

# Guide for Independent External Experts (IEEs)

## COST Open Call 2023-1 Evaluation

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to facilitate and instruct Independent External Experts (IEEs) to ensure a high-quality and standardised assessment of COST Action proposals. As such, it is focused on the role of IEEs in the Open Call process, including the requirements of confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest, and it illustrates the evaluation process in practice.

Assigned IEEs must be familiar with the COST framework. To learn about COST, COST Actions and the COST Open Call, IEEs are invited to read the following documents:

- [COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(COST 101/21\)](#)
- [COST Open Call – Applicant Guidelines \(Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval - SESA\)](#)

Finally, general information about COST and its activities is available at <https://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/about-cost/>.

## 1. OVERVIEW OF COST FRAMEWORK, COST ACTION AND OPEN CALL PROCESS

### 1.1. The COST framework: mission and policy

COST is a pan-European intergovernmental framework<sup>1</sup> dedicated to European-based Science and Technology (S&T) networking activities aiming at allowing their participants to jointly develop their ideas and new initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European coordination of nationally or otherwise funded research activities. COST has been contributing since its creation in 1971 to closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond.

The COST **Mission** is to provide networking opportunities for researchers and innovators in order to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges. There are three strategic priorities:

- promoting and spreading excellence;
- fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science;
- empowering and retaining young researchers.

COST implements its mission by funding bottom-up, excellence-driven, open and inclusive networks for peaceful purposes in all areas of science and technology.

To achieve its mission, COST provides support for activities such as:

- the development of European-based scientific and technological networks in any scientific or interdisciplinary domain;
- the exploitation of the research outcomes by integrating all stakeholders, thereby intensifying the links between scientific communities, enterprises, policy makers and society;
- the dissemination of results of such research activities in order to improve their scientific, social and economic impact;
- the provision for collaboration opportunities to all researchers to employ all talented and creative human resources available in Europe overcoming the bottlenecks linked to geographic location, age or gender;
- the facilitation of the international collaboration of the European research networks, thereby increasing their efficiency, effectiveness and impact within the European Research Area (ERA) and at global level;

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

- COST has put in place the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness policy and a set of rules aiming at fulfilling its mission and specific objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> and gender balance throughout its activities and operations.

This policy aims to provide collaboration opportunities to all researchers and innovators in COST Full or Cooperating Members<sup>3</sup> 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) (see [Annex I – Level A: Country and Organisations table](#));
- counterbalancing research communities' unequal access to knowledge, infrastructures, funding and resources;
- providing strong means to increase the visibility and integration of researchers to the leading knowledge hubs of Europe, as well as to acquire their necessary leadership skills, regardless of their location, age or gender;
- smoothly contributing to trigger structural changes in the national research systems of COST Members;
- identifying excellence across Europe to contribute to ERA widening objectives.

Through COST global networking, COST encourages the participation of researchers and innovators affiliated in non-COST Members<sup>4</sup> and Specific Organisations in COST activities on the basis of mutual benefit. The participation of researchers from Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) is particularly encouraged, according to the provisions related to eligibility for both participation and reimbursement set in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

Further, COST aims at enabling fruitful collaborations between researchers, innovators and other stakeholders and business by providing a platform for them to meet and build mutual trust. It also aims at increasing impact of research in the industrial sector. With this purpose, COST promotes the use and development of technologies, as well as the exploitation<sup>5</sup> of COST Action results and outcomes through dedicated dissemination and exploitation activities targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large companies in Europe.

## 1.2. COST Actions

COST funds **networking activities** to the benefit of nationally or otherwise funded research activities.

COST Actions are Science and Technology (S&T) networks open to researchers and innovators affiliated to universities, research centres, companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as other stakeholders and relevant legal entities. All the relevant information to manage a COST Action is presented in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#). COST Actions 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 activities:

- Meetings (e.g., Management Committee meetings, Working Group meetings);
- Training Schools;

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<sup>2</sup> COST has a special focus on Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI), defined as 'researchers or innovators under the age of 40' (COST Glossary - <https://www.cost.eu/Glossary>)

<sup>3</sup> See the list of countries in COST 088/21 Rules and Principles for COST Activities, [Annex I](#)

<sup>4</sup> States that are not COST Members. They can be Near Neighbour Countries or Third States (also called International Partner Countries)

<sup>5</sup> See [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#), Chapter 5.5.2 on Intellectual Property Rights on Action results

- Mobility of Researchers and Innovators (Short-Term Scientific Missions – STSMs; Virtual Mobility - VM);
- Presentations at conferences organised by third parties (ITC Conference presentation and Dissemination presentations).

Further, COST Actions can receive funding for other expenses supporting the Action:

- Dissemination and Communication Products;  
Expenses incurred for the benefit of the network (OERSA and Virtual Networking Support VNS).

**No budget forecast is requested when submitting a proposal.** For information, in recent years, the average funding received during the 4-year duration of a COST Action amounts to 600,000 EUR. The amounts are variable from a grant period to another and depends, among others, on the size of the network and overall budget available to COST. COST Actions are:

- **Pan-European:** the COST inter-governmental framework spans over 41 Full Members, one Cooperating Member, and one Partner Member;
- **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;
- **Unique:** as a platform to coordinate national research funding and resources within a well-defined 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 shall promote actively the participation of the next generation of researchers and innovators. Thus, COST Actions are especially well-suited to pursue **new ideas through collaborative efforts** and/or to **build communities** around emerging S&T topics and societal questions.

### 1.2.1. COST ACTION STRUCTURE

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

The **Action Management Committee (MC)** is the decision-making body. The Action MC is responsible for the coordination, implementation and management of the Action activities and for supervising the appropriate allocation and use of the grant with a view to achieve the Action's scientific and technological objectives. It is composed of:

**MC Members:** up to two representatives of the COST Full or Cooperating Member. Nomination of MC Members is a national prerogative, follows national procedures, and is performed by the COST National Coordinator's (CNCs)<sup>6</sup>.

**MC Observers:**

- up to two representatives of the COST Partner Member. Action MC Observers from the Partner Member are nominated by the respective COST National Coordinator (CNC);
- up to one representative of the Specific Organisation that joined the Action. Action MC Observers from Specific Organisations are nominated by the Specific Organisation.

The MC takes decisions by simple majority vote. MC Observers have no voting rights.

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<sup>6</sup> Before the start of the Action (date of the first Management Committee meeting), persons nominated by the CNC will automatically become Action MC Members. After the Action's first MC meeting, new Action MC Members need to be validated by the Action MC.

**Working Groups (WGs)** are in charge of developing the scientific activities needed to achieve the Action objectives, in line with the Action strategy defined by the Action MC. The composition is based on WG applications submitted via the Action page on the COST website, the leadership is subject to the Action MC vote, and the activity of the WG is defined by the MC and the MoU.

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 Action MC, taking advantage of the full range of the COST **networking activities**. The rules applying to their funding are defined in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

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

## 1.2.2. PARTICIPANTS

COST Actions are open to all researchers and innovators who are committed to work on and achieve the Action objectives and are affiliated to a legal entity<sup>7</sup>. Action Participants are defined as any person being an Action MC Member, an Action MC Observer, a Working Group member or an ad hoc participant:

**Action MC Members and Observers:** their role is to represent and benefit their national community and pro-actively participate in the implementation of coordination and management decisions in the Action.

**WG members:** any individual affiliated to a legal entity in any country in the world may become a WG member. Their participation needs to be approved by the Action MC, based on an application submitted through the Action page on the COST website. Their role is to contribute to the achievement of the Action objectives through their participation in WG(s).

