COST Open Call – Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) Guidelines

COST

EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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Document Change History

Version	Release date	Summary of changes
2017-01	11 January 2017	First release of the document
2018.01	26 April 2018	Amendment of the document, following revision of COST 132/14 and COST 133/14 and cancellation of COST 009/15 "Budgetary cost of the SESA". - respect for fundamental ethical principles as depicted in Code of Conduct as an eligibility criterion; - amendment for aligning COST Implementation Rules with Privacy obligations (GDPR). - amendment to include Albania as a COST Full Member and ITC. - amendment to include Kosovo*[1] as a Near Neighbour Country.

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[1] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides a practical step-by-step guide to the COST Open Call rules and procedures for Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval of COST Action proposals, as decided by the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)[2]. It is available at http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa_guidelines.

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:

- Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities (COST132/14 REV 3)
- COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (COST 133/14 REV2)
- COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment (COST 134/14 REV3)
- Rules for Participation of Non-COST Countries and Specific Organisations (COST 135/14 REV)
- COST Vademecum (http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum)

They are available at: http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call

These documents are legally binding and take precedence over any guidelines. In case of any contradiction between the COST Implementation Rules and the present guidelines, COST Implementation Rules shall prevail.

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

2.1. THE COST FRAMEWORK: MISSION AND POLICY

COST (CO-operation in Science and Technology) is a pan-European intergovernmental framework[3] dedicated to European-based 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.

COST Mission is notably to enable breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts, services and products and thereby contributing to strengthening European research and innovation capacities.

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 the scientific communities, the enterprises, the policy makers and the society;
- the dissemination of results of such research activities in order to improve their scientific, social and economic impact;
- 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;

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[2] See CSO Decision "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", http://www.cost.eu/participate
[3] The full list of COST Members is available at http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries

- 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.

The COST Association is the legal entity in charge of the management and implementation of COST strategy, policies and activities towards the achievement of the COST Mission. The overview of the COST structure and its intergovernmental dimension can be found at http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/organisation.

COST draws the funds for its activities from the EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020. The COST Association has signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission, defining the Strategic Action Plan, setting the objectives and legal frame for the period 2014-2020[4]. Specific Grant Agreements describing the implementation of the Action Plan are signed or amended yearly.

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

- COST Excellence and Inclusiveness,
- Participation of non-COST Countries and Specific Organisations.

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, engineers, scholars and other stakeholders in COST Full or Cooperating Members[5] 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) and fulfil the Horizon 2020 widening eligibility condition, being either an EU Member State or Associated Country to the EU Framework programme[6];
- 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 Horizon 2020 widening objectives.

COST aims at reinforcing and supporting the **participation of Non-COST Countries** in COST activities, in particular COST Actions underpinning its open and global scope on the basis of ascertained mutual benefit. The participation of Near Neighbour Countries is particularly encouraged, according to the provisions related to eligibility for both participation and reimbursement set in the "Rules for Participation of Non-COST countries and Specific Organisations"[7] and in the COST Vademecum.

Further, COST aims at enabling fruitful collaborations between researchers, engineers, scholars and other stakeholders and business by providing a natural platform for them to meet and build mutual trust. It also aims at **increasing impact of research in the industrial sector, by promoting** the use and

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[4] Framework Partnership Agreement n° 633054 – COST H2020
[5] http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries
[6] The list of ITC Countries includes: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Serbia and Turkey.
[7] See "Rules for Participation of Non-COST countries and Specific Organisations".

development of technologies, as well as the exploitation[8] of COST Action results and outcomes **through dedicated dissemination and exploitation activities** targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large companies in Europe.

2.2. 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, engineers and scholars from 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 a COST Action is presented in the COST Vademecum (http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum)**.** 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 tools:

- Meetings (i.e. Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings)
- Training Schools
- Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)
- Dissemination

COST Actions are:

- **Pan-European**: the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 36 Full Members and one Cooperating 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 within their first three years;
- **Unique**: as a platform to coordinate national research funding and resources within a lightweight 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, engineers, scholars and other relevant stakeholders. Thus, COST Actions are especially well-suited to pursue **new ideas through collaborative** efforts and/or to **build communities** around emerging Science & Technology (S&T) topics and societal questions.

