

## 1. STSMs - The basics

Short-term scientific missions (STSM; for COST terminology, see the last page of this document) are exchange visits between researchers involved in a COST Action, allowing scientists to visit an institution or laboratory in another COST Member state. Their aim is to facilitate valuable collaborations with research groups applying techniques unavailable in their own laboratories, with mutual benefit towards joint publications and the perspective of attracting additional funding. STSMs are mainly intended for young researchers (starting with PhD students), but can also be granted for more advanced scientist when properly justified (e.g. for meeting another PI to finalize a publication as a result of a collaboration in another STSM).

The grant usually covers travel and accommodation/subsistence. Funding of an STSM will be in the form of a fixed grant; the contribution will be based on the application's details and the result of the evaluation by the STSM Committee. The financial support is a contribution to the costs of an STSM and may not necessarily cover all the costs. It is NOT a salary for the grantee, nor does it cover expenses for research itself (e.g. consumables).

IN ALL CASES, ELIGIBILITY RULES AND REGULATIONS OF COST MUST BE RESPECTED! THEY ARE PUBLISHED IN SECTION 8 OF THE COST VADEMECUM (VERSION 5 OF MAY 2018).

## 2. STSM Committee

In the kick-off meeting, the MC members voted for establishing the following 4-member committee to handle the STSMs of the action:

\* **STSM coordinator: Frank O. Fackelmayer (Greece)**

email: frank@fackelmayer.eu

\* **STSM vice coordinator: Jonathan Turner (Luxembourg)**

email: jonathan.turner@lih.lu

\* **Committee member: Peter Meister (Switzerland)**

email: peter.meister@izb.unibe.ch

\* **Committee member: Mohamed Ragab Abdel Gawwad (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

email: mragab@ius.edu.ba

The committee has defined a set of criteria that it will apply to evaluate every application, see below. During the grant period, the committee will jointly handle all requests, grant applications and final reports of the missions. The committee will pre-approve (or reject) the applications, which then have to be activated and signed by the Action Grant Holder, as requested by COST.

**Caveat: No one may travel and start a pre-approved STSM before s/he has received the Grant Holder's signature, otherwise the STSM cannot be reimbursed. No signature - no money. COST is very strict on this! Awards cannot be granted for visits already started, under any circumstance.**

### 3. STSM Applications

#### 3.1 Duration, Eligibility and Funding

COST permits STSMs between 5 days (including travel) and 90 days, for early stage investigators (PhD student, young post-docs) up to 180 days. Everyone is eligible to apply for an STSM, if s/he fulfils the criteria published in the COST Vademecum (<https://www.cost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/20180501-Vademecum2.pdf>).

Briefly, STSM applicants must be engaged in an official research program as a PhD Student or postdoctoral fellow or can be employed by, or affiliated to, an institution, organisation or legal entity which has within its remit a clear association with performing research. These criteria *exclude* non-scientific staff such as technicians, or pre-PhD students.

Important: the STSM and its Final Report need to be completed within a single grant period (for this period, the STSM and Final Report must be completed before April, 30<sup>th</sup>). In properly justified cases, a project can be split into two separate STSMs that can be in consecutive Grant Periods, provided that they are handled separately, and that funding will be available in both funding periods.

In any case, the main criterion for being approved by the committee will be the scientific excellence of the proposed work and its relevance for the Action. However, in the selection by the STSMs committee, preference will be given to ECIs and PhD students, with further considerations of country and gender balance. The committee especially encourages researchers from ITC and NNC countries to apply. The PI of the home or the host laboratory must be members of COST Action (but *not* limited to the laboratories of MC members, who represent their country in the Action, not their own laboratory) and both countries must be eligible Participating COST Countries. **STSMs are not awarded, under any circumstances, for exchanges between two laboratories within the same country.**

Funding guidelines: an STSM can be funded with up to 2500 Euro (for up to 90 days) or 3500 Euro (for STSMs of ECIs, 91 to 180 days). Typically, for short STSMs (e.g. for one week), up to 160 Euro per day plus economy travel by the most economical route can be approved. Travel expenses should not exceed 500 Euro. For longer STSMs, up to 500 Euros per week accommodation/ subsistence plus economy travel by the most economical route can be approved, but never more than 2500/3500 Euro per STSM. The goal is to support as many STSMs as possible with the available funding. Thus, the committee will consider different costs of living in the different member states. The committee reserves the right to only partially grant the requested amount, if it appears to not be properly justified. If in doubt, please contact the committee members **before** applying for a specific amount.