**Ad hoc Participants:** Individuals selected, as necessary, by the Action MC to contribute to the COST Action activities towards the achievement of the COST Action Objectives. Ad hoc participants can be STSM grantees, trainees and trainers in Training Schools, and invited speakers at COST Action Workshops and Conferences.

All Action Participants must be affiliated to a legal entity located in a COST Member or in any NNC or Third State (IPC<sup>8</sup>).

A **legal entity** can be (non-exhaustive list) a public entity (national, regional, local public authority or any other kind of public entity), a university, a research centre, company, association, Specific Organisation or any other form of legal entity recognised under a national or international framework<sup>9</sup>.

The eligibility for reimbursement and the rules for participation depend on the status of country or specific organisation the participant is affiliated to according to COST rules (see [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#) and [Annex I – Level A : Country and Organisations table](#)).

The procedures to participate in a COST Action may be found in the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

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<sup>7</sup> For more detailed information, please check [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

<sup>8</sup> International Partner Countries (IPC) – Third States: States that are neither COST Members nor COST Near Neighbour Countries (e.g., Argentina, Japan, US, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 4.1.1.1.1 in the [COST 094/21 Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

## 1.3. COST Open Call and SESA processes

The COST Open Call is implemented via the Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) procedure. COST publishes the official announcement of the Open Call on [Funding Documents & Guidelines](#) with the Collection Date, the schedule, the description of the procedure and reference to the evaluation criteria. Further information including an Open Call infographic is available on the [Open Call page](#) on the COST website.

The proposal submission involves a one-stage submission process. Proposals may be submitted through a dedicated secured online tool, [e-COST](#).

The proposal evaluation and selection follow a three-step process, with Step 1 being the focus of these guidelines:

### **Step 1 – Evaluation by Independent External Experts**

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

### **Step 3 – Proposals' Selection by COST Scientific Committee (SC)**

The shortlist of proposals selected by the SC is submitted to the CSO for approval. Further details about the three-step process and the approval are provided in the rules on [COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(COST 101/21\)](#).

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

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

## 2. THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN PRACTICE

Independent External Experts (IEEs) carry out the remote peer-review evaluation. They are identified and assigned to proposals on the basis of their scientific and technological expertise necessary for the evaluation of proposals, taking into account the Research Areas and keywords selected by the network of proposers.

This step uses double-blind peer review, which means the identity of both IEEs and proposers is kept confidential. Each proposal is evaluated by a minimum of three IEEs. The evaluation is performed remotely, and each IEE submits an Individual Evaluation Report (IER) for each proposal they evaluate. One of the IEEs is appointed Rapporteur, with the responsibility to coordinate the preparation and submission of the Consensus Evaluation Report (CER).

Following the submission of the IERs, a consensus is sought among the IEEs (remotely) and a CER is drafted. Consensus shall not be imposed, and IEEs may maintain their views on the proposal. In the cases where no consensus is reached, the three IERs are sent to the Review Panel member in charge of the quality check and resolution of discrepancies.

This chapter provides practical guidance on the whole evaluation process. Particular attention should be paid to how comments are drafted and scored. **It is of utmost importance that the evaluation task is carried out in the fairest, most accurate and consistent way, as it significantly affects the final selection of proposals.**

The remote evaluation of proposals is performed on the e-COST platform. The IEE needs to select the link "My evaluations for (Call number)", after logging onto the e-COST platform, as seen in Figure 1.



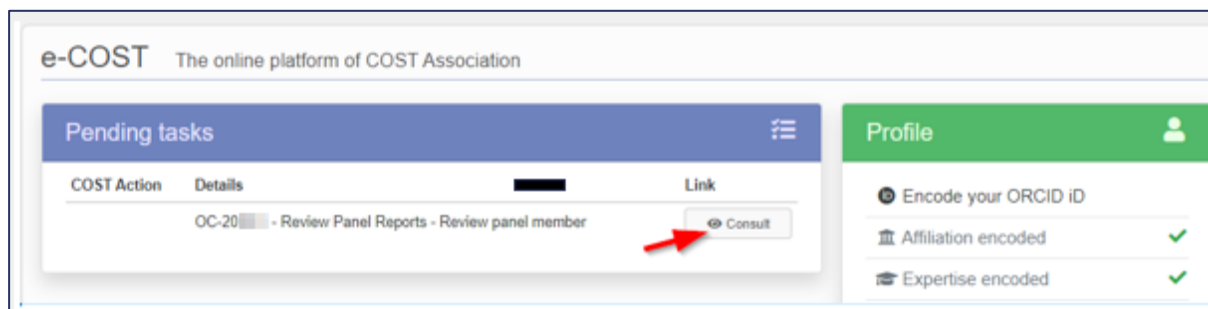


Figure 1: Screenshot of e-COST on how to access the evaluation panel.

## 2.1. OC-2023-1 Evaluation Schedule

The foreseen schedule for the evaluation of proposals submitted to the COST Open Call 2023-1 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Foreseen OC-2023-1 Evaluation schedule.

Activity	Foreseen Schedule	Reference chapters in these guidelines
<b>Acceptance of terms and conditions</b> for the assigned proposal(s)	Deadline: 15 December 2023 12 o'clock (noon) CET	Chapters 2.2, 3.1 and 3.2
<b>Individual Evaluation Report(s)</b> preparation and submission, including eligibility check	From 11 December 2023 to 12 January 2024, 12 o'clock (noon) CET	Chapters 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7 and 2.8
<b>Consensus Evaluation Report(s)</b> preparation and submission, including voting	From 24 January 2024 to 6 February 2024, 12 o'clock (noon) CET	Chapters 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8
<b>Confirmation of potential mark changes</b> following the Review Panel meeting (12-14 March 2024)	From 14 to 19 March 2024	Chapter 2.9

The COST Association reserves the right to slightly modify the foreseen schedule. Assigned IEEs and RP members will be informed in a timely manner in case of any modification.

## 2.2. Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

To access the assigned proposal(s) and the documentation needed for performing the evaluation task, the IEE has to accept the Evaluation Terms and Conditions (Figure 2), including:

- Declaration of no Conflict of Interest (CoI, see chapter 3.1);
- Declaration of confidentiality agreement (see chapter 3.2);
- Acceptance of not participating in Actions originating from proposals evaluated;
- Consent to sharing contact details and the Individual Evaluation Report with other IEEs assigned to the proposal for the purpose of preparing its Consensus Evaluation Report.



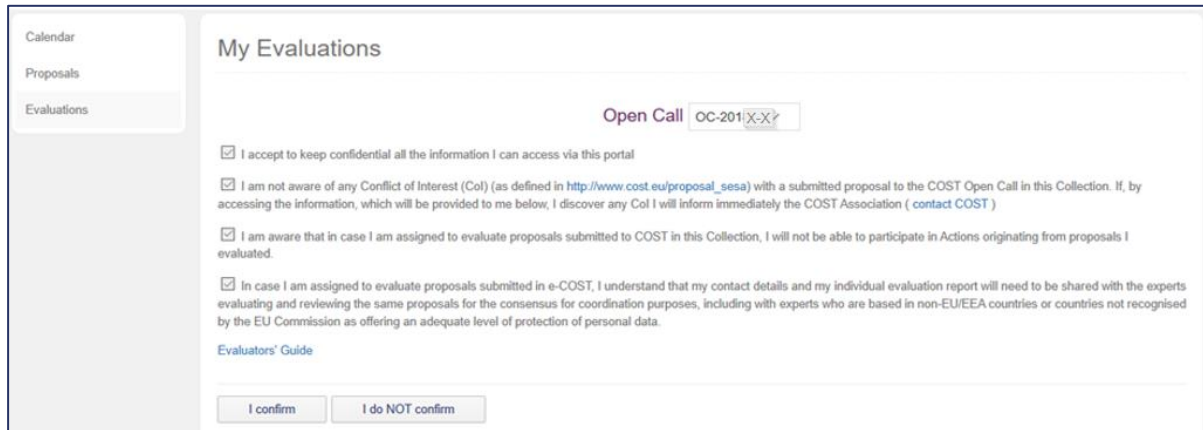


Figure 2: Screenshot of e-COST with the Terms and Conditions.

