

# **COST Open Call - Review Panel Members' Guide**

## **COST Open Call 2025-1 Evaluation**

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## Document Change History

Version	Release date	Summary of changes
1.0	January 2024	Version for OC-2023-1
1.1	November 2024	OC-2024-1 updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed the title of the document</li> <li>• Minor linguistic and formatting changes, including the text reduction for Section 1</li> <li>• Update in the Terms and Conditions</li> <li>• Introduced the section on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence</li> <li>• Changed procedure for any change of marks approval requested by the Review Panel</li> </ul>
2.0	January 2026	OC-2025-1 updates : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New evaluation grid</li> <li>• Introduction of the updated review panel member platform (new screen shots)</li> <li>• Automatic pre-validation of the approved CERs</li> <li>• Removal of remote quality check in e-cost for approved CERs</li> </ul>

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to instruct Members of the Review Panels (RPs) for the revision and quality check of the Consensus Evaluation Reports (CER) and the resolution of differences in non-approved CERs. Assigned RP Members shall be familiar with the COST framework. To learn about COST, COST Actions and the COST Open Call, RP Members are invited to read the following documents:

- [COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(COST 101/21\)](#)
- [COST Open Call – Proposers’ Guidelines– Level C](#)

General information about COST and its activities is available at [www.cost.eu/who-we-are/about-cost/](http://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/about-cost/).

## 1. OVERVIEW OF COST FRAMEWORK, COST ACTION 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 framework<sup>1</sup> 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. COST has been contributing since its creation in 1971 to closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout 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 funds networking activities and not research itself, and no budget forecast is requested at the proposal stage.** The research and development activities needed for the achievement of the Action objectives rely on nationally or otherwise funded research projects and resources (e.g., employees’ time, infrastructures and equipment).

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 Innovators<sup>2</sup>, throughout its activities and operations.

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

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

- The main strategic objectives of COST are the following: 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](#));
- 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 Members<sup>3</sup> and Specific Organisations<sup>4</sup> 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:

- a) **Pan-European**: the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 41 Full Members, one Cooperating Member, and one Partner Member;
- b) **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**;
- c) **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;
- d) **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.

**N.B.: When assessing a) and b), it is important to consider that these features may not be yet fully accomplished at proposal level. It is therefore fundamental to assess whether the proposal describes appropriate strategies to address them.**

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 (MC) meetings, Working Group meetings);
- Training Schools;
- Mobility of Researchers and Innovators (Short-Term Scientific Missions – STSMs; Virtual Mobility - VM);

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

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cost.eu/Country\\_Organisations\\_Table](https://www.cost.eu/Country_Organisations_Table)

- 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.

The Action's activities are decided by the Action MC and approved by the COST Association. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

### 1.2.1. COST ACTION STRUCTURE

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

The **Action Management Committee (MC)** is the decision-making body. The Action 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 achieve the Action's scientific and technological objectives. It 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)<sup>5</sup>.

**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 activities needed to achieve the Action objectives, in line with the Action strategy defined by the Action MC.

### 1.2.2. PARTICIPANTS

COST Actions are open throughout their lifetime to anyone with a legal affiliation located in a COST Member or in any NNC or Third State (IPC<sup>6</sup>). 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);
- **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 rules to participate in a COST Action may be found in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> International Partner Countries (IPC) – Third States: States that are neither COST Members nor COST Near Neighbour Countries (e.g., Argentina, Japan, US, etc.).

### 1.3. The COST Open Call

The COST Open Call is implemented via the Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) procedure. COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on [Funding Documents & Guidelines](#) with the Collection Date, the schedule, the description of the procedure 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 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 phases, all performed through a dedicated secured online tool, [e-COST](#):

**1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts**

**2 – Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Evaluation Reports by ad hoc Review Panels**

**3 – Proposals’ Selection by COST Scientific Committee (SC)**

**4 – Approval of the shortlisted proposals by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)**

The second phase, Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Evaluation Reports, being the focus of this guide.

Annex 1 provides information on Evaluation criteria and guiding questions, as well as the scoring used for the criterion 1&2 and criterion 3 Annex 2 provides information on Eligibility.

Further details about the process and the approval are provided in the rules on [COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(COST 101/21\)](#).

## 2. REVISION AND QUALITY CHECK

This chapter provides practical guidance on the revision and quality check by the RP of the CERs prepared by the Independent External Experts (IEEs). RP Members are assigned by the COST Association to each proposal under evaluation. Each RP Member will have access to both the Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs) prepared by the IEEs and to the CERs during the consensus phase.