2.2.1. 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. It is composed of up to two representatives of each COST Member having accepted the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** of the Action (the Participating COST Members). The MoU is the document accepted by a minimum of seven different COST Members, describing the Action objectives. Action MC members are nominated

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[8] See "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6: "If in the course of the Action results are obtained or expected, which could give rise to intellectual property rights, the Action MC shall take the necessary steps, be it by written agreement among the Action MC members or otherwise, in order to protect these rights, with respect to the principles set out in "Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities" and corresponding guidelines."

by the COST National Coordinators (CNCs). 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 achieving the Action scientific and technological objectives.

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, the leadership and the activity of the WG are defined by the Action MC.

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 tools**. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the COST Vademecum**.**

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.

2.2.2. PARTICIPANTS

COST Actions are open to all researchers, engineers and scholars or other stakeholders, who are committed to work and achieve the Action objectives and are affiliated to a legal entity. Action Participants are defined as being any person being an Action MC member, an Action MC substitute, an Action MC Observer, a Working Group member or an ad-hoc participant:

1. **Action MC members:** up to two representatives for each COST Full or Cooperating Member may be nominated to the COST Action MC by the COST National Coordinator (CNC), once the MoU of the Action has been accepted by the COST Member. The role of Action MC members is to pro-actively participate in the implementation and decision-making activities in the Action. Action MC members have voting rights within the Action MC: decisions are made by simple majority, with one vote per COST Full or Cooperating Member. The nomination of Action MC members is a national prerogative and follows national procedures.[9]
2. **Action MC substitutes:** up to three representatives for each COST Full Member and/or Cooperating Member may be nominated to the COST Action MC by the CNC, once the MoU of the Action has been accepted by the COST Member. The role of Action MC substitutes is to replace, where necessary, an Action MC member with approval of the Action Chair.
3. **MC Observers**: Action Participants affiliated to COST Partner Members having accepted the MoU, to Approved Institutions based in NNCs and IPCs, to the European Commission, EU bodies, offices or agencies, International Organisations, or European RTD Organisations[10] may be present at the Action MC as MC Observers. Their role is to observe the Action decision-making processes on behalf of their institution of affiliation. They have no voting rights, but they may participate in discussions related to Action MC decisions.
4. **WG members**: Action Participants appointed by the Action MC in this regard. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives through their participation in WG.
5. **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 university, research centre, company or other relevant legal entity located in a Participating COST Member or in any of the NNCs or IPCs. They may also be affiliated

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[9] Within a period of twelve months after the approval of the Action, any COST Member may join the Action. After this period, the Action MC agreement is needed.
[10] See "Rules for Participation of Non-COST countries and Specific Organisations" for details on the procedure regarding the approval of MC Observers.

to the EU Commission, EU bodies, offices or agencies, EU RTD Organisations and International Organisations. The eligibility of reimbursement and the rules for participation vary for each category of affiliation according to COST rules (see COST Vademecum).

Below is the overview of all the types of potential Action Participants grouped by affiliation category[11].

Table 1: Overview of Affiliation Categories

Affiliation Category	Organisation Type
COST Members **Near Neighbour Country approved institution** **International Partner Country approved institution**	Universities, research centres, companies or any relevant legal entity, such as Government, public bodies, private or non-governmental (NGO) organisations (without an international membership/ shareholding).
European Commission or other Institutions and EU bodies, offices or agencies	The European Commission or other Institutions and any EU bodies, offices or agencies so defined in accordance with EU law established in the EU to accomplish specific tasks of a legal, technical and/or scientific nature in a given policy field and to support the EU Member States. A list of the EU bodies, offices or agencies may be found at http://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/agencies_en
European RTD Organisation	The intergovernmental scientific research organisations responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are States, and the majority of which are COST Members. The list of these organisations is available at http://www.eiroforum.org/about/organisations/index.html
International Organisation	International Organisation within the framework of COST is defined as "Any organisation with a European or international membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality, promoting in particular scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST Mission." Based on that definition and following authoritative interpretation by the COST CSO, any organisation not appearing on the list of European RTD Organisations nor being an EU body, office or agency will be deemed an International Organisation when it has an international membership/shareholding and a legal personality.

