26 March 2012 | General, President

Towards a simpler, fairer, faster evaluation

Evaluating the evaluation procedures... time to assess, reflect and adapt where needed

Assessment of the COST evaluation procedure

The current evaluation procedures for COST Action proposals have shown over the past years their value and the engagement of the evaluators. Times have changed, and COST would like to adapt to new challenges in a highly competitive environment. COST wishes to receive independent advice on the evaluation and selection procedures, with the aim to further improve transparency, fairness and quality.

Independent, high-level scientists from research, high-education and European funding organisations will be appointed as observers to perform an external assessment of two Open Call collections and present their recommendations to COST.

The experts will be asked to deliver a report addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the COST Open Call from the point of view of the proposers, the proposal evaluators and the COST Office staff responsible for administering the Call and evaluation procedure. The report will also address aspects such as transparency, fairness and best practices in peer review; the duration and cost efficiency of the procedure and conflict of interest management. The European Commission will follow the process as an observer.

Pilot Evaluation Procedure on Trans-Domain Proposals (TDP)

As requested by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), the COST Office will put in place a Pilot Evaluation and Selection Procedure – a test case – in order to assess the performance and feasibility of several new features that are expected to achieve a simpler, faster and more efficient evaluation procedure with full transparency towards the proponents. The Trans-Domain Proposals (TDP) track will be used for this Pilot Evaluation and will be followed by the same external observers who will monitor the traditional Evaluation procedure.

COST faces the challenge of evaluating proposals that expand in scope and cover several scientific fields, and delivering a new proposal template and evaluation criteria that will comply with the new COST strategy at the same time.

In parallel with the expert evaluation described above, the CSO decided at its last meeting to study a Pilot evaluation scheme for the trans-disciplinary track of the COST Open Call. The Pilot – foreseen for 2013 – will test new IT tools and revised evaluation criteria and guidelines, allowing for a simpler, faster, lighter and more efficient evaluation procedure, with greater transparency and feedback to proposers.

An important step forward is to link the proposal's objectives with the expected outputs. This will provide useful insights into the proposal assessment process, as well as into the monitoring and evaluation of COST Actions. Another goal is also to reduce the time that elapses between the application submission and the actual kick-off of the project so as to increase the focus on COST Actions' results and impact.

This exercise fits in COST's overall aim to optimise all its procedures and to strive for the best quality performance so as to best serve the interests of the researchers exposed to high pressure and international competition. Researchers need to receive the outcome of a successful or unsuccessful evaluation with quality justifications as fast as possible.