



COST Open Call Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) Guidelines

Date of release: 24/03/2015



COST is supported by
the EU Framework Programme
Horizon 2020

COST Association
Avenue Louise 149 | 1050 Brussels, Belgium
t: +32 (0)2 533 3800 | f: +32 (0)2 533 3890
office@cost.eu | www.cost.eu

Contents

1	Purpose of this document.....	4
2	Overview of COST framework, COST Action and SESA process.....	5
2.1	The COST framework: mission and policies.....	5
2.2	COST Actions.....	6
2.2.1	COST Action Strategy and Structure.....	7
2.2.2	Participants	8
2.3	COST Open Call and SESA process.....	9
3	Preparing and Submitting a Proposal for a COST Action	10
3.1	Registration for submission	10
3.2	Eligibility criteria.....	10
3.3	Network of Proposers: requirements.....	11
3.4	Proposal template.....	12
3.4.1	General Features.....	12
3.4.2	Technical Annex	14
3.4.3	References	17
3.4.4	COST Mission and Policies.....	17
3.4.5	Network of Proposers.....	17
3.5	Proposal style guide.....	19
3.6	Definition of key concepts used in COST proposals.....	20
3.6.1	Challenges.....	20
3.6.2	Potential innovation/breakthrough	20
3.6.3	Objectives	20
3.6.4	Strategy and Structure	21
3.6.5	Networking tools.....	21
3.6.6	Action activities	22
3.6.7	Results and outputs	22
3.6.8	Impact.....	22
3.6.9	Deliverables.....	22
3.6.10	Milestones.....	22
4	How COST Proposals are Evaluated, Selected and Approved	23
4.1	Conflict of Interest	23
4.2	Confidentiality.....	25
4.3	Proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval	25

4.3.1 Step 1 – Proposal Evaluation by Independent External Experts:	25
4.3.2 Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check by <i>ad hoc</i> Review Panel	28
4.3.3 Step 3 – Proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee	28
4.3.4 Proposal Approval by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)	29
4.4 Feedback to proposers.....	29
4.5 Redress Procedure	29
Annex I - List of Acronyms	30
Annex II – Definitions	31

1 Purpose of this document

This document provides a practical step-by-step guide to the COST Open Call rules and procedures for Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval of COST Action proposals, as decided by the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)¹. It is available at http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa_guidelines.

Proposers are invited to read the set of COST Implementation Rules establishing the conditions for participation in COST activities and in particular in COST Actions, namely:

- A. Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities (COST 132/14)
- B.1. COST Action Proposal Submission Evaluation and Approval (COST 133/14)
- B.2. COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment (COST 134/14)
- B.3. COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation (COST 135/14)
- COST Vademecum (<http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum>)

These documents are legally binding and take precedence over any guidelines. They are available at: http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call

¹ See COST 133/14 B.1. "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

2 Overview of COST framework, COST Action and SESA process

2.1 The COST framework: mission and policies

COST (CO-operation in Science and Technology) is a pan-European intergovernmental framework² dedicated to networking activities for European researchers, engineers and scholars to jointly develop their ideas and new initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European coordination of nationally 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.

COST Mission is to enable breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contributing to strengthening European research and innovation capacities³.

In order to achieve its mission, COST endeavours to:

- build capacity by connecting high-quality scientific communities throughout Europe and worldwide;
- provide networking opportunities for Early Career Investigators (ECI);
- increase the impact of research on policy makers, regulatory bodies and national decision makers as well as on the private sector.

The COST Association is the legal entity in charge of the management and implementation of COST strategy, policies and activities towards the achievement of the COST Mission. The overview of the COST structure and its intergovernmental dimension can be found at http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/organisation.

COST draws the funds for its activities from the EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020. The COST Association has signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission, defining the Strategic Action Plan, setting the objectives, policies and legal frame for the period 2014-2020⁴. Specific Grant Agreements describing the implementation of the Action Plan are signed yearly.

COST has put in place a set of policies aiming at fulfilling its Mission and specific objectives:

- COST Excellence and Inclusiveness,
- COST International Cooperation,
- Industrial dimension.

The policy on COST Excellence and Inclusiveness is built upon two pillars:

- Strengthening the excellence through the creation of cross-border networking of researchers;
- Promoting geographical, age and gender balance throughout its activities and operations.

This policy aims to provide collaboration opportunities to all researchers, engineers and scholars in COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State⁵ and to overcome the bottlenecks that prevent the use of all talented and creative human resources available for European science. It has the following objectives:

- 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) and fulfil the Horizon 2020 widening eligibility condition, being either an EU Member State or Associated

² The full list of COST Member Countries is available at http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries

³ See COST 4152/11 "COST Mission Statement"

⁴ Framework Partnership Agreement n° 633054 – COST H2020

⁵ www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries

- Country to the EU Framework programme⁶;
- Counterbalancing research communities' unequal access to knowledge, infrastructures, funding and resources;
- Providing a 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 Member Countries;
- Identifying excellence across Europe to contribute to Horizon 2020 widening objectives.

The policy on COST International Cooperation aims at fostering cooperation between researchers from COST Member Countries, COST Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs)⁷ and COST International Partner Countries (IPCs) on the basis of ascertained mutual benefit, complementary expertise and scientific added value. The participation of NNCs is particularly encouraged, according to the provisions related to eligibility for both participation and reimbursement set in the "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation"⁸ and in the COST Vademecum.

The policy on Industrial Dimension aims at enabling fruitful collaborations between researchers and business by providing a natural platform for them to meet and build mutual trust. It also aims at increasing impact of research in the industrial sector, by promoting the use and development of technologies, as well as the exploitation⁹ of COST Action results and outcomes through dedicated dissemination and exploitation activities targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large companies in Europe.

2.2 COST Actions

COST funds networking activities; it does not fund research.

COST Actions are Science and Technology (S&T) networks open to researchers, engineers and scholars from universities, research centres, companies, in particular SMEs, as well as other relevant legal entities. All the relevant information to manage a COST Action is presented in the COST Vademecum (<http://www.cost.eu/Vademecum>). They are set up to achieve specific objectives within their four-year duration, based upon the sharing, creation, dissemination and application of knowledge. These objectives can be reached through COST networking tools:

- Meetings (i.e. Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings),
- Training Schools,
- Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs),
- Dissemination.