The procedures to join a COST Action can be found at http://www.cost.eu/participate/join_action

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[11] For their detailed list and conditions for participation, please refer to "Rules for Participation in and implementation of COST Activities" and "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation" (http://www.cost.eu/int_coop_rules).

2.3. 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 3).

COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call as well as the Collection Dates, the complete schedule, the description of the procedure, and the evaluation criteria.

The proposal Evaluation and Selection follows a three-step process further described in Section 4 of these guidelines:

- **Step 1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts**
- **Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Reports by ad hoc Review Panels**
- **Step 3 – Establishment of a shortlist of selected proposals 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 4.

Proposals are evaluated *per se* 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.

3. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL FOR A COST ACTION

3.1. REGISTRATION FOR SUBMISSION

Proposals shall be submitted by a network of proposers, represented by a Main Proposer affiliated to an institution located in a COST Full or Cooperating Member, or affiliated to a European RTD organisation (see Table 1), as described in Table 2: Network of Proposers' eligibility by Affiliation Category (in the following section 3.3).

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 (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", "Create New proposal" (https://e-services.cost.eu/sesa).

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 data related to the Network of Proposers become not available and should be re-encoded from the scratch in case of re-submission.**

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 to another one submitted during the same collection. Should this occur, only the proposal submitted first shall be considered.

3.2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Please pay particular attention to this section and to each one of the following eligibility criteria[12], COST Action proposals must:

- Represent a Network of Proposers from **at least 7** different COST Full or Cooperating Members **amongst which a minimum number shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in Annex** to the present guidelines;
- Be **anonymous**. In order comply with the double-blind principle of the evaluation:
  - o Proposals may **not contain any direct or indirect reference** to people and/or institutions participating in the Network of Proposers (be they Main or Secondary Proposers). This means that proposers and/or institutions' names 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. (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");

  Exception:
  - o In section 2.2.3 Mutual Benefits" of the "Technical Annex". If you include a secondary proposer from a Non-COST Country Approved Institution *[International Partner Country (IPC), Near Neighbour Country (NNC)]* or Specific Organisation[13], you can mention in this section the non-COST Country or Specific Organisation proposer's name/institution name when describing the mutual benefit deriving from the participation of this institution;

  Note on "References":
  - o In the "References" section of the proposal, you may quote proposers' own publication, only provided that: a) there is no evidence that the publication is authored by one or more of the proposers and b) it is only one of a set of other bibliographical references.

- Respect fundamental ethical principles as described in the COST Code of Conduct[14] and in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[15], 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 section 3.4.2 of this document. Do not change in anyway the compulsory format of the "Technical Annex" (font, margins, line spacing, etc.). 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.

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

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[12] See "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval".
[13] Specific Organisations are detailed in the definitions in Section 6 of the present Guidelines.
[14] COST 081/15 dated 18 Nov 2015 or any successor document, COST Code of Conduct, www.cost.eu/download/Code_of_Conduct
[15] European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, Berlin, ALLEA – All European Academies, published on http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/h2020-ethics_code-of-conduct_en.pdf

3.3. NETWORK OF PROPOSERS: REQUIREMENTS

The Network of Proposers must fulfil the following requirements:

- The Network of Proposers must represent at least 7 proposers affiliated to entities located in at least 7 different COST Full or Cooperating Members (one Main Proposer plus at least 6 Secondary Proposers) amongst which a minimum number shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in Annex. There can be more than one proposer per institution, as long as it is clearly beneficial for the proposed Action. 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 their institution.
- 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 filling an e-COST profile may require some time. They should therefore make sure that the potential Secondary Proposers comply with this requirement in due time. If there are not 7 proposers in 7 different COST Full or Cooperating Members amongst which the required number from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries, the proposal is declared ineligible. Please note that after the Collection Date the data related to the Network of Proposers become not available and should be re-encoded from the scratch in case of re-submission.

