**Virtual Networking Tools: new types of grants available**

To improve virtual collaboration, COST has launched the **Virtual Networking Tools**, aiming to build capacity and spread the uptake of virtual collaboration across different research communities. This is a pilot scheme running **until 31 October 2021**. The new grants refer strictly to activities starting from the launch of these grants as of 28 April 2021. They must be carried out in their entirety within the grant period.

There are **two types of grants**:

1. **Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grants**

These grants aim at promoting virtual collaboration as a complement to traditional ways of collaboration within the research and innovation communities. This mechanism intends to stimulate virtual collaboration among the members of a given Action.

The successful applicant will be selected by the COST Action Management Committee (MC) to promote virtual collaboration, such as developing a virtual networking strategy for the Action, taking overall responsibility for Virtual Mobility Grants (see below) and supporting the MC in the discussions and planning of virtual events and collaboration activities. The VNS grantee will take the role of Virtual Networking Support Manager who will evaluate the virtual mobility grants applications. Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grant amount per grant period is set to a **maximum of EUR 4.000**. The MC shall define the exact amount of the grant, which does not necessarily cover all expenses related to u ndertaking the virtual networking coordination role. The MC shall document and provide written rationale for their decision with regard to the exact amount of the grant.

1. **Virtual Mobility (VM) Grants**

These grants aim at strengthening the existing networks by allowing scientists to foster collaboration in a virtual setting, to exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, disseminate the Action results, etc.

The successful applicant(s) will be selected by the MC to perform activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence. These activities may include surveys, questionnaires or preparation of protocols, virtual mentoring of activities that can generate capacity, build new skills, etc. **Maximum amount per VM Grant is EUR 1.500, with a maximum of 6 VM Grants per Action**. This amount can be reduced by the MC determined by the activities included in the grant application (as is standing practice with STSM Grants and ITC Conference Grants).

**Eligibility**

All Action participants with a primary affiliation to an institution located in a COST Full Member country or Cooperating Member, or MC Observers from a COST Near Neighbour Country are eligible to apply for the grants.

**Application procedure**

Applications are to be submitted via e-COST. Description and explanations are provided [here](https://www.cost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/VNT-userguide.pdf).

**Evaluation procedure**

The evaluation of each received VNS grant application is performed by the Action’s MC. The Action Chair or an appointed Coordinator / Committee can assume this responsibility if the Action’s MC gives them the mandate to perform this task on their behalf.

The VNS grantee will take the role of Virtual Networking Support Manager who will evaluate the VM grants applications.

**Selection criteria**

Two criteria have to be fulfilled: (1) contribution to the overall objectives of the Action and (2) implementation of the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy. Additional criteria for each type of grants are listed below.

VNS grant applications must include an outline of the proposed virtual networking strategy for the Action.

VM grant applications must demonstrate how the proposed activities will contribute towards the implementation of the approved strategy on virtual networking for the Action.

**Call for applications**

**VNS grant applications** shall be submitted **before 15 June 2021**.

**VM grant applications** shall be submitted following the approval of the virtual networking strategy (date to be specified at a later stage) and **before 15 July 2021**.

**Further information** about the type of activities that can be covered with these new grants, application and reporting process can be found in the [Vademecum](https://www.cost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Vademecum-28-April-2021.pdf) (version Apr 2021) (Section 10) and in the [FAQ document](https://www.cost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FAQ-VNTs-Final-Version-1.pdf).