### 2.1 Timeline

The revision and quality check are performed in several steps. The foreseen schedule for the revision and quality check of CERs for proposals submitted to the COST Open Call 2025-1 is communicated in the automated notifications addressed to Review Panel Members. The COST Association reserves the right to slightly modify the foreseen schedule. The RP Members will be informed in a timely manner in case of any modification.

### 2.2 Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

The RP Member logs in to e-COST and clicks on the link “My Review Panel reports for [Open Call Collection number]”.

This leads to the Terms and Conditions page where the RP Member must confirm them, as shown below:

Calendar

Proposals

Reviews

### Review Panel Proposals for OC-2025-1

Open Call: OC-2025-1

I accept to keep confidential all the information I can access via this portal.

I am not a family member of a COST Administration staff member or of a COST Association Board, General Assembly (CSO), Scientific Committee member or of a COST National Coordinator.

I am not aware of any Conflict of Interest (Col) (as defined in <http://www.cost.eu/open-call-sesa>) with a submitted proposal to the COST Open Call in this Collection. If, by accessing the information, which will be provided to me below, I discover any Col I will inform immediately the COST Association (Contact Us).

I am aware that in case I am assigned to participate in a Review Panel in this Collection, I shall not be MC Member nor WG member in the Action deriving from a proposal assigned to me, however I may be invited for an ad-hoc contribution or be Action Rapporteur for that Action.

In case I am assigned to participate in a Review Panel for COST, I understand that my contact details will need to be shared with the other experts evaluating and reviewing the proposal(s) to which I am assigned, including with experts who are based in non-EU/EEA countries or countries not recognised by the EU Commission as offering an adequate level of protection of personal data.

[COST Open Call – Independent External Expert's Guide](#)

[COST Open Call – Review Panel members' Guide](#)

I confirm
I do NOT confirm

Participation Certificates

Collection ID	Role	Download Certificate
No certificates available for download.		

**N.B.:** in case a Col arises (real, potential, perceived - see Chapter 3.1 for definitions) during the evaluation, the RPM must **immediately**:

- inform the COST Association (via email to [opencall@cost.eu](mailto:opencall@cost.eu) or via the link “contact COST” on the e-COST page with the overview of the list of proposals);
- stop reviewing **all assigned CERs**.

Should the Col be confirmed by the COST Association, any of the provided comments and scores will be discarded and the honorarium will not be paid.

**In case that Col arises after the evaluation**, the COST Association will examine the potential impact and consequences of the Col and will respond appropriately

Once the RP Member accepts the terms and conditions, the page will display the proposals assigned to the RP Member for the quality check during their respective CER preparation, as shown below:

Calendar

Proposals

Reviews

### Review Panel Proposals for OC-2025-1

Open Call: OC-2025-1

I accept to keep confidential all the information I can access via this portal.

I am not a family member of a COST Administration staff member or of a COST Association Board, General Assembly (CSO), Scientific Committee member or of a COST National Coordinator.

I am not aware of any Conflict of Interest (Col) (as defined in <http://www.cost.eu/open-call-sesa>) with a submitted proposal to the COST Open Call in this Collection. If, by accessing the information, which will be provided to me below, I discover any Col I will inform immediately the COST Association (Contact Us).

I am aware that in case I am assigned to participate in a Review Panel in this Collection, I shall not be MC Member nor WG member in the Action deriving from a proposal assigned to me, however I may be invited for an ad-hoc contribution or be Action Rapporteur for that Action.

In case I am assigned to participate in a Review Panel for COST, I understand that my contact details will need to be shared with the other experts evaluating and reviewing the proposal(s) to which I am assigned, including with experts who are based in non-EU/EEA countries or countries not recognised by the EU Commission as offering an adequate level of protection of personal data.

[COST Open Call – Independent External Expert's Guide](#)

[COST Open Call – Review Panel members' Guide](#)

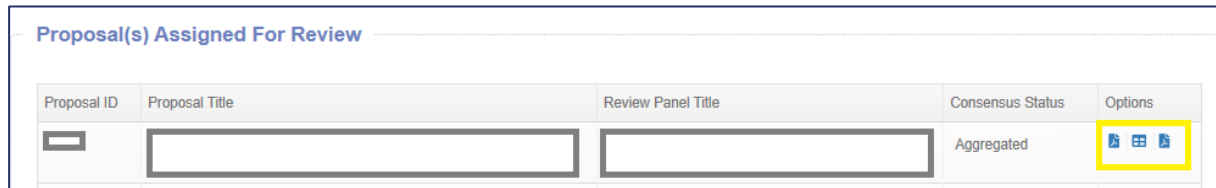
Proposals Assigned For Review





Proposal ID	Proposal Title	Review Panel Title	Consensus Status	Reviewed Consensus Status	Options
0009	Integrative Science and Technology for Sustainable Development and Resilient Societies	001 - Integrating education/technologies research, innovation, and policy strategies for sustainable living and health	Not approved	Final	<a href="#">i</a> <a href="#">e</a> <a href="#">d</a>