The following table summarises the eligibility of Main and Secondary Proposers by affiliation:

Table 2: Network of Proposers' eligibility by Affiliation Category

Affiliation Category	Status in the Network of Proposers	
	Main Proposer	**Secondary Proposer**
COST Full or Cooperating Member	YES	YES
Near Neighbour Country (NNC)	NO	YES
International Partners Country (IPC)	NO	YES
European Commission and EU bodies, offices or agencies	YES	YES
European RTD Organisation	YES	YES
International Organisation	NO	YES
Independent workers	NO	NO

3.4. 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.

3.4.1. 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
Open Call Collection identifier • Automatically assigned
Proposal reference • Automatically assigned
Title • Mandatory • Max. 12 words • The title of the proposal should describe at a glance what the proposal is about
Acronym • 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 "@".
Summary • 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 in COST website, should the Action be approved. ***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.***
Key expertise needed for evaluation • 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.

3.4.2. 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 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 section 3.2). 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 be kept** (COST standard style: Arial font, size 10, line spacing 1 - choose "Normal,Text" style option from the ribbon styles gallery).

The instructions to complete each section are listed below. Section 3.6 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.

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 section 3.2 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

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. Take care not to breach the anonymity rules.

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.

If your Network misses any of these features, present a clear plan for overcoming the identified gaps.

N.B: Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check section 3.2 of these Guidelines!). *However, if you include a secondary proposer from a Non-COST Country Approved Institution [International Partner Country (IPC), Near Neighbour Country (NNC)] or Specific Organisation, you can mention in this section the Non-COST Country or Specific Organisation proposer's name/institution name when describing the mutual benefit deriving from the participation of this institution.*

N.B: COST Policy should not be addressed in this section but in the dedicated section online.

2.2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

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

2.2.3 MUTUAL BENEFITS OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF SECONDARY PROPOSERS FROM NEAR NEIGHBOUR OR INTERNATIONAL PARTNER COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

If you include a secondary proposer from a Non-COST Country Approved Institution [International Partner Country (IPC), Near Neighbour Country (NNC)] or Specific Organisation, you may mention in this section the Non-COST Country or Specific Organisation proposer's name/institution name when describing the mutual benefit deriving from the participation of this institution.

Section 3 - IMPACT

3.1 IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAK-THROUGHS

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 realistically envisaged by the proposal in the short and longer 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 relevant[16]. 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[17].

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

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 ensuring that it are 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 section 3.2 of these Guidelines!).

4.1.4 GANTT Diagram

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[16] See "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6.
[17] As an indication, the average budget for the 1st Grant Period of the Actions starting in 2016 was EUR 111000.

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 section 3.2 of these Guidelines!).

3.4.3. REFERENCES

Please complete this section online.

References
- 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 optional. It is shown to the evaluators, but not assessed during the evaluation.   N.B: In compliance with the eligibility criterion of anonymity, proposers should ensure that the bibliography submitted respects this criterion (see section 3.2 of these Guidelines). Note on "References": in the "References" section of the proposal, you may quote proposers' own publication(s), only provided that: a) there is no evidence that the publication is authored by one or more proposers and b) it is only one of a set of other bibliographical references.

3.4.4. COST MISSION AND POLICY

Please complete this section online. Summarise how the proposal addresses COST Mission and Policy. Please refer to Section 2.1 of this document for further details on the COST Mission and Policy.

COST Mission and Policy
- Mandatory   - Max. 1000 words   - This is a free text section to allow the proposer to show how the Action proposal will contribute to addressing one or more dimensions of the COST Policy and rules. The proposer should list relevant initiatives and activities planned in the proposal pointing out which COST Policy they target and how.   - An example for COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy addressing ITC: - Seeking ITC researchers' full involvement through: - Leadership roles in COST Actions   - Note that it is mandatory that at least one of the key leadership positions in the Action management (e.g. Action Chair, Vice-Chair, Working Group Leader, Grant Holder Scientific Representative, STSM Coordinator, Science Communication Manager) shall be reserved for a representative of a COST Inclusiveness Target Country   - The content of this section will be taken into account during the selection phase conducted by COST Scientific Committee.

3.4.5. NETWORK OF PROPOSERS

Please complete this section online. For further details please check Chapter 3, section 3.3.

