

COST Open Call – Proposers' Guidelines

Level C

November 2024

Open Call oc-2025-1

**COST 104/21
V4.0**

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Document Change History

Version	Release date	Summary of changes
1.0 (former oc-2022-1)	15 December 2021	Updates to launch oc-2022-1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - included clear examples of eligible statements on anonymity, - list of information to be provided to evaluators has been modified (deleting those which were not an evaluation criteria), - the amended list of ITCs, - updates of the links to reference documents in the context of Horizon Europe, - change of terminology and definition: Early Career Investigators (ECI) is changed to Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI), and - amendments resulting from the change on the rules for participation of researchers and innovators from NNC and Third States (IPC)
1.1 (former oc-2022-1)	13 April 2022	Minor updates, linguistic and formatting changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - correction of the release date on page 3 (15 December instead of 29 October 2021) - due to the deletion of a Chapter in the previous version, a series of references to Chapter numbers needed to be updated - the “sections” of the Guidelines were renamed as “Chapters” to avoid confusion with the “sections” of the proposal, which are also described in the Guidelines
2.0	18 November 2022	Updates to launch oc-2023-1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated link to Country and Organisation table - Sentence added for resubmissions to use the correct template - Clarification on outermost regions status for Open Call - Text edits / reference updates - Link added to the European Commission website on gender equality in research and innovation
2.1	December 2022	Updates to launch oc-2023-1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anonymity clarification for proposal section added (general feature and Network of Proposers) - Honoria information for iEEs and RPMs added
3.0	November 2023	Guidelines updated for oc-2024-1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarification on Action funding level in Chapter 1.2 - Summary table showing proposal section visibility by SESA actors in Chapter 2.4 - Merged Chapter 2.4.2 (Technical Annex) and former 2.6 (Key Concepts definitions) to improve readability and avoid repetitions
4.0	November 2024	Updates to launch oc-2025-1, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changed title of the document - Renamed Chapters to Sections in these Guidelines - Renamed Sections to Parts in the Proposal Template - Shortened Section 1 to make it more readable and to the point - Introduced the new annotated version of the Technical Annex - Introduced the new scoring system of the remote individual evaluation - Introduced a Section on Generative Artificial Intelligence - Introduced the notion of Acceptability of COST Action’s proposals

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INTRODUCTION

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

Proposers are invited to read the set of COST Implementation Rules, namely:

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

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

Both documents are available at: <https://www.cost.eu/funding/documents-guidelines/>.

1. OVERVIEW OF COST FRAMEWORK, COST ACTIONS, AND OPEN CALL PROCESS

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

1.1. The COST framework: mission and policy

COST is a pan-European intergovernmental framework¹ dedicated to supporting European-based Science and Technology (S&T) networking activities, enabling collaboration between researchers, innovators, and other relevant stakeholders. COST participants can jointly develop ideas and new initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European coordination of nationally or otherwise funded research activities. Since its creation in 1971, COST has significantly contributed to reducing the gap between science, policy makers and society in Europe and beyond.

The COST **Mission** is to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges, by funding bottom-up, excellence-driven, open and inclusive networks (COST Actions) in all areas of science and technology.

COST is also implementing a **Policy** towards **Excellence and Inclusiveness**, built upon two pillars:

- strengthening the excellence through the creation of cross-border networking of researchers;
- promoting geographical and gender balance and foster the participation of Young Researchers and Innovators², throughout its activities and operations.

with the following objectives:

- encouraging and enabling researchers from less research-intensive countries across Europe to set up or join COST Actions. These countries are denominated Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC) (see [Annex I – Level A: Country and Organisations table](#));

¹ See the list of countries and organisations in COST 088/21 Rules and Principles for COST Activities, [Annex I](#).

² See COST Glossary - <https://www.cost.eu/Glossary>

- counterbalancing research communities' unequal access to knowledge, infrastructures, funding and resources;
- providing strong means to increase the visibility and integration of researchers to the leading knowledge hubs of Europe, as well as to acquire their necessary leadership skills, regardless of their location, age or gender;
- smoothly contributing to trigger structural changes in the national research systems of COST Members;
- identifying excellence across Europe to contribute to ERA widening objectives.