⁶ The list of ITC Countries includes: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, fYR Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁷ The list of NNC includes: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldavia, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Russia, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

⁸ See COST 135/14 B.3. "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation"

⁹ See COST 134/14 B.2. "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6: *"If in the course of this Action results are obtained or expected, which could give rise to intellectual property rights, the MC shall take the necessary steps, be it by written agreement among the participants or otherwise, in order to protect these rights, with respect to the principles set out in "Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities" and corresponding guidelines."*

COST Actions are:

- **Pan-European:** the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 35 Member Countries and one Cooperating State;
- **Bottom-up:** in terms of S&T fields and topics, COST welcomes any novel, original and innovative idea;
- **Open:** in terms of participation, COST Actions can grow in size within the first three years;
- **Unique:** as a platform to coordinate national research funding and resources within a lightweight framework;
- **Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinary:** bridging different research communities, disciplines, fields and methodologies;
- **Output and Impact-Oriented:** COST Actions are monitored against their expected output and impact.

COST Actions are “**bottom-up**” in two ways: their topics are chosen by proposers and the scientific management decisions are entrusted to the Action Management Committees. They are **open** throughout their lifetime to new members and are **adaptable** in terms of internal organisation and strategy. They are **future-oriented** promoting actively the participation of the next generation of researchers. Thus, COST Actions are especially well-suited to pursue **new ideas through collaborative** efforts and/or to **build communities** around emerging Science & Technology (S&T) topics and societal questions.

2.2.1 COST Action Strategy and Structure

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

The **Management Committee (MC)** is the decision-making body. It is composed of up to two representatives of each COST Member Country having accepted the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** of the Action. The MoU is the document accepted by a minimum of five different COST Member Countries, and/or Cooperating State, describing the Action objectives. MC Members are nominated by the COST National Coordinators (CNCs). The 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 achieving the Action scientific and technological objectives.

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 MC. WG Members are both MC Members and any researcher appointed by the MC.

COST Actions are funded via yearly **Action Grant Agreements (AGAs)** based on annual **Work and Budget Plans (W&BPs)**, detailing the activities designed to achieve the objectives defined in the MoU. The Action's activities are decided by the MC, taking advantage of the full range of the COST **networking tools**. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the COST Vademecum.

The research and development activities needed for the achievement of the Action objectives rely on nationally funded research projects and resources (e.g. employees' time, infrastructures and equipment) are not funded by COST. COST Actions aim at leveraging national funding towards efficient trans-European research cooperation.

2.2.2 Participants

COST Actions are open to all researchers, engineers and scholars, who are committed to work and achieve the Action objectives and are affiliated to a legal entity. Action Participants are composed of four main types:

1. **MC Members:** up to two representatives for each COST Member Country can be nominated to the COST Action MC by COST National Coordinators, once the MoU of the Action has been accepted by the country. The role of MC members is to pro-actively participate in the implementation and decision-making activities in the Action. MC Members have voting rights within the MC: decisions are taken by simple majority, with one vote per COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State. The nomination of MC members is a national prerogative and follows national procedures. Within a period of twelve months after the approval of the Action, any COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State can join the Action. After this period, the Action MC agreement to the CNC nomination is needed¹⁰.
2. **MC Observers:** participants affiliated to institutions based in NNC and IPC institutions or in the European Commission, other EU Institutions and EU Agencies, International Organisations, or European RTD Organisations, need to be approved by the COST Association Executive Board (EB), after MC approval. Their role is to observe the Action decision-making processes on behalf of their institution of affiliation. They have no voting rights, but they can participate in discussions related to MC decisions.
3. **WG Members:** participants in COST Member Countries or in NNCs or IPCs institutions participating in the Action and approved by the MC. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives, by coordinating the nationally funded research within the COST Action.
4. **Ad hoc Participants:** *ad hoc* participants invited by the MC to contribute to the Action activities when their expertise is deemed necessary for the achievement of the Action Objectives. *Ad hoc* Participants can also be eligible for STSM and Training Schools, as well as be invited speakers or attendees at Action workshops and conferences.

Action Participants must be affiliated to legal entities located in the COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State, in any of the NNCs or IPCs. They can also be affiliated to the EU Commission and Agencies, EU RTD Organizations and International Organizations. The eligibility of reimbursement and the rules for participation vary for each category of affiliation according to COST rules (see COST Vademecum).

Below is the overview of all the types of legal entities that can participate in COST Actions, grouped by affiliation category¹¹.

¹⁰ See COST 132/14 A “Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities”

¹¹ For their detailed list and conditions for participation, please refer to COST 132/14 A “Rules for Participation in and implementation of COST Activities” and COST 135/14 B.3. “COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation” (http://www.cost.eu/int_coop_rules)

Table 1: Overview of Affiliation Categories

Affiliation Category	Organisation Type
COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State Near Neighbour Country institution International Partner Country institution	Universities, research centres, companies or any relevant legal entity, such as: Government organisations, Regional bodies, private non-profit organisations, NGOs, etc.
European Commission and EU Agencies	EU Institutions and Agencies. The list of Agencies is available at: http://europa.eu/about-eu/agencies/index_en.htm
European RTD Organisation	Any intergovernmental scientific research organisation that is responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are countries, and the majority of which are COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State. The list of these organisations is available at http://www.euroforum.org/about/organisations/index.html
International Organisation	Any organisation with a European or International membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality, governed by international public law or recognised as of general interest, in particular promoting scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST mission.

The procedures to join a COST Action can be found at: http://www.cost.eu/participate/join_action.

2.3 COST Open Call and SESA process

COST Open Call is a one-stage submission process. Proposals can be submitted at any time through a dedicated secured online tool, the e-COST Submission Tool (further details are provided in Chapter 3).

COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on http://www.cost.eu/participate/open_call, indicating the Collection Dates, the complete schedule, the description of the procedure, and the evaluation criteria.

There are two collection dates and two cycles of evaluation/selection/approval per year.

The proposal Evaluation and Selection follows a three-step process:

- Step 1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts
- Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check of Evaluation Consensus Reports by *ad hoc* Review Panels
- Step 3 – Selection by COST Scientific Committee (SC)

The proposals selected by the SC are submitted to COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) for approval. Further details about the three-step process and the Approval are provided in Chapter 4.

Proposals are evaluated *per se* and selected on a competitive basis, taking into account the available funds for the particular Open Call Collection.

