

Brussels, 18 November 2021

COST 101/21

Version 3.0

COST ACTION PROPOSAL SUBMISSION, EVALUATION, SELECTION AND APPROVAL (LEVEL B)

The COST Committee of Senior Officials (“CSO”) having regard to:

The Statutes of the COST Association,

The Internal Rules of the COST Association,

The CSO Decision COST 088/21, “Rules and Principles for COST Activities”,

In accordance with its role as General Assembly of the COST Association,

Whereas

- (1) COST Full Members have established an International not-for-profit Association, the COST Association, integrating the governance, management and implementation functions of COST.
- (2) COST contributes to the objective of strengthening the scientific and technological bases of the European Research Area by promoting the European-based scientific and technological networking encouraging all stakeholders to share, create and apply knowledge, thereby encouraging Europe to become more competitive.
- (3) COST shall be open to all fields in science and technology and wishes to foster multi- and interdisciplinary networks, aiming to enable breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts, services and products.
- (4) The set of COST Rules should provide a coherent, comprehensive and transparent frame to ensure efficient and harmonised implementation of activities, as well as ease access for all potential stakeholders, by promoting and facilitating participation from a wide range of researchers, engineers or scholars from universities, research centres and companies, as well as other relevant stakeholders (in particular small and medium-sized enterprises - SMEs) and legal entities.
- (5) For the benefit of the Action Participants the set of COST Implementation Rules should be robust, stable and consistent and should focus on best interest of research communities and foster mutual trust in their networking activities.
- (6) COST should provide funding for activities of relevance for fulfilling COST mission and achieving COST objectives, more particularly for COST Actions, the COST networking instrument.
- (7) COST should further encourage participation of young talents and next generation leaders in science and technology, promote working opportunities for Young Researchers and Innovators and gender balance.

- (8) COST should support integration of scientific research communities and increase the contribution of participants from identified Inclusiveness Target Countries in COST activities.
- (9) COST should fund networking activities in the field of science and technology destined only for peaceful purposes; any funding of activities related to sensitive technology development, armament or defence-oriented research should be avoided. COST should support activities carried out in compliance with fundamental ethical principles.
- (10) COST should establish rules and procedures to govern the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals for COST Actions and other activities where appropriate.
- (11) COST should protect EU financial interests and ensure sound financial management. COST is aware that the EU auditing procedures apply.

The CSO has adopted the present rules for Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval for COST Action Proposals in accordance with the [Rules and Principles for COST Activities](#).

The present rules shall be subordinated to and may not contravene the Rules and Principles for COST Activities. In case of any contradiction between those CSO Decisions, the Rules and Principles for COST Activities shall prevail.

These rules shall enter into force on 26 March 2026, approval date of the Committee of Senior Officials.

SUBJECT MATTER AND SCOPE

COST shall strive to implement transparent, cost-efficient, timely and simple evaluation and selection procedures.

This decision shall lay down the rules and procedure for the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of COST Action proposals. These rules derive from the basic principles laid down in the Rules and Principles for COST Activities.

These rules shall be further detailed and explained in the Level C document: [COST Open Call Proposers' Guidelines](#).

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of the [Annex II of the Rules and Principles for COST Activities](#) shall apply to this Decision.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

The present rules and procedures shall allow researchers and innovators or other stakeholders to submit proposals and provide them with networking opportunities in order to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges.

The objective of the rules and procedure described herein shall be to enhance the scientific excellence and transparency through an accessible bottom-up opportunity with rigorous peer review on a competitive basis.

COST Action proposals shall be submitted for evaluation and selection following the publication of the Open Call. The proposal shall aim at addressing the COST mission and Excellence and Inclusiveness policy.