Other Proposals Allocated to Your Panel

Proposal ID	Proposal Title	Review Panel Title	Consensus Status	Options
0004	Revolutionizing Education with Quality, Resilience	001 - Integrating education/technologies research innovation and policy strategies for sustainable living and health	N/A	N/A
0008	Using Agri-tech to Develop Resilient & Sustainable Food Systems	001 - Integrating education/technologies research innovation and policy strategies for sustainable living and health	N/A	N/A
0002	Revolutionizing Education	001 - Integrating education/technologies research innovation and	N/A	N/A

For each proposal three icons are displayed. The first icon from the left gives access to a pdf of the proposal, the second icon gives access to a summary table of marks and comments for each question, and the third one allows to download the CER in pdf.



Proposal ID	Proposal Title	Review Panel Title	Consensus Status	Options
			Aggregated	  

Screenshot of e-COST showing how to access the proposal and the evaluation pages.

Additionally, to allow gaining an overall understanding of the topics of the proposals allocated to the RP, the RP Member has access to all the proposals within the RP, not only those individually assigned for the quality check.

## 2.3 Process for Quality Check of CER

The preparation of CER and its quality Check is a collaborative process involving the three IEEs and the RP member.

One of the three IEEs is appointed as the proposal Rapporteur by the COST Association. The Rapporteur coordinates the preparation of the remote Consensus Evaluation Report (CER), seeking consensus whenever possible among the other two IEEs.

As RP member assigned to the proposal, you have to carry out a quality check of the draft CER namely ensuring the consistency between comments and marks in the CER, its completeness, clarity and language.

### **NB: The RP Member does not evaluate any proposal!**

The Rapporteur needs to take into account the submitted Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs) and propose a first draft, either before or after discussing it with the other IEEs and the RP Member.. The CER must address all the evaluation questions.

You will be notified when the Rapporteur starts the process and you are advised to take a proactive approach and get involved in discussions during the preparation of the CER.

For this reason, the names and e-mail addresses of the RP Member and the IEEs assigned to a proposal are visible to each other only during the consensus phase and must be kept **confidential** (please see Chapter 3 on Confidentiality ).

For each proposal, the IEEs and the RP member will receive:

- i. access to IERs submitted by all IEEs in a *read-only* format and;
- ii. an e-COST email notification with the following:
  - contact details of the other two IEEs;
  - contact details of the appointed Rapporteur;
  - contact details of the assigned RP Member;
  - deadline for submitting the final CER for voting.

For a smooth consensus process, it is important to establish and communicate clearly an internal timeline and collaboration modality for each of the activities, namely the drafting and submission of the CER by the Rapporteur, how feedback from the IEEs and RP member on the draft will be implemented (e.g., email exchanges, dedicated call/meeting) as well as and the voting process.

A “Send Email to all” function is available in e-COST to facilitate the communication during the consensus between the IEEs and RP Member.

For the preparation of the first draft of the CER, the Rapporteur must complete and save all mandatory sections in the three criteria.. When the Rapporteur has prepared the CER, you and the other two IEEs will be notified and receive an automatic e-notification informing you all that the draft CER is ready for discussion and feedback.

In order to see the IER and CER marks and comments you can:

- click on the icons corresponding to the IER and CER and open a pdf document; or;
- click, for each question, on the letter(s) in the “Consensus” row.

Before the deadline for voting and before submission, the Rapporteur can still revise the CER as many times as necessary. Once the discussions are finalised, and prior to the deadline for voting, the Rapporteur submits the final version of the CER for approval by the two other IEEs and the RP Member in e-COST.

Please make sure that your contribution and input to the finalisation of CER, are taken into account to improve the quality of the report.

**N.B.: Once submitted, the CER on the e-COST platform is final and can no longer be edited.**



The Rapporteur should allow sufficient time (at least 2 days) for the IEEs and RP Member to vote on the CER, thus avoiding non-approval of the CER. The time needed from launch to finalising the voting can be minimised in case the CER submission is done during a call/meeting to collaborative finalise the CER. In this case, the IEEs and RP Member have the chance to immediately vote upon the CER submission.

