 – IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN

Please note that you do not need to provide a budget breakdown at this stage, since the budget is allocated to the approved Actions by the COST Association on the basis of specific parameters and subject to budget availability.

4.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

Provide a detailed description of the different Working Groups, tasks and activities, ensuring that these are appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Action.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

¹² See [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

Describe the proposed Action's major deliverables and timeframe, ensuring that these are appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Action.

4.1.3 RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Identify the main risks related to the Work Plan and present a credible contingency plan which is appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Action.

N.B: Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check chapter 2.2 of these Guidelines!).

4.1.4 GANTT DIAGRAM

Provide a graphical illustration of the time schedule for the different activities, tasks, and deliverables according to the management structure of the proposed Action.

N.B: Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check chapter 2.2 of these Guidelines!).

2.4.3. REFERENCES

Please complete this section online.

References
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non mandatory • Max. 500 words • Free text section to list relevant references on the topic of the proposal further demonstrating your awareness on the state of the art of the given field(s). The list of references is displayed to the evaluators, but not assessed during the evaluation. <p><i>N.B: In compliance with the eligibility criterion of anonymity, proposers should ensure that the bibliography submitted respects this criterion (see chapter 2.2 of these Guidelines).</i></p> <p>You may quote proposers' own publication(s), provided that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) there is no emphasis that the publication is authored by one or more proposers and b) it is only one or a few of a set of other references.

2.4.4. COST MISSION AND POLICY¹³

Please complete this section online. Summarise how the proposal addresses COST Mission and Policy- Please refer to chapter 1.1 of this document for further details on the COST Mission and Policy.

COST Mission and Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory • Max. 1000 words • This is a free text section to explain how the Action proposal will address the COST Policy with regard to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensuring a geographical balance, and involving participants from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC); 2. Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI); 3. addressing Gender balance¹⁴.

¹³ The content of this section will be assessed at the selection phase by the Scientific Committee.

¹⁴ Applicants may find it useful to consult the [European Commission website on gender equality in research and innovation](#)

- The proposal should describe the plans (what and how) for each of these three specific targets.

2.4.5. NETWORK OF PROPOSERS

Please complete this section online. For further details please check chapter 2.3.

On the “Network” section of the proposal, the Main Proposer invites Secondary Proposers by filling in the following mandatory fields: first name, last name and e-mail address. By clicking on the “envelope” icon, an automatic email is sent to the candidate Secondary Proposer.

The Secondary Proposer accepts the invitation by following the link communicated in the invitation e-mail. To do so, they must have (or set up) an e-COST profile. NB: the email address used in the invitation email must be registered in the Secondary Proposers e-COST profile.

In case the Secondary Proposer is affiliated to a legal entity in a COST Full Member or COST Cooperating Member, they can express their intention to be considered by the COST National Coordinator (CNC) to be nominated to the Action’s Management Committee (MC).

Based on e-COST profiles (automatic extracts) from the Main and Secondary Proposers, the following aggregated information will be displayed to the evaluators:

Network of Proposers’ Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COST Full or Cooperating Members (number and list in alphabetical order) • NNCs (number and list in alphabetical order) • IPCs (number and list in alphabetical order) • European Commission, EU bodies, offices and agencies • European RTD Organisations • International Organisations • Core Expertise of proposers: distribution by sub-field of Science • Institutional distribution of the Network of Proposers

2.5. Writing style guide

The COST Association strongly recommends complying with the following requirements when drafting a proposal:

- check language and spelling;
- present the text in a logical way, avoiding unnecessary repetition between the different sections;
- do not use footnotes;
- use of capital letters for COST-specific and Action-related expressions. A non-exhaustive list: COST Action, Action Chair, Action Management Committee, Working Group, Short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM), Training School, Core Group;
- explain all acronyms, including those commonly used in the Framework Programme context;
- use of “Europe” or “COST Member Countries” when referring to the overall geographical scope of COST. “European Union” or “EU Member States” should only be used to refer to the EU as a player (“EU legislation”, “EU programmes”, “EU policies” etc.) or when only EU Member State(s) need to be explicitly mentioned, excluding COST Members that are no Member States of the EU;
- use of “framework” or “scheme” when referring to COST (COST is an intergovernmental framework, not an “EU instrument”, although it is funded by the EU Framework Programme);
- avoid pronouns such as “I”, “we”; rather use “the Action”;

- avoid expressions such as “planned” or “proposed” when referring to the Action; rather use “aims at”, “will”, etc.;
- avoid overstatements regarding the potential impact of the Action.

