COST

European Cooperation in Science and Technology - COST -

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Secretariat

Brussels, 28 March 2011

COST 4111/11

NOTE

From :	COST Secretariat
To :	COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)
Subject :	Guidelines for Assessment of applications for COST Actions

Delegations will find attached the "Guidelines for Assessment of applications for COST Actions" as approved by the CSO by written procedure on 24 March 2011.

These Guidelines will enter into force as from the next Collection date on 25 March 2011 and replace the previous version set out in COST 4115/10.

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Guidelines for Assessment of applications for COST Actions

1 - Introduction

The main tasks assigned to a COST Domain Committee (DC) in pursuit of a successful Action are:

a. Quality Control

- Assessment of proposals for new Actions
- Monitoring of Actions in progress
- Evaluation of completed Actions

b. Dissemination and exploitation of the results of a COST Action.

Quality control is the prime responsibility of a DC, in accordance with its Terms of Reference approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) (see COST Docs 4161/10 - 4169/10 or any new document amending or replacing them to be found in *www.consilium.europa.eu/cost*). The quality control tasks aim to maintain the excellence of COST Actions, by combining best practices used in the scientific community with the bottom up approach, equality of access and flexibility traditional to COST. Best practices adopted by the CSO as mandatory include consistent use of external peer review, both in assessing full proposals for new Actions and in the final evaluation of a completed Action.

2 - Conflict of Interest

COST strives to avoid any kind of conflicts of interest in its framework. Standard good practice in science funding schemes requires that any individual with an interest in a proposal for funding should not take part in the selection process. Executing the COST quality control tasks may give rise to a conflict of interest, for example if a DC member is at the same time a participant in a current Action, or is involved in a new Action proposal. No CSO member should be in a position to nominate him/herself as a member of another COST Committee.

To ensure the 'bottom-up' characteristics of an Action, the proposition and execution of an Action shall not normally be performed by any member of a body that has executive or advisory power over its assessment, management or evaluation.

The same principle applies to any other person who may be approached to assist with any COST quality control task. It is mandatory that any potential conflict of interest be declared. A declaration that there is no potential conflict of interest must be made by every assessor of preliminary proposals. The responsibility to solve a possible conflict of interest is in the hands of the relevant Committee. Details addressing the conflict of interest issue for all players involved are given in COST Code of Conduct, doc. COST 4160/10 or in any new document amending or replacing it (to be found in *www.consilium.europa.eu/cost*).

3 – Anonymity

All individual marks and comments during the assessment process will be kept anonymous. On the other hand, in order to guarantee the widest transparency, all such marks and comments will be made available for the Applicant and those involved in the assessment process.

Every effort should be made to keep the identity of applicants of Preliminary Proposals anonymous. The identity of the members of the External Expert Panel (EEP) is also to be kept confidential.

4 - Commission involvement

The Commission Contact Persons will have access to all proposals and are encouraged to submit comments on the Full Proposals. These comments will be encoded in the online tool in due time and will hence be made available both to the EEP and the DC for consideration. They will also be made available to the COST National coordinators (CNC).

5 - Assessment of new Action proposals

New Action proposals are assessed and selected from submissions to a continuous and thematically Open Call normally with two collection dates a year. Proposals submitted after a collection date are retained for the next collection date.

The objective of the Open Call is to enhance the scientific excellence and transparency of COST through an accessible bottom-up opportunity with rigorous peer review. The Call follows a two step process, with Preliminary Proposals followed by invited Full Proposals. This helps to reduce over-subscription and ensures a reasonable success rate for Full Proposals.

Characteristics of a COST Action

COST Actions are new, innovative and often interdisciplinary scientific networks. COST does not fund the research in itself. COST Actions contribute to the scientific, economic, cultural or societal development of Europe, by supporting networking activities such as meetings, conferences, short term scientific exchanges and outreach activities. An Action is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) accepted by the Governments of at least 5 COST member countries.

A successful proposal should:

- reach out for high scientific/technological quality in an innovative way (interdisciplinary topics are also welcome);
- contribute substantially to the coordination and defragmentation of research efforts across Europe and to the strengthening of Europe's scientific networking capacity (in the context of the European Research Area), namely with the participation of relevant stakeholders;
- contribute strongly and visibly to European society, economic growth and welfare by producing results of potential interest to important sectors such as public authorities, policy institutions, standards bodies and/or private companies and industry;
- be based on a) careful consideration of the level of interest and relevant research resources in the countries likely to participate in the Action; b) assessment of the added value expected from the coordination of national research efforts by the Action;
- be flexible enough to permit the inclusion, at the implementation stage, of disciplinary perspectives and activities not foreseen during the preparation of the proposal;
- identify and take into account R&D efforts supported by other national and international funding schemes;
- encourage capacity building and the mobility of early-career European researchers.

6 - The Open Call process for New COST Actions

Upcoming collection dates for the Open Call will be announced on the COST website, in the Official Journal of the European Union and in other appropriate media (see Annex E).

Selection Procedure

I. Preliminary Proposals (see Template in Annex C)

a. The initiative of preparing a new Action proposal is normally taken by a group of European researchers, who see an opportunity for advancing scientific, technological or social knowledge through the international coordination support offered by COST. The Coordinator of the group (the "Applicant") should come from a COST Country or a European body and is responsible for submitting the proposal.

b. Applicants may wish to contact their national COST Coordinator (CNC) for information and guidance – see www.cost.eu/cnc.

c. Submission: the Preliminary Proposal is submitted on-line to a dedicated secure database operated by the COST Office. The web template (see Annex C) limits the main text of the proposal to 10,000 characters (equivalent to about 1500 words). The Applicant is asked to indicate the preferred Domain of allocation and which other Domain(s) is/are relevant to it. The text must be in English, as no translation is provided and peer reviewers will come from various countries. The Applicant is strongly advised to have the text checked for correctness and clarity.

d. A pre-check is performed by the COST Office to reject any Preliminary Proposal which does not meet the basic requirements for COST support. The pre-check addresses four questions:
    - Does the Proposal conform with the specified template? [NO = Reject]
    - Are 5 or more COST Member States involved in the Proposal? [NO = Reject]
    - Does the Proposal seek funding for research? [YES = Reject]
    - Is there obvious duplication with work currently or recently supported by COST? [YES = Reject]

e. The COST Office allocates the Preliminary Proposal to the relevant Domain, based on the Applicant's stated preference and its own judgment. The DC Chairs and the Chair of the Trans Domain Proposal Standing Assessment Board (TDP-SAB) may also be consulted, if needed. Any Preliminary Proposal which cannot readily be allocated to a COST Domain, because its topic is unusually broad and inter-disciplinary, is allocated as a Trans Domain Proposal (TDP) and assessed as follows:

    1. A TDP Standing Assessment Board (TDP-SAB) is constituted.
    2. Members are nominated by CNCs in the same way as for Domain Committees and should have a broad interdisciplinary expertise. However, since the TDP-SAB should also represent the different COST Domains, the DC Chairs are also members of the TDP-SAB, although they cannot become Chair of the TDP-SAB.
    3. The Chair of the TDP-SAB is elected by its members and his/her country will then be allowed to nominate another member. The Chair remains neutral in the process.
    4. The TDP-SAB will operate according to the usual rules for the assessment of pre-proposals in the COST Open Call. At the end of the pre-proposal assessment phase, the marks given by the TDP-SAB are to be treated for filtering at the same level as the other 9 Domains. In case TDPs are invited for submission of full proposals, then an EEP will be formed and TDP-SAB hearings will be organised.
    5. In case of need of an EEP, its composition is decided by the Chair with the help of the COST Office. The Chair is the convenor of the EEP.
    6. In case a TDP is approved by the CSO, it is allocated to a single Domain for administrative purposes, but Rapporteurs from several DCs should normally be appointed to monitor the resulting Action.

    In the following paragraphs references to DC or DC Chair should be read as including the TDP-SAB or its Chair.

f. Assessor allocation: The DC chair, supported by the COST Office, allocates to each proposal sufficient Assessors, i.e. DC members or external experts (who may be drawn from the pool of "nominated DC experts" or from other sources), to ensure that a minimum of three assessments are completed for each proposal. DC Chairs are not entitled to assess the pre-proposals in their domains. The Assessors mark their allocated Preliminary Proposals on the basis of the criteria at Annex A by assigning marks between 1 and 6 to each criterion. For this purpose they have electronic access to the proposal, and secure access to an on-line automated marking database.

g. In order to guarantee a fair evaluation, assessors are required to justify their scoring through clear comments so that appropriate and constructive feedback can be provided to the Applicant.

h. Access to the marking database is password protected. Marks are not visible during the assessment period in order to guarantee unbiased assessment.

i. If the average total of the remaining marks for the Proposal fails to reach the threshold of 70% of the maximum achievable score, the Proposal cannot be considered for invitation to submit a Full Proposal.

j. To overcome inter-Domain variation in scoring practice, a process of filtering is applied. The filtering formula must be consensual between the DC Chairs and the COST Office and any possible conflicts are to be resolved by JAF/CSO. The COST Office provides for each Domain a table with the total remaining Assessor marks, and derived from that the average mark for all proposals. This table is made available to all members of the Domain Committee.

k. The COST Office normally invites, in total, between around two and three times as many top ranked Preliminary Proposals to submit Full Proposals as the total number of new Actions that can be supported by the available funds.

l. The COST Office informs all other Applicants that they are not invited to submit a full proposal. If requested by the Applicant, the COST Office shall provide the assessment scores and comments for Proposals that received at least three marks.

m. The COST Office provides the Commission Contact Persons with username and password for access to the COST website with an overview of the selected pre-proposals. The relevant time table for the assessment process will be available on the COST website.

II. Full Proposals

When submitting a full proposal, the Applicant should inform the national COST Coordinator (CNC) – see www.cost.eu/cnc.

a. Full Proposal format: The text of a successful Full Proposal will constitute the formal Technical Annex of the Memorandum of Understanding of the COST Action, and must therefore conform in all material respects, including formatting, to the template provided by the COST Office (see Annex D). The Proposal must be formatted as Rich Text Format (.rtf) or a word (.doc) file. The Proposal must be written in English; no translation service is provided by the COST Office, and peer reviewers will come from various countries. The Applicant is strongly advised to have the text checked for correctness and clarity.

The Assessment Criteria for a Full Proposal are shown in Annex B.

b. External Expert Panel (EEP): The COST Office, in close cooperation with each DC, convenes for each round and each DC an EEP. The EEP typically has five members, drawn from the pool of nominated DC experts or experts from other sources, aiming to cover adequately the required expertise and to ensure gender balance. The EEP members provide individual assessments of each Full Proposal, before they convene for a consensus meeting.

c. The Commission Contact Person will give comments according to relevance for their Directorate and RTD FP activities via the online tool. These comments will be made available to the members of the EEP and DC.

d. The EEP is normally co-ordinated by the DC chair or a member delegated by the DC ("the Convenor"). The Convenor moderates the EEP meeting.

e. The COST Office draws up a summary table of the individual EEP assessor marks; organises the consensus meeting; prepares briefing materials in consultation with the Convenor and makes these available to members before the meeting; and ensures that all relevant documentation is provided at the meeting.

f. At the meeting the members consider how far each Full Proposal meets the assessment criteria, and agree on consensus marks and the recommendation or not for the DC-Hearings for each Full Proposal. Proposals marked below the threshold of 55 points are excluded from further assessment. The EEP may decide to recommend any number of proposals to the DC-Hearings, among those that have reached the threshold mark.

g. Before the meeting closes the members must agree a brief consensus report on each Full Proposal, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. This consensus report is made available to the Applicant. In addition, the EEP may suggest leading experts or institutions in the relevant field for possible nomination to the Management Committee (MC) by the CNC. The Convenor must present the EEP's conclusions to the DC.

h. DC decision process: The Applicants of each Full Proposal recommended by the EEP are invited to present the Proposal to the DC (or its delegated Executive Group). Following the presentations the DC (or Executive Group) ranks the Proposals and shall document the reasons for the ranking, in particular regarding any deviations with respect to the EEP rating. The respective document is made available to the Applicant. The DC may suggest leading experts or institutions in the relevant field for possible nomination to the MC by the CNC. In addition the DC decides on the requested number of qualified proposals for funding.

i. The COST Office prepares the final list to be approved by the CSO based on the following key elements:

a. The Domain's share, which is generated by a filtering distribution that takes into account the submission distribution per Domain. TDP is treated as a separate Domain.
b. The number of Action Credits per Domain, which is generated from the past Collection Dates up to 4 years, from the accumulated differences between the number of proposals actually approved and the Domain's share for those Collection Dates.