COST reserves its right to involve observers to assess and provide feedback on the Evaluation and Selection process.

3 Preparing and Submitting a Proposal for a COST Action

3.1 Registration for submission

To submit a proposal to the COST Open Call, the Main Proposer has first to create an account (if not registered yet) in e-COST, (<https://e-services.cost.eu>).

Main Proposers will be able to create, manage and submit their proposal before the Collection Date, by logging into e-COST and selecting the e-COST Submission Tool, by clicking “Open Call”, “Create New proposal” (<https://e-services.cost.eu/sesa>).

The proposal has a draft status until it is submitted. Once it is submitted, it can still be revised as many times as needed, before the Collection Date. **N.B.: when being revised, the proposal loses its “submitted” status. In order to be evaluated, it needs to be submitted again before the Collection Date.** Proposals that are not submitted will not be evaluated. The data is saved in the system, and it can be accessed and retrieved by the Main Proposer (except the data related to the Network of Proposers), at any time after the Collection date.

In order to avoid possible congestions of the e-COST Submission Tool, it is highly recommended to avoid submitting the proposal just before the Collection Date.

All enquiries concerning the Open Call can be addressed directly from the “contact us” link in e-COST or by sending an e-mail to opencall@cost.eu.

3.2 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for funding¹², COST Action Proposals must:

- Include a Network of Proposers from **at least 5** different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State
- Be coordinated by a **Main Proposer** affiliated to an institution located in a COST Member Country and/or Cooperating State, or affiliated to a European RTD organisation
- Be **anonymous**, hence not containing any reference to the names and/or institutions of the participants in the Network of Proposers (main or secondary proposers) in all the sections with the exception of the specific section “Network of Proposers”. This means that proposers’ names should neither be explicitly mentioned, nor identifiable through links to web pages or through unequivocal references to their role and/or participation in existing or ended projects.
In the “References” section of the proposal, it is possible to quote one’s own publication, only provided that: a) there is no evidence that the publication is authored by one or more of the proposers and b) it is one of a set of other bibliographical references.
- Address S&T challenges destined only for **peaceful** purposes
- Respect **word and page limits** as described in section 3.4.2 of this document
- Be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association
- **Not be identical** to another submitted proposal.

¹² See COST 133/14 B.1. “COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval”

Proposals can be declared non-eligible at any steps of the SESA process, whenever a breach of the above eligibility criteria is identified. Proposers will be informed by the COST Association of the non-eligibility of their proposal.

3.3 Network of Proposers: requirements

The Network of Proposers must fulfil the following requirements:

- The Network of Proposers must include at least 5 proposers affiliated to legal entities based in at least 5 different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State (one Main Proposer plus at least 4 Secondary Proposers). There can be more than one researcher per institution, as long as it is clearly beneficial for the proposed Action. The European Commission and EU Agencies, European RTD Organisations and International Organisations do not count as COST Member Country institutions, even if they are geographically located in COST Member Countries.
- The Main Proposer acts as coordinator and contact point for the COST Association, and is also in charge of inviting and accepting Secondary Proposers to the Network.
- All proposers must have a registered and updated e-COST profile (<https://e-services.cost.eu>) and specify their scientific expertise. Proposers should be aware that filling an e-cost profile may require some time. They should therefore make sure that the potential Secondary Proposers comply with this requirement in due time. No letter of intention is required from their institution.

The following table summarizes the eligibility of Main and Secondary Proposers by affiliation:

Table 2: Network of Proposers eligibility by Affiliation Category

Affiliation Category	Status in the Network of Proposers	
	Main Proposer	Secondary Proposer
COST Member Country	YES	YES
COST Cooperating State	YES	YES
Near Neighbour Country (NNC)	NO	YES
International Partners Country (IPC)	NO	YES
European Commission and EU Agencies	YES	YES
European RTD Organisation	YES	YES
International Organisation	NO	YES
Independent workers	NO	NO

By joining or forming a Network of Proposer **an individual accepts:**

1. **To share his/her personal data with the other members of the same Network and with COST Scientific Committee Members.**

The shared data are:

- Year of birth, Type of institution, Address of the institution and Sub-field of Science of the department of the Main Proposer.
- Title, First name, Last name, Gender, Years from PhD, E-mail, Telephone, Institution, Core-Area of Expertise, both of Main and Secondary Proposers.

2. **That the following data are used for aggregated statistics on the composition of the Network, to be disclosed to Independent External Experts and Review Panel Members:**

- COST Member Countries (number and list in alphabetic order); % of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries; NNCs (number and list in alphabetic order); IPCs (number and list in alphabetic order); European Commission and EU Agencies; European RTD Organisations; International Organisations.
- Number of Proposers; Gender Distribution of Proposers in %; Average number of years elapsed since PhD graduation of Proposers; Number of Early Career Investigators; Core Expertise of Proposers; Distribution by sub-field of S&T fields; Affiliation distribution of Network of Proposers

The COST Association and the CNCs have access, via e-COST, to the full identity of proposers, full content of proposals and outcomes of the evaluation. COST expects from all participants ethical behaviour of actors involved in COST activities at all levels. As such, the identity of the proposers, the content of proposals and the evaluation outcomes must remain confidential.

3.4 Proposal template

Proposals for COST Actions have the following sections:

- **General Features**
- **Technical Annex**
- **References**
- **COST Mission and Policies**
- **Network of Proposers**

All these sections are to be completed online with the exception of the Technical Annex. The instructions related to each section are specified below.

3.4.1 General Features

This section should be completed online in the e-COST Submission Tool. It contains mandatory fields that need to be filled in by the Main Proposer.

