



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



Copyright Notice

© The COST Association

Reproduction of this document and its content, in part or in whole, is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged, save where otherwise stated.





Version: OC-2016-2
15th July 2016

Document Change History

| Version | Release date | Summary of changes |
|-----------|--------------|---|
| OC-2016-2 | 25-04-2016 | First release of the document |
| OC-2016-2 | 15-07-2016 | Second release of the document containing information on the deadline for submitting redress requests by Main Proposers |



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Document Change History..... | 3 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 5 |
| 2. Overview of COST framework, COST Action and SESA process | 5 |
| 2.1. The COST framework: mission and policies | 5 |
| 2.2. COST Actions | 6 |
| 2.2.1. COST Action Strategy and Structure..... | 7 |
| 2.2.2. Participants | 8 |
| 2.3. COST Open Call and SESA process | 9 |
| 3. Preparing and Submitting a Proposal for a COST Action | 10 |
| 3.1. Registration for submission | 10 |
| 3.2. Eligibility criteria | 10 |
| 3.3. Network of Proposers: requirements | 11 |
| 3.4. Proposal template..... | 12 |
| 3.4.1. General Features | 12 |
| 3.4.2. Technical Annex | 14 |
| 3.4.3. References | 16 |
| 3.4.4. COST Mission and Policies | 16 |
| 3.4.5. Network of Proposers | 17 |
| 3.5. Writing style guide | 18 |
| 3.6. Definition of key concepts used in COST proposals | 19 |
| 3.6.1. Challenges | 19 |
| 3.6.2. Potential innovation/breakthrough | 19 |
| 3.6.3. Objectives | 19 |
| 3.6.4. Strategy and Structure | 20 |
| 3.6.5. Networking tools | 21 |
| 3.6.6. Action activities | 21 |
| 3.6.7. Results and outputs | 21 |
| 3.6.8. Impact | 21 |
| 3.6.9. Deliverables | 21 |
| 3.6.10. Milestones..... | 22 |
| 4. How COST Proposals are Evaluated, Selected and Approved | 22 |
| 4.1. Conflict of Interest | 22 |
| 4.2. Confidentiality | 24 |
| 4.3. Proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval..... | 24 |
| 4.3.1. Step 1 – Proposal Evaluation by Independent External Experts:..... | 24 |
| 4.3.2. Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check by ad hoc Review Panel | 26 |
| 4.3.3. Step 3 – Proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee | 27 |
| 4.3.4. Proposal Approval by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) | 27 |
| 4.4. Feedback to proposers | 28 |
| 4.5. Redress Procedure..... | 28 |
| 5. List of Acronyms | 29 |
| 6. Definitions | 29 |

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)¹. 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 (COST 132/14)
- COST Action Proposal Submission Evaluation and Approval (COST 133/14)
- COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment (COST 134/14)
- COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation (COST 135/14)
- COST Vademecum (<http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum>)

These documents are legally binding and take precedence over any guidelines. They are available at: http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call

2. Overview of COST framework, COST Action and SESA process

2.1. The COST framework: mission and policies

COST (CO-operation in Science and Technology) is a pan-European intergovernmental framework² dedicated to networking activities for European researchers, engineers and scholars to jointly develop their ideas and new initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European coordination of nationally 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 to enable breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contributing to strengthening European research and innovation capacities³.

In order to achieve its mission, COST endeavours to:

- build capacity by connecting high-quality scientific communities throughout Europe and worldwide;
- provide networking opportunities for Early Career Investigators (ECI);
- increase the impact of research on policy makers, regulatory bodies and national decision makers as well as on the private sector.

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, policies and legal frame for the period 2014-2020⁴. Specific Grant Agreements describing the implementation of the Action Plan are signed yearly.

COST has put in place a set of policies aiming at fulfilling its Mission and specific objectives:

- COST Excellence and Inclusiveness,
- COST International Cooperation,
- Industrial dimension.