Through global networking, COST also encourages the participation of researchers and innovators affiliated in non-COST Members³ and Specific Organisations⁴ in COST activities on the basis of mutual benefit. The participation of researchers from Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) is particularly welcome, according to the provisions on eligibility for participation and reimbursement established in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

1.2. COST Actions

COST Actions are:

- **Pan-European:** the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 41 Full Members, one Cooperating Member, and one Partner Member;
- **Bottom-up:** the priorities are defined by the research community and the scientific management decisions are entrusted to the Action Management Committees. The COST framework is especially well-suited to promote **Multi-, Inter- and Trans-disciplinary collaborations**.
- **Open** throughout their lifetime to new members and are **adaptable** in terms of internal organisation and strategy. They shall promote actively the participation of the next generation of researchers and innovators.;
- **Output and Impact-Oriented:** COST Actions are set up to achieve specific objectives within their four-year duration based upon the sharing, creation, dissemination and application of knowledge. COST Actions are monitored against their expected output and impact.

The research and development activities needed for the achievement of the Action objectives are not funded by COST and rely on nationally or otherwise funded research projects and resources (e.g., employees' time, infrastructures and equipment).

COST Actions have a four-year duration and the **networking tools** funded by COST are the following:

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

COST Actions can also receive funding for other expenses:

- Dissemination and Communication Products;
- Expenses incurred for the benefit of the network.

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 Management Committee (MC) and approved by the

³ States that are not COST Members. They can be Near Neighbour Countries or Third States (also called International Partner Countries)

⁴ https://www.cost.eu/Country_Organisations_Table

COST Association. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

No budget forecast is requested when submitting a proposal. The average funding received during the 4-year duration of a COST Action amounts to approximately 600,000 EUR. The amounts are variable from a grant period to another and depends, among others, on the size of the network and overall budget available.

1.2.1. COST ACTION STRUCTURE

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

The **Action Management Committee** is the decision-making body and is responsible for the coordination, implementation and management of the Action activities and for supervising the appropriate allocation of the grant in view to achieving the Action objectives.

The MC is composed of:

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

MC Observers:

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

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

Working Groups (WGs) are in charge of developing the scientific and networking activities needed to achieve the Action objectives, in line with the Action strategy defined by the Action MC.

1.2.2. PARTICIPANTS⁶

COST Actions are open to anyone with a legal affiliation located in a COST Member or in any NNC or Third State (IPC⁷). A **legal entity** can be (non-exhaustive list): a public entity (national, regional, local public authority or any other kind of public entity), universities, research centres, SMEs, large companies, NGOs, as well as Specific Organisation or any other form of legal entity recognised under a national or international framework⁸.

Action Participants are defined as any individual being an Action MC Member, an Action MC Observer, a Working Group member or an *ad hoc* participant:

- **Action MC Members and Observers:** their role is to pro-actively participate in the implementation of coordination and management decisions in the Action, and be a gateway to their national community;
- **WG members:** any individual affiliated to a legal entity in any Country in the world may become a WG member. Their participation shall be approved by the Action MC, based on an application submitted through the Action page on the COST website. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives through their participation in WG(s);

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

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

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

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

- **Ad hoc Participants:** Individuals who are not MC or WG members and are selected by the Action MC for a specific contribution towards the achievement of the COST Action Objectives. Examples of *ad hoc* participants can be STSM grantees, trainees and trainers in Training Schools, or invited speakers at COST Action Workshops and Conferences.

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

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

1.3. COST Open Call process

The COST Open Call is implemented via the Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) process. COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on [Funding Documents & Guidelines](#) with the Collection Date, the schedule, the description of the process and reference to the evaluation criteria. Further information including an Open Call infographic is available on the [Open Call page](#) on the COST website.

The Open Call involves a one-stage submission process. Proposals shall be submitted through a dedicated secured online tool, [e-COST](#) (further details are provided in Section 2).

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

The proposal evaluation, selection and approval comprise the following steps further described in Section 3 of these guidelines:

Step 1 – Proposal Evaluation by Independent External Experts and Consensus Report

Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check by the Review Panel

Step 3 – Proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee

Step 4 – Proposal Approval by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

2. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL FOR A COST ACTION

2.1. Requirements for the network of proposers

Proposals shall be submitted by a network of proposers, represented by only one Main Proposer (MP) affiliated to an institution as described in Table 1.