2.6. Definition of key concepts used in COST proposals

This section clarifies COST definitions of key concepts to guide proposers in the preparation of proposals.

2.6.1. CHALLENGES

Challenges are the research questions addressed by a COST Action, targeting S&T and/or socio-economic problems.

In COST Actions, researchers and innovators from different places and backgrounds are expected to work as a team towards the resolution of a S&T challenge. To respond to the challenge, the network needs not only coordination in working as a team, but also in gathering a critical mass of participants (researchers and innovators) around the science and technology topic in question.

2.6.2. POTENTIAL INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGH

Through the Actions, COST aims notably at enabling breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts, services, processes and products and thereby contributing to strengthening Europe’s research and innovation capacities.

When choosing a COST Action as an instrument to tackle the S&T Challenge, proposers must have a clear vision on the innovation potential of their endeavour.

2.6.3. OBJECTIVES

COST Action objectives are the results that an Action needs to achieve in order to respond to its challenge. These are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) and twofold: Research Coordination Objectives and Capacity-building Objectives, in order to comply with COST Mission. Note that COST Action objectives are not COST Action networking activities (e.g. meetings, training schools, etc.) nor deliverables. Indeed, networking activities are means to support the achievement of the Action objectives.

a) Research Coordination Objectives

These objectives entail the distribution of tasks, sharing of knowledge and know-how, and the creation of synergies among Action Participants to achieve specific outputs. Achieving these objectives turns COST Actions from initially scattered groups into one transnational team and leverages the existing funded research.

Examples of Research Coordination Objectives:

- development of a common understanding/definition of the subject matter;
- coordination of information seeking, identification, collection and/or data curation;
- coordination of experimentation or testing;
- comparison and/or performance assessment of theory/ model/ scenario/ projection/ simulation/ narrative/ methodology/ technology/ technique;
- development of knowledge needing international coordination: new or improved theory/ model/scenario/ projection/ simulation/ narrative/ methodology/ technology/ technique;
- achievement of a specific tangible output that cannot be achieved without international coordination (e.g. due to practical issues such as database availability, language barriers, availability of infrastructure or know-how, etc.);

- input to stakeholders (e.g. standardization body, policy-makers, regulators, users) -excluding commercial applications;
- input for future market applications (including cooperation with private enterprises);
- dissemination of research results to the general public or to stakeholders.

b) Capacity-building Objectives

Achieving these objectives entails building critical mass to drive scientific progress, thereby strengthening the European Research Area. They can be achieved by the delivery of specific outputs and/or through network features or types and levels of participation.

Examples of Capacity-building Objectives:

- fostering knowledge exchange and the development of a joint research agenda around a topic of scientific and/or socio-economic relevance;
- fostering knowledge exchange and the development of a joint research agenda around a new or emerging field of research;
- bridging separate fields of science/disciplines to achieve breakthroughs that requires an interdisciplinary approach;
- acting as a stakeholder platform or trans-national practice community (by area of socio-economic application and/or market sector);
- involving specific target groups (e.g. newly established research groups, Young Researchers and Innovators, the under-represented gender, teams from countries/regions with less capacity in the field of the Action).

2.6.4. COST ACTION STRUCTURE

This comprises the organisation of the Action in:

- the Action S&T research and development activities necessary to achieve the objectives;
- the internal organisation of the Action into Working Groups and other managing structures needed for the successful implementation of the Action;
- the work plan including efficient use of the networking activities – Meetings (Action MC meetings, Working Group meetings, workshops, conferences), Training Schools, Mobility of Researchers and Innovators, and Presentations at Conferences organised by third parties to share ideas and knowledge and create added value;
- the timeline for the implementation of the Action activities and the achievement of objectives within the Action lifetime.