**Note that in case Col arises (real, potential, perceived - see chapter 3.1 for definitions) during the evaluation:** in this case, the IEE must **immediately**:

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

Any of the provided comments and scores already given will be discarded.

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

### 2.3. Preparation and Submission of the Individual Evaluation Report (IER)

For each proposal, the assigned IEE shall carry out an Eligibility check and fill in the Individual Evaluation Report (IER). The submission of the IER is possible only once all its mandatory sections are complete.

The IEE has access to the assigned proposal(s) on e-COST. As shown in Figure 3, there are three icons for each proposal:

- The left icon gives access to the proposal (PDF file) to be evaluated.
- The middle icon gives access to the evaluation form, to be completed online on e-COST. By clicking on it, the IEE can start the evaluation of the proposal.
- The right icon generates the evaluation form in a PDF format.




Status	Proposal	Evaluation
To be evaluated		 

Figure 3: Screenshot of e-COST showing how to access the Proposal and the evaluation pages.

The following chapters illustrate how to perform the eligibility check and complete an Individual Evaluation Report (IER).

### 2.4. Proposal Eligibility check

The IEE shall check the compliance to eligibility criteria for each assigned proposal. By clicking on the “X” in the box named “Eligibility” (Figure 4), the Eligibility section of the evaluation form is opened.

Questions in grey need to be completed. The triangle indicates the current position.

Eligibility	S&T Excellence			Networking Excellence			Impact			Implementation
▼	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
▲										

Figure 4: Screenshot of e-COST showing the evaluation panel.

The IEE must answer each of the questions listed in Table 2, providing a justification when required.

Table 2: Questions in the “Eligibility” section of the evaluation form.

<b>Is the technical annex of the proposal longer than 15 pages?</b>
For this criterion, only the length of the Technical Annex is to be considered. In the proposal, the Technical Annex starts after the keywords of the proposal overview and ends before the page titled "References".
Yes/No Justification (not mandatory)
<b>Is any part of the proposal not written in English?</b>
Yes/No Justification (not mandatory)
<b>Does the proposal address a challenge not destined solely for peaceful purposes?</b>
Please note that only the content of the proposal should be considered.
Yes/No Justification (mandatory in case of Yes). Please provide the explanation why the proposal does not comply with this criterion and indicate the text excerpts and/or the page numbers where this can be identified.
<b>Is there in the proposal a direct reference to a name and/or institutions of affiliation of any of the proposers (main and secondary)?</b>
Yes/No Justification (mandatory in case of Yes). Please provide the explanation why the proposal does not comply with this criterion and indicate the text excerpts and/or the page(s) numbers where this can be identified.
<b>Is a proposer identifiable through a direct reference to previous or ongoing grants, grant applications, EU projects, Networks, etc.?</b>
Yes/No Justification (mandatory in case of Yes). Please provide the explanation why the proposal does not comply with this criterion and indicate the text excerpts and/or the page numbers where this can be identified.
<b>Is there a clear self-citation?</b>
<b>Self-citation: cited bibliography that is explicitly attributed to the participants in the Network of Proposers.</b>
Yes/No Justification (mandatory in case of Yes). Please provide the explanation why the proposal does not comply with this criterion and indicate the text excerpts and/or the page numbers where this can be identified.
<b>From the information in the proposal, can you clearly identify one or more participants in the network of proposers?</b>
Yes/No Justification (mandatory). Please provide the explanation why the proposal does not comply with this criterion and indicate the text excerpts and/or the page numbers where this can be identified.

## 2.5. Evaluation Criteria

In addition to complete the eligibility check, the IEE has to answer all the ten evaluation questions to complete the evaluation form. To fill in a specific question, the IEE can click the “X” under the corresponding question such as Q1, Q2 to Q10, as shown in Figure 5.

Questions in grey need to be completed. The triangle indicates the current position.

Eligibility	S&T Excellence			Networking Excellence			Impact			Implementation
✓	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	▲									

Figure 5: Screenshot of e-COST showing the evaluation panel.

For each question, the IEE must:

1) **Select** one of the six statements reflecting the evaluation assessment. These statements are intended to help the IEE in the elaboration of the comments, as shown in Figure 6.

S&T Excellence >> Soundness of the Challenge

Q1. Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field and present a relevant and timely challenge?

- The proposal addresses this question in an excellent manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a very good manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a good manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a fair manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a poor manner.
- The proposal fails to address the question under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Figure 6: Screenshot of e-COST showing the available statements valid for each evaluation question.

2) **Fill in** the comment boxes:

Case 1: Only one comment box is displayed when one of these evaluation statements is selected:

- ‘the proposal addressed this question in an excellent manner’
- ‘the proposal addressed this question in a poor manner’
- ‘the proposal fails to address the question under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information’

Case 2: Two comment boxes are displayed for all other statements, as shown in Figure 7.

Q1. Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field and present a relevant and timely challenge?

- The proposal addresses this question in an excellent manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a very good manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a good manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a fair manner.
- The proposal addresses this question in a poor manner.
- The proposal fails to address the question under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Main strengths:

250 words limit

The proposal would benefit from certain improvements:

250 words limit

Figure 7: Screenshot of e-COST with the comment boxes to be compiled with the justification for a given statement.

The IEE must provide coherent and consistent comments, that correspond with the selected evaluation statement (see also Chapter 2.7).

Once the comments are completed, the IEE should **save** them and move to the following question.

The IER can be submitted upon completion of the evaluation questions (Figure 8). Please note that **the “Submit” button is available only upon completion of the eligibility and the ten questions.**

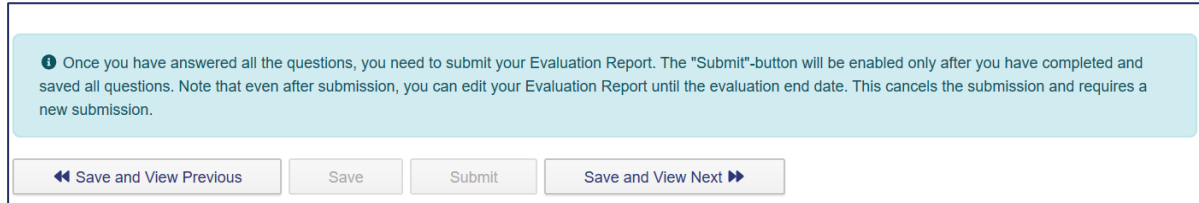


Figure 8: Screenshot of e-COST showing the submission pane active once all questions have been addressed.

It is possible to change the submitted IER multiple times before the deadline. After the deadline, the IER is locked and can no longer be modified.

**Case of no deadline compliance:** if an IER is not completed and submitted before the deadline, the involved IEE might be removed from the evaluation process of this specific proposal, losing the entitlement to the honorarium for that evaluation.

Table 3 summarises the **four evaluation criteria**, the respective maximum scoring and the overall threshold required to access to the Selection stage. Proposals scored below the overall threshold cannot be funded.