COST Action proposals shall guarantee that the proposed Action objectives shall be achieved by means of COST networking support using national or other R&D funding and resources.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
Version	Publication date	Changes
1.0	18.11.2021	Initial version adopted by the CSO decision of 16 June 2021.
2.0	12.11.2024	<p>Summary of changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text clarifications and improvements not affecting the content of the document; • Compilation of a comprehensive summary list of eligibility criteria, previously spread across the document (section 5); • Introduction of the notion of acceptability in addition to eligibility (section 5); • Introduction of a new evaluation grid (section 6.2).
3.0	26.03.2026	<p>Summary of changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new eligibility criteria; • Removal of Review Panels; • Revision of the role of the Scientific Committee in the selection of proposals.

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1. BASIC PRINCIPLES

The present rules shall reflect the basic principles governing the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals for COST Actions which shall ensure fairness, transparency, openness, excellence and inclusiveness.

COST will endeavour to avoid conflicts of interest.

All those involved in the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals shall commit to confidentiality.

2. OBLIGATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Each actor involved in the submission, evaluation, selection and approval procedure (Independent External Expert, Scientific Committee Member, COST National Coordinator (CNC), Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) Member and COST Administration) shall:

- Treat confidentially any information, including personal data of any natural person concerned by or involved in the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals process, and documents, in any form (i.e. paper or electronic), disclosed in writing or orally in relation to the performance of the evaluation;
- Process 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;
- Not disclose, directly or indirectly, confidential information or documents relating to proposals or proposers, without prior written approval of the COST Association;
- Not discuss any proposal with others, including other evaluators or staff not directly involved in evaluating the proposal, except during Scientific Committee meetings;
- Not disclose any detail of the evaluation process and its outcomes or of any proposal submitted for evaluation for any purpose other than fulfilling their tasks as evaluator;
- Not disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation;
- Not communicate with proposers on any proposal during or after the evaluation until the approval by the CSO.

Further, under no circumstances should the proposers contact any of the actors involved in the evaluation, selection and approval procedure regarding their proposal. Any attempt to do so may lead to immediate exclusion of the proposal from the evaluation, selection and approval process.

3. COST OPEN CALL

The COST Open Call shall allow submitting proposals on a regular basis as announced by the COST Administration.

COST shall publish on its website the official announcement of the Open Call indicating the Collection Date, the description of the procedure and complete schedule, and criteria against which COST Action proposals shall be evaluated and selected.

COST shall ensure transparency of the COST Open Call through an accessible bottom-up opportunity with rigorous peer review. Proposals shall be evaluated and approved on a competitive basis, taking into account the available funds for the particular Collection Date.

The Open Call is a one-stage submission process where proposals may be registered and submitted between the opening of the call and the Collection Date. All proposals shall be collected on this (Collection) Date.

The Open Call follows the subsequent phases:

- Proposal Submission by a Main Proposer on behalf of a network of proposers;
- Proposal Assessment for Eligibility;
- Proposal Evaluation by Independent External Experts;
- Proposal Assessment for Acceptability when relevant by the COST Association and the Scientific Committee;
- Proposal Selection by the Scientific Committee;
- Proposal Approval by the CSO.

4. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Proposals shall be submitted by a Main Proposer acting on behalf of a network of proposers.

In each Open Call Collection, each individual may participate either as Main or Secondary Proposer in one proposal only. Secondary Proposers in already submitted proposals shall no longer be able to withdraw from the network they have joined nor accept invitations to any other proposal within the same Collection.

The network of proposers shall be composed of:

- At least seven (7) COST Full or Cooperating Members amongst which at least fifty per cent ($\geq 50\%$) shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries¹ (see also in Annex B to the present decision the required minimum number of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries per number of COST Full or Cooperating Members represented in a proposal);
- At least forty per cent ($\geq 40\%$) of individuals who are Young Researchers and Innovators².

The table below shows who can be part of a Network of Proposers as Main Proposer or Secondary Proposer (✓ = Yes, ✗ = No).