2.6.5. FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO COST ACTIONS: NETWORKING ACTIVITIES AND OTHER EXPENSES

Funding provided by COST supports networking activities, in particular:

- Meetings (i.e. Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings);
- Training Schools;
- Mobility of Researchers and Innovators (Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobility (VM));
- Presentations at conferences organised by third parties (ITC Conference grants and Dissemination grants).

Further, COST Actions can receive funding for other expenses supporting the Action:

- Dissemination and Communication Products;
- Expenses incurred for the benefit of the network (OERSA and Virtual Networking Support (VNS)).

Please refer to the following link for further information: <https://www.cost.eu/cost-actions/cost-actions-networking-tools/>. These networking activities can generate activities that, although not directly funded by COST, contribute to the proposed Action challenge.

2.6.6. ACTION ACTIVITIES

This definition encompasses all the activities organised by the COST Action, by means of the networking activities, in order to achieve the research coordination and capacity-building objectives.

2.6.7. RESULTS AND OUTPUTS

These are the direct results stemming from the COST Action activities. Outputs can be, among other things, codified knowledge, tacit knowledge, technology, and societal applications:

- Codified knowledge: Knowledge expressed through language (including mathematics, music etc.) and thus capable of being stored on a physical support (i.e. transferrable knowledge) – e.g. *publications; patents, websites;*
- Tacit knowledge: Not formalised knowledge, resulting from the participation in the COST Action networking activities and the social interaction among its members that can also be re-invested in other contexts;
- Technology: Knowledge embedded in artefacts either ready to use or not, such as machinery or software, new materials or modified organisms –e.g. *a prototype, a database;*
- Societal applications: Use of any kind of knowledge (codified, tacit, technology) to perform specific tasks;
- Societal applications require the active participation of stakeholders (such as business enterprises, practitioners, regulators, users) within the lifetime of an Action. If stakeholders are not involved, then societal applications may only be considered as possible future impacts resulting from the envisaged outputs, rather than direct Action outputs (e.g. *use of a methodology developed by the Action by a community of practitioners not participating to the Action*).

2.6.8. IMPACT

Impact is the effect or influence on short-term to long-term scientific, technological, and/or socio-economic changes produced by a COST Action.

2.6.9. DELIVERABLES

Deliverables are distinct, expected and tangible outputs of the Action, meaningful in terms of the Action's overall objectives, such as: reports, documents, technical diagrams, scientific and technical papers and contributions, content for training schools, input to standards, best practices, white papers, etc. Note that COST Action deliverables are used to measure the Action's progress and success on Action objectives, and should not be confused with COST Action networking activities (e.g. meetings, training schools, etc.).

2.6.10. MILESTONES

Milestones are control points in the Action that help to map progress. They can be Core Group or Action MC meetings, mid-term reviews etc. They are needed at intermediary stages so that, if problems have arisen, corrective measures can be taken in a timely way.

3. HOW COST PROPOSALS ARE EVALUATED, SELECTED AND APPROVED – CORE PRINCIPLES AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST RULES

The Open Call Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure fulfils three core principles: excellence, fairness and transparency. COST strives to avoid any Conflict of Interest (Col) and all those involved in the SESA process must commit to confidentiality.

3.1. Conflict of Interest¹⁵

COST expects an ethical behaviour from all the participants in COST activities.

The Conflict of Interest rules apply to all those concerned by the SESA process (CNCs, Independent External Experts, Review Panel Members, Scientific Committee Members, and CSO members). Each individual involved in the evaluation, selection and approval of proposals shall have only one role in the evaluation, selection and approval of a COST Action and may not take any benefit from any Action approved under that specific Collection. In particular:

- Independent External Experts having evaluated a proposal may not participate in the Action deriving from that proposal;
- Review Panel Members may not participate in any Action approved following the evaluation process in which they were involved in that position;
- CNCs and Scientific Committee Members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate;
- CSO members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate.

A Conflict of Interest can be real, potential or perceived.

1. Cases of Real Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member):

- has been involved in the preparation of the proposal;
- has been involved in any previous evaluation step in the same Collection.

2. Cases of Potential Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member):

- was aware of the preparation of the proposal;
- has a professional or personal relationship with a proposer;
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal shall be accepted or rejected.

3. Cases of Perceived Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, Scientific Committee Member):

- feels for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the proposal.