¹ See COST 133/14 "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

² The full list of COST Member Countries and Cooperating State is available at http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries

³ See COST 4152/11 "COST Mission Statement"

⁴ Framework Partnership Agreement n° 633054 – COST H2020

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 and scholars in COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State⁵ 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 programme⁶;
- 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 Member Countries;
- Identifying excellence across Europe to contribute to Horizon 2020 widening objectives.

The policy on **COST International Cooperation** aims at fostering cooperation between researchers from COST Member Countries, COST Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs)⁷ and COST International Partner Countries (IPCs) on the basis of ascertained mutual benefit, complementary expertise and scientific added value. The participation of NNCs is particularly encouraged, according to the provisions related to eligibility for both participation and reimbursement set in the "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation"⁸ and in the COST Vademecum.

The policy on **Industrial Dimension** aims at enabling fruitful collaborations between researchers 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 development of technologies, as well as the exploitation⁹ 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; it does not fund research.

COST Actions are Science and Technology (S&T) networks open to researchers, engineers and scholars from universities, research centres, companies, in particular SMEs, as well as other relevant legal entities. All the relevant information to manage a COST Action is presented in the COST Vademecum (<http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum>). They are set up to achieve specific objectives within their four-year duration,

5 http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries

6 The list of ITC Countries includes: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, fYR Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7 The list of NNC includes: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldavia, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Russia, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

8 See COST 135/14 "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation"

9 See COST 134/14 "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6: "If in the course of this Action results are obtained or expected, which could give rise to intellectual property rights, the MC shall take the necessary steps, be it by written agreement among the participants 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."



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 Member Countries and one Cooperating State;
- **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 the 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 are **future-oriented** promoting actively the participation of the next generation of researchers. 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 Strategy and Structure

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

The **Management Committee (MC)** is the decision-making body. It is composed of up to two representatives of each COST Member Country having accepted the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** of the Action. The MoU is the document accepted by a minimum of five different COST Member Countries, and/or Cooperating State, describing the Action objectives. MC Members are nominated by the COST National Coordinators (CNCs). The 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 MC. WG Members are MC Members and any researcher appointed by the 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 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 funded research projects and resources (e.g. employees’ time, infrastructures and equipment) are not funded by COST. COST Actions aim at leveraging national funding towards efficient trans-European research cooperation.

2.2.2. Participants

COST Actions are open to all researchers, engineers and scholars, who are committed to work and achieve the Action objectives and are affiliated to a legal entity. Action Participants are composed of four main types:

1. **MC Members:** up to two representatives for each COST Member Country and Cooperating State can be nominated to the COST Action MC by CNC, once the MoU of the Action has been accepted by the Country. The role of MC members is to pro-actively participate in the implementation and decision-making activities in the Action. MC Members have voting rights within the MC: decisions are taken by simple majority, with one vote per COST Member Country and Cooperating State. The nomination of MC members is a national prerogative and follows national procedures. Within a period of twelve months after the approval of the Action, any COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State can join the Action. After this period, the Action MC agreement to the CNC nomination is needed¹⁰.
2. **MC Observers:** participants affiliated to institutions based in NNC and IPC institutions or in the European Commission, other EU Institutions and EU Agencies, International Organisations, or European RTD Organisations, need to be approved by the COST Association Executive Board (EB), after MC approval. Their role is to observe the Action decision-making processes on behalf of their institution of affiliation. They have no voting rights, but they can participate in discussions related to MC decisions.
3. **WG Members:** participants in COST Member Countries and Cooperating State or in NNCs or IPCs institutions participating in the Action and approved by the MC. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives, by coordinating the nationally funded research within the COST Action.
4. **Ad hoc Participants:** *ad hoc* participants invited by the MC to contribute to the Action activities when their expertise is deemed necessary for the achievement of the Action Objectives. *Ad hoc* Participants can also be eligible for STSM and Training Schools, as well as be invited speakers or attendees at Action workshops and conferences.

All Action participants must be affiliated to legal entities located in the COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State, in any of the NNCs or IPCs. They can also be affiliated to the EU Commission and Agencies, EU RTD Organizations and International Organizations. 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 legal entities that can participate in COST Actions, grouped by affiliation category¹¹.