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

Proposers affiliated in	Eligible as	
	Main Proposer	Secondary Proposer
A legal entity in a COST Full/Cooperating member	✓	✓
A legal entity in a COST Partner Member	✗	✓
A legal entity in a Near Neighbour Country (NNC)	✗	✓
A legal entity in a Third State (IPC)	✗	✓
EU Institutions, Bodies, Offices and Agencies (EC/EU)	✓	✓
European RTD	✓	✓
International Organisations	✗	✓
Individuals with no legal affiliation	✗	✗

- ✗ = No ✓ = Yes

The Network of Proposers shall fulfil also the following requirements:

- The Network of Proposers must include at least 7 different COST Full or Cooperating Members. Among these countries at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in [Annex I – Level A: Country and Organisations Table](#). **Please check the required ratio of ITC vs non-ITC in the Annex.** There can be more than one proposer from the same institution or country.
- It is important to note that for the participation in the Network of Proposers, the ITC status of researchers and innovators from EU Member States Outermost Regions will be counted as the EU Member State they are linked to⁹ (see [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations Table](#)).
- The European Commission and EU bodies, offices or agencies, European RTD Organisations and International Organisations do not count as COST Full or Cooperating Members, independently of their geographical location in one of the COST Full or Cooperating Members.

Please note: No letter of intention is required from any of the institutions involved in the Network of Proposers (Main or Secondary Proposers). All proposers must have a registered and updated e-COST profile (<https://e-services.cost.eu>) and specify their scientific expertise. Proposers should be aware that completing an e-COST profile may require some time.

2.2. How to submit a proposal

Only the Main Proposer can register and submit a proposal by the Collection Date. To do so, the Main Proposer needs to have an e-COST profile that can be created via the following link: <https://e-services.cost.eu/>.

The Main Proposer needs to log in e-COST and select in sequence: “Open Call”, “Proposals”, “Create New proposal” (<https://e-services.cost.eu/sesa/quickAccess>).

Proposals may be registered and submitted at any time before the Collection Date.

⁹ For example, researchers affiliated in a legal entity in e.g., Guadeloupe will be counted as France (non-ITC), researchers affiliated in a legal entity in Azores will be counted as Portugal (ITC).

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 reverts to the “draft” status. To be evaluated, it needs to be submitted again before the Collection Date.

Only proposals having a “submitted” status will be evaluated. Please note that after the Collection Date the data of submitted proposals are only available in “read” mode, hence none of its sections is transferable to another Open Call collection. The data of “non submitted” proposals will be deleted after the Collection Date.

To avoid possible congestions of the e-COST platform, it is highly recommended to avoid submitting the proposal just before the deadline for submission. The COST Association cannot be held responsible for any delay due to, for example, heavy internet traffic or connection difficulties.

Only the last submitted version of a proposal shall be considered for evaluation.

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

A COST Action proposal is composed of the following parts:

- General Features
- Technical Annex
- References
- COST Mission and Policy
- Network of Proposers

Each part is explained in detail in Section 2.4.

Please ensure you submit your proposal using the Technical Annex template of the current Collection (see Section 2.3) available in e-COST when creating a proposal.

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.

2.3. Eligibility and acceptability of proposals

In order to be evaluated, a proposal must comply with the **eligibility criteria** described in Section 2.3.1. Proposals may be declared ineligible at any stage of the SESA process. The Main Proposer is informed by the COST Association of the ineligibility of their proposal, upon which the Main Proposer may submit a redress request complying with the procedure described in Section 3.5.

Additionally, in order to be funded, a proposal must comply with the **acceptability criteria** detailed in Section 2.3.2. The compliance is assessed only for those proposals which are in the selection zone and are susceptible to be funded (Section 3.1.3). The Main Proposer is informed by the COST Association of the unacceptability of their proposal. The decision is not subject to redress.

2.3.1. ELIGIBILITY

Please pay particular attention to this Section and to each one of the following eligibility criteria¹⁰.

To be eligible, COST Action proposals must:

- Be submitted by an eligible Main Proposer (see Table 1);
- Represent a Network of Proposers from **at least 7** different COST Full or Cooperating Members **among which at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries as detailed in the Annex of this document**;
- Respect **word and page limits** as described in Section 2.4.2 of this document. For this reason, the format of the “Technical Annex” shall not be changed in any way (font, margins, line spacing, etc.). A “Technical Annex”, the parts of which are completely empty, will be deemed ineligible. Furthermore, no links or references to any additional information about the proposal (web link to pages describing the proposal, audio-visual material, etc) can be provided;
- Be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association;
- Be **anonymous**: proposals may **not contain any direct or indirect reference** to people and/or their institutions participating in the Network of Proposers (Main or Secondary Proposers). This means that names of proposers or their institutions should **neither be explicitly mentioned, nor be potentially identifiable** through, e.g., links to web pages or through references to their role and/or participation in existing or ended projects, grants, networks that are mentioned in the proposal. Table 2 provides examples of eligible statements and statements resulting in ineligibility due to the breach of the anonymity criterion.