## 2.4 Guiding Principles for Quality Check of CER

**The CERs validated by the RPs are communicated as evaluation feedback to the Main Proposers after Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) approval. Hence, they must be accurate, complete and clear.**

Under the COST rules, a Main Proposer may submit a request for redress to the COST Association in case of factual error(s) and / or procedural shortcoming, i.e., whenever:

- the evaluation of the proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in the COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval - Level B (COST 101/21; [http://www.cost.eu/proposal\\_sesa](http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa));
- the Consensus Evaluation Report contains a factual error(s) that is verifiable by a non-expert. Examples of what is a factual error or not are provided below:

***Example of a factual error*** - the evaluation report states: “The state-of-the-art section in the proposal does not mention the new developments in Black hole theory”, while in fact on p. 3 of the proposal there is a section called “Black hole theory – new developments”.

***An example of what is not considered a factual error*** - the evaluation report states: “The proposal does not sufficiently discuss new developments in Black hole theory”. Such a statement is considered as the scientific judgement of the IEEs, which cannot be appealed under the redress procedure.

Therefore, comments in a CER shall be:

- consistent with the selected mark;
- strictly related to each specific evaluation criterion;
- substantial (no hollow statement);
- adequately justified, providing enough feedback to the proposers, concise and to the point;

- factual, evidence-based, and not formulated as subjective opinions: “*This proposal is...*” and not “*I think that...*”, “*I feel that...*”;
- written having in mind the proposer as recipient (avoid discriminatory language, be polite, be fair, etc.);
- clear and avoiding acronyms or technical terms (see Table 1).

**CER revision check-list:** when reviewing the report, the following should be checked:

- is the CER adequately justified and of an appropriate length?
- do the comments provided justify the selected marks? For instance: what is the degree of seriousness of the weaknesses listed? Does it appropriately fit the selection of the description / mark in the scale provided?
- are the proposal’s strengths and weaknesses carefully explained?
- has any quotation been double-checked? (Please be aware that factual errors lead to redress procedure)
- does the report contain any contradictory statements or references such as “*see External Expert 1 report*” or “*not applicable*”?
- if you were the Main Proposer, would you find this report fair, accurate, clear and complete?

Table 1: Comparison of clear and unclear comments.

Unclear comments	Clear comments
are ambiguous	are precise and highlight strengths and weaknesses
are not justified	are duly justified
are contradictory	are consistent
are descriptive	are explanatory and express an analysis
make assumptions	are based on facts
include words like <i>perhaps, think, seems, assume, probably</i>	include words such as: <i>because, specifically, for example</i>

Table 2 shows some examples of inadequate versus adequate comments.

Table 2: Comparison of adequate and inadequate comments.

Inadequate comment	Adequate comment
I find the proposal far too ambitious	The proposal presents ambitious plans. However, the methodology is not adequately explained and fails to address the two key aspects of A and B ...
The proposal does not show a good understanding of the state of the art	This proposal fails to adequately describe the state of art in X or Y and it does not take Z sufficiently into account ...
There is no indication of involvement of stakeholders	The involvement of stakeholders’ is not adequately addressed. In particular, X and Y are not targeted by ...

## 2.5 Voting on the CER

Following the CER submission, the IEEs and you need to vote on the CER by selecting one of the two options as shown below: I approve the Consensus Evaluation Report or I do NOT approve the Consensus Evaluation report.

It is not mandatory to reach consensus. In case of non-approval of the CER by either an IEE or you, a justification shall be provided.

The CER prepared by the Rapporteur is approved if the other two IEEs and the RP Member approve it. If an IEE or the RP Member does not provide an approval/non-approval vote, this CER will be considered non-approved.

Additionally, in case the CER is not submitted by the Rapporteur, the CER status is considered Not Approved.