GENERAL FEATURES
Open Call Collection identifier <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automatically assigned
Proposal reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automatically assigned
Title <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory Max. 12 words The title of the proposal should describe at a glance what the proposal is about
Acronym <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory Only original acronyms should be adopted, i.e., not in use by any other public or private entity or research group, even if they are part of the Network of Proposers. Acronyms can only contain letters and numbers. The use of symbols is not accepted, with the exception of “-” and “@”.
Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Max. 250 words Short abstract used to illustrate the challenge that the Action is proposing to address. A revised version of the text of this section will be used as a summary of the Action to be published in COST website, should the Action be approved. <p><i>Be brief, clear and “to the point”: illustrate your ideas in a concise manner. Explain what is the main S&T and/or societal Challenge the proposed Action aims to address.</i></p>
Key expertise needed for evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 1 key expertise and maximum 5 (recommended: 3) must be indicated. Multiple choice selection of sub-fields to be chosen from six main S&T fields: natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences and humanities. <p><i>Be aware that this will be the key information for the identification of external experts. COST Association will identify Independent External Experts that have this expertise and are appropriate for the evaluation of your proposal.</i></p>
Keywords <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum 3 and maximum 5 keywords Each keyword not exceeding 60 characters These should exclusively refer to the S&T content of the proposal, including techniques or methodologies used or developed and/or infrastructures involved. Keywords are separated by commas. Keywords can be composed by multiple words. Generic keywords, such as “interdisciplinary”, “research coordination”, “science” or “networking”, as well as their combinations, should be avoided as they bring no information on the specific expertise needed to evaluate the proposal.

3.4.2 Technical Annex

The Technical Annex is composed by the following sections:

1. S&T EXCELLENCE
2. IMPACT
3. IMPLEMENTATION

It must be completed following the structure of the template downloadable from www.cost.eu/Technical_Annex_Template. The completed template needs to be saved as a single PDF document and uploaded to the e-COST Submission Tool.

N.B.: The length of the Technical Annex must not exceed fifteen (15) pages (eligibility criteria; see section 3.2). The first page with instructions has to be deleted when saving the proposal to PDF!

Disclaimer on Intellectual Property Rights and Copyright: Proposers must tick a box stating that they own, or have received the necessary authorisation from the intellectual property rights holders to validly use, all intellectual property rights on the photographs, slides, graphs, digital images or other material included in the Technical Annex.

When formatting the content, the template provided must not be modified. (COST standard style: Arial font, size 11, line spacing 1, colour Grey coded: R86 G88 B91).

The specific instructions related to each section are listed below. Section 3.6 provides the definitions of key-concepts useful for the preparation of the proposal.

■ Section 1 - S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1 Challenge

1.1.1 Description of the Challenge (Main Aim)

1.1.2 Relevance and timeliness

Describe the research question(s) your proposal aims to address. You should make a case for the relevance and timeliness of the proposed challenge(s).

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

1.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

Provide a clear and specific description of the project objectives against the background of the state-of-the-art, showing their pertinence to tackle the proposed challenge. Make sure the proposed objectives are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely).

1.3 Progress beyond the state-of-the-art and Innovation Potential

1.3.1 Description of the state-of-the-art

1.3.2 Progress beyond the state-of-the-art

1.3.3 Innovation in tackling the challenge

Describe briefly the state-of-the art in the field related to the challenge, as well as the advance that the COST Action will bring about.

Highlight the innovation potential anticipated by the proposed COST Action in order to tackle the challenge. Innovation is to be intended as the creation and / or development of new or improved concepts, products, processes, services, and / or technologies that are made available to markets, governments and society.

1.4 Added value of networking

1.4.1 In relation to the Challenge

1.4.2 In relation to existing efforts at European and/or international level

Describe the added value of networking in relation to the challenge by highlighting why networking is the best approach to tackle the challenge.

Describe the added value of the proposed COST Action in relation to former and existing efforts (research projects, other networks, etc.) at the European and/or international level. Particular attention should be paid to respecting the eligibility criterion of anonymity (see section 3.2 of these Guidelines).

■ Section 2 - IMPACT

2.1 Expected Impact

2.1.1 Short-term and long-term scientific, technological, and/or socio-economic impacts

Describe in a clear and realistic way the S&T and socio-economic impact envisaged by the proposed COST Action in the short- and long-term perspective.

2.2 Measures to Maximise Impact

2.2.1 Plan for involving the most relevant stakeholders

Identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them as Action's participants.

2.2.2 Dissemination and/or Exploitation Plan

Present a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results, including IPR, if relevant¹³.

2.3 Potential for Innovation versus Risk Level

2.3.1 Potential for scientific, technological and/or socioeconomic innovation breakthroughs

Make a case on how well the proposal addresses potential innovation/ scientific breakthroughs with a convincing risk/return trade-off.

¹³ See COST 134/14 B.2. "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment", Annex I, Art. 6.

■ Section 3 - IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Description of the Work Plan

NB: No budget breakdown is required in the proposal phase, as the budget is allocated to the approved Actions by the COST Association on the basis of specific parameters and subject to budget availability¹⁴.

3.1.1 Description of Working Groups

Provide a detailed description of the different Working Groups. For each WG provide objectives, tasks, activities, milestones and list of major deliverables.

3.1.2 GANTT Diagram

Provide a graphical illustration of a schedule offering the project management overview of the different WGs, tasks, activities, and deliverables of your proposal.

3.1.3 PERT (Programme Evaluation Review Technique) (optional)

Provide a graphical representation of the different WGs showing their inter-relation. If needed, the same can be provide to show the inter-relation among the different tasks within each WG.

3.1.4 Risk and Contingency Plans

Identify the main risks related to the Work Plan and present a credible contingency plan.

3.2 Management structures and procedures

Describe the Action organisation in terms of management structure that would help the Action meet the proposed challenge. It is required that the proposed Action organisation and management structure respect COST rules. Be reminded that:

- ✓ *MC Members are nominated by the COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State and **can join the Action during the first three years**. The composition of the MC is not defined at proposal stage.*
- ✓ *The participation of WG Members and ad hoc participants is decided by the MC*
- ✓ ***WG and management structure can be adapted by the MC of the Action during its lifetime.***

3.3 Network as a whole

Describe how well the features of your Network of Proposers can achieve the objectives of the proposed COST Action. Make a case for the critical mass, expertise and geographical distribution needed for addressing the challenge and the objectives.

If your Network misses any of these features, present a clear plan for overcoming the identified gaps. Note that COST Policies should not be addressed here.

If you plan to include International Partner Countries (IPCs) or Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) institutions in your proposal, give a brief description of the mutual benefits deriving from the participation of each of those institutions.

¹⁴ As an indication, the average budget per Grant Period in 2014 was EUR 130000.

3.4.3 References

This section must be completed online.

REFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non mandatory ▪ Max. 500 words ▪ Free text section to list relevant references on the topic of the proposal further demonstrating your awareness on the state-of-the-art of the given field(s). The list of references is optional. It is shown to the evaluators, but not assessed during the evaluation. ▪ In compliance with the eligibility criterion of anonymity, proposers should ensure that the bibliography submitted respects this criterion (see section 3.2 of these Guidelines).