Table 2: Examples of statements resulting in ineligibility due to the breach of the anonymity criterion and statements that are eligible.

Statements resulting in ineligibility	Eligible statements
“Prof. Smith” will coordinate the Action activities within WG5 (direct reference)	“The coordinator of WG5 activities will be appointed by the Action’s Management Committee.”
“Several members of the proposers’ network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and institutions/organisations/networks/COST Actions, such as FP0901” (indirect reference)	“The Action will seek contact with / reach out to / draw on the expertise of / build on / ... previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and institutions/organisations/networks/COST Actions/..., such as FP0901.”
“Among government-run public services we have the Department of Health of Catalonia on board” (direct reference)	“The Network of Proposers already includes a / several government-run public service(s).”
“The Network of Proposers has already generated some output”, with in the footnote a link to a YouTube video or webpage in which Secondary Proposers can be identified (indirect reference, potentially identifiable)	“The Network of Proposers has already generated some output”, without links to a YouTube video or webpage in which Secondary Proposers can be identified

Note on “References”:

In the “References” part of the proposal, you may quote proposers’ own publications, provided that there is no emphasis in the text (e.g., in bold/italics or with links) that the publication is authored by one or more of the proposers.

¹⁰ See also [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation Selection and Approval](#), Chapter 5.

2.3.2. ACCEPTABILITY

COST Action proposals shall respect fundamental ethical principles as described in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#) (COST 094/21) and in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity¹¹, including **originality** of findings and ideas, and **peaceful** purposes of the addressed S&T challenges. As mentioned in Section 2.3, this check is performed only on those proposals reaching the selection zone.

2.4. Proposal structure

The proposal for a COST Action is composed of the following parts:

- General Features including “Summary”
- Technical Annex
- References
- COST Mission and Policy
- Network of Proposers

All these parts are to be completed online except for the Technical Annex, which needs to be uploaded in e-COST as a single PDF document (see Section 2.4.2). The instructions related to each part are given below.

2.4.1. GENERAL FEATURES

The Main Proposer shall complete this part in e-COST.

Table 3: General Features of the proposal to be filled in e-COST.

General Features
Open Call Collection identifier (automatically filled by e-COST)
Proposal reference (automatically filled by e-COST)
Title Mandatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Max. 12 words
Acronym Mandatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Max. 250 words • The summary is accessible to potential evaluators when their availability is requested • The summary illustrates the challenge(s) that the Action is proposing to address and will be published on the COST website, should the Action be approved. <p><i>Be brief, clear and “to the point”: illustrate your ideas in a concise manner and include what is the main S&T and/or societal Challenge the proposed Action aims to address.</i></p>

¹¹ European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (<https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>), Berlin, ALLEA – All European Academies (Version June 2023).

Key expertise needed for evaluation

Mandatory

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

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

Keywords

Mandatory

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

2.4.2. TECHNICAL ANNEX

The Technical Annex is composed by the following criteria:

- **Criterion 1. EXCELLENCE IN S&T AND NETWORKING**
- **Criterion 2. IMPACT**
- **Criterion 3. IMPLEMENTATION**

Please ensure you submit your proposal using the Technical Annex template of the current Collection available in e-COST when creating a proposal.

Follow the instructions provided and pay particular attention to the following:

- Use of the Technical Annex template of the current Collection;
- Complete of all the parts of the Technical Annex template;
- The length of the Technical Annex must not exceed **fifteen (15)** pages. The first page with the instructions has to be deleted when saving the Technical Annex to PDF;
- The template provided **must not be modified and the formatting must be kept** (COST standard style: Arial font, size 10, line spacing 1 – choose “Normal, Text” style option from the ribbon styles gallery). When figures or tables are added, they must be readable;
- The **anonymity** criterion must be respected throughout the proposal.

The instructions to complete each criterion are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Template of the Technical Annex with annotations.