**My Evaluations / Proposal Evaluation Overview**

Proposal Reference: [REDACTED]

Assigned Review Panel Member(s) (RPM): Dr. [REDACTED]

[COST Open Call – Independent External Expert's Guide](#)

Evaluator	Status	Excellence in S&T and Networking	Impact	Implementation	Total Mark (0 - 13)	Options
Dr. [REDACTED]	IER Submitted	Very Good (4)	Good (3)	Standard (2)	9	<a href="#">Download PDF</a>
Dr. [REDACTED] Rapporteur	IER Submitted	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Standard (2)	11	<a href="#">Download PDF</a>
Prof. [REDACTED]	IER Submitted	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Outstanding (3)	12	<a href="#">Download PDF</a>
<b>Consensus Evaluation Report</b> (vote in progress)		Q1 ✓ Q2 ✓ Q3 ✓ Q4 ✓ Q5 ✓	Q6 ✓ Q7 ✓ Q8 ✓	Q9 ✓	12	<a href="#">Download PDF</a>
		Very Good (4) ✓	Excellent (5) ✓	Outstanding (3) ✓		

[Send email to all](#)

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**My Consensus Evaluation Vote**

I approve the Consensus Evaluation report

I do NOT approve the Consensus Evaluation report

[Submit](#)

Screenshot of e-COST showing the voting pane for the submitted CER in case of approval or non-approval.

## 2.6 Remote revision and quality check of CER in e-COST

The RP Member can access the page displaying first a list of the proposals,.

There are two main types of CER:

- **Approved CER (*app*)**: both IEEs and the assigned RP Member approved the CER submitted by the Rapporteur. In this case, the approved CER will be displayed as validated and **no further action in e-cost** is needed from you.
- **Non-Approved CER (*nap*)**: at least one of the IEEs and/or the assigned RP Member did not approve the CER submitted by the Rapporteur. In this case a second RP member is assigned, and the two RP Members jointly prepare the CER.

The CER is not approved (status of proposal '*nap*') when:

- a. the Rapporteur submits the CER and at least one of the other two IEEs does not approve it, or;
- b. the Rapporteur submits the CER and the RP Member does not approve it, or;
- c. when the Rapporteur does not submit the CER.

**Please remember that the role of the RPM is to ensure the quality of the CER, and not to (re)evaluate the proposal.**

An additional RP Member is assigned to a non-approved CER. The two RP Members shall review and resolve the discrepancies and prepare a revised version of the CER, taking into consideration the comments given by the IEEs. For this, the two assigned RP Members are given access to:

- 1) the Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs);
- 2) the non-approved CER and;

3) the justification(s) provided by the IEE(s) and/or RP Member for not approving the CER.

The two RP Members assigned to the proposal shall **jointly**:

- prepare a CER based on the information available;
- While completing the comments for each question related to a criterion, the RPM shall pay attention to the word limits (minimum and maximum), of each question
- in case of disagreement among the IEEs, resolve the discrepancy by selecting any mark corresponding to their comments

In case only the assigned RP Member did not approve the CER, a mark change (aligned with the original or revised comment) and a justification shall be proposed.

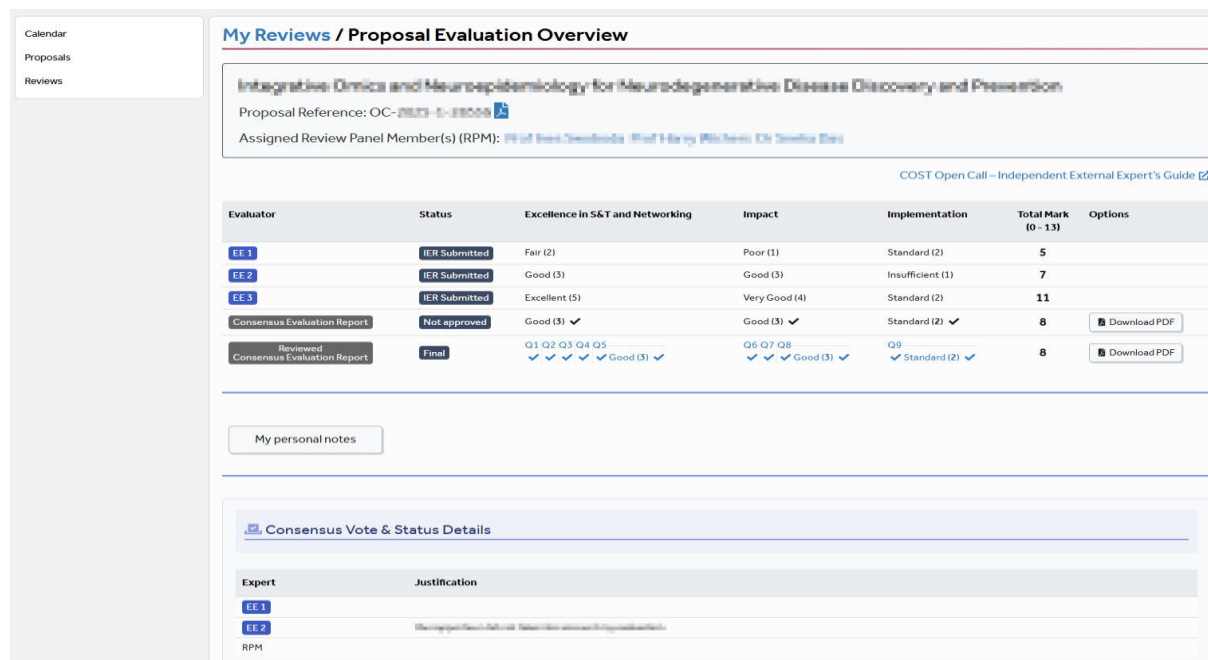
- one of the two RP Members encodes and submits the CER in e-COST.