The Main Proposer needs to invite the Secondary Proposers through the e-COST Submission tool, by clicking the "Network" section of the proposal under preparation. He/she has then to fill in the mandatory fields (first name, last name and e-mail address. The e-mail address has to be the one that is set as primary address in e-COST).

He/she then has to click the icon of the envelope, in order to prompt the system to send an invitation e-mail. The Secondary Proposers have to accept the invitation by following the link communicated in the e-mail.

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
- COST Full or Cooperating Members (number and list in alphabetic order)   % of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries   - NNCs (number and list in alphabetic order)   - IPCs (number and list in alphabetic order)   - European Commission, EU bodies, offices and agencies   - European RTD Organisations   - International Organisations   - Number of proposers   - Gender distribution of proposers: Males (%) – Females (%)   - Average number of years elapsed since PhD graduation of proposers   - Number of Early Career Investigators   - Core Expertise of proposers: distribution by sub-field of Science   - Institutional distribution of the Network of Proposers

3.5. WRITING STYLE GUIDE

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

- Checking language and spelling;
- Presenting the text in a logical way, avoiding unnecessary repetition between the different sections;
- No 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;
- Explaining 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 not being 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);
- Avoiding pronouns such as "I", "we"; rather use "the Action";
- Avoiding expressions such as "planned" or "proposed" when referring to the Action; rather use "aims at", "will", etc.;
- Avoiding overstatements regarding the potential impact of the Action.

3.6. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS USED IN COST PROPOSALS

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

3.6.1. CHALLENGES

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

In COST Actions, researchers, engineers, scholars or other stakeholders 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, engineers, scholars and other stakeholders) around the science and technology topic in question.

3.6.2. 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.

3.6.3. 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.

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 entail 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 require 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, Early Career Investigators, the under-represented gender, teams from countries/regions with less capacity in the field of the Action)

3.6.4. 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 tools – meetings (Action MC meetings, Working Group meetings, workshops, conferences), Short Term Scientific Missions, Training Schools and Dissemination activities 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.

3.6.5. NETWORKING TOOLS

These are the tools through which eligible activities can be funded by COST. They include:

- Meetings (Action Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings, Workshops, Conferences)
- Training Schools
- Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)
- Dissemination

Please refer to the following link for further information: http://www.cost.eu/participate/networking

These tools can generate activities that, although not directly funded by COST, contribute to the proposed Action challenge.

3.6.6. ACTION ACTIVITIES

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

3.6.7. RESULTS AND OUTPUTS

These are the direct results stemming from the COST Action activities. Outputs can be, among other, 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).*

3.6.8. 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.

3.6.9. 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. Action deliverables are used to measure the Action progress and success.

3.6.10. 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.

4. 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 (CoI) and all those involved in the SESA process must commit to confidentiality.

4.1. CONFLICT OF INTEREST[18]

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

The CoI 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

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[18] See "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", http://www.cost.eu/participate

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 the particular Collection Date they participated in.

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 during their mandate.
- CSO members may not be Action Participants.

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 Date.

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.

The table below summarises the cases of Conflict of Interest.

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

1. If the CoI is confirmed/identified **before** the evaluation starts, the person concerned will not be able to participate in the evaluation/selection procedure in the ongoing collection and is replaced.
2. If the CoI is confirmed/identified **during** the evaluation/selection:
    o The person must stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and is replaced;
    o Any comments and marks already given shall be discarded.
3. If the CoI is confirmed/identified **after** the evaluation/selection has taken place, the COST Association shall examine the potential impact and consequences of the CoI and take appropriate measures.

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

All cases of CoI 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 CoI 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 of the expert from the COST Expert Database.

4.2. CONFIDENTIALITY[19]

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 the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- Not disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation;

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[19] See "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", http://www.cost.eu/participate

- 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.

4.3. PROPOSAL EVALUATION, SELECTION AND APPROVAL

As outlined in Section 2.3, the proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure **is divided into three steps, which are described below.**

4.3.1. 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/ or keywords chosen by the network of proposers themselves.