The number of proposals to be approved per Domain is produced by taking into consideration the DCs' requests, the Domains' share, and the Action Credits for each Domain.

The technical details of the methodology must be consensual between the DC Chairs and the COST Office and any possible conflicts are to be resolved by JAF/CSO.

j. On the basis of the above procedure the JAF group will propose a definitive list for the CSO to approve within the available funding.

k. The COST Office will inform all the Applicants of the Full Proposals of the result of the selection process.

The envisaged time line for the open call process is indicated in Annex F.

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ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL

I.1	**RIGHT FOR COST?** **Is COST the best mechanism for achieving the Action's objectives?** • High marks are given to proposals for which COST is the best adapted mechanism. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1
I.2	**PUBLIC UTILITY/SCIENCE** **Does the proposed Action address real current problems/ scientific issues?** • High marks are given to highly exciting and interesting proposals on a very important and/or timely topic. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1
I.3	**INNOVATION** **Is the proposed Action innovative?** • High marks are given to highly innovative proposals. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1
I.4	**IMPACT** **Would the proposed network make a significant difference in terms of knowledge, capacity building, social impacts, etc?** • High marks are given to proposals with high potential impact. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1
I.5	**NETWORKING** **Are networking aspects well motivated and developed in the proposal?** • High marks for proposals that both motivate the need for networking in the field and show how the proposed networking will add value to the current state-of-the-art. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1
I.6	**PRESENTATION** **Is the proposed Action presented in a clear, rational and understandable way?** • High marks for proposals that are presented in a clear, rational and understandable way. • Lower marks are given otherwise.	yes no r r r r r r 6 5 4 3 2 1

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR FULL PROPOSAL

A	SCIENCE AND NETWORKING (Weight 2)	
A.1	**Does the proposed Action address real current problems/scientific issues?** 4. The topic is very important and /or timely and proposal presents the correct approaches. 3. The topic is very important and /or timely, but proposal fails to present the correct approaches. 2. The topic is not important nor timely, although proposal presents the correct approaches. 1. Serious lack of substance and/or relevance.	yes no r r r r 4 3 2 1
A.2	**Does the proposed Action show awareness of the state-of-the-art of the relevant scientific/technical/socio-economic fields?** 4. Excellent and up to date awareness of relevant scientific/technical fields 3. Good awareness of relevant fields. 2. Defective awareness of relevant fields. 1. Serious lack of awareness of relevant fields.	yes no r r r r 4 3 2 1
A.3	**Is the proposed Action innovative?** 4. Highly innovative: identifies a significant new problem and/or a significant new approach. 3. Innovative in some notable aspects. 2. Not very innovative: the topic is already well-studied and/or the proposal largely follows a well-trodden approach. 1. Not at all innovative.	high no r r r r 4 3 2 1
A.4	**Does the proposed Action answer a need for the networking of experts in the field?** 4. Networking in this field ranks amongst the best mechanisms to progress the state-of-the-art and the proposal uses such a mechanism in a sound manner. 3. Networking in this field ranks amongst the best mechanisms to progress the state-of-the-art, but the proposal fails to use such a mechanism in a sound manner. 2. Networking in this field is not amongst the best mechanisms to progress the state-of-the-art, although the proposal uses such a mechanism in a sound manner. 1. Networking in this field is not amongst the best mechanisms to progress the state-of-the-art and the proposal fails to use such a mechanism in a sound manner.	high no r r r r 4 3 2 1

Comments:

TOTAL MARK FOR SECTION A (Max 16 x 2 = 32)	

B	IMPACT (Weight 2)	
A COST Action may make impacts in various valuable directions. This Action mainly aims at impacts in : (1) meeting European economic or societal needs [YES] [NO] If YES go to B.1A (2) developing the scientific or technological field [YES] [NO] If YES go to B.1B (3) both (1) and (2) [YES] [NO] If YES go to B.1C NOTE: Score only ONE of the three alternatives		
B.1A	**If the proposed Action aims primarily to meet European <u>economic or societal needs</u>, how likely is it to achieve useful impacts?** 4. Important impacts very likely in several respects. 3. Some notable impacts likely. 2. May be some minor impacts. 1. Unlikely to make useful impacts.	high low r r r r 4 3 2 1
B.1B	**If the proposed Action aims primarily to contribute to the development of the <u>scientific or technological field</u>, how likely is it to achieve useful impacts?** 4. Important impacts very likely in several respects. 3. Some notable impacts likely. 2. May be some minor impacts. 1. Unlikely to make useful impacts.	high low r r r r 4 3 2 1
B.1C	**If the proposed Action aims BOTH to meet European economic or societal needs, AND to contribute to the development of the scientific or technological field, how likely is it to achieve useful impacts?** 4. Important impacts very likely in several respects. 3. Some notable impacts likely. 2. May make some minor impacts. 1. Unlikely to make useful impacts. Comments:	high low r r r r 4 3 2 1
B.2	**Are there clear plans for stimulating the production of high quality outputs?** 4. Plans for outputs are clear, wide-ranging and ambitious. 3. Plans for outputs are reasonable. 2. Plans for outputs are unambitious or defective. 1. Plans for outputs are minimal or absent.	good little r r r r 4 3 2 1

B.3	Is attention given to the involvement of stakeholders in order to increase the potential application of results (including, where appropriate, fostering their commercial exploitation)?	
	4. Stakeholders are already part of experts who took part in the preparation of the proposal. 3. Plans for implication of stakeholders are clear, wide-ranging and feasible. 2. Plans for implication of stakeholders are reasonable. 1. Plans for implication of stakeholders are unambitious or defective.	good little r r r r 4 3 2 1

Comments:

TOTAL MARK FOR SECTION B (Max 12 x 2 = 24)	