3.4.4 COST Mission and Policies

This section must be completed online and shall summarize how the proposal, if funded, would respond to COST Mission and Policies. Please refer to Section 2.1 of this document for further details on the COST Mission and Policies.

COST Mission and Policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mandatory section ▪ Max. 500 words ▪ This is a free text section to allow the proposer to show how the proposed Action will contribute to address one or more of the COST Policies. The proposer should list relevant activities planned in the proposal pointing out which COST Policy they target and how. ▪ An example for COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy addressing ITC: Seeking ITC researchers' full involvement through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership roles in COST Actions - Grant Holder role ▪ The content of this section will be taken into account during the selection phase conducted by COST Scientific Committee.

3.4.5 Network of Proposers

This section must be completed online. For further details please check Chapter 3, section 3.3.

The following data of the Main Proposer are automatically extracted from her/his e-COST profile:

NETWORK of PROPOSERS - DETAILS

MAIN PROPOSER DETAILS

- Title
- First name
- Last name
- Gender
- Year of birth
- Years from PhD
- E-mail
- Telephone
- Institution
- Type of institution
- Address of the institution
- Sub-field of Science of the department
- Core-Area of Expertise

The Main Proposer needs to invite the Secondary Proposers through the e-COST Submission tool, by clicking the “Network” section of the proposal under preparation. S/he has then to fill in the mandatory fields (first name, last name and e-mail address. The e-mail address has to be the one that is set as primary address in e-COST).

S/he then has to click the icon of the envelope, in order to prompt the system to send an invitation e-mail. The Secondary Proposers have to accept the invitation by following the link communicated in the e-mail. Upon their acceptance, the following data about the Secondary Proposers are extracted from their e-COST profile:

SECONDARY PROPOSERS' DETAILS

- Title
- First name
- Last name
- Gender
- Years from PhD
- E-mail
- Telephone
- Institution
- Core-Area of Expertise

The following aggregated information will then be displayed to the evaluators:



COST is supported by
the EU Framework Programme
Horizon 2020

COST Association
Avenue Louise 149 I 1050 Brussels, Belgium
t: +32 (0)2 533 3800 I f: +32 (0)2 533 3890
office@cost.eu I www.cost.eu

NETWORK of PROPOSERS - FEATURES

- COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State (number and list in alphabetic order)
- % of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries
- NNCs (number and list in alphabetic order)
- IPCs (number and list in alphabetic order)
- European Commission and EU Agencies
- European RTD Organisations
- International Organisations
- Number of proposers
- Gender distribution of proposers: Males (%) – Females (%)
- Average number of years elapsed since PhD graduation of proposers
- Number of Early Career Investigators
- Core Expertise of proposers: distribution by sub-field of Science
- Institutional distribution of the Network of Proposers

3.5 Proposal style guide

The COST Association strongly recommends to comply with the following requirements when drafting a proposal.

- Checking language and spelling;
- Presenting the text in a logical way, avoiding unnecessary repetition between the different sections;
- No footnotes
- Use of capital letters for COST-specific and Action-related expressions. A non-exhaustive list: COST Action, Action Chair, Management Committee, Working Group, Short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM), Training School, Core Group;
- Explaining all acronyms, including those commonly used in the Framework Programme context;
- Use of "Europe" or "COST Member Countries" when referring to the overall geographical scope of COST. "European Union" or "EU Member States" should only be used to refer to the EU as a player ("EU legislation", "EU programmes", "EU policies" etc.) or when only EU Member State(s) need to be explicitly mentioned, excluding COST Countries not members of the EU;
- Use of "framework" or "scheme" when referring to COST (COST is an intergovernmental framework, not an "EU instrument", although it is funded by the EU Framework Programme);
- Avoiding pronouns such as "I", "we"; rather use "the Action";
- Avoiding expressions such as "planned" or "proposed" when referring to the Action; rather use "aims at", "will", etc.;
- Avoiding overstatements regarding the potential impact of the Action.

3.6 Definition of key concepts used in COST proposals

This section clarifies COST definitions of key concepts to guide proposers in the preparation of proposals.

3.6.1 Challenges

Challenges are the research questions addressed by a COST Action, targeting S&T and / or socio-economic problems.

In COST Actions, researchers, engineers and scholars from different places and backgrounds are expected to work as a team towards the resolution of a S&T challenge. To respond to the challenge, the network needs not only coordination in working as a team, but also in gathering a critical mass of researchers around the science and technology topic in question.

3.6.2 Potential innovation/breakthrough

Through the Actions, COST aims at enabling breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contributing to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities.

When choosing a COST Action as an instrument to tackle the S&T Challenge, researchers must have a clear vision on the innovation potential of their endeavour.

3.6.3 Objectives

COST Action objectives are the results that an Action needs to achieve in order to respond to its challenge. These are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) and twofold: Research Coordination Objectives and Capacity-building Objectives, in order to comply with COST Mission.

a. Research Coordination Objectives

These objectives entail the distribution of tasks, sharing of knowledge and know-how, and the creation of synergies among Action participants to achieve specific outputs. Achieving these objectives turns COST Actions from initially scattered groups into one transnational team and leverages the existing funded research.

Examples of Research Coordination Objectives

- Development of a common understanding/definition of the subject matter
- Coordination of information seeking, identification, collection and/or data curation
- Coordination of experimentation or testing
- Comparison and/or performance assessment of theory/ model/ scenario/ projection/ simulation/ narrative/ methodology/ technology/ technique
- Development of knowledge needing international coordination: new or improved theory/ model/ scenario/ projection/ simulation/ narrative/ methodology/ technology/ technique
- Achievement of a specific tangible output that cannot be achieved without international coordination (e.g. due to practical issues such as database availability, language barriers, availability of infrastructure or know-how, etc.)
- Input to stakeholders (e.g. standardization body, policy-makers, regulators, users) - excluding commercial applications
- Input for future market applications (including cooperation with private enterprises)
- Dissemination of research results to the general public or to stakeholders

b. Capacity-building Objectives

Achieving these objectives entail building critical mass to drive scientific progress, thereby strengthening the European Research Area. They can be achieved by the delivery of specific outputs and/or through network features or types and levels of participation.