¹⁰ See COST 132/14 "Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities"

¹¹ For their detailed list and conditions for participation, please refer to COST 132/14 "Rules for Participation in and implementation of COST Activities" and COST 135/14 "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation" (http://www.cost.eu/int_coop_rules)

Table 1: Overview of Affiliation Categories

| Affiliation Category | Organisation Type |
|--|--|
| COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State Near Neighbour Country institution International Partner Country institution | Universities, research centres, companies or any relevant legal entity, such as: Government organisations, Regional bodies, private non-profit organisations, NGOs, etc. |
| European Commission and EU Agencies | EU Institutions and Agencies. The list of Agencies is available at: http://europa.eu/about-eu/agencies/index_en.htm |
| European RTD Organisation | Any intergovernmental scientific research organisation that is responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are countries, and the majority of which are COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State. The list of these organisations is available at http://www.euroforum.org/about/organisations/index.html |
| International Organisation | Any organisation with a European or International membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality, governed by international public law or recognised as of general interest, in particular promoting scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST mission. |

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

2.3. COST Open Call and SESA process

COST Open Call is a one-stage submission process. Proposals can 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.

There are two collection dates and two cycles of evaluation/selection/approval per year.

The proposal Evaluation and Selection follows a three-step process:

- Step 1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts
- Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Reports by *ad hoc* Review Panels
- Step 3 – Selection by COST Scientific Committee (SC)

The proposals selected by the SC are submitted to 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 its 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

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 can 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 can 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.

3.2. Eligibility criteria

Please pay particular attention to this section and to each one of the following eligibility criteria¹², COST Action proposals must:

- Include a Network of Proposers from **at least 5** different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State
- Be coordinated by a **Main Proposer** affiliated to an institution located in a COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State, or affiliated to a European RTD organisation, as described in Table 2: Network of Proposers’ eligibility by Affiliation Category (in the following section 3.3).
- Be **anonymous**. In order comply with the double-blind principle of the evaluation:
 - In any section of the “Technical Annex”, proposals **must 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 identifiable** through links to web pages or through unequivocal references to their role and/or participation in existing or ended projects.
 - In the “References” section of the proposal, it is possible to quote one’s 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.

For further guidance on how to deal with the anonymity criteria when preparing your proposal, please check http://www.cost.eu/download/anonymity_proposals

- Address S&T challenges destined only for **peaceful** purposes
- 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, audiovisual material, etc.)
- Be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association
- **Not be identical** to another submitted proposal.

¹² See COST 133/14 “COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval”

Proposals can 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.

3.3. Network of Proposers: requirements

The Network of Proposers must fulfil the following requirements:

- The Network of Proposers must include at least 5 proposers affiliated to legal entities based in at least 5 different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State (one Main Proposer plus at least 4 Secondary Proposers). There can be more than one researcher per institution, as long as it is clearly beneficial for the proposed Action. The European Commission and EU Agencies, European RTD Organisations and International Organisations do not count as COST Member Country institutions, even if they are geographically located in COST Member Countries. No letter of intention is required from their institution.
- The Main Proposer acts as coordinator 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 5 proposers in 5 different 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 summarizes 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 Member Country | YES | YES |
| COST Cooperating State | YES | YES |
| Near Neighbour Country (NNC) | NO | YES |
| International Partners Country (IPC) | NO | YES |
| European Commission and EU Agencies | YES | YES |
| European RTD Organisation | YES | YES |
| International Organisation | NO | YES |
| Independent workers | NO | NO |

By joining or forming a Network of Proposer **an individual accepts:**

1. **To share his/her personal data with the other members of the same Network and with COST Scientific Committee Members.**

The shared data are:

- Year of birth, Type of institution, Address of the institution and Sub-field of Science of the department of the Main Proposer.
- Title, First name, Last name, Gender, Years from PhD, E-mail, Telephone, Institution, Core-Area of Expertise, both of Main and Secondary Proposers.