C	STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION (Weight 1)	
C.1	**Is the proposal presented in a clear, convincing, and appropriate way?** 4. Very clearly written with compelling argument; fully appropriate format. 3. Well written; argument is easy to follow; appropriate format but may need minor changes; 2. Poorly written, but argument can be followed with effort; and/or defective format. 1. Poorly written; argument is unclear; and/or inappropriate format.	high low r r r r 4 3 2 1
C.2	**Are the workplan and organisation appropriate?** 4. Workplan and organisation make full, productive and cost-effective use of COST opportunities. 3. Workplan and organisation are reasonable, any defects are minor. 2. Workplan and/or organisation show significant defects. 1. Workplan and/or organisation are lacking or inappropriate or unclear.	very not r r r r 4 3 2 1
C.3	**Are the time schedule and the setting of milestones appropriate?** 4. Schedule and milestones are well-defined and practical. 3. Schedule and milestones are reasonable. 2. Schedule and/or milestones show some defects. 1. Schedule and/or milestones are lacking or inappropriate or unclear.	very not r r r r 4 3 2 1
C.4	**Are appropriate plans made for monitoring and evaluating the achievement of objectives?** 4. Monitoring and evaluation plans are well-defined and practical. 3. Monitoring and evaluation plans are reasonable. 2. Monitoring and evaluation plans show some defects. 1. Monitoring and evaluation plans are lacking or inappropriate or unclear.	good little r r r r 4 3 2 1

Comments:

TOTAL MARK FOR SECTION C (Max 16)	

D	CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER COST GOALS (Weight 1)	
D.1	**How well does the proposed Action aim to involve early stage researchers?** 1. An innovative plan is presented in addition to the standard template in Section E.4 of Full Proposal 0. Otherwise.	r r 1 0
D.2	**How well does the proposed Action aim at gender balance?** 1. An innovative plan is presented in addition to the standard template in Section E.4 of Full Proposal 0. Otherwise.	r r 1 0
D.3	**Does the proposed Action have the potential to contribute to the solution of global challenges in a global dimension?** 1. Proposal will certainly attract interest from a wide range of non-COST Countries if approved 0. Otherwise.	r r 1 0

Comments:

TOTAL MARK FOR SECTION D (Max 3)	

TOTAL MARK FOR FULL PROPOSAL (Threshold: 55 points out of 75)

E	OVERALL RECOMMENDATION OF EEP Comments: Strength of proposal Weakness of proposal New experts suggested by the EEP for possible nomination by the CNCs	

COST Open Call Proposal
1st stage: Preliminary Proposal

Applicant Details
Please note that proposals should come from COST Countries

For statistical purposes (mandatory):

Title: [title ▼]

Gender: [gender ▼]

Family Name: [ ]

Early-stage researcher

(less than PhD+8 years): [Yes/No ▼]

Forename: [ ]

Resubmission: [Yes/No ▼]

Year of Birth: [year ▼]

Email: [ ]

Institution: [ ]

Position [ ]

Country: [country ▼]

Contact Address : [ ]

Scientific Content

Proposal Title

[ ]

Abstract (max 1000 characters, approx. 150 words):

[ ]

Key Words (open format, max 400 characters, approx. 50 words):

Relevant COST Domains: to know more about COST Domains please click >>here<<
Select all Domains covered by your proposal

Select Domains""""""""""" | domain | ▼ |

Preferred COST Domain:
*If you don't find a suitable domain for your proposal or your proposal covers several domains, select "Transdomain (TD)"
in the drop-down*

Select Domain[1]""""""""""" | domain | ▼ |

Text of proposal (maximum 10000 characters, approx. 1500 words):
Please use the following structure:

Background, problems. for details click >>here<<
Benefits. for details click >>here<<
Objectives, Deliverables and expected scientific impact. for details click >>here<<
Scientific programme and innovation. for details click >>here<<
Organisation. for details click >>here<<

BACKGROUND, PROBLEMS ADDRESSED
BENEFITS
OBJECTIVES, DELIVERABLES AND EXPECTED SCIENTIFIC IMPACT
SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME AND INNOVATION
ORGANISATION

Participants interested in network (name, institution and country, maximum 2000 characters, approx. 300 words):

Name, Institution, Country

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[1]   IF TDP is chosen, then a box with limited space will open and ask the following:

Please shortly explain:
    — How the research topic includes two or more COST Domains.
    — How the research requires the reciprocal interaction between these Domains.
    — Why within the scientific approach, the reference to common theoretical concepts and methods as well as to their common evolution is needed for all involved Domains.

Template for Full Proposal

Introduction

In case a proposal is selected to become a COST Action, the first part of the Full Proposal, the draft Technical Annex, will become part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which is a specific formal intergovernmental document. Therefore the thorough drafting of the Full Proposal is of highest importance. The draft MoU which will be presented to the CSO for final approval consists of the Memorandum proper which is prepared by the COST Office, and the Technical Annex which is prepared by the Applicant.

Good proposals are precise, concise, formally and linguistically correct and drafted in a clear and easily understandable way.

The proposal should consist of a title page and two parts:
- Part I – the draft Technical Annex
- Part II – Additional information.

In order to help you to draft a Full Proposal that corresponds to the particular COST framework, the following guidelines – formal and content-related – have been developed. Please note that your Full Proposal may be rejected if it does not comply with these guidelines.

The structure of Part I – draft Technical Annex – of the proposal is mandatory, while the structure of Part II – Additional Information – is a recommendation (except for the List of Experts which is mandatory and must include current contact details for each named person).

Please make sure that your proposal contains all the necessary information in parts I and II for its evaluation, which must follow this template.

General specifications on the format

- The Full Proposal has to be submitted as a word file (.doc) or a rich-text format (.rtf)
- Margins: Top 2cm, Bottom 2cm, Left 2cm, Right 2cm, Header/Footer 1.25cm
- Font type: Times New Roman
- Size: 12pts
- Font colour: black
- No font effects, underlining or background colours
- Alignment: left
- No foot notes/endnotes

Formal Instructions

Language
Make sure that the text is of high linguistic quality. COST does not provide translation or correction services. Peer reviewers, likely to come from several different countries, will assess the proposal as presented.

Spelling
Have the full document spell checked. For terms like "**A**ction", "**A**ction **C**hair", "**M**anagement **C**ommittee", "**W**orking **G**roup" etc. please use capitals.

Expression
Make sure (use "Find" function on Word/Edit) in Part I
- that neither "I" nor "we" appears in the text
- that no individual scientists or institutes are mentioned in sections C and D
- that words like "planned" or "envisaged" or "proposed" about the Action are deleted. Rather use factual words such as "will be", "this COST Action" etc.
- that no references to information contained in Part II are used (such as "see attached list of experts")
- that the indicated structure A, B, C, … is respected
- that the economic dimension is properly cited and calculated

Title Page

The Title Page must contain the following information: preliminary title of the Action and acronym if applicable; the name and contact details of the applicant; the name and contact details of the COST National Coordinator of the proposing country and the date of the proposal. The names and contact details of the rapporteur appointed by the DC will be added by the COST Office.