Examples of Capacity-building Objectives

- Fostering knowledge exchange and the development of a joint research agenda around a topic of scientific and/or socio-economic relevance
- Fostering knowledge exchange and the development of a joint research agenda around a new or emerging field of research
- Bridging separate fields of science/disciplines to achieve breakthroughs that require an interdisciplinary approach
- Acting as a stakeholder platform or trans-national practice community (by area of socio-economic application and/or market sector)
- Involving specific target groups (e.g. newly established research groups, Early Career Investigators, the under-represented gender, teams from countries/regions with less capacity in the field of the Action)

3.6.4 Strategy and Structure

This comprises the organisation of the Action in:

- The Action S&T research and development activities necessary to achieve the objectives;
- The internal organisation of the Action into Working Groups and other managing structures needed for the successful implementation of the Action;
- The work plan including efficient use of the networking tools – meetings (MC meetings, Working Group meetings, workshops, conferences), Short Term Scientific Missions, Training Schools and Dissemination activities to share ideas and knowledge and create added value;
- The timeline for the implementation of the Action activities and the achievement of objectives within the Action lifetime.

3.6.5 Networking tools

These are the tools through which eligible activities can be funded by COST. They include:

- Meetings (Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings, Workshops, Conferences),
- Training Schools,
- Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs),
- Dissemination.

Please refer to the following link for further information: <http://www.cost.eu/participate/networking>

These tools can generate activities that, although not directly funded by COST, contribute to the proposed Action challenge.

3.6.6 Action activities

This definition encompasses all the activities organised by the COST Action, by means of the networking tools, in order to achieve the research coordination and capacity-building objectives.

3.6.7 Results and outputs

These are the direct results stemming from the COST Action activities. Outputs can be, among other, codified knowledge, tacit knowledge, technology, and societal applications:

- **Codified knowledge:** Knowledge expressed through language (including mathematics, music etc.) and thus capable of being stored on a physical support (i.e. transferrable knowledge) –e.g. *publications; patents, websites*.
- **Tacit knowledge:** Not formalised knowledge, resulting from the participation in the COST Action networking activities and the social interaction among its members that can also be re-invested in other contexts.
- **Technology:** Knowledge embedded in artefacts either ready to use or not, such as machinery or software, new materials or modified organisms –e.g. *a prototype, a database*.
- **Societal applications:** Use of any kind of knowledge (codified, tacit, technology) to perform specific tasks. Societal applications require the active participation of stakeholders (such as business enterprises, practitioners, regulators, users) within the lifetime of an Action. If stakeholders are not involved, then societal applications may only be considered as possible future impacts resulting from the envisaged outputs, rather than direct Action outputs (e.g. *use of a methodology developed by the Action by a community of practitioners not participating to the Action*).

3.6.8 Impact

Impact is the effect or influence on short-term to long-term scientific, technological, and/or socio-economic changes produced by a COST Action, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

3.6.9 Deliverables

Deliverables are distinct, expected and tangible outputs of the Action, meaningful in terms of the Action's overall objectives, such as: reports, documents, technical diagrams, scientific and technical papers and contributions, content for training schools, input to standards, best practices, white papers, etc. Action deliverables are used to measure the Action progress and success.

3.6.10 Milestones

Milestones are control points in the Action that help to map progress. They can be Core Group or MC meetings, mid-term reviews etc. They are needed at intermediary stages so that, if problems have arisen, corrective measures can be taken.

4 How COST Proposals are Evaluated, Selected and Approved

The Open Call Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure fulfils three core principles: excellence, fairness and transparency. COST strives to avoid any Conflict of Interest (Col) and all those involved in the SESA process must commit to confidentiality.

4.1 Conflict of Interest¹⁵

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

The Col rules apply to all those concerned by the SESA process (CNCs, Independent External Experts, Review Panel Members, COST Scientific Committee Members, and CSO Members). Each of these actors shall not be involved in more than one role. Another important principle is that s/he cannot derive any benefit from the Actions approved under the Collection Date in which s/he has participated. In particular:

- Independent External Experts cannot participate in an approved Action if they evaluated the corresponding proposal; Review Panel Members cannot participate in any approved Action of the Collection Date if they were involved in the revision.
- As a principle, CNC and COST Scientific Committee Members, as well as CSO members, cannot participate in any Action.

A Col can be real, potential or perceived:

- *Real Col*

The person taking part in the SESA process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, COST Scientific Committee Member, CSO Member):

- has been involved in the preparation of the proposal;
- has been involved in any other evaluation step in the same Collection Date.

- *Potential Col*

The person taking part in the SESA process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, COST Scientific Committee Member, CSO Member):

- has a professional or personal relationship with a proposer;
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal is accepted or rejected.

- *Perceived Col*

The person taking part in the SESA process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, COST Scientific Committee Member, CSO Member) feels for any reason unable to provide an impartial view of the proposal.

¹⁵ See COST 133/14 B.1. "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval", <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

The table below summarizes the cases of incompatibility of roles.

Steps	Main Proposer and Network of Proposers	Independent External Expert	Review Panel Member	COST Scientific Committee
Step 1 Evaluation (Independent External Experts)	X		X	X
Step 2 Revision (Review Panel)	X	X		X
Step 3 Selection (COST Scientific Committee)	X	X	X	
Final approval (CSO)	X	X	X	X

Any person to be involved in the SESA process shall sign a declaration stating that s/he:

- Is not aware of any Col regarding the proposal(s) to be evaluated/selected;
- Will inform immediately the COST Association of any Col discovered during the SESA process;
- Will maintain the confidentiality.

If the Col is confirmed/identified **before** the evaluation starts, the person concerned will not be able to participate in the evaluation/selection procedure in the ongoing collection and is replaced.

If the Col is confirmed/identified **during** the evaluation/selection:

- The person must stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and is replaced;
- Any comments and marks already given shall be discarded.

If the Col is confirmed/identified **after** the evaluation/selection has taken place, the COST Association shall examine the potential impact and consequences of the Col 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 must be recorded. All those related to nationally nominated evaluators (Review Panel Members and COST Scientific Committee Members) are reported to the COST National Coordinator.

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 COST Scientific Committee Members;
- Removal of the expert from the COST Expert Database.

4.2 Confidentiality¹⁶

COST expects that each person involved in the SESA process (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, COST Scientific Committee Member, CNC and CSO Member):

- Treats confidentially any information and document, in any form (i.e. paper or electronic), disclosed in writing or orally in relation to the performance of the evaluation;
- 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;
- Not discuss any proposal with others, including other evaluators or COST Association staff, even when not directly involved in evaluating the proposal, except during formal discussions at *ad hoc* Review Panels and COST Scientific Committee meetings. Under no circumstances the proposers should 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.
- 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;
- 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 of CSO.