This step uses double-blind peer review, which means the identity of both experts and proposers is kept confidential from each other. Each proposal is evaluated by a minimum of three independent External Experts. The evaluation is performed remotely and each External Expert submits an evaluation report for each proposal He/she evaluates. One of the experts is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Consensus Report.

Following the submission of the individual evaluations, a consensus is sought among the External Experts (remotely) and a Consensus 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 Panels who are in charge of the quality check and resolution of discrepancies.

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 section 3.4.2 of this document):

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

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

S&T EXCELLENCE	NETWORKING EXCELLENCE	IMPACT	IMPLEMENTATION
Total marks for the section = 15 points	Total marks for the section = 15 points	Total marks for the section = 15 points	Total marks 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

Soundness of the Challenge

Q1: Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field and present a relevant and timely challenge?

Progress beyond the state-of-the-art.

Q2: Does the proposal describe an innovative approach to the challenge that advances the state of the art in the field?

Q3: Are the objectives presented relevant to the challenge, clear and ambitious?

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 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's participants?

IMPACT CRITERIA

Impact to science, society and competitiveness, and potential for innovation/break-throughs

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?

4.3.2. 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, engineers or scholars who have been nominated by the CNCs.

Step 2 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 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 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 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.

4.3.3. STEP 3 – PROPOSAL 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:

- 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 Code of Conduct (see 3.2).
- 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 mark:
    - above the cut-off mark*;
    - equal to the cut-off mark*, one point less than the cut-off mark* or two points less than the cut-off mark*; 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 proposal the short list 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 Policies, as described in section 3.4.4 COST Mission and Policies 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 Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval". Each main proposer in proposals under B receives a notification that his/her 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 Report.

    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 4.3.3. above.

4.3.4. 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 "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment" rules[20].

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[20] "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment"

4.4. FEEDBACK TO PROPOSERS

The Consensus Reports, the marks of the evaluation and the results of the assessments made by the SC under paragraph 4.3.3. 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.

4.5. 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 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.](mailto: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).

5. HONORARIA

Honoraria shall be paid to the independent External Experts and ad-hoc Review Panels' members involved in the SESA procedure as follows:

1. Independent External Experts: EUR 50 per proposal
2. Review Panel members: EUR 250 per collection date

6. LIST OF ACRONYMS

COST	Cooperation in Science and Technology
CNC	COST National Coordinator
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials
ECI	Early Career Investigator
EU	European Union
IPC	International Partner Country
ITC	Inclusiveness Target Country
MC	Action Management Committee
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NNC	Near Neighbour Country
SC	Scientific Committee
S&T	Science and Technology
STSM	Short Term Scientific Mission
TS	Training School
W&BP	Work and Budget Plan
WG	Working Group

7. DEFINITIONS

The COST Implementation Rules set the definitions of the terms used in these guidelines.

Action Management Committee (Action MC)	The group of representatives of the COST Members having accepted the MoU. They are in charge of the coordination, implementation, and management of an Action's activities as well as supervising the appropriate allocation and use of the COST funding with a view to achieving the Action's scientific and technological objectives. They are nominated by the CNC.
Action Chair and Action Vice-Chair	Elected during an Action MC meeting by the Action MC from amongst the Action's MC members. The Action Chair is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the Action. The Action Vice-Chair assists in these activities when requested to do so by the Action Chair and can substitute for the Action Chair when required or mandated to do so.
Action MC Observers	An individual observing at the Action MC a COST Action's coordination and decision-making processes and monitors activities on behalf of His/her institution of affiliation - namely individuals from COST Partner Members, Near Neighbour Countries or International Partner Countries Approved Institutions or Specific Organisations.
Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	The agreement accepted by a minimum of seven different COST Full Members and/or Cooperating Member describing the Action objectives. This document has to be accepted by any additional COST Member joining the Action.
Action Participant	Any person being an Action MC member, an Action MC substitute, an Action MC Observer, a Working Group member or an ad hoc Participant.
Approved Institution	Institution located in a Non-COST Country (either Near-Neighbour Country or International Partner Country) which participation to a COST Action has been approved by the Action Management Committee (Action MC), the Head of Science Operations of the COST Administration and the Executive Board of the COST Administration.
Collection Date	The date when the proposals for new COST Actions submitted during a certain period are gathered and sent for evaluation.
COST Action Grant Agreement (AGA)	The agreement between the COST Association and the Grant Holder that governs the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.
COST Action or Action	The COST pan-European networking instrument allowing their participants to develop jointly their ideas and new initiatives in a field or topic of common interest.
COST Cooperating Member	Israel
COST Full Members	The following European States : Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.