Full Proposal for a new COST Action

Title

Applicant: *full coordinates incl. name of applicant, name of Institute, address, tel, fax and email*

COST National Coordinator:* *full coordinates incl. names, affiliation, address, tel, fax and email*

DC: *Domain name**

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* *will be completed by the COST Office*

DRAFT
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
For the implementation of a European Concerted Research Action designated as

Title

The Parties to this "Memorandum of Understanding", declaring their common intention to participate in the concerted Action referred to above and described in the "technical Annex to the Memorandum", have reached the following understanding:

1. The Action will be carried out in accordance with the provisions of document COST 4159/10 "Rules and Procedures for Implementing COST Actions", or in any new document amending or replacing it, the contents of which the Parties are fully aware of.

2. The aim of the Action is *XX.*

3. The economic dimension of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, at Euro *XX* million in *XX* prices.

4. The Memorandum of Understanding will take effect on being accepted by at least five Parties.

5. The Memorandum of Understanding will remain in force for a period of *XX* years, calculated from the date of the first meeting of the Management Committee, unless the duration of the Action is modified according to the provisions of Chapter V of the document referred to in Point 1 above.

Part I - Draft Technical Annex

A. ABSTRACT

Maximum 200 words, maximum 5 keywords or very short phrases

General remark: *Be very clear and precise as this section will form the basis for COST information – web site and booklets – and reporting. The Abstract should include the broader scientific context of the Action as well as the expected deliverables and benefits. It should also indicate the European added value of the Action and the reasons for undertaking it in the COST framework.*

B. BACKGROUND

Maximum 2-3 pages

B.1 General background

- *Define the research topic in such a way that it is clear that the network will address real current problems or scientific issues.*
- *Inform about the wider relevance of the Action (why is it desirable to launch it as COST Action).*
- *Explain why COST, which funds only networking and capacity-building activities and not research, is the best mechanism for support. State reasons **why COST** seems to offer the appropriate framework for the Action, compared to other research frameworks such as ESF, ESA, EUREKA! or the EU Framework Programme.*
- *Describe the advantages or benefits which should arise from carrying out your project within the COST framework.*

B.2 Current state of knowledge

- *Summarise the previous research in the field of the proposal.*
- *Describe the **current state of the art**, including relevant research within the EU Framework Programmes and other EU fora, comparison of EU research with that in other parts of the world.*
- *Explain how the Action will be innovative in addressing either a new problem or a new approach to an existing problem.*

B.3 Reasons for the Action

- ***Reasons for launching the Action**, indicating the need for an experts network in the area and the added value of the Action networking. Emphasise immediate and future benefits and envisaged applications (understandable for non-specialists readers).*
- *Indicate whether the Action is mainly aimed at European economic/societal needs, or at scientific/technological advance, or both.*
- *Clearly distinguish between objectives, expected results and the means that are needed to achieve them. The impact of COST comes from concrete outcomes, not just activity; so indicate how the Action will aim for maximally productive outcomes.*
- *If this is a Trans-Domain proposal, clearly demonstrate the following:*
  - *How the research topic includes two or more COST Domains.*
  - *How the research requires the reciprocal interaction between these Domains.*
  - *Why within the scientific approach, the reference to common theoretical concepts and methods as well as to their common evolution is needed for all involved Domains.*

B.4 Complementarity with other research programmes (if appropriate)

- *Relevant links to and complementarity with any current and/or planned European research projects, such as ESF, FP, EUREKA! (bear in mind that avoiding duplication is one of the goals of COST)*

C. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS

Maximum 2 pages

C.1 Aim

Standard text as first item of this section (as this sentence will be quoted word for word in point 2 of the Memorandum proper, it should be extremely concise):

"The aim of the Action is… *(please add)*"

- *The impact of COST comes from concrete outcomes, not just activity. Therefore indicate clearly* **what should be achieved** *through the Action. Given that all COST Actions are networks of scientists, the objectives should therefore clearly state the purpose of such networking, indicating - where possible - clear expected deliverables, not only research activities to be undertaken. However, if the proposed Action is of specially novel or "high risk" nature so that concrete deliverables are difficult to envisage, this should be explained clearly in the proposal.*

C.2 Objectives

- **List and explain objectives** *(whenever possible in quantitative terms, which will make it easier to evaluate how well the Action may achieve its goals).*

C.3 How networking within the Action will yield the objectives?

- **Distinguish between objectives** *(aims of the Action)* **and means needed** *(manpower, equipment, etc.)* **to achieve these objectives** *(avoid any reference to method and means – e.g. scientific problems to be solved as well as research tasks – as they belong to section D (Scientific programme) detailed below).*

C.4 Potential impact of the Action

- *Describe expected benefits that will stem from the Action (with reference to section B).*

C.5 Target groups/end users

- *Reflect on the likely stakeholders and end users that will exploit the expected results. Indicate whether they were involved in the preparation of the proposal.*

D. SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

Maximum 3-4 pages

D.1 Scientific focus

- *Describe the **most important research tasks** to be coordinated by the Action.*
- *Provide a structured, but not too detailed work plan flexible enough to permit the inclusion, at the implementation stage, of disciplinary perspectives and activities not foreseen during the preparation of the proposal. Keep the framework of the Action open and flexible.*
- *Explain the human and technical **means to achieve the objectives** described in section C.*
- ***Remember that this section must be clear to non-specialists** (even if the description may be more "technical").*

D.2 Scientific work plan – methods and means

- ***Do not mention explicitly** the names of individual scientists, specific research institutions or other bodies (only exceptionally, if the Action cannot be implemented without the participation of a specific Institution, you should clearly mention this with the relevant explanation);*
  Always remember that scientists who have not participated in the preparation are also entitled to join if their countries accept the MoU.
- ***Focus on work plan and methods** of the Action and not on its organisation.*
- *If you plan Working Groups, you may mention their objectives and what they will achieve.*

E. ORGANISATION

Maximum 2 pages

General remark: **You need not reiterate organisational features common for all COST Actions**, *described in the "Rules and Procedures for Implementing COST Actions" (doc. COST 4159/10). As a rule, organisational matters should be mentioned only if you intend to apply them in some specific way. In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions or contradictions, please refer to Rules and Procedures when drafting this section.*