2. **That the following data are used for aggregated statistics on the composition of the Network, to be disclosed to independent External Experts and Review Panel members:**

- COST Member Countries (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 and EU Agencies; European RTD Organisations; International Organisations.
- Number of Proposers; Gender Distribution of Proposers in %; Average number of years elapsed since PhD graduation of Proposers; Number of Early Career Investigators; Core Expertise of Proposers: Distribution by sub-field of S&T fields; Affiliation distribution of Network of Proposers

The CNCs have access, via e-COST, to the full identity of the Main Proposers from their own Country, the features of the Network of Proposers and the summary of these proposals. The identity of the proposers as well as the content of the proposals must remain confidential. COST expects an ethical behaviour from all the actors involved in COST activities at any level.

3.4. Proposal template

Proposals for COST Actions have the following sections:

- **General Features**
- **Technical Annex**
- **References**
- **COST Mission and Policies**
- **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 can 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 can 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:

1. S&T EXCELLENCE
2. IMPACT
3. 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 11, line spacing 1, colour Grey coded: R86 G88 B91).

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 Challenge

- 1.1.1 Description of the Challenge (Main Aim)
- 1.1.2 Relevance and timeliness

Describe the research question(s) your proposal addresses. You should make a case for the relevance and timeliness of the identified challenge(s). Be concise, clear and “to the point”.

1.2 Objectives

- 1.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives
- 1.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

Provide a clear and concise description of the objectives showing their pertinence to the identified challenge. Please formulate the objectives in a “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely) way.

1.3 Progress beyond the state-of-the-art and Innovation Potential

- 1.3.1 Description of the state-of-the-art
- 1.3.2 Progress beyond the state-of-the-art
- 1.3.3 Innovation in tackling the challenge

Describe briefly the state-of-the art in relation to the identified challenge, and highlight the progresses beyond the state of the art as well as the potential technological or socioeconomic innovation and scientific breakthrough.

1.4 Added value of networking

- 1.4.1 In relation to the Challenge
- 1.4.2 In relation to existing efforts at European and/or international level

Describe the added value of networking in relation to the identified challenge by highlighting why networking is the best approach.

Describe the added value of the proposed COST Action 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!).

■ Section 2 - IMPACT

2.1 Expected Impact

2.1.1 Short-term and long-term scientific, technological, and/or socio-economic impacts

Describe in a clear way the scientific and/or technological and/or socio-economic impact realistically envisaged by the proposal in the short and longer term perspective.

2.2 Measures to Maximise Impact

2.2.1 Plan for involving the most relevant stakeholders

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

2.2.2 Dissemination and/or Exploitation Plan

Present a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results, including IPR, if relevant¹³.

2.3 Potential for Innovation versus Risk Level

2.3.1 Potential for scientific, technological and/or socioeconomic innovation breakthroughs

Demonstrate how the proposal addresses potential innovation and/or scientific breakthroughs with a convincing risk/return trade-off.

■ Section 3 - IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Description 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 availability¹⁴.

3.1.1 Description of Working Groups

Provide a detailed description of the different Working Groups. For each WG provide objectives, tasks, activities, milestones and list of major deliverables.

3.1.2 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.

3.1.3 PERT (Programme Evaluation Review Technique) (optional)

Provide a graphical representation of the different WGs showing their inter-relation. If needed, the same can be provided to show the inter-relation among the different tasks within each WG.

3.1.4 Risk and Contingency Plans

Identify the main risks related to the Work Plan and present a credible contingency plan.

¹³ See COST 134/14 "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6.

¹⁴ As an indication, the average budget for the 1st Grant Period of the Actions starting in 2016 was EUR 111000.

3.2 Management structures and procedures

Describe the management structure and procedures of the proposed Action which should comply with COST rules. Be aware that:

- ✓ The composition of the Management Committee (MC) is not defined at proposal stage. MC Members are nominated by the COST Countries and can join the Action anytime during its lifetime.
- ✓ The participation of WG Members and ad hoc participants is decided by the MC.
- ✓ WG and management structure can be changed by the MC at a later stage in compliance with COST rules.

3.3 Network as a whole

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.