Table 3: Evaluation criteria and maximum mark per criterion.

S&T EXCELLENCE	NETWORKING EXCELLENCE	IMPACT	IMPLEMENTATION
Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 15 points	Total mark for the section = 5 points
<b>TOTAL MARKS AWARDED = 0 – 50 points</b>			
<b>OVERALL THRESHOLD = 34 points</b>			

The scoring uses a harmonised scale for all the evaluation criteria as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Scale for the evaluation criteria.

Mark	Abbreviation displayed in e-COST	Label	Description
5	E	Excellent	The proposal fully addresses all relevant aspects of the question. Any shortcomings are minor.
4	VG	Very Good	The proposal addresses the question very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
3	G	Good	The proposal addresses the question well, although improvements would be necessary.
2	F	Fair	While the proposal broadly addresses the question, there are significant weaknesses.
1	P	Poor	The question is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
0	Fail	Fail	The proposal fails to address the question under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Table 5 shows the specific questions on each of the evaluation criteria, with guidance on what should be addressed in each question.

Table 5: Guidelines on what should be addressed in the evaluation questions.

EVALUATION CRITERIA
Questions, definitions and guiding principles for addressing them
<p><b>IMPORTANT</b></p> <p><b>IEEs must <i>NOT</i> assess whether the COST Policy (Young Researchers &amp; Innovators, Gender Balance, Inclusiveness Target Countries participation) is addressed by the proposal. This evaluation will be carried out by the Scientific Committee in the Selection phase.</b></p>

S&T EXCELLENCE CRITERIA
<p><b>Soundness of the Challenge</b></p> <p><b>Q1 - Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field and present a relevant and timely challenge?</b></p> <p><i>Challenges are the research questions addressed by a COST Action proposal, tackling S&amp;T and / or socio-economic problems. In COST Actions, researchers, engineers, scholars or other stakeholders from different institutions/countries and backgrounds work as a team towards the resolution of the identified challenge. To respond to the challenge, the network needs coordination in working as a team, and to gather a critical mass of participants (researchers, engineers, scholars and other stakeholders) related to the identified topic.</i></p> <p>☛ Check the information related to Q1 in sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Section 1.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART the proposers are invited to: "Demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field."</li> <li>• In Section 1.1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM) the proposers are invited to: "Describe the research question(s) your proposal addresses. Explain the relevance and timeliness of the identified challenge(s)."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Progress beyond the state-of-the-art</b></p> <p><b>Q2 - Does the proposal describe an innovative approach to the challenge that advances the state-of-the-art in the field?</b></p> <p>☛ Check the information related to Q2 in section 1.2.1 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Section 1.2.1 APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART the proposers are invited to: "Describe how the challenge will be approached and emphasise the innovativeness of this approach and how it will advance the state of the art in the field."</li> </ul> <p><b>Q3 - Are the objectives presented relevant to the challenge, clear and ambitious?</b></p> <p><i>COST Action Objectives are the results that an Action needs to achieve in order to respond to the identified challenge. Objectives need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely). Objectives are two-fold: i) Research Coordination and ii) Capacity-building:</i></p> <p><i>Research Coordination Objectives:</i></p> <p><i>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 transforms COST Actions from initially scattered groups into one transnational team and leverages funded research.</i></p> <p><i>Capacity-building Objectives:</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>

☛ Check the information related to Q3 in section 1.2.2 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 1.2.2 OBJECTIVES the proposers are invited to: "Describe clear and ambitious objectives clearly showing their relevance to the identified challenge. Please formulate the objectives in a "SMART" (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely) way. Objectives are not COST Action networking activities (e.g., meetings, training schools), milestones nor deliverables; please refer to Chapter 2.6.3. OBJECTIVES of the COST Open Call – Applicant Guidelines (Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval – SESA) – Level C ([http://www.cost.eu/proposal\\_sesa\\_guidelines](http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa_guidelines)) for explanation and examples".

## NETWORKING EXCELLENCE CRITERIA

### Added value of networking in S&T Excellence

#### Q4 - Does networking bring added value in tackling the challenge in relation to existing efforts at the European and/or international level?

*COST is a unique framework for European researchers to jointly address a specific S&T challenge by sharing knowledge, developing new ideas and joint initiatives across all scientific disciplines through trans-European networking of nationally funded research activities.*

☛ Check the information related to Q4 in section 2.1 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 2.1 ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE the proposers are invited to: "Describe the added value of the proposed COST Action in tackling the challenge in relation to former and existing efforts (research projects, other networks, etc.) at the European and/or international level. **N.B.:** Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity. In particular, do not link projects, networks, etc. with specific participants or institutions within the network of proposers (e.g., do not make statements such as "several members of the proposer network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and COST Actions, such as FP0901.").

### Added value of networking in Impact

#### Q5 - Does the proposed network contain, or present a credible plan for securing, the critical mass and expertise for achieving the objectives and thus addressing the challenge?

*In COST Actions, researchers, engineers, scholars or other stakeholders from different institutions/countries and backgrounds work as a team towards the resolution of an identified challenge. To respond to the challenge, the network needs coordination in working as a team, and to gather a critical mass of participants (researchers, engineers, scholars and other stakeholders) related to the identified topic.*

☛ Check the information related to Q5 in section 2.2.1 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 2.2.1 SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE AND GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE WITHIN THE COST MEMBERS AND BEYOND the proposers are invited to take note of the following:

"Demonstrate that the proposed network contains the critical mass and expertise for achieving the objectives and thus addressing the challenge; and/ or present a credible plan for securing the critical mass and expertise for achieving the objectives.

Explain why the Network of Proposers can address the identified challenge and 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, both in the COST Members and, if applicable, NNC, Third States (IPC) and Specific Organisations. If your Network misses any of these features, present a clear plan for overcoming the identified gaps. **N.B.:** Pay particular attention not to breach the eligibility criterion of anonymity".

#### Q6 - Does the proposal identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them as Action's participants?

☛ Check the information related to Q6 in section 2.2.2 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 2.2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS the proposers are invited to: "Identify the most relevant stakeholders and present a clear plan to involve them in the Action."

## IMPACT CRITERIA

### Impact to science, society and competitiveness, and potential for innovation/breakthroughs

#### **Q7 - Does the proposal clearly identify relevant and realistic impacts for science, society and/or competitiveness (including potential innovations and/or breakthroughs)?**

*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.*

*Through the Actions, COST aims at enabling breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts, services, processes and products, thereby contributing to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities. When choosing a COST Action as an instrument to tackle a specific challenge, proposers must have a clear vision on the innovation potential of their endeavour.*

☞ Check the information related to Q7 in section 3.1 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 3.1 IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGHS the proposers are invited to: "Describe in a clear way the relevant scientific and/or technological and/or socio-economic impact realistically envisaged by the proposal in the short- and long-term perspective. Clearly identify relevant and realistic impacts for science, society and/or competitiveness, including potential scientific, technological and/or socioeconomic innovations and/or breakthroughs."

### Measures to maximise impact

#### **Q8 - Does the proposed networking clearly contribute to knowledge creation, transfer of knowledge and career development?**

☞ Check the information related to Q8 in section 3.2.1 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

- In Section 3.2 MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT 3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT the proposers are invited to: "Clearly describe the contribution that the proposed Action would make to knowledge creation, transfer of knowledge and career development."

#### **Q9 - Is the plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results clear and attainable and does it contribute to the dialogue between science and the general public or policy?**

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

☞ Check the information related to Q9 in section 3.2.2 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

In Section 3.2 MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT 3.2.2 PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY the proposers are invited to: "Present a clear and attainable plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results, including IPR, if relevant. Describe a plan for dissemination and/or exploitation of results that is clear and attainable and contributes to the dialogue between science and the general public and/or policy."