E.1 Coordination and organisation

- *Give a clear picture of the management and organisation of the Action.*
- *Reflect the fact that a COST Action is implemented through a **concerted action**, which means that the research is carried out in and financed by the participating countries, while COST provides the necessary co-ordination.*
- *Use **organisational features common to all COST Actions**, but also allow for limited **Action-specific variations** (e.g. you may want to introduce a Steering Group, an Editorial Board, STSM manager, etc.). Consult "Rules and Procedures for implementing COST Actions". Keep in mind in particular that the Management Committee remains ultimately in charge of the Action, whilst it may arrange for particular support to it or its Chair in their tasks.*
- *Mention **milestones** – major achievements that are crucial to the future direction of the Action.*
- *Explain **how the coordination of national research will be implemented** (including the creation of possible common research teams, conferences and workshops, short-term scientific missions or other exchanges between laboratories, training schools, websites, etc.).*
- *Be aware of the **obligation to set up an Action specific website** that will not duplicate general information already available from the COST website (e.g. list of Parties, MC list, etc.) and to keep it updated: Include a plan to keep this website up to date, both to serve the needs of the participants and with the specific aim of ensuring the dissemination or exploitation of the results of the Action.*
- *As a rule, do not list names of interested research establishments and scientists.(This will be part of the Additional Information.)*

E.2 Working Groups

- *Working Groups are a useful way of extending the Action beyond the membership of the Management Committee and of sharing workloads.*
- *An Action has normally 4, but not more than 6 Working Groups.*
- *If you plan Working Groups, explain their organisation (without repeating unnecessarily the "Scientific Programme" given under Section D).*

E.3 Liaison and interaction with other research programmes

- *Address possible liaisons and interaction with other COST Actions and other European and international research programmes, such as ESF, FP, EUREKA!, etc.*
- *Indicate how these interactions will be organised: by exchange of information, meetings, by joint seminars or any other means.*

E.4 Gender balance and involvement of early-stage researchers

The following paragraph is compulsory:

"This COST Action will respect an appropriate gender balance in all its activities and the Management Committee will place this as a standard item on all its MC agendas. The Action will also be committed to considerably involve early-stage researchers. This item will also be placed as a standard item on all MC agendas."

Please add any additional support the Action plans concerning gender balance and the involvement of early-stage researchers, in particular with respect to the organisation of training schools, STSMs etc. Explain how you intend to realise capacity building.

F. TIMETABLE

Maximum ½ page

- *Give a **clear picture of the timescale** of the Action and an **explicit estimate of the total duration** of the Action, preferably in the first paragraph. (This estimate will be quoted in the Memorandum proper and will determine the period for which the MoU enters into force.)*
- *Bear in mind that the normal duration of a COST Action is normally **four years**, unless there are specific cases to be approved by the CSO, on the basis of a justification provided in the proposal.*
- *Use **relative time scales** (Year 1, Year 2, etc) rather than specific years.*

G. ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Maximum ½ page

General remark: The purpose of this section is to provide an estimate of the total manpower expressed in person-years dedicated to the activities of the Action for each year and the total duration of the Action (The maximum would therefore normally be 10 person-years per country, in the case that 2 persons on the MC and 2 on each of 4 WGs from that country all work full time on COST.) An average of 100.000 € per scientist including overhead can normally be used as basis for the calculation. Additional expenses, such as equipment, instruments and/or infrastructure, should be added to the total. Please round up the total to the next full Million.

"The following COST Countries have actively participated in the preparation of the Action or otherwise indicated their interest: **<list of the relevant countries>.**

On the basis of national estimates, the economic dimension of the activities to be carried out under the Action has been estimated at **X** Million € for the total duration of the Action.

This estimate is valid under the assumption that all the countries mentioned above but no other countries will participate in the Action. Any departure from this will change the total cost accordingly."

H. DISSEMINATION PLAN

Maximum 2 pages

H.1 Who?

- *Identify the **target audiences** for the dissemination of the results of the Action (in particular findings and recommendations), e.g. other researchers working in the field; other research frameworks; research Institutes and Academia; Standards Bodies; industry (represented by manufacturers and service providers); European level policy makers; Government policy makers, regional planners and policy makers; general public.*

H.2 What?

- *Describe the **dissemination methods** you intend to use.*
- *For each of your audiences you may choose several of the existing possibilities, e.g.*
  - *posting of general information on a public website;*
  - *posting of working documents on a password protected website;*
  - *set up of an electronic communication network (internet discussion forum, e-mail network, etc.);*
  - *publications: state of the art reports, interim reports, case study reports, proceedings, guidelines, manuals, final reports;*
  - *events: workshops, seminars and conferences organised by the MC, contributions to other national and international conferences and symposia;*
  - *articles in peer-reviewed scientific and technical Journals;*
  - *non-technical publications.*

H.3 How?

- *Describe **how these dissemination methods will be used**.*
- *Note that dissemination goes beyond publication of results.*
- *Take into consideration the progress of the Action as well the results of its evaluation in updating the dissemination plan during the course of the Action.*

For details, see chapter 9: "Dissemination of results".

Part II – Additional Information

Maximum 10 pages (excluding Part A)

General remark: The main purpose of the second part of the proposal is to facilitate the assessment of the proposal and the nomination of National Representatives to the Management Committee (MC). This part will not be element of the MoU. To some extent, however, the information contained in it may also be useful, when the Action starts and a detailed work programme is being planned. Note that part A (List of Experts) is mandatory as the information given here is important for the later nominations to the MC.

The structure of the Additional Information is not standardised and you are at liberty to structure it in any logical way. A suggested guideline is given hereafter under the following subheadings:

A. LIST OF EXPERTS

Two lists should be submitted. The first is a list of experts who have been consulted during the drafting of the proposal and who have already expressed interest in participating in the Action. The second list, if appropriate, covers those experts who may well be interested but who have not been contacted, or who have not yet replied, during the pre-proposal planning.
Please highlight the experts that might be part of the Management Committee (give full contact details), subject to the appointment by the COST Countries concerned. For the others, please list only title, institution and e-mail.

Name and title: **Country:**   Institution:

Contact details (if appropriate):

E-mail: Telephone:

At the stage of approval of the draft MoU, remember to provide, the COST Office with a detailed updated list of potential participants in the Action for the CSO, in order to facilitate the work of the CNCs (clearly distinguishing contacted and non-contacted experts).

B. HISTORY OF THE PROPOSAL

The purpose of this section is to give the historical background of the proposal: how the idea of the COST Action was born and how the subsequent definition of the objectives and the pre-proposal planning was carried out.