If you plan to include International Partner Countries (IPCs), Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) institutions in your proposal, provide a description of the mutual benefits deriving from the participation of each of those institutions.

N.B: Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity (check section 3.2 of these Guidelines!).

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

3.4.3. 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 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). |

3.4.4. COST Mission and Policies

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

COST Mission and Policies

- **Mandatory**
- Max. 500 words
- This is a free text section to allow the proposer to show how the proposed Action will contribute to address one or more of the COST Policies. The proposer should list relevant 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
 - Grant Holder role
- 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 following data of the Main Proposer are automatically extracted from her/his e-COST profile:

Network of Proposers' Details

MAIN PROPOSER DETAILS

- Title
- First name
- Last name
- Gender
- Year of birth
- Years from PhD
- E-mail
- Telephone
- Institution
- Type of institution
- Address of the institution
- Sub-field of Science of the department
- Core-Area of Expertise

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. S/he 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).

S/he 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. Upon their acceptance, the following data about the Secondary Proposers are extracted from their e-COST profile:

| Secondary Proposers' Details | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ | Title |
| ▪ | First name |
| ▪ | Last name |
| ▪ | Gender |
| ▪ | Years from PhD |
| ▪ | E-mail |
| ▪ | Telephone |
| ▪ | Institution |
| ▪ | Core-Area of Expertise |

The following aggregated information will then be displayed to the evaluators:

| Network of Proposers' Features | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ▪ | COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State (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 and EU 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, 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 Countries not members 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 and scholars 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 researchers around the science and technology topic in question.

3.6.2. Potential innovation/breakthrough

Through the Actions, COST aims at enabling breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts 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, researchers 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. Strategy and 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 (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 (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, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

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 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

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 ¹⁵

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, COST Scientific Committee members, and CSO members). Each of these actors shall not be involved in more than one role and not derive any benefit from the Actions approved under the Collection Date in which they have participated. In particular:

- Independent External Experts cannot participate in an approved Action if they evaluated the corresponding proposal; Review Panel members cannot participate in any approved Action of the Collection Date if they were actively involved as members of an *ad hoc* Review Panel.
- CNCs, COST Scientific Committee members and CSO members cannot participate in any Action.

A CoI can be real, potential or perceived:

▪ *Real CoI*

The person taking part in the SESA process (External Expert, Review Panel member, COST Scientific Committee member, CSO member):

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

▪ *Potential CoI*

The person taking part in the SESA process (External Expert, Review Panel member, COST Scientific Committee member, CSO member):

- has a professional or personal relationship with a proposer;
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal is accepted or rejected.

▪ *Perceived CoI*

The person taking part in the SESA process (External Expert, Review Panel member, COST Scientific Committee member, CSO member) feels for any reason unable to provide an impartial view of the proposal.

¹⁵ See COST 133/14 "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

The table below summarizes the cases of Conflict of Interest.

| Steps | Main Proposer and Network of Proposers | Independent External Expert | <i>ad hoc</i> Review Panel Member | COST 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 |

Any person to be involved in the SESA process shall sign a declaration stating that s/he:

- Is not aware of any Col regarding the proposal(s) to be evaluated/selected;
- Will inform immediately the COST Association of any Col discovered during the SESA process;
- Will maintain the confidentiality.

If the Col 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.

If the Col is confirmed/identified **during** the evaluation/selection:

- The person must stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and is replaced;
- Any comments and marks already given shall be discarded.

If the Col is confirmed/identified **after** the evaluation/selection has taken place, the COST Association shall examine the potential impact and consequences of the Col 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.

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 COST Scientific Committee members;
- Removal of the expert from the COST Expert Database.

4.2. Confidentiality ¹⁶

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

- Treats confidentially any information and document, in any form (i.e. paper or electronic), disclosed in writing or orally in relation to the performance of the evaluation;
- 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 COST Association staff, even when not directly involved in evaluating the proposal, except during formal discussions at *ad hoc* Review Panels and COST Scientific Committee meetings. Under no circumstances the proposers should 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.
- 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;
- Not communicate with proposers on any proposal during or after the evaluation until the approval of CSO.