4.3 Proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval

As outlined in Section 2.3, the proposal Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure **is divided into three steps, which are described below.**

4.3.1 Step 1 – Proposal Evaluation by Independent External Experts:

Independent External Experts are in charge of the remote peer-review evaluation. They are identified, selected and assigned to proposals through a matching of the key expertise indicated by the Network of Proposers with those from the COST Expert Database. The assignment of Independent External Experts to the proposals is examined and validated by COST Scientific Committee. Whenever possible, each Independent External Expert will evaluate at least three proposals.

This step uses double-blind peer review, which means the identity of both experts and proposers is kept confidential from each other.

Each proposal is evaluated by a minimum of three Independent External Experts. The evaluation is performed remotely and each Independent External Expert submits an evaluation report for each proposal s/he evaluates. One of the experts is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Evaluation Consensus Report.

Following the submission of the individual evaluations, a consensus is sought among the Independent External Experts (remotely) and an Evaluation Consensus Report is drafted. The consensus shall not be imposed and Independent External Experts may maintain their views on the proposal. In the cases where no consensus is reached, the three Individual Evaluation Reports will be sent to the *ad hoc* Review Panels who are in charge of the quality check and resolution of discrepancies.

¹⁶ See COST 133/14 B.1. “COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval”, <http://www.cost.eu/participate>

The Individual Evaluation Reports are structured as follows:

- Eligibility criteria
- Evaluation criteria
 - S&T Excellence
 - Impact
 - Implementation

The table below presents the eligibility criteria that are checked by the Independent External Experts.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA checked by Independent External Experts	
▪	The Technical Annex must not exceed 15 pages (see section 3.4.2 of this document)
▪	Be anonymous, hence not containing any reference to the names and/or institutions of the participants in the Network of Proposers
▪	Address S&T challenges destined only for peaceful purposes
▪	Be written in English, the working language of the COST Association

The table below presents the evaluation criteria and sub-criteria, as well as the respective maximum scoring. The overall threshold to access to the selection stage is also indicated.

EVALUATION CRITERIA		
S&T EXCELLENCE	IMPACT	IMPLEMENTATION
▪ Soundness of the challenge.	▪ Scientific, technological and/or socio-economic impact.	▪ Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan.
▪ Progress beyond the state- of-the-art and innovation potential.	▪ Measures to maximise impact.	▪ Appropriateness of management structures and procedures.
▪ Added value of networking.	▪ Level of risk and level of potential innovation/breakthroughs	▪ Network as a whole
Total marks for the section = 25 points	Total marks for the section = 20 points	Total marks for the section = 20 points
TOTAL MARKS AWARDED = 65 points		
OVERALL THRESHOLD = 45 points		
<u>Proposals failing to achieve the overall threshold will not be funded</u>		

Below are the specific questions addressed by the Independent External Experts on each of the criteria:

S&T EXCELLENCE CRITERIA
Soundness of the Challenge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q1 - Is the challenge relevant and timely? Q2 - Are the objectives presented clear and pertinent to tackle the challenge?
Progress beyond the state-of-the-art and innovation potential. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q3 - Does the proposal advance the state-of-the-art and introduce an innovative approach to the challenge?
Added value of networking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q4 - Is networking the best approach to tackle the challenge? Q5 - What is the added value of the proposed Network in relation to former and existing efforts at European and/or international level?

IMPACT CRITERIA
Scientific, technological and/or socio-economic impacts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q6 - Does the proposal clearly identify relevant, and realistic short-term/long-term impacts?
Measures to maximise impact. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q7 - Does the proposal identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them as Action's participants? Q8 - Is there a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results?
Level of risk and level of potential innovation/breakthroughs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q9 - How well does the proposal succeed in putting forward potential innovation/ breakthroughs with a convincing risk/return trade-off?

IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA
Overall Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q10 - Is the work plan (WGs, tasks, activities, timeframe and deliverables) coherent, realistic and appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives? Q11 - Does the proposal identify the main risks related to the work plan and has a plan for contingencies?
Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q12 - Are the management structure and procedures appropriate?

Added value of the proposed Network

- Q13 - Does the proposed Network envisage the critical mass, expertise and geographical distribution for addressing the challenge and the objectives? If not, does the proposal identify the gaps in the Network and present a clear plan for overcoming the gaps? Are mutual benefits clearly ascertained in case of involvement of NNC and IPC institutions?

4.3.2 Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check by *ad hoc* Review Panel

From four to six *ad hoc* Review Panels are set up after each Collection Date, based on the number of received proposals and on the topics covered.

The Members of the *ad hoc* Review Panels are appointed by the COST Association from a pool of active researchers, engineers or scholars who have been nominated by the CNCs. Each CNC has the right to nominate up to eighteen Review Panel Members, covering expertise from up to six S&T fields¹⁷. Review Panel Members must register in the COST Expert Database. The duration of the mandate of the Review Panel Members is up to two years.

Step 2 uses double-blind peer review, which means that the identity of both Review Panel Members and proposers is kept confidential.

The *ad hoc* Review Panels are in charge of:

- a) Reviewing and validating all the Evaluation Consensus Reports and marks elaborated in Step 1.
- b) Resolving the differences in opinions among the Independent External Experts, using one of the following options:
 - Choose one or the average of two individual marks as the review consensus marks, produce and validate the Evaluation Consensus Report.
 - In exceptional cases, ask for one or two additional Independent External Experts to remotely evaluate the proposal. In this case the *ad hoc* Review Panel shall make use of the additional evaluation reports to prepare the validated Evaluation Consensus Report and marks.
- c) Ranking the proposals above the overall threshold and preparing the shortlist of proposals. The shortlist is ranked by the validated overall consensus mark.
- d) Identifying those proposals, among those above the overall threshold, which address emerging issues or potentially important future developments.
- e) Preparing the report for the COST Scientific Committee, reflecting the process and the decisions of Step 2.

4.3.3 Step 3 – Proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee

COST Scientific Committee is composed of 36 high-level experts (one from each COST Member Country and one from the Cooperating State) with international renowned expertise and recognised merit in their professional career (science, technology, research management, innovation, industry or other). COST Scientific Committee Members are appointed by, and report to, the CSO.