COST Inclusiveness Target Countries	COST Members listed hereinafter that fulfil the Horizon 2020 widening eligibility conditions being either an EU Member State or an Associated Country to the EU Framework Programme – Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Republic of Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
COST Members	The COST Full Members, the COST Cooperating Member(s) and COST Partner Member(s).
COST National Coordinators (CNC)	The individuals appointed by COST Members in charge of confirming the participation of the Action's Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of their COST Member and nominating the Action Management Committee members of their COST Member as well as the experts from their COST Member to be part of the pool of Experts for the Review Panels.
COST Near Neighbour Countries	Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Kosovo*[21], Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Russia, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.
COST Partner Member	Any State fulfilling the conditions stated under article 8 of the Statutes of the COST Association admitted to the COST Association as a COST Partner Member.
Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)	The main decision-making body of COST, responsible for the strategic development of the COST framework. Each COST Full Member can appoint up to two Delegates to the CSO.
Dissemination	The public disclosure of COST Action's results and/or outcomes by any appropriate means (other than resulting from protecting or exploiting the results), including by scientific publications in any media.
Early Career Investigator (ECI)	A researcher in the time span of up to 8 years after the date of obtaining the PhD/doctorate (full-time equivalent).
EU Institutions, bodies, offices and agencies	Any body so defined in accordance with the Treaties on European Union and on the functioning of the European Union established in the EU to accomplish specific tasks of a legal, technical and/or scientific nature in a given policy field and to support the EU Member States. A list of the EU bodies, offices or agencies may be found at http://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/agencies_en
European RTD Organisations	The intergovernmental scientific research organisations responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are States, and the majority of which are COST Members. The list of these organisations is available at http://www.eiroforum.org/about/organisations/index.html
Grant Holder	The legal entity responsible for the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.
International Organisation	Any organisation with a European or international membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality promoting in particular scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST Mission. A non-exhaustive list of the

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[21] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

	International Organisations may be found in the "Rules for Participation in and implementation of COST Activities".
International Partner Countries	All those States that are neither COST Members nor COST Near Neighbour Countries.
Invited Speakers	Specialists who are not COST Action Participants but can partake in one COST Action meeting and one Training School throughout the lifetime of the COST Action.
Main Proposer	The representative of a network of proposers who submit a proposal for a COST Action in response to the Open Call.
Management Committee members and substitutes	National representatives of each COST Full or Cooperating Member nominated by COST National Coordinators (CNC) to take charge of the coordination, implementation and management of an Action's activities as well as supervising the appropriate allocation and use of the COST funds with a view to achieving the Action's research coordination objectives and capacity building objectives.
Management Committee Observers (MC Observers)	Representatives from COST Partner Members, non-COST Countries Approved Institutions or Specific Organisations present at the Action MC.
Non-COST Countries	States that are not COST Members.
Open Call for proposals	The official announcement/publication with the description of the objectives and criteria required for COST Action proposals to be evaluated and selected. The Open Call allows submitting proposals on a continuous basis; the publication indicates the Collection Dates.
Participating COST Members	COST Members having accepted the Action MoU of the relevant COST Action.
Scientific Committee (SC)	Committee composed of independent, internationally renowned, high-level experts, one per COST Full or Cooperating Member, appointed by the CSO.
Specific Organisations	The European Commission, EU bodies, offices and agencies, the European RTD Organisations and International Organisations.
Working Group	A group of Action Participants whose activity, composition and leadership shall be defined by the Action MC in order to achieve the Action objectives.
Young researcher	This refers to a researcher under the age of 40.

REQUIRED MINIMUM NUMBER OF COST INCLUSIVENESS TARGET COUNTRIES' PER NUMBER OF COST MEMBERS REPRESENTED IN A PROPOSAL

Number of COST 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