The CERs will then be validated during the RP Meeting.

In case no consensus is achieved before the RP Meeting between the two RP Members assigned to the proposal: the RP Members shall inform the COST Association by sending an email to the Science Officers (SOs) in charge of the RP;

When clicking on the right icon the following information is available in the figure below:

- not approved CER available as pdf document, icon under 'Options';
- summary table of the marks of the not approved CER;
- status of the RP Report, below marked 'Incomplete';
- justifications given by IEE(s) for not approving the CER.



**My Reviews / Proposal Evaluation Overview**

Integrative Omics and Neuroepidemiology for Neurodegenerative Disease Discovery and Prevention  
 Proposal Reference: OC-2023-1-18008  
 Assigned Review Panel Member(s) (RPM): Prof. Hans-Otto Thoenen, Prof. Henry (Richard) Ch. Swales, etc.

COST Open Call – Independent External Expert's Guide

Evaluator	Status	Excellence in S&T and Networking	Impact	Implementation	Total Mark (0 - 13)	Options
EE 1	IER Submitted	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	Standard (2)	5	
EE 2	IER Submitted	Good (3)	Good (3)	Insufficient (1)	7	
EE 3	IER Submitted	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Standard (2)	11	
Consensus Evaluation Report	Not approved	Good (3) ✓	Good (3) ✓	Standard (2) ✓	8	Download PDF
Reviewed Consensus Evaluation Report	Final	Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 Q5 ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ Good (3) ✓	Q6 Q7 Q8 ✓ ✓ ✓ Good (3) ✓	Q9 ✓ Standard (2) ✓	8	Download PDF

My personal notes

**Consensus Vote & Status Details**

Expert	Justification
EE 1	
EE 2	
RPM	

To perform the quality check, one of the two RP Members (both RP Members are given the same access rights to the system) shall take the lead of encoding the comments and marks.

My Reviews / Consensus Evaluation Report – Quality Check

**Integrative Clinics and Neuroepidemiology for Neurodegenerative Disease Discovery and Prevention**  
 Proposal Reference: OC-2021-1-200000

COST Open Call – Independent External Expert’s Guide  
 Review Panel members’ Guide

Excellence in S&T and Networking					Impact				Implementation		Total (0 - 13)	
Q1 ✓	Q2 ✓	Q3 ✓	Q4 ✓	Q5 ✓	Good (3) ✓	Q6 ✓	Q7 ✓	Q8 ✓	Good (3) ✓	Q9 ✓	Standard (2) ✓	8

**Evaluation Criterion 1 Excellence in S&T and Networking**

You will be able to assign a mark to a criterion once its questions are answered.

**Question 5**

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.

Evaluator	Comment
IEE 1	Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo. Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui ratione voluptatem sequi nesciunt. Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit, sed quia non numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaerat voluptatem. Ut enim ad minima veniam, quis nostrum exercitationem ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat quo voluptas nulla pariatur? At vero eos et accusamus et iusto odio dignissimos ducimus qui blanditiis praesentium voluptatum deleniti atque corrupti quos dolores et quas
IEE 2	Far far away, behind the word mountains, far from the countries Vokalia and Consonantia, there live the blind texts. Separated
IEE 3	Li European linguae es membris deloam familie. Lor separat existente es un mythi. Por scientie, musica, sport etc, lloot Europa usa li sam vocabular. Li linguae differe solemen in li grammatica. I pronunciation e li plu common vocabules. Omnisioa directe al desirabile de un nov lingua franca. On refusa
Consensus Evaluation Report	One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin.

Reviewed Consensus Evaluation Report:

My reviewed Consensus Evaluation Report entered here...

To access individual comments and marks given by each IEE and carry out the quality check for each question, the RP Member shall click on the respective question.