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	✗	✓
Specific Organisations		
EU Institutions, Bodies, Offices and Agencies (EC/EU)	✓	✓
European RTD	✓	✓
International Organisations	✗	✓
Individuals with no affiliation to a legal entity	✗	✗

A list of Countries and Specific Organisations can be found in [Annex I of the Level A Rules and Principles for COST Activities](#).

¹ [Annex I – Level A: Country and Organisations table](#). NB: 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 to e.g., Guadeloupe will be counted as France (non-ITC), researchers affiliated in a legal entity in Azores will be counted as Portugal (ITC).

² see the [Glossary](#)

Proposals may be registered and submitted via a secured online tool designed for this purpose (e-COST). The online tool allows the Main Proposer to access, edit and submit the proposal until the Collection Date.

5. PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT AGAINST ELIGIBILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY CRITERIA

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

- a) Be submitted by an eligible Main Proposer who is not Main or Secondary proposer in any other proposal within the same collection;
- b) Be put forward by a network of proposers affiliated to legal entities from at least seven (7) COST Full or Cooperating Members amongst which $\geq 50\%$ shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries with proposers having a registered e-COST profile;
- c) Be put forward by a network of proposers with at least forty per cent ($\geq 40\%$) of Young Researchers and Innovators³ among its participants.
- d) All sections of the proposal, including the Technical Annex, shall be duly submitted in e-COST. They must respect word and/or page limits as described in the [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#)⁴;
- e) Contain neither links nor references to any additional information about the proposal beyond the Technical Annex (web link to pages describing the proposal, audio-visual material, etc);
- f) Be written in English, the working language of the COST Association;
- g) Be anonymous, hence contain neither direct nor indirect references to the proposers' and/or institutions' names participating in the network of proposers.

Proposals can be declared ineligible at any time during the evaluation and selection procedure.

To be acceptable, a proposal for a COST Action shall respect fundamental ethical principles as described in the [Rules and Principles for COST Activities](#), including originality of ideas, and peaceful purposes. This check will be performed only on those proposals that based on their score should enter the shortlist of proposals.

The eligibility and acceptability criteria are explained in detail in the [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#).

6. PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND SELECTION

6.1 ROLES

6.1.1. EXTERNAL EXPERTS

Independent External Experts carry out the remote peer-review evaluation.

They shall be identified, selected and assigned to proposals on the basis of their scientific and technological expertise necessary for the evaluation of proposals. The Research Areas⁵ and keywords chosen by the network of proposers themselves support the process of identification of External Experts.

³ see [Glossary](#)

⁴ Details in [COST 104/21 COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines \(http://www.cost.eu/open-call-proposers-guidelines\)](http://www.cost.eu/open-call-proposers-guidelines).

⁵ See Annex A to the present document: List of Fields and Sub-Fields of Science and Technology.

6.1.2. COST SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Scientific Committee shall:

- a) Assess the acceptability of proposals that based on their score should enter the shortlist of proposals and that have been identified as potentially breaching the Rules and Principles for COST Activities. This is followed by the Scientific Committee making a recommendation to the COST Administration;
- b) Endorse the shortlist of proposals provided by the COST Administration to be presented to the CSO for approval;
- c) Produce an analysis on emerging topics, scientific trends and interdisciplinarity, and advise on potentially important future developments.

6.2 PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Proposals shall be evaluated against the following procedure. During this phase, the identity of the Main Proposer and of the network of proposers is kept anonymous.

6.2.1 EXTERNAL REMOTE EVALUATION

Each proposal shall be evaluated by 3 Independent External Experts. The evaluation shall be performed remotely, and each Independent External Expert shall submit an evaluation report for each proposal they evaluate.

6.2.2 CONSENSUS AND QUALITY CHECK

Further to the individual evaluation, a consensus shall be sought between the Independent External Experts (remotely). One of the experts is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Consensus Evaluation Report.

The consensus shall not be imposed; Independent External Experts may maintain their views on the proposal.

After the submission of the Consensus Evaluation Reports, the COST Administration shall perform a quality check.

