

VADEMECUM (April 2021), SECTION 10. VIRTUAL NETWORKING TOOLS

Virtual Networking Tools aim to introduce two new types of Grants to build capacity and spread the uptake of virtual collaboration across different research communities, in the form of a **pilot scheme running until 31 October 2021**. There are two types of Grants:

1. Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grants

These 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 a given Action.

2. Virtual Mobility (VM) Grants

These grants aim at strengthening the existing networks by allowing scientists to foster collaboration in a virtual setting, to exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, disseminate the Action results, etc.

10.1 VIRTUAL NETWORKING SUPPORT (VNS) GRANT

10.1.1 ELIGIBILITY RULES

The following eligibility criteria apply:

- 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.

10.1.2 EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICANTS

The evaluation of each submitted VNS grant application is performed by the Action's MC. The Action Chair or an appointed Coordinator / Committee can assume this responsibility if the Action's MC gives them the mandate to perform this task on their behalf. The evaluation criteria defined by the Action's MC shall be communicated to all potential applicants.

The selection of successful grantee shall be based on contributions to the overall objectives of the Action and the implementation of the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy.

The **application shall be** submitted in e-COST and **include the following information**:

1. 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).

2. 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.

Additionally, the proposal shall include 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.

10.1.3 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).

The grantee has 15 calendar days from the end of the Grant Period to submit a report to the Action Chair / the appointed Coordinator / Committee 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.

The report shall consider only virtual activities carried out in their entirety within a single Grant Period.

10.1.4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND PAYMENT

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. 38

10.2 VIRTUAL MOBILITY (VM) GRANTS

10.2.1 ELIGIBILITY RULES

The following eligibility criteria apply:

- 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 inform the MC about the aim of the VM Grant and how its outcomes will generate benefits to the Action, actively contribute to the activities and overall objectives of the Action and submit a report at the end, to be approved by the VNS manager on behalf of the MC.

10.2.2 EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICANTS

The evaluation of each received VM grant application is performed by the Action's MC. The Action Chair or an appointed Coordinator / Committee can assume this responsibility if the Action's MC gives them the mandate to perform this task on their behalf. The person responsible for performing the related tasks is referred to as Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Manager as defined under Section 10.1. The evaluation criteria defined by the Action's MC shall be communicated to all potential applicants.

The selection of successful grantee shall be based on contributions to the overall objectives of the Action, the approved strategy on the virtual networking for the Action and the implementation of the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy.

The application shall be submitted in e-COST and include the following information:

- Main objective of the Virtual Mobility Grant.
- Working Plan: Description of the collaborative initiative to be implemented.
- Plan for Participation: List of participants in the collaborative initiative (short description of their expertise and contribution).
- Main expected outputs: results and contribution to the progress towards the MoU objectives (either research coordination and/or capacity building objectives can be tackled) and delivery of the MoU objectives.

- Contribution to the COST Action Strategy: How will the Virtual Mobility contribute to the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy and plans for stakeholder engagement and promoting participation of researchers from NNC and IPC (COST Global Networking) and to the approved virtual networking strategy, if available.

10.2.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

The successful applicant(s) shall implement the workplan approved in their application within the time frame also there defined and always within one single Grant Period.

The activities expected to be performed by the successful applicant, but not limited to, are:

- To support the harmonisation and standardisation of methods and procedures within the Action networking activities, e.g.
 - o setting up a survey amongst all Action members to collect different results and outcomes from experiments done in their respective labs and research groups.
 - o coordinating the discussions to create common protocols to be used by the network afterwards.
 - o preparing questionnaires and response scales to be used by the Action members as part of virtual networking activities.
- To support the implementation of research related activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence, e.g.
 - o computational or modelling activities.
 - o data analysis of the Action for a specific report or activity.
- Virtual mentoring scheme, with special focus on activities and exchanges that can generate capacity building and new skills, particularly for ECIs researchers (e.g. managerial skills, methodological skills, communication skills, etc).
- Content preparation and coordination of science communication activities, e.g.
 - o Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC).
 - o Online workshops like 'webinar series' or 'tv series'-like format.
 - o Online COST Action workshops in external international conferences or events, when the applicant can demonstrate a role in the organising committee, that could help in the promotion of the Action activities.

The grantee has 30 calendar days from the completion of the Virtual Mobility Grant to submit a report to the Action Chair/ the VNS Manager and to the Science Officer of the Action including:

- Description of the outcomes and achieved outputs (including any specific MoU deliverables, or publications resulting from the Virtual Mobility).
- Description of the benefits to the COST Action Strategy (what and how).
- Description of the virtual collaboration (including constructive reflection on activities undertaken, identified successful practices and lessons learned).

The report shall consider only virtual activities carried out in their entirety within a single Grant Period.

The MC must be informed at the end of the respective activity of the main results of each Virtual Mobility Grant. Also, the grantee will have the obligation to actively contribute to the activities of the Action WG relevant to those findings.

10.2.4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND PAYMENT

A maximum of 6 Virtual Mobility Grants per Action per Grant Period can be awarded. Each Virtual Mobility Grant cannot exceed EUR 1 500.

The MC shall define the exact amount of each grant reflecting the scope and complexity of the task and activities. The grant does not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking the virtual mobility activity.

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 from 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.

10.3 NON-ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

1. Expenses already covered under other networking tools (e.g. LOS, STSM, ITC Conference Grants).
2. Expenses considered non-eligible under any other networking tool (e.g. LOS, Dissemination, etc)
3. Expenses related to licence fees for virtual communication tools beyond the permitted amount for the Action for a Grant Period.
4. Expenses related to the participation in a conference.
5. Translation or interpretation expenses.
6. Purchase of software and technical equipment or electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers, printers, etc.