The RP Members shall review all the comments included in the comment box(es) of the CER and arbitrate any discrepancies between the evaluations and marks provided by the IEEs.

The RP Members, upon agreement, will provide a consensus comment originating on the IEEs comments and consistent with the selected mark for each criterion.

In case the available marks do not reflect the comment agreed by the RP Members, the Science Officers in charge of the RP panel shall be informed and the issue will be discussed in the RP meeting.

The RP Member shall click “Next” to save the edited comment and move to the next question. When all the questions related to one criterion have been addressed, then the RPM must score the criterion. The CER shall be submitted by clicking the “Submit” button, only after all criterion have been scored. **Once the report is submitted, no further modifications are possible in this preparatory remote revision.**

The procedure described above applies also in the case of a non-submitted CER, with the only difference that the RP Members have access only to the IERs.

## 2.7 The Review Panel meeting

At the RP Meeting each RP is assisted by Science Officers from the COST Association.

The objectives of the RP meeting are to:

- finalise the CERs of the proposals;

- enable discussions among RP Members belonging to different RPs, to address common issues, including recommendations to the Scientific Committee;
- analyse the proposals allocated in order to provide insights and overall quality within each RP.

Prior to the meeting, a Rapporteur is assigned by the COST Association.. The role of the Rapporteur is to collect the input from the other RP Members and prepare the RP report for the COST Scientific Committee. The RP Reports, consists of two parts:

- a) the overall ranking of proposals after the RP meeting;
- b) the compilation of each RP analysis and overall quality.

Science Officers support the RP in determining the working methodology, moderating the meeting, assisting the Rapporteur in the preparation of the RP report.

The detailed agenda, the template of the RP Report, and specific instructions for the RP Meeting are sent by Science Officers prior to the meeting.

**N.B.: the information obtained during the quality check phase (CER preparation) must be kept confidential**, i.e., there shall be no disclosure of:

- IEEs' comments in the IERs;
- IEEs' identities (name, e-mail, etc.).

## 2.8 Responsibilities, guiding principles and use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

RP Members are responsible for carrying out their tasks themselves and shall not delegate their work. They shall treat all proposals equally and impartially on their merits.

The RP Member must perform the quality check and finalise the CERs on the e-COST platform within the given deadline. This is part of their contractual obligations. In case of non-compliance with the latter, the honorarium of the RP Member could be cancelled.

In respect to the possible use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), RP Members:

- must be human experts;
- should check the CERs solely on the content;
- must not upload any parts of the proposal or CER to any online service or to an unauthorised third party, including Generative AI tools;
- should perform the quality check of the assigned CERs according to each assessment criteria;
- must make all efforts to protect confidentiality of proposals, independent external experts, and evaluations;
- must not use Generative AI tools for any quality check of the scientific content of the proposal or CER. They may only make use of Generative AI tools for improving the readability of their reviews while ensuring no loss of confidentiality.

## 3. CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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 Evaluation, Selection and Approval process must commit to confidentiality.

## 3.1 Conflict of Interest

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

The Conflict of Interest (Col) 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 evaluated a proposal may not participate 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.

**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 procedures (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 procedures (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 procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, Scientific Committee Member):

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

Table 3 below, provides an overview of the possible cases of Conflict of Interest in the evaluation of COST Action proposals.

Table 3: Summary of the cases of Conflict of Interest, marked with **X**.

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)	✓	X	X	X	X	X
Independent External Experts (Evaluation)	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Review Panel Members (Revision)	X	X	✓	X	X	X
COST Scientific Committee Members (Selection)	X	X	X	✓	X	X
CSO (Final approval)	X	X	X	X	X	✓

If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified before the evaluation starts:

- the evaluator may not participate in the evaluation/selection procedure in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced.

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.

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.

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.

### Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

- 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 of the procedure.

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 Confidentiality

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 ad hoc Review Panels 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;
- 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.

## 4. HONORARIA AND CERTIFICATE

Honoraria<sup>7</sup> shall be paid to the Independent External Experts and Review Panel Members involved in the SESA procedure as follows:

1. Independent External Experts: EUR 50 per proposal, based on submitted Individual Evaluation Report (IER) and voting on the Consensus Evaluation Report (CER). The proposal Rapporteur is entitled to an additional EUR 50 per proposal, based on the submitted CER.  
**N.B.:** in case a proposal is declared as non-eligible, the IEE having submitted an IER for that proposal is still entitled to the payment of the honorarium as described under point 1 above, even in the absence of a CER vote or CER being submitted.
2. Review Panel members: EUR 400 per Collection Date, based on the active involvement in the consensus process and quality check of the proposals (remotely and at the dedicated RP meeting).