## IMPLEMENTATION CRITERION

### Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan

#### **Q10 - Is the work plan (WGs, tasks, activities, timeframe, deliverables and risk analysis) appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives?**

*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.

*Deliverables* are not COST Action networking activities (e.g., meetings, training schools, etc.).

*Milestones* are control points in the Action that help to map progress. They are needed at intermediary stages so that, if problems have arisen, corrective measures can be taken.

*COST Action networking activities*: This definition encompasses all the activities organised by the COST Action, by means of the networking tools (i.e., Meetings, Training Schools, Short-Term Scientific Missions, Virtual Mobility grants, Conference Grants, and Dissemination), in order to achieve the research coordination and capacity-building objectives.

**IMPORTANT – During the evaluation when listing strengths and weaknesses, the IEE should consider:**

- **Whether the planned deliverables are in line with the definitions given above. N.B.: Action deliverables must not be confused with COST Action networking activities.**
- **Whether the planned deliverables are the most appropriate results to achieve the stated objectives.**
- **Whether the tasks and activities planned are adequate for assuring achievement of the results and deliverables.**
- **Whether the planned timeframe for the implementation is achievable.**
- **Whether specific Action structure including additional leadership roles (beyond the standard Action structure) serves the needs of the Action. The standard Action structure refers to the Action organisation into a Management Committee led by a Chair and Vice-Chair, supported by other mandatory leadership positions (e.g., WG Leaders, Grant Awarding Coordinator, Science Communication Coordinator). A proposal should not be penalised in the evaluation if details of the Action standard structure are not provided.**

☛ Check the information related to Q10 in section 4 of the Technical Annex (not exclusively).

In Section 4.1 COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN the proposers are invited to take note of the following:

"Please note that you do not need to provide a budget breakdown at this stage, since the budget is allocated to the approved Actions by the COST Association on the basis of specific parameters and subject to budget availability.

**4.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES:** Provide a detailed description of the different Working Groups, tasks and activities, ensuring that these are appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Action.

**4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME:** Describe the proposed Action's major deliverables and timeframe, ensuring that these are appropriate to achieve the objectives of the proposed Action.

**4.1.3 RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS:** Identify the main risks related to the Work Plan and present a credible contingency plan ensuring that they are appropriate to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Action. N.B: Pay particular attention to the breach of eligibility criteria for anonymity.

**4.1.4 GANTT Diagram:** Provide a graphical illustration of the time schedule for the different activities, tasks, and deliverables according to the management structure of the proposed Action".

## 2.6. Preparation and Submission of the Consensus Evaluation Report (CER)

One of the three IEEs is assigned as the proposal Rapporteur by the COST Association. By accepting the Evaluation Terms and Conditions the IEE also accepts this potential role as it is part of the consensus evaluation process. If the appointed Rapporteur encounters any difficulty in taking on this role, the IEE shall **immediately** inform the COST Association by contacting [opencall@cost.eu](mailto:opencall@cost.eu).

The Rapporteur coordinates the preparation of the remote Consensus Evaluation Report (CER) taking into account the submitted Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs) by seeking consensus among the other two IEEs. The CER must address all the evaluation questions.

Furthermore, a Review Panel (RP) Member is assigned by the COST Association to a proposal under evaluation to participate in the consensus evaluation process to ensure the consistency between comments and marks in the CER, its completeness and clarity. To support this task, the RP Member has access both to the IERs and to the CER during the consensus phase for a preliminary revision and quality check of the CER. The RP Member shall be involved in all pertinent discussions with the IEEs during the preparation of the CER. For this reason, the names and e-mail addresses of the RP Member and the IEEs assigned to a proposal are visible to each other only during the consensus phase, and must be kept **confidential** (please see Chapter 3.2 for more information).

☛ **The IEEs and RP member should be able to review and provide input on the CER before its submission.** This way the proposal Rapporteur can still take into account their comments in the final edit of the CER before it is submitted.

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

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

### 2.6.1. CONSENSUS TIMELINE AND COLLABORATION MODALITY

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

A “Send Email to all” function is available in e-COST (Figure 9) to facilitate the communication during the consensus between the IEEs and RP Member.

The choice for the most suitable collaboration modality shall consider the IERs comments and marks. When comments and marks are not aligned and discrepancies in opinions cannot be easily solved, a dedicated call/meeting is typically more effective than an email exchange: during the call/meeting, the involved IEEs and RPs may collaboratively agree on a proper formulation of the comment and mark for the affected evaluation question(s).

☛ **In presence of discrepancies of opinions for specific questions, it is not recommended to average the respective IER marks and include all IER comments into the CER. This may result in inconsistencies between comments and marks throughout the CER. Therefore, the Rapporteur shall pay particular attention to these cases and ensure consistency between comments and marks.**

## My Evaluations / Proposal Evaluation Overview

Proposal Reference OC-2019-1



Proposal PDF

Assigned Review Panel Member(s) (RPM):

-

Evaluator	Report Status	Options	S&T Excellence			Networking Excellence			Impact			Implementation
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
<input type="text"/>	IER Submitted		E	G	E	E	E	VG	E	E	E	G
<input type="text"/>	IER Submitted		E	G	G	E	G	E	VG	E	G	G
<input type="text"/>	IER Submitted		G	G	F	F	F	F	F	G	E	F
Consensus	Aggregated		N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C

[Send email to all](#)

Figure 9: Screenshot of e-COST showing the “Send email to all” possibility (highlight in yellow box).

### 2.6.2. CER PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION BY THE RAPPORTEUR

For the preparation of the draft CER, the Rapporteur shall complete and save all mandatory comment boxes of the ten evaluation questions (see also Chapter 2.7).

In order to access the IER and CER marks and comments the IEEs can:

- click on the icons corresponding to the IER and CER and open a pdf file; or
- click, for each question, on the letter(s) in the “Consensus” row (Figure 10).

Questions in grey need to be completed. The triangle indicates the current position.

S&T Excellence			Networking Excellence			Impact			Implementation
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E

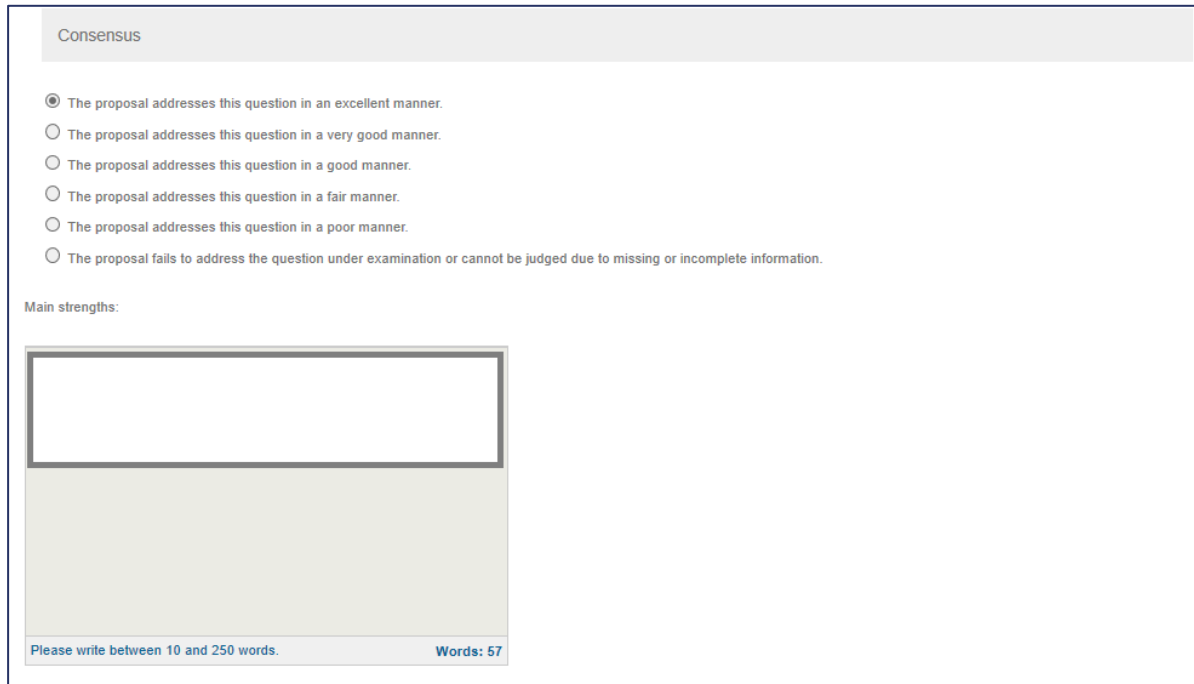
S&T Excellence >> Soundness of the Challenge