¹⁷ See Annex I of COST 133/14 B.1. “COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval”

COST Scientific Committee guarantees that the present rules and procedures are observed throughout all the SESA process. Specifically, it is in charge of:

- Validating the list of names and expertise of the Independent External Experts assigned to each proposal;
- Validating the *ad hoc* Review Panels at each Collection Date (number of Review Panels and composition);
- Identifying among the proposals with the same marks, those that best respond to COST Mission and Policies (see section 2.1), on the basis of the aggregated data on the Network of Proposers (breakdown, expertise, geographic, age and gender distribution), and of the plans to involve relevant participants or targeted stakeholders in the proposal.
- Ensuring a balanced COST Action portfolio by ensuring the coverage of all S&T fields;
- Establishing the final ranking of proposals recommended for funding to be presented to CSO for Approval, on the basis of c) and d). The methodology for selection will be established in detail by COST Scientific Committee and be made publicly available, subject to previous CSO approval.

4.3.4 Proposal Approval by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

The final decision on Approval and funding for new COST Actions is taken by the CSO, on the basis of the results of the evaluation and selection steps described above and taking into account the available budget. The CSO reserves the right to not approve Actions selected by the Review Panel(s) through the procedure.

The text of a successful proposal approved by the CSO will form the basis of the Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The procedure for starting a COST Action is described in the "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment" rules¹⁸.

4.4 Feedback to proposers

The Evaluation Consensus Reports and the marks validated in Step 2 are made available to all the proposers via e-COST at the end of Step 2.

The decision on the approved proposals is communicated after the CSO decision.

4.5 Redress Procedure

In order to contribute to the fairness and transparency of the SESA process, the COST Association has established a Redress Procedure. The Main Proposer has the possibility to submit a request for redress to redress@cost.eu.

Redress is allowed only in case of alleged procedural shortcomings and factual errors, i.e., whenever:

- The Network of Proposers considers that the evaluation has not been carried out in accordance with the SESA procedures;
- The Network of Proposers deems that the Evaluation Consensus Report bears factual errors.

Requests for redress dealing with the scientific judgment by the Independent External Experts or of the *ad hoc* Review Panels is not admissible.

The proposal Selection by COST Scientific Committee (Step 3) shall not be open to redress.

¹⁸ COST 134/14 "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment"

Annex I - List of Acronyms

COST	Cooperation in Science and Technology
CNC	COST National Coordinator
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials
EB	Executive Board
ECI	Early Career Investigator
EU	European Union
IPC	International Partner Country
ITC	Inclusiveness Target Country
MC	Management Committee
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NNC	Near Neighbour Country
SC	COST Scientific Committee
S&T	Science and Technology
STSM	Short Term Scientific Mission
TS	Training School
W&BP	Work and Budget Plan
WG	Working Group

Annex II – Definitions

The COST Implementation Rules set the definitions of the terms used in these guidelines.

1. COST Member Country: means any country that joined the COST Association as a Full Member following the approval of the COST Association Statutes.
2. COST Cooperating State: means any State that was admitted to the COST Association as Cooperating Member.
3. COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC): means COST Member Countries that fulfil the Horizon 2020 widening eligibility conditions being either an EU Member State or an Associated Country to the EU Framework Programme.
4. COST Near Neighbour Countries (NNC): means countries approved by the Committee of Senior Officials to benefit from dedicated support for the integration of their researchers, engineers or scholars in COST activities.
5. International Partners Countries (IPC): means all those countries that are neither COST Member Countries, nor Cooperating State nor COST Near Neighbour Countries.
6. EU Agencies: means an organisation governed by European public law, with its own legal personality, established in the EU to accomplish specific tasks of a legal, technical and/or scientific nature in a given policy field and to support the EU Member States but distinct from the EU institutions.
7. European RTD Organisation: means any intergovernmental scientific research organisation that is responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are countries, and the majority of which are COST Member Countries or Cooperating State.
8. International Organisation: means any organisation with a European or international membership, scope or presence, with its own legal personality, governed by international public law or recognised as of general interest, in particular promoting scientific and technological cooperation, which should have an added value in the fulfilment of COST Mission.
9. COST National Coordinator (CNC): means the individuals appointed by the COST Member Countries and Cooperating State in charge of confirming the acceptance of the Action Memorandum of Understanding by nominating the Management Committee members of their country and the evaluators for the *ad hoc* Review Panels pool of Experts.
10. COST Scientific Committee (SC): means the committee composed of independent, internationally renowned, high-level experts, one per COST Member Country and Cooperating State, appointed by the CSO.
11. Open Call for proposals: means the official announcement/publication with the description of the objectives and criteria required for COST Action proposals to be evaluated and selected. The Open Call allows submitting proposals on a continuous basis; the publication indicates the Collection Dates.
12. Collection Date: means the date when the proposals for new COST Actions submitted during a certain period are gathered and sent for evaluation.
13. Main Proposer: means the coordinator of the network of proposers who submits a proposal for a COST Action in response to the Open Call.

14. COST Action: means the COST pan-European networking instrument allowing researchers, engineers or scholars from COST Member Countries and Cooperating State to develop jointly their ideas and new initiatives in a field or topic of common interest.

15. Action's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): means the agreement accepted by a minimum of five different COST Member Countries and/or Cooperating State describing the Action objectives. This document has to be accepted by any additional COST Member Country or Cooperating State joining the Action.

16. COST Action Grant Agreement (AGA): means the agreement between the COST Association and the Grant Holder that governs the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.

17. Grant Holder: means the legal entity responsible for the administrative and financial implementation of the COST Action.

18. Action Participant: means any researcher, engineer or scholar who participates actively in a COST Action.

19. Early Career Investigator (ECI): means a researcher in the time span of up to 8 years after the date of obtaining the PhD/doctorate (full-time equivalent).

20. Management Committee (MC): means the group of researchers, engineers or scholars, representing the COST Member Countries (or Cooperating State) that have accepted the MoU. They are in charge of the coordination, implementation, and management of an Action's activities as well as supervising the appropriate allocation and use of the COST funding with a view to achieving the Action's scientific and technological objectives. They are nominated by their respective CNC.

21. Dissemination: means the public disclosure of COST Actions' results and/or outcomes by any appropriate mean (other than resulting from protecting the results), including by scientific publications in any media.