1. EXCELLENCE IN S&T AND NETWORKING

A. Main challenge

Describe clearly and concisely the issue or need that the proposal aims at addressing. The main challenge can be of different nature: e.g., scientific, technological and/or societal. Describe also why and how it is relevant and timely.

B. Objectives

Describe the objectives addressing the main challenge presented above and elaborate how they are relevant, concrete and achievable within the lifetime of the proposed Action.

The objectives shall entail both research coordination and capacity building objectives. Hereafter, we provide a non-exhaustive list of examples of research coordination and capacity building objectives.

Research coordination:

- Development of a common understanding/definition of the subject matter;
- Coordination of research methodologies;
- Coordination of experimentation or testing;
- Comparative analysis of data;
- Development of knowledge needing international coordination;
- Etc.

Capacity building:

- Fostering knowledge exchange;
- Bridging separate fields of science/disciplines;
- Enabling collaboration from different stakeholders, e.g., academia, industry, policy makers, NGOs;
- Etc.

C. State-of-the-art

Describe how the proposal builds on the state-of-the-art and to what extent its approach and methodologies will advance the state of the art, including former and existing efforts (research projects, other networks, etc.) at European and/or international level.

D. Rationale for choosing networking to address the main challenge

Demonstrate clearly and concisely why a pan-European network is the most appropriate approach to tackle the main challenge as opposed to e.g., a research project. This is important because COST funds networking activities and not research.

E. Critical mass of the network

Elaborate how the proposed network has the critical mass and the range of expertise needed to address the main challenge and objectives. If this is not yet achieved at proposal level, describe a credible plan to grow the network and ensure meaningful engagement by all relevant participants. Please note that the COST Policy (Country coverage, gender balance and involvement of Young Researchers and Innovators) must not be addressed in this criterion - see Section 2.4.4 of these Guidelines.

2. IMPACT

A. Impact related to objectives

Describe how the proposal aims to achieve realistic and innovative impacts. Impacts can be on science, society, policy, or any other relevant area, and short-, medium- or long-term. Also describe how the proposed Action will produce impact on research coordination and capacity building.

B. Involvement of stakeholders

Describe the stakeholders targeted by the proposed Action and the tailored plans to involve the identified categories. Specify the role in which they will be engaged in the proposed Action, their added-value and the challenges you may face to include them.

C. Communication, dissemination and valorisation

Describe the plans for communication, dissemination and valorisation of results and how they target the relevant audience (research community, policymakers, civil society, etc.).

If relevant, please describe the exploitation plan and the targeted audience, including IPR¹².

3. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Action Structure

Describe the different Working Groups, their interrelation and how they address the main challenge and contribute to achieve the objectives.

If the management structure entails additional roles beyond the mandatory COST Action ones, (i.e., Management Committee, Working Group Leaders, Action Chair, Vice Chair, Science Communication Coordinator, Grant Awarding Coordinator), please describe them here and explain how they are intended to address the main challenge and contribute to achieve the objectives.

B. Work plan (tasks, activities and timeframe)

Describe the work plan (e.g., tasks, activities, milestones and timeframe) to address the main challenge and ensure the achievement of the objectives.

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 (see Section 1.2 of these Guidelines).

C. Deliverables

Describe the proposed Action's major deliverables and their timeframe.

Deliverables are tangible outputs of the Action such as: reports, documents, technical diagrams, papers, publications, content for training schools, input to standards, best practices, white papers, etc.

COST Action networking activities (e.g., meetings, training schools, etc.) are not deliverables but means to achieve the objectives.

D. Gantt chart

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

2.4.2.1. Writing Style Guide

The COST Association strongly recommends complying with the following, when writing the proposal:

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

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

- avoid pronouns such as “I”, “we”; rather use “the Action”;
- avoid expressions such as “planned” or “proposed” when referring to the Action; rather use “aims at”, “will”, etc.

2.4.2.2. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The COST Association acknowledges the use of AI in compliance with the following:

- Proposers must be human beings;
- Proposers are fully and solely responsible for all content in the submitted proposal independently of how it was authored;
- Proposals are judged solely on the content submitted, independently of whether any Generative AI tools were used. Any undesired content produced by Generative AI tools is the responsibility of the proposers;
- Proposers should be aware that Generative AI tools may provide ideas that are not new, innovative or relevant;
Proposers should be aware that Generative AI tools may suggest existing text fragments, provide incorrect information and otherwise generate content that may be interpreted as scientific misconduct.