¹⁵ See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(SESA\) – \(Level B\)](#)

Table 3: Summary of the cases of Conflict of Interest (Col)

Steps	Main Proposer and Network of Proposers	Independent External Expert	ad hoc Review Panel Member	Scientific Committee Member
Step 1 Evaluation (Independent External Experts)	×		×	×
Step 2 Revision (Review Panel)	×	×		×
Step 3 Selection (COST Scientific Committee)	×	×	×	
Final approval (CSO)	×	×	×	×

1. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified before the evaluation starts:
 - the evaluator may not participate in the evaluation/selection procedure in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced.

2. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified during the evaluation:
 - the evaluator shall stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced;
 - any comments and marks already given by the evaluator shall be discarded.

3. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified after the evaluation has taken place, the COST Association shall examine:
 - the potential impact and consequences of the Conflict of Interest and take appropriate measures.

The COST Association has the right to take the lead in any resolution process of a Col situation at any moment of the evaluation and selection.

All cases of Col must be recorded. All those related to nationally nominated actors (Review Panel Members and COST Scientific Committee Members) are reported to the COST National Coordinator.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Any person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member) shall sign a declaration stating/accepting he/she:

- is not aware of any conflict of interest regarding the proposal(s) to be evaluated/selected;
- shall inform immediately the COST Association of any conflict of interest discovered during the evaluation process;
- shall maintain the confidentiality of the procedure.

Failure to declare the Col may have the following consequences:

- notification to the COST Association Director;
- notification to the respective CNC for Review Panel Members;
- notification to the CSO for Scientific Committee Members;
- removal from the COST Expert Database.

3.2. Confidentiality¹⁶

COST expects that each person involved in the SESA process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, Scientific Committee Member, CNC and CSO member):

- treats confidentially any information, including personal data of any natural person concerned by or involved in the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of the proposals process, and document, in any form (i.e. paper or electronic), disclosed in writing or orally in relation to the performance of the evaluation;
- processes any confidential information or documents as described above only for the purposes and for the duration of the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals process;
- does not, either directly or indirectly, disclose any confidential information or document related to proposals or applicants, without prior written approval of the COST Association;
- does not discuss any proposal with others, including other evaluators or staff not directly involved in evaluating the proposal, except during formal discussions at dedicated ad hoc Review Panels and Scientific Committee meetings;
- does not disclose any detail of the evaluation process and its outcomes, nor of any proposal submitted, for any purpose other than fulfilling their tasks as evaluator;
- does not disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation;
- does not communicate with proposers on any proposal during or after the evaluation until the approval of CSO.

Under no circumstances should the proposers contact any of the actors involved in the SESA process regarding their proposal. Any attempt to do so may lead to immediate exclusion of the proposal from the process.

3.3. Proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval

As outlined in chapter 1.3, the proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure **is divided into three steps, which are described below.**

3.3.1. STEP 1 – PROPOSAL EVALUATION BY INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EXPERTS:

Independent External Experts carry out the remote peer-review evaluation. They are identified, selected and assigned to proposals on the basis of their scientific and technological expertise necessary for the evaluation of proposals. This will notably be based on Research Areas and keywords chosen by the network of proposers themselves.

This step uses double-blind peer review, which means the identity of both Independent External Experts and proposers is kept confidential. Each proposal is evaluated by a minimum of three Independent External Experts. The evaluation is performed remotely, and each External Expert submits an Individual Evaluation Report for each proposal they evaluate. One of the experts is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Consensus Evaluation Report.

Following the submission of the Individual Evaluation Reports, a consensus is sought among the External Experts (remotely) and a Consensus Evaluation Report is drafted. Consensus shall not be imposed and External Experts may maintain their views on the proposal. In the cases where no consensus is reached, the three Individual Evaluation Reports will be sent to the ad hoc Review Panel which is in charge of the quality check and resolution of discrepancies.

¹⁶See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(SESA\) – \(Level B\)](#)

The Individual Evaluation Reports are structured as follows:

- eligibility criteria
- evaluation criteria
 - S&T Excellence
 - Networking Excellence
 - Impact
 - Implementation.

The Independent External Experts check the following eligibility criteria (see chapter 2.4.2 of this document):

- Length;
- Anonymity;
- Respect of fundamental ethical principles with special emphasis on peaceful purposes;
- Language (English).