Q1. Does the proposal demonstrate a comprehensive command of the state of the art in the field and present a relevant and timely challenge?

Evaluator	Mark	Comments
<input type="text"/>	E	The proposal addresses this question in an excellent manner. <input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	VG	The proposal addresses this question in a very good manner. <input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	E	The proposal addresses this question in an excellent manner. <input type="text"/>

Figure 10: Screenshot of e-COST showing the possible marks to be selected for a given question.

In addition to show the comments and marks from the IERs for the selected question, the tool allows encoding the consensus comment and mark (Figure 11).



Consensus

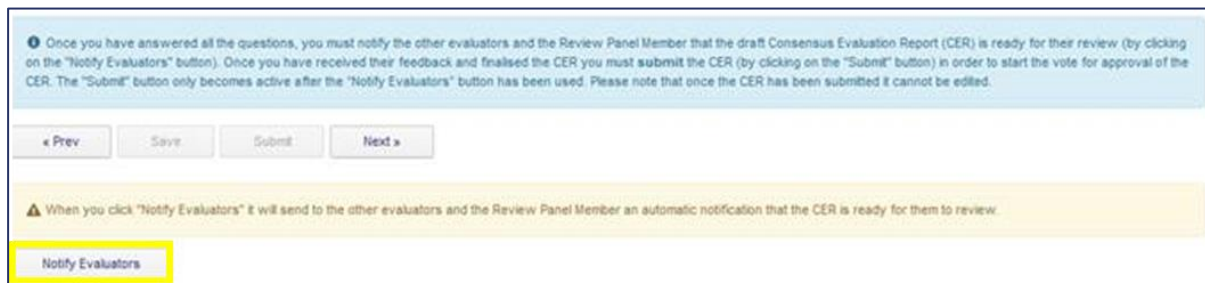
The proposal addresses this question in an excellent manner.  
 The proposal addresses this question in a very good manner.  
 The proposal addresses this question in a good manner.  
 The proposal addresses this question in a fair manner.  
 The proposal addresses this question in a poor manner.  
 The proposal fails to address the question under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Main strengths:

Please write between 10 and 250 words. Words: 57

Figure 11: Screenshot of e-COST showing the comment box to be filled in for each of the ten evaluation questions.

To share the draft CER with the two other IEEs and the RP Member for their revision and feedback, the Rapporteur shall click on the “Notify Evaluators” button (Figure 12).



Once you have answered all the questions, you must notify the other evaluators and the Review Panel Member that the draft Consensus Evaluation Report (CER) is ready for their review (by clicking on the “Notify Evaluators” button). Once you have received their feedback and finalised the CER you must submit the CER (by clicking on the “Submit” button) in order to start the vote for approval of the CER. The “Submit” button only becomes active after the “Notify Evaluators” button has been used. Please note that once the CER has been submitted it cannot be edited.

When you click “Notify Evaluators” it will send to the other evaluators and the Review Panel Member an automatic notification that the CER is ready for them to review.

**Notify Evaluators**

Figure 12: Screenshot of e-COST showing how to notify the other evaluators and the RP Member that a CER is ready for revision.

Feedback on the draft CER may be provided by using the “Send email to all” function described previously (Figure 9) or during a dedicated call/meeting, depending on the agreed collaboration modality (see Chapter 2.6.1).

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

The “Submit” button becomes active **only** after the Rapporteur has notified at least once the draft CER to the other IEEs and the RP Member (Figure 13).

**IMPORTANT: the final version of the CER must NOT contain unclear statements or references such as “see External Expert 1 report” and “not applicable” (see Chapter 2.7).**

**Before finalising the submission, a pop-up window will be displayed to the Rapporteur reminding to not submit without first taking into account the feedback received from IEEs and RP member.**

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

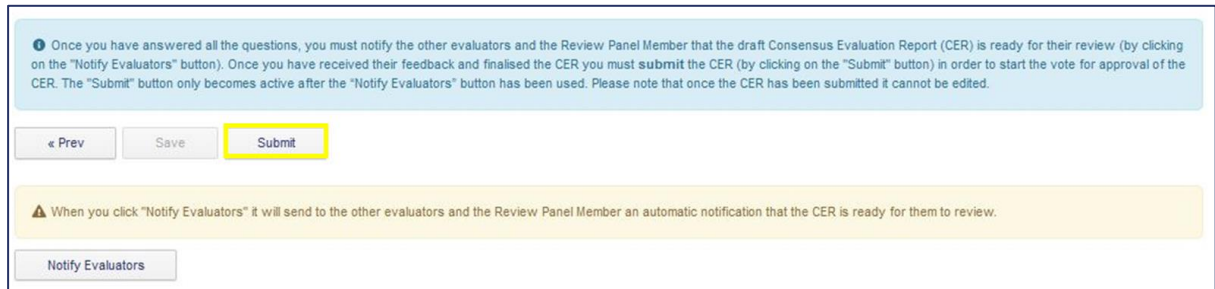


Figure 13: Active 'Submit' button for the CER submission

### 2.6.3. VOTING ON THE CER

Following the CER submission, the IEEs and the RP Member need to vote on the CER by selecting one of the two options as shown in Figure 14 (approve or NOT approve). It is not mandatory to reach consensus. In case of non-approval of the CER by either an IEE or the RP Member, a justification shall be provided.