RPMs having completed the assigned review(s) can download a participation certificate (PDF document) from e-COST Reviews page.

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<sup>7</sup> See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(SESA\) – \(Level B\)](#)

## ANNEX 1: EVALUATION CRITERIA, QUESTIONS AND SCORING SYSTEM

The evaluation criteria, the respective maximum marks for the different sections, and the overall threshold required for shortlisting are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Evaluation criteria and maximum mark 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
<b>RANGE OF MARKS AWARDED: 0 – 13</b>		

The evaluation criteria and guiding questions are illustrated 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.
- 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)*

*Marks: 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)*

*Marks: 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 marks: empty section (0), insufficient (1), standard (2), outstanding (3)*

The scoring system uses a harmonised scale for all the evaluation criteria as shown below.

The scoring uses a scale for the criterion 1 and criterion 2 as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Scale for the evaluation criteria 1 & 2.

Mark	Label	Description
5	Excellent	The proposal fully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. <i>Any detected shortcoming is not affecting the excellence of the proposal under this criterion</i>
4	Very Good	The proposal addresses the criterion very well. <i>Minor improvements are however needed to fully address the criterion.</i>
3	Good	The proposal addresses the criterion well. <i>Considerable improvements are necessary to fully address the criterion.</i>
2	Fair	The proposal generally addresses the criterion. <i>Weaknesses are significant and major improvements are necessary.</i>
1	Poor	The proposal inadequately addresses the criterion. <i>Weaknesses are inherently serious and would need fundamental reconsideration.</i>
0	Empty section	The proposal does not address the criterion at all <i>This section is either empty or the criterion has not been addressed either in the relevant section or anywhere else in the proposal.</i>

The scoring for criterion 3 is different from the previous criteria above, and is shown in Table 6, below:

Table 6: Scale for the evaluation criterion 3 :

Mark	Label	Description
3	Outstanding	The proposal fully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. <i>The proposal goes beyond the standard management structure defined by COST Rules, and the workplan is thoroughly presented, appropriate for the main challenge, and tailored to the achievement of the objectives.</i>
2	Standard	The proposal addresses the criterion fulfilling COST standards. <i>The proposal does not go beyond the standard management structure defined by COST Rules, and the workplan is acceptable but needs further elaboration to thoroughly address the main challenge and the objectives.</i>
1	Insufficient	The proposal inadequately addresses the criterion. <i>The proposal does not comply with the standard management structure defined by COST Rules and significantly lacks details on the workplan.</i>
0	Empty section	The proposal does not address the criterion at all <i>This section is either empty or the criterion has not been addressed either in the relevant section or anywhere else in the proposal.</i>

## ANNEX 2: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for a COST Action, the proposal shall:

- ✓ include a Network of Proposers from **at least 7 different COST Full or Cooperating States** amongst which at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (Annex of the COST Open Call – Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) Guidelines ([http://www.cost.eu/proposal\\_sesa\\_guidelines](http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa_guidelines)) address S&T challenges destined only for **peaceful purposes**;
- ✓ respect the template of the Technical Annex, **word and page limits**: the length of the Technical Annex must not exceed fifteen (15) pages.
- ✓ be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association
- ✓ be **anonymous** in order to comply with the double-blind principle of the evaluation:

*Proposals may not contain any **direct or indirect reference to people and/or institutions participating in the Network of Proposers (Main or Secondary Proposers)**. This leads to the fact that proposers and/or institutions' names should **neither be explicitly mentioned, nor be potentially identifiable** through links to web pages or through references to their role and/or participation in existing or ended projects, grants, networks.*

Note on “References”:

In the “References” section of the proposal, it is possible to quote proposers’ own publications, provided that:

- a) there is no emphasis that the publication is authored by one or more of the proposers and
- b) it is only one or a few of the references in the reference list provided.

Table 7 illustrates examples of eligible and non-eligible statements.

Table 7: Examples of statements resulting in ineligibility and statements that are eligible.

Statements resulting in ineligibility	Eligible statements
“Several members of the proposers’ network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and COST Actions, such as FP0901” (direct 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 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).”
Some of the Proposers’ names are emphasised in the references section, e.g. “ <b>Smith A &amp; Jones B</b> (2020), Journal of Physics”, where A. Smith is a proposer (direct reference).	No emphasis on proposers' publications in the references section in any way, e.g., “Smith A & Jones B (2020), Journal of Physics”.
“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