The table below presents the evaluation criteria, as well as the respective maximum marks at this stage of the procedure. The overall threshold for access to the selection stage is also indicated.

Table 4: Evaluation criteria and maximum mark per criterion

S&T EXCELLENCE	NETWORKING EXCELLENCE	IMPACT	IMPLEMENTATION
Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 5 points
TOTAL MARKS AWARDED = 0 – 50 points OVERALL THRESHOLD = 34 points			

Proposals failing to achieve the overall threshold will not be funded.

Below are the specific questions addressed by the Independent External Experts on each of the criteria:

S&T EXCELLENCE CRITERIA
<p>Soundness of the Challenge</p> <p>Q1: Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field(s) and present a relevant and timely challenge?</p>
<p>Progress beyond the state-of-the-art.</p> <p>Q2: Does the proposal describe an innovative approach to the challenge that advances the state of the art in the field(s)?</p> <p>Q3: Are the objectives presented relevant to the challenge, clear and ambitious?</p>

NETWORKING EXCELLENCE CRITERIA

Added value of networking in S&T Excellence

Q4: Does networking bring added value in tackling the challenge in relation to existing efforts at the European and/or international level?

Added value of networking in Impact

Q5: Does the proposed network contain, or present a credible plan for securing, the critical mass and range of expertise for achieving the objectives and thus addressing the challenge?

Q6: Does the proposal identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them as Action participants?

IMPACT CRITERIA

Impact to science, society and competitiveness, and potential for innovation/breakthroughs

Q7: Does the proposal clearly identify relevant and realistic impacts for science, society and/or competitiveness (including potential innovations and/or breakthroughs)?

Measures to maximise impact

Q8: Does the proposed networking clearly contribute to knowledge creation, transfer of knowledge and career development?

Q9: Is the plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results clear and attainable and does it contribute to the dialogue between science and the general public or policy?

IMPLEMENTATION CRITERION

Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan

Q10: Is the work plan (WGs, tasks, activities, timeframe, deliverables and risk analysis) appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives?

3.3.2. STEP 2 – REVISION AND QUALITY CHECK BY AD HOC REVIEW PANEL

Ad hoc Review Panels are set up after each Collection Date, based on the number of received proposals and on the topics covered.

The members of the ad hoc Review Panels are appointed by the COST Association from a pool of active researchers and innovators who have been nominated by the CNCs. Step 2 again uses double-blind peer review, which means that the identity of both Review Panel Members and proposers is kept confidential.

The ad hoc Review Panels shall:

- a) ensure the quality of the Consensus Evaluation Reports and marks submitted in Step 1;
- b) resolve the differences in opinions among the Independent External Experts, using one of the following options:
 - choose any mark within the range of marks awarded by the individual Independent External Experts or the non-agreed consensus mark of the Rapporteur as the review consensus marks, produce and validate the Consensus Evaluation Report;
 - in exceptional cases, ask for one or two additional Independent External Experts to remotely evaluate the proposal. In this case the *ad hoc* Review Panel shall make use of the additional evaluation reports to prepare the validated Consensus Evaluation Report and marks;
- c) rank the proposals above the overall threshold;
- d) strive for consistency of marking across the proposals within and across the Review Panels;
- e) identify those proposals which address emerging issues or potentially important future developments;
- f) prepare the report for the Scientific Committee, reflecting the process and the decisions of Step 2.

3.3.3. STEP 3 – PROPOSALS SELECTION BY COST SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee is composed of high-level experts (one from each COST Full Member and one from the Cooperating Member) with internationally renowned expertise and recognised merit in their professional career (science, technology, research management, innovation, industry or other). Scientific Committee Members are appointed by, and report to, the CSO.