2.4.3. REFERENCES

Please complete this part online.

Table 5: Online part of the proposal regarding the References.

References
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non mandatory but recommended; • Max. 500 words; • Section to list relevant references on the topic of the proposal. The list of references is displayed to the evaluators.

2.4.4. COST MISSION AND POLICY

Please complete this part online. Describe how the proposal addresses the COST Mission and Policy (see Section 1.1).

N.B.: The content of this section will be assessed at the selection phase by the Scientific Committee for those proposals reaching the selection zone (Section 3.1.3).

Table 6: Online part of the proposal regarding the COST Mission and Policy.

COST Mission and Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory • Max. 1000 words • This is a free text section to explain how the Action proposal will address the COST Policy with regard to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensuring a geographical balance, and involving participants from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC); 2. Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI)¹³; 3. addressing Gender balance¹⁴. • This part should describe the plans to address each of these three targets.

¹³ Glossary - <https://www.cost.eu/Glossary>

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

2.4.5. NETWORK OF PROPOSERS

Please complete this part online taking into account the eligibility criteria described in Section 2.3 of these Guidelines.

In the “Network” part of the proposal, only the Main Proposer can encode the details of the Secondary Proposers by filling in the following mandatory fields:

- first name;
- last name; and
- e-mail address.

By clicking on the “envelope” icon, an automatic notification is sent to invite the Secondary Proposer candidate. The Secondary Proposer candidate can accept the invitation by following the link communicated in the automatic notification. To do so, they must have (or set up) an e-COST profile.

N.B.: The email address used by the Main Proposer to invite the Secondary Proposer candidate must be the same as the one registered in e-COST under the Secondary Proposer’s profile.

Based on the e-COST profiles of the Main and Secondary Proposers, only the following information on the Network of Proposers, automatically extracted and aggregated, will be displayed to the evaluators.

Table 7: Online part of the proposal regarding the Network of Proposers - Features.

Network of Proposers - Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (%) • Number of Proposers • Geographic Distribution of Proposers • Gender Distribution of Proposers (% M/F) • Number of Young Researchers and Innovators • Core Expertise of proposers: distribution by sub-field of Science • Institutional distribution of Network of Proposers • COST Full Members (number and list in alphabetical order) • COST Cooperating Members • COST Partner Member • NNCs (number and list in alphabetical order) • IPCs (number and list in alphabetical order) • European RTD Organisations • European Commission, EU Bodies, Offices and Agencies • International Organisations

In case the Secondary Proposer is affiliated to a legal entity in a COST Full Member or COST Cooperating Member, they can indicate their interest to be considered by the COST National Coordinator (CNC) for nomination to the Action’s Management Committee (MC) by clicking [COST CNCs](#).

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

The SESA process fulfils three core principles: excellence, fairness and transparency. COST strives to avoid any Conflict of Interest (CoI)¹⁵ and all those involved in the SESA process must commit to confidentiality.

3.1. Proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval

As outlined in Section 1.3, the proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval process **is divided into four steps, which are described below.**

3.1.1. STEP 1 – PROPOSAL EVALUATION BY INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EXPERTS AND CONSENSUS REPORT

Individual Evaluation Report

Independent External Experts carry out the remote peer-review evaluation. They are identified and assigned to proposals on the basis of their relevant expertise, taking into account the Research Areas and keywords selected indicated in the proposals (see Section 2.4.2).

This step uses double-blind peer review, i.e. the identity of both Independent External Experts and proposers is kept confidential. Each proposal is evaluated by three Independent External Experts. The evaluation is performed remotely, and each External Expert submits an Individual Evaluation Report for each proposal they evaluate.

The table below presents the evaluation criteria, the respective range of marks and the thresholds.

Table 8: Evaluation criteria and range of marks per criterion.

EXCELLENCE IN S&T AND NETWORKING	IMPACT	IMPLEMENTATION
Range of marks: 0 – 5 Threshold: 3	Range of marks: 0 – 5 Threshold: 3	Range of marks: 0 - 3
RANGE OF MARKS AWARDED: 0 – 13		

Proposals failing to achieve the threshold either in “Excellence in S&T and Networking” or “Impact” shall not be funded.

The specific questions addressed by the Independent External Experts on each of the criteria are presented below.