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 are in charge of the remote peer-review evaluation. They are identified, selected and assigned to proposals through a matching of the key expertise indicated by the Network of Proposers with those from the COST Expert Database. The assignment of independent External Experts to the proposals is examined and validated by COST Scientific Committee.

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 s/he 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
 - Impact
 - Implementation

¹⁶ See COST 133/14 “COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval”, <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

The independent External Experts are in charge of checking the following eligibility criteria (see section 3.4.2 of this document):

- Length
- Anonymity
- Peaceful purpose
- Language (English)

The table below presents the evaluation criteria and sub-criteria, as well as the respective maximum scoring. The overall threshold to access to the selection stage is also indicated.

| EVALUATION CRITERIA | | |
|---|---|--|
| S&T EXCELLENCE | IMPACT | IMPLEMENTATION |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Soundness of the challenge. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scientific, technological and/or socio-economic impact. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress beyond the state-of-the-art and innovation potential. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Measures to maximise impact. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriateness of management structures and procedures. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Added value of networking. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level of risk and level of potential innovation/breakthroughs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Network as a whole |
| Total marks for the section = 25 points | Total marks for the section = 20 points | Total marks for the section = 20 points |
| <p>TOTAL MARKS AWARDED = 65 points</p> <p>OVERALL THRESHOLD = 45 points</p> <p><u>Proposals failing to achieve the overall threshold will not be funded</u></p> | | |

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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Q1 - Is the challenge relevant and timely? ▪ Q2 - Are the objectives presented clear and pertinent to tackle the challenge? |
| <p>Progress beyond the state-of-the-art and innovation potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Q3 - Does the proposal advance the state-of-the-art and introduce an innovative approach to the challenge? |
| <p>Added value of networking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Q4 - Is networking the best approach to tackle the challenge? ▪ Q5 - What is the added value of the proposed Network in relation to former and existing efforts at European and/or international level? |

IMPACT CRITERIA

Scientific, technological and/or socio-economic impacts.

- Q6 - Does the proposal clearly identify relevant, and realistic short-term/long-term impacts?

Measures to maximise impact.

- Q7 - Does the proposal identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them as Action's participants?
- Q8 - Is there a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results?

Level of risk and level of potential innovation/breakthroughs.

- Q9 - How well does the proposal succeed in putting forward potential innovation/ breakthroughs with a convincing risk/return trade-off?

IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA

Overall Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan

- Q10 - Is the work plan (WGs, tasks, activities, timeframe and deliverables) coherent, realistic and appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives?
- Q11 - Does the proposal identify the main risks related to the work plan and has a plan for contingencies?

Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures

- Q12 - Are the management structure and procedures appropriate?

Network as a whole

- Q13 - Does the proposed Network envisage the critical mass, expertise and geographical distribution for addressing the challenge and the objectives? If not, does the proposal identify the gaps in the Network and present a clear plan for overcoming the gaps? Are mutual benefits clearly ascertained in case of involvement of NNC and IPC institutions?

4.3.2. Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check by ad hoc Review Panel

From four to six *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. Each CNC has the right to nominate up to eighteen Review Panel members, covering expertise from up to six S&T fields¹⁷. Review Panel members must register in the COST Expert Database. The duration of the mandate of the Review Panel members is up to two years.

Step 2 uses double-blind peer review, which means that the identity of both Review Panel members and proposers is kept confidential.

¹⁷ See Annex I of COST 133/14 "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval"

The *ad hoc* Review Panels are in charge of:

- a) Reviewing and validating all the Consensus Reports and marks submitted in Step 1.
- b) Resolving the differences in opinions among the independent External Experts, using one of the following options:
 - Choose one or the average of two individual marks 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) Ranking the proposals above the overall threshold and preparing the shortlist of proposals.
- d) Identifying those proposals, among those above the overall threshold, which address emerging issues or potentially important future developments.
- e) Preparing the report for the COST Scientific Committee, reflecting the process and the decisions of Step 2.