The Scientific Committee guarantees that the present rules and procedures are observed throughout all the SESA process. Specifically, it is in charge of:

- establishing the shortlist of proposals that shall be submitted to the CSO for approval by
 - adopting from the ranked shortlist of proposals provided by the Review panels a list of retained proposals, which include all proposals with marks:
 - above the cut-off mark* (A);
 - equal to the cut-off mark*, one point less than the cut-off mark* or two points less than the cut-off mark* (B); and

**the cut-off mark is the number of points of the Nth proposal in the ranked list (sorted in decreasing order according to number of points), with N being the number of proposals to be funded according to available funds)*

- selecting from the list of retained proposals the shortlist of proposals for approval by the CSO:
 - the proposals in A (above the cut-off mark*) automatically enter the list of proposals recommended for funding;
 - among the proposals in B (equal to the cut-off mark*, one point less than the cut-off mark* or two points less than the cut-off mark*) the Scientific Committee completes the list of proposals recommended for funding with those that, besides being highly marked with respect to S&T Excellence/Networking Excellence / Impact / Implementation (i.e. the mark established by the Review Panels), best respond to COST Mission and Policy, based on the description in the proposal on COST Mission and Policy, as described in chapter 2.4.4 COST Mission and Policy of the present Guidelines. In order to achieve that, the Scientific Committee applies a pass / no-pass mark to all the proposals in B based on the criteria 2.b-2.d that are described in section 7 of document COST 101/21 [“COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and](#)

Approval". Each Main Proposer in proposals under B receives a notification that their proposal has been grouped among the proposals in B and that the final mark consists of the mark established by the Review Panels and the pass / no-pass mark established by the Scientific Committee. A separate comment on the pass / no-pass mark is provided by the Scientific Committee to each Main Proposer in proposals under B, additionally to the Consensus Evaluation Report.

- deciding on eligibility of proposals that have been identified by the COST Administration, the External Experts or the Review Panels as potentially breaching the COST principles;

For all proposals recommended for funding the Scientific Committee adopts a Recommendation on COST Mission and Policy.

The Scientific Committee will document its assessment made under paragraph 3.3.3. above.

3.3.4. PROPOSAL APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS (CSO)

The final decision on approval and funding for new COST Actions is taken by the CSO, on the basis of the shortlist submitted by the Scientific Committee taking into account the available budget. The CSO may decide not to approve Actions selected through the procedure above described.

The text of a successful proposal approved by the CSO will form the basis of the Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The procedure for starting a COST Action is described in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

3.4. Feedback to proposers

The Consensus Evaluation Reports, the marks of the evaluation and the results of the assessments made by the SC under paragraph 3.3.3. are made available to all proposers via e-COST. The decision on the approved proposals is communicated after the CSO decision to the Main Proposers.

3.5. Redress Procedure

In order to contribute to the fairness and transparency of the SESA process, the COST Association has established a Redress Procedure. The Main Proposer has the possibility to submit a request for redress **within 15 calendar days** after being notified of the proposal non-eligibility and/or following the communication of the final result of the evaluation.

Redress is allowed only in case of alleged procedural shortcomings and factual errors, i.e., whenever:

- the Network of Proposers considers that the evaluation has not been carried out in accordance with the SESA procedures;
- the Network of Proposers deems that the Consensus Evaluation Report bears factual errors.

Requests for redress dealing with the scientific judgment by the Independent External Experts, by the *ad hoc* Review Panels or Scientific Committee members are not admissible.

The proposal Selection by the COST Scientific Committee (Step 3) shall not be open to redress.

The redress procedure may be initiated only by email sent to redress@cost.eu. In the email, the Main Proposer shall:

- indicate the proposal number and title;
- provide a detailed description of the alleged procedural shortcoming(s) and /or factual error(s).

4. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The Rules and Principles for COST Activities ([Annex II](#))¹⁷ set the definitions of the terms and acronyms used in these guidelines.

¹⁷ [Annex II - Level A: Definitions and Abbreviations applicable throughout COST Implementation Rules - Glossary](#)

ANNEX: REQUIRED MINIMUM NUMBER OF COST INCLUSIVENESS TARGET COUNTRIES PER NUMBER OF COST FULL OR COOPERATING MEMBERS REPRESENTED IN A PROPOSAL

Number of COST Full or Cooperating Members	Minimum number of ITC
7	4
8	4
9	5
10	5
11	6
12	6
13	7
14	7
15	8
16	8
17	9
18	9
19	10
20	10
21	11
22	11
23	12
24	12
25	13
26	13
27	14
28	14
29	15
30	15
31	16
32	16
33	17
34	17
35	18
36	18
37	19
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