C. PRELIMINARY WORK PROGRAMME

Especially if the proposal is very complex and based on participation of research teams from different fields of research interacting in a specific way, you may wish to explain how this has been envisaged, at a more concrete level than that indicated in the draft Technical Annex.

D. RECENT PUBLICATIONS

In order to make it easier to assess the scientific merits of the proposal, you may wish to compile a short list of recent scientific publications relating to the topic of the Action. If desired, you could group all the publications authored or co-authored by you as a kind of scientific self-portrait. This should be a maximum of 2 pages.

E. FURTHER REMARKS

In this subheading you may add any information or remarks but also comment on the following assessment criteria as outlined in Annex B.

- *To what extent does the proposed network aim at involving early-stage researchers?*
- *To what extent does the proposed network aim at being gender balanced?*
- *Does the number of countries the Applicants come from reflect a wide European dimension?*
- *To what extent have provisions been made for monitoring and evaluating the achievement of objectives?*
- *To what extent have provisions been made for assessing potential application, and fostering exploitation, of results?*

Checklist for Applicants of new COST Actions

Before submitting your Full Proposal, please check it against the following items:

- Confirming to the title page template given in the Template
- Respecting the formatting guidelines
- Respecting the indicated structure of the draft Technical Annex
- Presenting the text in a logical way, avoiding unnecessary repetition between the different sections
- Respecting the word limits
- Language check
- Spell check
- Use of capital letters for COST-specific and Action-related expressions; non-exhaustive list: Action, Action Chair, Management Committee, Working Group, STSM (Short-Term Scientific Mission), Steering Group, etc.
- Explaining all acronyms (including those commonly used in the Framework Programme context)
- Use of "Europe" or "COST 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 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 Framework Programme)
- No mentioning of individual scientists, institutes or organisations
- 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 unsubstantiated "value judgements" (neutrality of research) or "overstatements" (regarding the potential/importance of the Action)
- Proper quoting of standard texts (Part A: main objectives; part E: commitment to gender balance and involvement of early-stage researchers; part G: economic dimension)
- Proper calculation of the economic dimension in part G
- Clarity and comprehensibility (also for non-specialist readers)
- Addressing all indicated items

OPEN CALL

European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST)

COST brings together researchers and experts in different countries working on specific topics. COST does NOT fund research itself, but supports networking activities such as meetings, conferences, short term scientific exchanges and outreach activities. Currently more than *(xx)* scientific networks (Actions) are supported.

COST invites proposals for Actions contributing to the scientific, technological, economic, cultural or societal development of Europe. Proposals playing a precursor role for other European programmes and/or initiated by early-stage researchers are especially welcome.

Developing stronger links amongst European researchers is crucial to building the European Research Area (ERA). COST stimulates new, innovative, interdisciplinary and broad research networks in Europe. COST activities are carried out by research teams to strengthen the foundations for building scientific excellence in Europe.

COST is organised in nine broad Domains (Biomedicine and Molecular Biosciences; Chemistry and Molecular Sciences and Technologies; Earth System Science and Environmental Management; Food and Agriculture; Forests, their Products and Services; Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health; Information and Communication Technologies; Materials, Physics and Nanosciences; Transport and Urban Development). The intended coverage of each Domain is explained at www.cost.eu.

Applicants are invited to locate their topic within one Domain. However, inter-disciplinary proposals not fitting readily into a single Domain are particularly welcome and will be assessed separately.

Proposals should include researchers from a minimum of five COST Countries. Financial support in the range of *(xx)* € p.a. for normally 4 years can be expected, subject to available budget.

Proposals will be assessed in two stages. *Preliminary Proposals* (maximum 1500 words/3 pages), submitted using the on-line template at www.cost.eu/opencall should provide a brief overview of the proposal and its intended impact. Proposals not conforming to the eligibility criteria of COST (e.g. requesting research funding) will be excluded. Eligible Proposals will be assessed by the relevant Domain Committees in accordance with the published criteria at www.cost.eu. Applicants of selected Preliminary Proposals will be invited to submit a Full Proposal. Full Proposals will be peer reviewed according to the assessment criteria at www.cost.eu/opencall. The decision will normally be taken within six months of the collection date and the Actions should expect to start within three months thereafter.
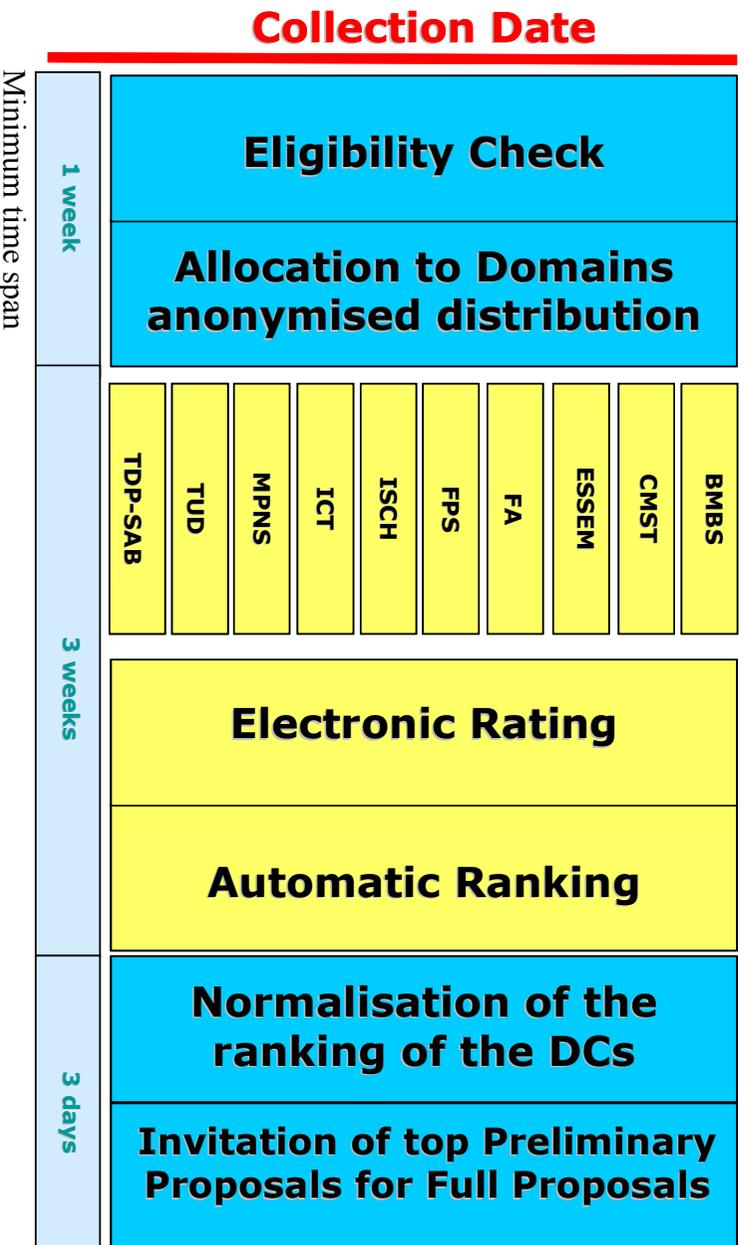
The collection date for Preliminary Proposals is (*date*), 17:00 Brussels time. Approximately (*xx*) Full Proposals will be invited for final selection of up to (*xx*) new Actions, subject to available budget. Full Proposals will be invited by (*date*) for submission by (*date*), with decisions expected in (*date*). The next collection date is envisaged for (*date*).