The COST Administration will manage differences in opinions, arbitrate and establish a ranked list of proposals above the “Excellence in S&T and Networking” and “Impact” thresholds as described hereunder.

The COST Administration shall:

- a) Review and validate the Consensus Evaluation Reports and marks of the proposals for which the Independent External Experts achieved consensus;
- b) Discuss and validate the Consensus Evaluation Reports and marks of the proposals for which consensus was not reached, and all other cases where an arbitrage is needed. This will be done in an ad-hoc Resolution Committee which also includes external experts. The composition of the Resolution Committee is described in the [COST Open Call Proposers Guidelines](#).

The COST Administration shall prepare a report with the outcome of the External Remote Evaluation, Consensus and Quality Check steps to the Scientific Committee. This report shall include the shortlist of proposals, with their validated consensus reports and marks, to be certified by the Scientific Committee.

6.2.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the following evaluation criteria:

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		

The evaluation criteria shall be further explained in the [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#).

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

6.3 PROPOSAL SELECTION

The Scientific Committee shall assess the acceptability of proposals that based on their score should enter the shortlist of proposals and have been identified as potentially breaching the Rules and Principles for COST Activities. This is followed by the Scientific Committee making a recommendation to the COST Administration.

The Scientific Committee shall receive the shortlist of proposals, as well as relevant information on proposals.

The Scientific Committee shall check and endorse the shortlist of proposals for approval by the CSO. The shortlist of proposals consists of:

- a) proposals above the defined cut-off mark* (hereafter 'zone A'), and
- b) proposals with a score equal to the cut-off score (hereafter 'zone B') will be ranked based on the following criteria applied sequentially:
 - i. Mark of the excellence criterion
 - ii. Mark of the impact criterion
 - iii. Mark of the implementation criterion

Random selection (automated procedure) is applied only as a final tie-break among the remaining proposals with the same score.

** The cut-off mark is the total mark of the Nth proposal in the ranked list (sorted in decreasing order), with N being the number of proposals to be funded subject to available budget.*

The procedure shall be described in the [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#). The Scientific Committee shall submit the final ranked list of selected proposals to the CSO for approval.

7. PROPOSAL APPROVAL

The final decision on approval and funding for new COST Actions shall be taken by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) on the basis of the shortlist submitted by the Scientific Committee, together with a list of the evaluation results of those proposals recommended for approval taking into account the available budget. The CSO may decide not to approve Actions selected through the procedure described under sections 5 and 6 of the present rules.

The Technical Annex of a successful proposal approved by the CSO shall form the basis of the Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The start of the COST Action shall be described in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

CNCs will receive the results either before or at the same time as the Main Proposers. The result of the evaluation and selection shall be made available to the Main Proposer via e-COST.

8. REDRESS OF THE EVALUATION

In order to contribute to the fairness and transparency of the COST evaluation process, the COST Association has established a redress procedure. The Main Proposer shall thereby have the possibility to submit a request for assessment of the evaluation and potential redress.

Redress shall be allowed only in case of potential procedural shortcomings and/or factual errors, i.e., whenever:

- the network of proposers considers that the evaluation has not been carried out in accordance with the procedure set out in the current document; or
- the network of proposers deems that the evaluation report bears a factual error.

Requests for redress dealing with the expertise based assessments by the Independent External Experts shall not be admissible.

Decisions on acceptability shall not be subject to redress.

Further, proposal selection by the Scientific Committee as described under section 6.3 shall not be open to redress.

The redress procedure shall be designed to ensure a prompt and fair feedback to requests and shall be available in the [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#).

9. HONORARIA

Honoraria shall be paid to the Independent External Experts involved in the SESA procedure. The EB shall determine the amount in the relevant [COST Open Call - Proposers' Guidelines](#).

10. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

COST expects ethical behaviour from all participants in COST activities in accordance with the principles established in the [Rules and Principles for COST Activities](#).