Criterion 1: Excellence in S&T and Networking

- A. Describe to what extent the main scientific, technological and/or societal challenge is relevant and timely.
- B. Explain how the objectives are relevant to the main challenge, achievable within the lifetime of the proposed Action, concrete, and ambitious.

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

- C. Describe to what extent the proposal builds on the state of the art and explain to what extent its approach and methodologies will advance the state of the art.
- D. Describe to what extent the proposal demonstrates that establishing a pan-European network is the most appropriate approach in relation to the main challenge and objectives.
- E. Describe to what extent the proposed network has the critical mass and the range of expertise needed to address the main challenge and objectives. If not, describe to what extent the proposal presents a credible plan to grow the network and ensure meaningful engagement by relevant participants.

Threshold: Good (3)

Scores: empty section (0), poor (1), fair (2), good (3), very good (4), excellent (5)

Criterion 2: Impact

- A. Describe to what extent the proposal aims to achieve realistic and innovative impacts. Impacts can be on science, society, policy, or any other relevant area, and short-, medium- or long-term.
- B. Describe to what extent the proposal identifies the relevant stakeholders and presents a clear and tailored plan to engage them in the Action activities.
- C. Describe to what extent plans for the communication, dissemination and valorisation of the results of the proposed Action are clear, attainable, and targeted to relevant audiences (research community, policymakers, civil society, etc.).

Threshold: Good (3)

Scores: empty section (0), poor (1), fair (2), good (3), very good (4), excellent (5)

Criterion 3: Implementation

- A. Describe to what extent the work plan and the structure of the proposed Action (WGs, leadership structure, tasks, activities, timeframe, deliverables, and internal communication) appropriately address the main challenge and ensures achievement of objectives.

No threshold

Please note that for this criterion there are only four possible scores: empty section (0), insufficient (1), standard (2), outstanding (3)

Consensus Evaluation Report

Following the submission of the Individual Evaluation Reports, a consensus is sought among the Independent External Experts (remotely) and a Consensus Evaluation Report is drafted. One of the experts is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Consensus Evaluation Report.

Consensus shall not be imposed, and 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 Review Panel which is in charge of the quality check and resolution of discrepancies (see Section 3.1.2 of these Guidelines).

3.1.2. STEP 2 – REVISION AND QUALITY CHECK BY THE REVIEW PANEL

The Review Panel is set up after each Collection Date, based on the number of received proposals and on the topics covered.

The members of the Review Panel are appointed by the COST Association from a pool of active researchers and innovators who have been nominated by the CNCs. This step also uses double-blind peer review.

The Review Panel shall:

- a) ensure the quality of the Consensus Evaluation Reports, including the consistency of marks with comments;
- b) when consensus is not achieved, resolve the differences in opinions among the Independent External Experts, using one of the following options:
 - based on the Individual Evaluation Reports, draft a Consensus Evaluation Report based on the comments and assign the adequate mark choosing within the range of marks awarded by the individual Independent External Experts or the non-agreed consensus mark of the Rapporteur, and validate it;
 - in exceptional cases, ask for one or two additional Independent External Experts to remotely evaluate the proposal. In this case the Review Panel shall make use of the additional evaluation reports to prepare the validated Consensus Evaluation Report and marks.
- c) strive for consistency of marks across the proposals within and across the Review Panel;
- d) identify those proposals which address emerging issues or potentially important future developments;
- e) prepare the report for the Scientific Committee, reflecting the process and the decisions of Section 3.1.2.

3.1.3. 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 is in charge of:

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

**the cut-off mark is the total mark of the Nth proposal in the ranked list (sorted in decreasing order according to number of), with N being the number of proposals to be funded according to available funds;*
 - selecting from the list of retained proposals the shortlist of proposals for approval by the CSO:
 - the proposals in A (above the cut-off mark) automatically enter the list of proposals recommended for funding;
 - among the proposals in B (equal to the cut-off mark), the Scientific Committee completes the list of proposals recommended for funding with those that, besides being highly marked with respect to S&T and Networking Excellence / Impact / Implementation (i.e. the mark established by the Review Panels), best respond to COST Mission and Policy, based on the description in the proposal on COST Mission and Policy, as described in Section 2.4.4.

In order to achieve that, the Scientific Committee applies a selected / not selected status to all the proposals in B based on the criteria 2.b to 2.d that are described in Chapter 7 of COST 101/21 “[COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval](#)”.