Applicants may wish to contact their national COST Coordinator (CNC) for information and guidance – see www.cost.eu/cnc.

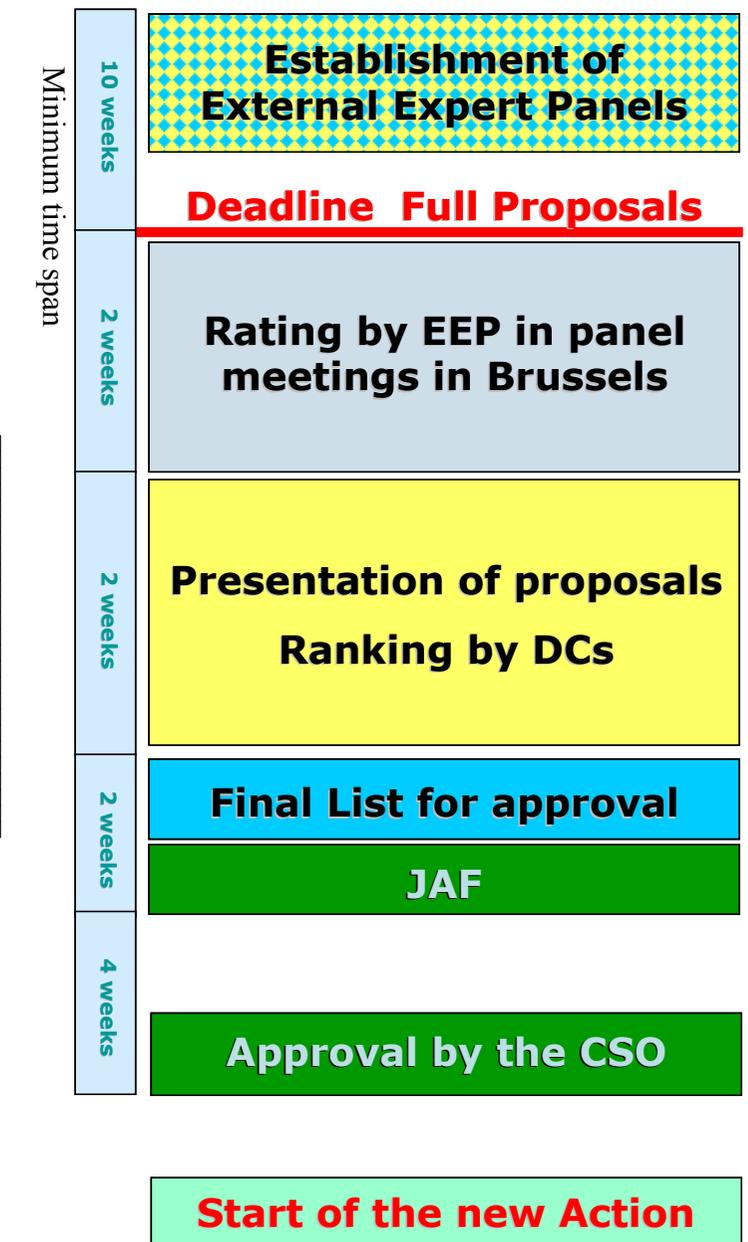Proposals must be submitted on-line to the COST Office website.

COST receives financial support for its coordinating activities from the EU RTD Framework Programme. The COST Office, set up by the European Science Foundation (ESF), acting as the implementing agent for COST, provides and manages the administrative, scientific and technical secretariat for COST, its Domain Committees and its Actions.

Selection process – Preliminary Proposals:

Collection Date

Minimum time span		
1 week	**Eligibility Check**	
	Allocation to Domains anonymised distribution	
3 weeks	TDP-SAB / TUD / MPNS / ICT / ISCH / FPS / FA / ESSEM / CMST / BMBS	
	Electronic Rating	
	Automatic Ranking	
3 days	**Normalisation of the ranking of the DCs**	
	Invitation of top Preliminary Proposals for Full Proposals	

Selection process – Full Proposals:

Minimum time span	
10 weeks	**Establishment of External Expert Panels**
	Deadline Full Proposals
2 weeks	**Rating by EEP in panel meetings in Brussels**
2 weeks	**Presentation of proposals / Ranking by DCs**
2 weeks	**Final List for approval**
	JAF
4 weeks	**Approval by the CSO**
	Start of the new Action

List of acronyms

APC	Annual Progress Conference
BMBS	Biomedicine and Molecular Biosciences
CEN	European Committee for Standardization
CMST	Chemistry and Molecular Sciences and Technologies
COST	European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research
CNC	COST National Co-ordinator
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials
DC	Domain Committee
ESR	Early Stage Researchers
ESSEM	Earth System Science and Environmental Management
EEP	External Expert Panel
ERA	European Research Area
ESF	European Science Foundation
ESA	European Space Agency
EU	European Union
FA	Food and Agriculture
FP	Framework Programme
FPS	Forests, their Products and Services
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ISCH	Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health
JAF	COST Working Group on Legal, Administrative and Financial Affairs
MC	Management Committee
MPNS	Materials, Physics and Nanosciences
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
R&D	Research and Development
RTD	Research and Technological Development
TDP	Trans Domain Proposal
TDP-SAB	Trans Domain Proposal Standing Assessment Board
TUD	Transport and Urban Development

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