COST shall strive to avoid any conflict of interest in its evaluation, selection and approval procedure.

Actors involved in the evaluation, selection and approval of proposals may not take any benefit from any Action approved under the particular Collection Date they participated in.

The present rules shall apply to all actors concerned by the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of COST Action proposals (Independent External Expert, Scientific Committee Member, CNC, and CSO Member).

10.1. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DEFINITION AND CASES

A Conflict of Interest with regard to the submission, evaluation, selection, and approval procedure shall be the risk that professional judgement or actions regarding a person's duties and responsibilities shall be unduly influenced by that person's professional or private interests. Each actor shall have only one role in the evaluation, selection and approval of a COST Action.

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, 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, 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, Scientific Committee Member):

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

10.2. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Before performing any evaluation, any actor involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert and Scientific Committee Member) shall sign a declaration stating/accepting that 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.

10.3. TABLE OF INCOMPATIBILITIES

This table presents cases where a position shall be incompatible with a submission, an evaluation, a selection and an approval step (✓ = Yes, ✗ = No).

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

Any actor having participated in the submission, evaluation, selection or approval of Action proposals shall observe these rules of conflict of interest.

10.4. CONSEQUENCES

Any actor involved in the evaluation or selection procedures shall immediately declare a Conflict of Interest. Failure to do so shall have the following consequences:

- notification to the COST Association Director;
- notification to the CSO for Scientific Committee Members;
- removal of the expert from the COST Expert Database.

All cases of Conflict of Interest shall be recorded and, for nationally nominated evaluators (Scientific Committee Members), reported to the COST National Coordinator.

1. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified before the evaluation starts:
 - the Independent External Expert may not participate in the evaluation procedure of the ongoing collection and shall be replaced.
2. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified during the evaluation:
 - the Independent External Expert shall stop evaluating in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced;
 - any comments and marks already given by the Independent External Expert 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 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 Conflict of Interest situation at any moment of the evaluation and selection.

11.FINAL PROVISIONS

The present rules shall be binding in their entirety and directly applicable to all actors concerned by the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of COST Action proposals.

Any change or derogations to the present rules shall be subject to the approval of the CSO.

List of Fields and Sub-Fields of Science and Technology⁶

Natural Sciences
Mathematics (research on methodologies of pure and applied mathematics, statistics and probability: mathematics and statistics applied to other fields of science are excluded)
Computer and Information Sciences
Physical Sciences (excluding engineering and nano-technology applications to be found under each engineering category)
Chemical sciences
Earth and related Environmental sciences
Biological sciences (excluding medical, clinical and agricultural applications)
Engineering and technology
Civil engineering
Electrical engineering, electronic engineering, Information engineering
Mechanical engineering
Chemical engineering
Materials engineering
Medical engineering (excluding biomaterials and physical characteristics of living material as related to medical implants, devices, sensors)
Environmental engineering (excluding environmental biotechnology)
Environmental biotechnology
Industrial biotechnology
Nano-technology
Other engineering and technologies
Medical and Health Sciences
Basic medicine
Clinical medicine
Health Sciences
Medical biotechnology
Other medical sciences
Agricultural sciences
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (excluding agricultural biotechnology)
Animal and dairy science (excluding animal biotechnology)
Veterinary science
Agricultural biotechnology
Other agricultural sciences
Social Sciences
Psychology
Economics and business
Educational sciences (excluding institutional and economic aspects)

⁶ Science and Technology Fields and Sub-Fields correspond to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Fields of Science used for international and European R&D statistics (source: OECD Document DSTI/EAS/STP/NESTI (2006)19/FINAL)

Sociology
Law
Political Science
Social and economic geography
Media and communications
Other social sciences
Humanities
History and Archaeology
Languages and literature
Philosophy, Ethics and Religion (excluding philosophy and ethics applied to other fields of science)
Arts (arts, history of arts, performing arts, music)
Other humanities

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