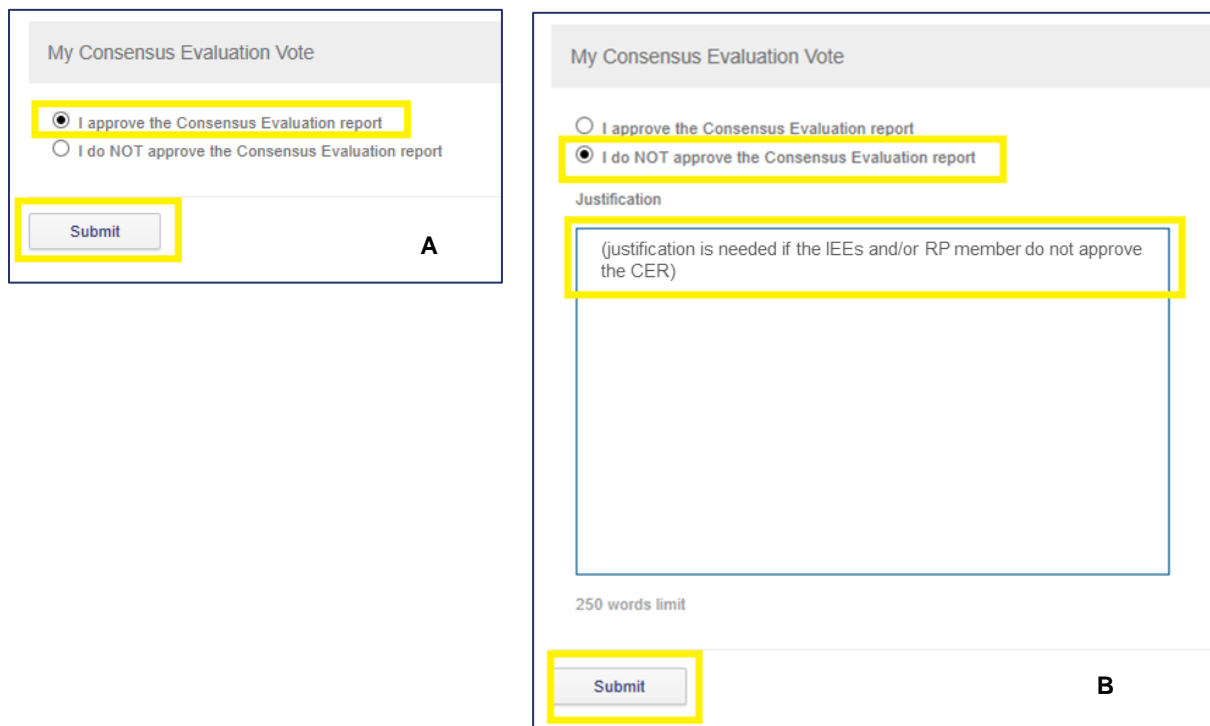


Figure 14: **A/** Screenshot of e-COST showing the voting pane for the submitted CER in case of approval. **B/** Screenshot of e-COST showing the voting pane for the submitted CER in case of non-approval.

After voting, the IEE will receive a confirmation email to their email account registered in e-COST. Should this not be the case, the IEE should immediately contact [opencall@cost.eu](mailto:opencall@cost.eu).

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

**Voting on the CER (either approval or non-approval) is mandatory to claim the honorarium. If an IEE does not vote, this CER will be considered non-approved and IEE may lose his/her entitlement to the honorarium.**

In case the CER is not submitted by the Rapporteur, the CER status is considered non-approved (Figure 15).

CONSENSUS VOTE & STATUS DETAILS		
Expert	Vote	Justification
Outcome of the vote	Completed	Consensus not achieved due to non-submitted Consensus report

Figure 15: screenshot of e-COST showing the consensus vote status for a non-submitted CER.

## 2.7. Individual and Consensus Evaluation Reports: examples of good and bad practices

**Please carefully read this section and follow the recommendations.**

Each proposal must be evaluated on the basis of the proposal content only.

Comments shall be:

- consistent with the selected statement (mark).
- strictly related to each specific evaluation question;
- substantial (no hollow statement);
- adequately argued, providing enough feedback to the proposers, concise and to the point.
- using factual evidence, and not formulated as subjective opinions: *“This proposal is...”* and not *“I think that...”*, *“I feel that...”*;
- written having in mind the proposer as recipient (avoid discriminatory language, be polite, be fair, etc.);
- clear and avoid obscure acronyms or technical terms.

Descriptions of clear or unclear comment are provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Comparison of clear and unclear comments.

Clear comments	Unclear comments
Clear comments are precise and highlight strengths and weaknesses	Unclear comments are ambiguous
Clear comments explain the score	Unclear comments merely echo the score
Clear comments close the question	Unclear comments provide an opening for a redress complaint
Clear comments are consistent	Unclear comments are contradictory
Clear comments express an analysis based on evidence	Unclear comments are descriptive
Clear comments are based on facts	Unclear comments make assumptions
Clear comments include words like: <i>because, specifically, for example</i>	Unclear comments include words like <i>perhaps, think, seems, assume, probably</i>

**The whole range of marks should be considered when assessing a proposal.**

Table 7 shows examples of adequate versus inadequate comments:

Table 7: Comparison of adequate and inadequate comments.

Adequate comments	Inadequate comments
The proposal presents ambitious plans. However, the methodology is not adequately explained and fails to address the two key aspects of A and B...	I find the proposal far too ambitious
This proposal fails to advance the state of art in X or Y and it does not take Z sufficiently into account ...	The proposal does not show a good understanding of the state of the art

The stakeholders' involvement is not adequately addressed. In particular, X and Y are not targeted by ...

There is no indication of stakeholders' involvement

Before submitting the report, the following items should be checked thoroughly:

- Is the Evaluation Report adequately argued?
- Do the justifications provided match the comments and scores selected? For instance: what is the severity of the weaknesses listed? Does it appropriately fit the selection of the statement and the score?
- Are the proposals' strengths and weaknesses carefully explained?
- Has any statement, which you have quoted, been double-checked? (Please be aware that factual errors may lead to a redress procedure).
- Does the report contain any contradictory statements or references such as "see External Expert 1 report" or "not applicable"?
- If you were the Main Proposer, would you find this report fair, accurate, clear and complete?

**CERs are communicated to the proposers and must therefore be accurate, complete and clear.**

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

- The evaluation of the proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (COST 101/21; [http://www.cost.eu/proposal\\_sesa](http://www.cost.eu/proposal_sesa))
- The Consensus Evaluation Report contains a factual error(s) that is verifiable by a non-expert.
  - An example of a factual error is the following: the CER states: "The state-of-the-art section in the proposal does not mention the new developments in Black hole theory", while in fact on p. 3 of the proposal there is a section called "Black hole theory - new developments".
  - An example of what is *not* considered a factual error is the following: the CER states: "The proposal does not sufficiently discuss new developments in Black hole theory". Such a statement is considered as scientific judgement of the assessment for which the redress procedure is *not* admissible.

## 2.8. Responsibilities and Guiding Principles

The IEE is responsible for carrying out the evaluation of the proposals themselves and is not allowed to delegate the work to another person. The IEEs do not represent either their employers or their countries.

The IEE must treat all proposals equally and evaluate them impartially on their merits.

The IEE must submit reports on the platform within the given deadline. This is part of their contractual obligations. In case of non-compliance with the latter, the honorarium of the IEE could be cancelled.

The IEE must pay particular attention to:

- the eligibility criteria as described in Annex 1;
- the content of their evaluation, based on which significant funding decisions will be made.

## 2.9. Confirmation of proposed mark changes to CER

IEEs may be contacted following the Step 2 – Revision and Quality Check of Consensus Evaluation Reports by ad hoc Review Panels (see Chapter 1.3), in case of proposed mark changes to the CER. Each of the proposed changes will include a reformulated comment with a justification by the Review Panel. The IEEs who evaluated the proposal are asked to review and confirm the proposed changes. In case of non-approval, the IEEs will have to provide a justification as well as a revised comment for the CER.



## 3. CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

### 3.1. Conflict of Interest

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

The Conflict of Interest rules apply to all those concerned by the SESA process (CNCs, Independent External Experts, Review Panel Members, Scientific Committee Members, and CSO members). Each individual involved in the evaluation, selection and approval of proposals shall have only one role in the evaluation, selection and approval of a COST Action and may not take any benefit from any Action approved under that specific Collection. In particular:

- Independent External Experts having evaluated a proposal may not participate in the Action deriving from that proposal;
- Review Panel Members may not participate in any Action approved following the evaluation process in which they were involved in that position;
- CNCs and Scientific Committee Members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate;
- CSO members may not join any Action in any way during their mandate.