A separate comment on the selected / not selected status is provided by the Scientific Committee to each Main Proposer in proposals under B, additionally to the Consensus Evaluation Report;

- assessing the acceptability of proposals that have been identified as potentially breaching the Rules and Principles for COST Activities and making a recommendation to the COST Administration;
- for all proposals recommended for funding, the Scientific Committee adopts a Recommendation on COST Mission and Policy.

3.1.4. STEP 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 process described above.

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

3.2. Conflict of Interest

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

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

- Independent External Experts and Review Panel Members having been respectively involved in the evaluation and quality check of a proposal shall not be MC Member nor WG member in the Action deriving from that proposal, they however may be invited for an *ad-hoc* contribution or be Action Rapporteur for that Action;
- CNCs and Scientific Committee Members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate;
- CSO members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate.

Table 9 presents cases where a position shall be incompatible with submission, evaluation, selection and approval of COST Action proposals.

Table 9: Summary of the cases of incompatibilities marked with ✗.

Position	Main Proposer and Network of Proposers	Independent External Expert	Review Panel Member	Scientific Committee Member	CNC	CSO
Main Proposer and Network of Proposers (Submission)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Independent External Experts (Evaluation)	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Review Panel Members (Revision)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
COST Scientific Committee Members (Selection)	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
CSO (Final approval)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

3.2.1. CASES OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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 process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member):

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

2. Cases of Potential Conflict of Interest

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

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

3.2.2. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

- 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.

Failure to declare the Col may have the following consequences:

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

3.2.3. CONSEQUENCES

1. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified before the evaluation starts:
 - the evaluator may not participate in the evaluation/selection process in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced.
2. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified during the evaluation:
 - the evaluator shall stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced;
 - any comments and marks already given by the evaluator shall be discarded.
3. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified after the evaluation has taken place, the COST Association shall examine:
 - the potential impact and consequences of the Conflict of Interest and take appropriate measures.
4. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified during the quality check performed by the Review Panel, or the selection by the Scientific Committee, the concerned actor shall not participate in the discussion related to the proposal for which they have a Conflict of Interest.

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 are recorded by the COST Association. All those related to nationally nominated actors (Review Panel Members and COST Scientific Committee Members) are reported to the COST National Coordinator.

3.3. Confidentiality¹⁶

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

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

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

- does not disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation;
- does not communicate with proposers on any proposal during or after the evaluation until the approval of CSO.

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

3.4. Feedback to proposers

The decision on the approved proposals is communicated after the CSO decision to the Main Proposers.

The Consensus Evaluation Reports, the marks of the evaluation and the results of the selection made by the Scientific Committee are made available to all proposers via e-COST.

3.5. Redress Procedure

In order to comply with the fairness and transparency principles of the SESA process, 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 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 process;
- the Network of Proposers deems that the Consensus Evaluation Report bears factual errors.

Requests for redress dealing with the scientific judgment by the Independent External Experts and by the Review Panel are not admissible. Furthermore, the proposal Selection by the COST Scientific Committee (Step 3) shall not be open to redress.

Decisions on acceptability shall not be subject to redress.

The redress procedure may be initiated only by email 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).

The outcome of the redress procedure is definitive.

4. HONORARIA

Honoraria¹⁷ shall be paid to the Independent External Experts and Review Panel Members involved in the SESA process as follows:

1. Independent External Experts: EUR 50 per proposal, an additional EUR 50 for the Rapporteur;
2. Review Panel Members: EUR 400 per Collection.

¹⁷ See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(SESA\) – \(Level B\)](#)

5. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The Rules and Principles for COST Activities ([Annex II](#))¹⁸ set the definitions of the terms and acronyms used in these guidelines.

¹⁸ [Annex II - Level A: Definitions and Abbreviations applicable throughout COST Implementation Rules - Glossary](#)

ANNEX

Table 10: Required minimum number of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries per number of COST Full or Cooperating Members represented in a proposal.

Number of COST Full or Cooperating Members	Minimum number of ITC
7	4
8	4
9	5
10	5
11	6
12	6
13	7
14	7
15	8
16	8
17	9
18	9
19	10
20	10
21	11
22	11
23	12
24	12
25	13
26	13
27	14
28	14
29	15
30	15
31	16
32	16
33	17
34	17
35	18
36	18
37	19
38	19
39	20
40	20
41	21
42	21