



Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Guidelines

Proposed by the Chair of the Action

Updated May 29th 2021



Mission

The VNS grants aim at promoting virtual collaboration as a complement to traditional ways of collaboration within the research and innovation communities. This mechanism intends to stimulate virtual collaboration among the members of the Action.

Eligibility

- Applicant(s) are Action participants with a primary affiliation to an institution located in a COST Full or Cooperating Member country or MC Observers from a COST Near Neighbour Country.
- The applicant(s) shall be prepared to develop a virtual networking strategy, coordinate the call for expression of interest for the Virtual Mobility Grants and draft at the end of the grant period a report to be approved by the MC.

Evaluation committee

The Core Group proposes the MC the evaluation process to be carried out by a committee for transparency and inclusion reasons.

The Core Group proposes the MC the committee to be composed by the WG leaders and co-leaders, the Policy and Practice Group Leader, the Chair, the Vice Chair, the STSM Coordinator, the ITC Grants Coordinator, and the Science Communication Manager.

Evaluation criteria

1. The degree to which the proposal contributes to the overall objectives of the Action (1-10 points).
2. The degree to which the proposal contributes to the implementation of the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy (1-10 points).

Evaluation process

- The evaluation criteria defined by the Action's MC are promptly communicated to all potential applicants on the website of the Action.
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- Deadlines for applications and for evaluation are clearly set and communicated via the website of the Action.
- For each call:
 - The Vice Chair will evaluate if the applications meet the criteria for eligibility, and if documents required are part of the application.
 - The committee will grade each applicant's proposal based on a ranking point from 1-10.
 - Starting from the ranking, COST policies on excellence and inclusiveness will be considered by the committee for a final decision.
- Upon completion of evaluation, inter-rate reliability is calculated (if insufficient - proceed with election procedure but re-work criteria on the next MC meeting).

List of documents for the application

For the application to be eligible, applicants need to submit the following supporting documents:

1. A complete proposal which includes:
 - A. A description of how the COST Action can benefit from developing virtual networking activities, with a focus on:
 - Progress towards the MoU objectives and deliverables.
 - COST Excellence and inclusiveness Policy, specially towards the support of researchers in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries.
 - Stakeholder engagement and promoting the participation of researchers from NNC and IPC (COST Global Networking).
 - B. A proposal for the strategy outline on virtual networking, including an approach for coordinating Virtual Mobility Grants (where relevant) by:
 - Opening calls and managing the evaluation process for awarding the Virtual Mobility Grants.
 - Supporting and advising beneficiaries of the Virtual Mobility Grant.
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- C. A plan on coordinating and reporting any planned COST Action events that will be held online (e.g., Annual Meeting or Conference) and how they fit the overall Action strategy.
2. An updated Europass CV (dates of degrees obtained, current position, past experience and a list of academic publications, if applicable).

Implementation of activities

The successful applicant shall take the Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Manager role in the COST Action. The activities expected to be performed by the successful applicant, but not limited to, are:

- Prepare and distribute among the MC members of the Action and the COST Science Officer a detailed strategy on virtual networking for the entire Action (following consultation with Action participants, subject to MC approval).
- Support the MC in the discussions and planning of virtual events and collaboration activities.
- Assist in the selection of hosts for the virtual networking events and collaboration activities.
- Assist the selected hosts in preparation and coordination of online events and collaboration activities (including the analysis of technical needs).
- Oversee the selection of the most appropriate virtual tools for each specific virtual activity (webinar, virtual conference, online library containing learning material for use by the Action members) considering the needs of the Action and the activities (need for sub-groups, forums, etc.), demonstrate the principle of best value for money, adhere to GDPR requirements.
- Support the call, evaluation process, and coordination of the Virtual Mobility Grants (upon decision of the MC).

Duration of the VNS

The VNS will start once the application has been approved by the appointed committee and will be carried out until the end of the Grant Period.

Final report

The grantee has 15 calendar days from the end of the Grant Period to submit a report to the Vice Chair and to the Science Officer of the Action including:

- The Action's strategy on virtual networking approved by the MC.
- The list and brief description of virtual events and collaboration activities organised during the Grant Period.
- The contribution to the COST Action MoU objectives for each of the virtual events and collaboration activities
- The contribution to the COST Excellence and inclusiveness Policy, specially towards the support of researchers in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries.
- Stakeholder engagement and promoting participation of researchers from Near Neighbour Countries and International Partner Countries.
- Description of identified successful practices and lessons learned.

VNS financial support

- A financial contribution of up to EUR 4 000 can be awarded per Grant Period. The MC shall define the exact amount of the grant. The grant does not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking the virtual networking coordination role.
- The Grant Holder shall pay the approved grant to the grantee after the MC has approved the grantee's report and no later than 15 days after the end of Grant Period.
- The COST Association and the Grant Holder of the Action cannot be considered as being the grantee's employer who shall make their own arrangements for all provisions related to personal security, health, taxation, social security, and pension matters. The grantee must also ensure they have the required technical material/equipment and infrastructure to carry out the activities proposed in their application to the grant.

Suggestions for the first Grant Period Call and future possible calls

- For the current Grant Period, the Core Group suggests to the MC to establish a call for 15 days after the MC, and the Evaluation Committee to provide an assessment among the following 7 days.
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- For further Grant Periods, it is proposed to launch one call at the beginning of the Grant Period.

Further details can be consulted at the COST Vademecum.