4.3.3. Step 3 – Proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee

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

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

- Validating the list of names and expertise of the independent External Experts assigned to each proposal;
- Validating the *ad hoc* Review Panels at each Collection Date (number of Review Panels and composition);
- Identifying among the proposals with the same marks, those that best respond to COST Mission and Policies (see section 2.1), on the basis of the aggregated data on the Network of Proposers (breakdown, expertise, geographic, age and gender distribution), and of the plans to involve relevant participants or targeted stakeholders in the proposal.
- Ensuring a balanced COST Action portfolio by ensuring the coverage of all S&T fields;
- Establishing the final ranking of proposals recommended for funding to be presented to CSO for Approval, on the basis of c) and d). The methodology for selection will be established in detail by COST Scientific Committee and be made publicly available, subject to previous CSO approval.

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 results of the evaluation and selection steps described above and taking into account the available budget. The CSO reserves the right not to approve Actions selected by the Scientific Committee.

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" rules¹⁸.

¹⁸ COST 134/14 "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment"

4.4. Feedback to proposers

The Consensus Reports and the marks 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 or by the *ad hoc* Review Panels are not admissible.

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

The redress procedure can 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)

5. List of Acronyms

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

6. Definitions

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

1. **COST Member Country:** means any country that joined the COST Association as a Full Member following the approval of the COST Association Statutes.
2. **COST Cooperating State:** means any State that was admitted to the COST Association as Cooperating Member.
3. **COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC):** means COST Member Countries that fulfil the Horizon 2020 widening eligibility conditions being either an EU Member State or an Associated Country to the EU Framework Programme.
4. **COST Near Neighbour Countries (NNC):** means countries approved by the Committee of Senior Officials to benefit from dedicated support for the integration of their researchers, engineers or scholars in COST activities.
5. **International Partners Countries (IPC):** means all those countries that are neither COST Member Countries, nor Cooperating State nor COST Near Neighbour Countries.
6. **EU Agencies:** means an organisation governed by European public law, with its own legal personality, 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 but distinct from the EU institutions.
7. **European RTD Organisation:** means any intergovernmental scientific research organisation that is responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are countries, and the majority of which are COST Member Countries or Cooperating State.
8. **International Organisation:** means any organisation with a European or international membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality, governed by international public law or recognised as of general interest, in particular promoting scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST Mission.

9. COST National Coordinator (CNC): means the individuals appointed by the COST Member Countries and Cooperating State in charge of confirming the acceptance of the Action Memorandum of Understanding by nominating the Management Committee members of their country and the evaluators for the *ad hoc* Review Panels pool of Experts.
10. COST Scientific Committee (SC): means the committee composed of independent, internationally renowned, high-level experts, one per COST Member Country and Cooperating State, appointed by the CSO.
11. Open Call for proposals: means 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.
12. Collection Date: means the date when the proposals for new COST Actions submitted during a certain period are gathered and sent for evaluation.
13. Main Proposer: means the coordinator of the network of proposers who submits a proposal for a COST Action in response to the Open Call.
14. COST Action: means the COST pan-European networking instrument allowing researchers, engineers or scholars from COST Member Countries and Cooperating State to develop jointly their ideas and new initiatives in a field or topic of common interest.
15. Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): means the agreement accepted by a minimum of five different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State describing the Action objectives. This document has to be accepted by any additional COST Member Country or Cooperating State joining the Action.
16. COST Action Grant Agreement (AGA): means the agreement between the COST Association and the Grant Holder that governs the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.
17. Grant Holder: means the legal entity responsible for the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.
18. Action Participant: means any researcher, engineer or scholar who participates actively in a COST Action.
19. Early Career Investigator (ECI): means a researcher in the time span of up to 8 years after the date of obtaining the PhD/doctorate (full-time equivalent).
20. Management Committee (MC): means the group of researchers, engineers or scholars, representing the COST Member Countries (or Cooperating State) that have 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 their respective CNC.
21. Dissemination: means the public disclosure of COST Actions' results and/or outcomes by any appropriate mean (other than resulting from protecting the results), including by scientific publications in any media.



COST is supported by
the EU Framework
Programme Horizon 2020