**A Conflict of Interest can be real, potential or perceived.**

#### 1. Cases of Real Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member):

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

#### 2. Cases of Potential Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, and Scientific Committee Member):

- was aware of the preparation of the proposal;
- has a professional or personal relationship with a proposer;
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal shall be accepted or rejected.

#### 3. Cases of Perceived Conflict of Interest

The person involved in the evaluation or selection procedures (Independent External Expert, Review Panel Member, Scientific Committee Member):

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

Table 8 provides an overview of the possible cases of Conflict of Interest in the evaluation of COST Action proposals.

Table 8: Summary of the cases of Conflict of Interest (Col), marked with X.

Steps	Main Proposer and Network of Proposers	Independent External Expert	ad hoc Review Panel Member	Scientific Committee Member
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

1. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified before the evaluation starts:
  - the evaluator may not participate in the evaluation/selection procedure in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced.
2. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified during the evaluation:
  - the evaluator shall stop evaluating/selecting in the ongoing collection and shall be replaced;
  - any comments and marks already given by the evaluator shall be discarded.
3. If the Conflict of Interest is confirmed/identified after the evaluation has taken place, the COST Association shall examine:
  - the potential impact and consequences of the Conflict of Interest and take appropriate measures.

The COST Association has the right to take the lead in any resolution process of a Col situation at any moment of the evaluation and selection.

All cases of Col are recorded by the COST Association. All those related to nationally nominated actors (Review Panel Members and COST Scientific Committee Members) are reported to the COST National Coordinator.

### Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

- is not aware of any conflict of interest regarding the proposal(s) to be evaluated/selected;
- shall inform immediately the COST Association of any conflict of interest discovered during the evaluation process;
- shall maintain the confidentiality of the procedure.

Failure to declare the Col may have the following consequences:

- notification to the COST Association Director;
- notification to the respective CNC for Review Panel Members;
- notification to the CSO for Scientific Committee Members;
- removal from the COST Expert Database.

## 3.2. Confidentiality

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

- treats confidentially any information, including personal data of any natural person concerned by or involved in the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of the proposals process, and document, in any form (i.e., paper or electronic), disclosed in writing or orally in relation to the performance of the evaluation;
- processes any confidential information or documents as described above only for the purposes and for the duration of the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals process;
- does not, either directly or indirectly, disclose any confidential information or document related to proposals or applicants, without prior written approval of the COST Association;
- does not discuss any proposal with others, including other evaluators or staff not directly involved in evaluating the proposal, except during formal discussions at dedicated ad hoc Review Panels and Scientific Committee meetings;
- does not disclose any detail of the evaluation process and its outcomes, nor of any proposal submitted, for any purpose other than fulfilling their tasks as evaluator;
- does not disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation;
- does not communicate with proposers on any proposal during or after the evaluation until the approval of CSO.

Under no circumstances should the proposers contact any of the actors involved in the SESA process regarding their proposal. Any attempt to do so may lead to immediate exclusion of the proposal from the process.

## 4. HONORARIA AND CERTIFICATE

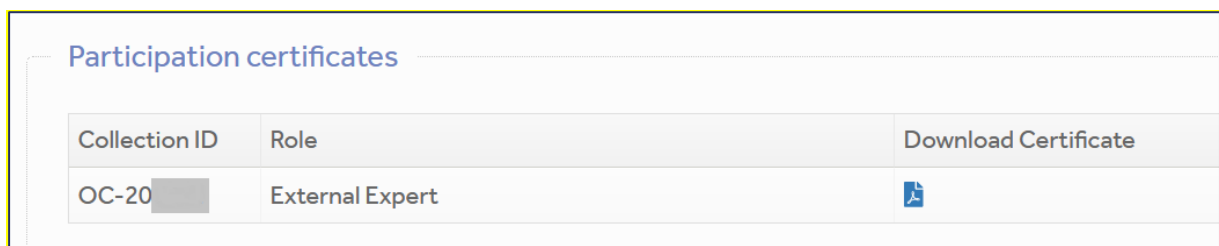
Honoraria<sup>10</sup> shall be paid to the Independent External Experts and ad-hoc Review Panels' Members involved in the SESA procedure as follows:

1. Independent External Experts: EUR 50 per proposal, based on submitted Individual Evaluation Report (IER) and voting on the Consensus Evaluation Report (CER). The proposal Rapporteur is entitled to an additional EUR 50 per proposal, based on the submitted CER.

N.B.: in case a proposal is declared as non-eligible, the IEE having submitted an IER for that proposal is still entitled to the payment of the honorarium as described under point 1 above, even in the absence of a CER vote or CER being submitted.

2. Review Panel members: EUR 400 per Collection Date, based on the active involvement in the consensus process and quality check of the proposals (remotely and at the dedicated RP meeting).

IEEs having completed the assigned evaluation(s) can download a participation certificate (PDF document) from e-COST Evaluations page, as displayed in Figure 16.




Participation certificates		
Collection ID	Role	Download Certificate
OC-20	External Expert	

Figure 16: Screenshot of e-COST showing IEE participation certificate.

<sup>10</sup> See [COST 101/21 COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval \(SESA\) – \(Level B\)](#)

## ANNEX 1: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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

- ✓ include a Network of Proposers from **at least 7 different COST Full or Cooperating States** amongst which at least 50% shall be from COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (Annex of the COST Open Call – Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval (SESA) Guidelines ([https://www.cost.eu/oc-2022-1\\_applicant\\_guidelines](https://www.cost.eu/oc-2022-1_applicant_guidelines)) address S&T challenges destined only for **peaceful purposes**;
- ✓ respect the template of the Technical Annex, **word and page limits**: the length of the Technical Annex must not exceed fifteen (15) pages.
- ✓ be written in **English**, the working language of the COST Association
- ✓ be **anonymous** in order to comply with the double-blind principle of the evaluation:

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

Note on “References”:

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

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

Table 9 illustrates examples of eligible and non-eligible statements.

Table 9: Examples of statements resulting in ineligibility and statements that are eligible.

Statements resulting in ineligibility	Eligible statements
“Several members of the proposers' network have been involved in previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and COST Actions, such as FP0901” (direct reference).	“The Action will seek contact with / reach out to / draw on the expertise of / build on / ... previous FP7 projects, like ATTPS and ADAPTIWALL, and COST Actions, such as FP0901.”
“Among government-run public services we have the Department of Health of Catalonia on board” (direct reference).	“The Network of Proposers already includes a / several government-run public service(s).”
Some of the Proposers' names are emphasised in the references section, e.g. “ <b>Smith A &amp; Jones B</b> (2020), Journal of Physics”, where A. Smith is a proposer (direct reference).	No emphasis on proposers' publications in the references section in any way, e.g., “Smith A & Jones B (2020), Journal of Physics”.
“The Network of Proposers has already generated some output”, with in the footnote a link to a YouTube video or webpage in which secondary proposers can be identified (indirect reference, potentially identifiable).	“The Network of Proposers has already generated some output”, without links to a YouTube video or webpage in which secondary proposers can be identified
The Technical Annex referring to the expertise of the network members through specific publications (the authors of these publications come from an institution participating in the proposal: indirect reference).	The Technical Annex referring to the expertise of the Network of Proposers, possibly also mentioning the field, sub-field and expected contribution to the respective WG(s) / activities but without mentioning specific publications.