#### 3.2 Deadlines for STSM applications

In this action, STSMs will be handled **continuously** to provide maximal flexibility. To ensure fairness, the Committee may set internal limits on how many STSMs will be approved per quarter, depending on the budget of the running year. There are no strict deadlines set by the Action. **HOWEVER**, as per COST regulations, the whole process of an STSM must be within one single Grant Period. For our Action, the Grant Periods end on April, 30th each year. Until that day, all STSMs of the running

grant period must be finished (date of approval of the final report, see below). This must be taken into account when applying. Also consider the time required to produce the final report of the mission, have it signed by the host PI, and two weeks for the STSM committee to approve the report. Thus, it is in the best interest of everybody to finish a mission (date of travel) before end of March.

### **3.3 Preparing an application**

Applying for a COST STSM is a simple process, but it must be done carefully in order to fulfill all criteria and provide all requested information. Incomplete applications must be rejected; no one wants this! So, do not hesitate to ask the STSM coordinator any questions you have regarding the application process that are not described below, or are not clear enough. It is generally a good idea to inform the STSM committee about your plans for an STSM, before you go through the whole application process. Please do not ask for exceptions to the rules that are set by COST; we have no authority to change any of them.

**All applications must be in written in English and must be in electronic form. Also, the application should be written by the applicant, not the supervisor - it is also a good chance to practice writing applications!**

In general, these are the steps for every application:

1. Obtain a written agreement of the host institution (i.e. the lab you want to visit)
2. Complete the online application form at the e-COST website  
<https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm/apply/new>  
If you are new to e-cost, you will first have to register a new account there
3. Send the following information in pdf format by **email** to the members of the STSM committee:
  - \* the completed online application form (from point 2)
  - \* a reference letter from the applicant's current supervisor, that must state that s/he approves the STSM and the dates/duration of the mission.
  - \* the letter of agreement for your visit from the host institution (the one of point 1) and, if you are not a PI, a letter of support from your PI for the visit.
  - \* a short (less than one page) current CV, plus a list of recent publications (we do realize that for PhD students there may be none yet!)
  - \* a short (250 words maximum) summary of the proposed mission and its aims
  - \* a description (up to two pages) of the mission, including the key objectives and a work plan that specifies clearly what you aim to achieve in the STSM visit and how, and why you have chosen the host lab. The description should be concise, but detailed enough to allow the reviewers to form a clear idea of the planned research activities. Do not include a list of own publications in this section.
  - \* a short description (less than half a page) of the relevance of the proposed STSM in the scope of the COST action; i.e. describe how the COST Action will benefit from the proposed STSM. Please also indicate the Working Group (WG1 – WG5) within which your project falls.

The committee aims at reaching a decision on an application within two weeks. In difficult cases, the committee may seek additional opinions from MC members, who will remain anonymous. **All decisions are final.**

#### **4. Reporting - After the STSM**

Within 30 days of completion of the STSM, and before the end of the running Grant Period, the grantee will have to produce a Final Report and submit it to the STSM Committee and to a senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution, for approval from both sides. Written approval of the STSM scientific report by the aforementioned persons must be uploaded in e-COST for archiving purposes.

This Report will require the following information:

- \* Name and Affiliation of the grantee
- \* title and registration number of the STSM (issued by the e-COST system during application)
- \* a short scientific abstract that will appear on the Action's website
- \* a brief (150 words maximum) dissemination text aimed at non-experts; this is NOT the same as the scientific abstract! This will also be critical for approval!
- \* a thorough description (approximately 2 pages) of the outcomes of the mission.
- \* a letter from the host laboratory confirming that the visit has been successfully undertaken.

**IMPORTANT: COST is strictly *re-imbursing*. The approved grant cannot be paid until the final report is approved.** Only in the case of grantees from ITC, 50% of the grant amount can be paid after the first day of the mission, and the other 50% after approval of the final report. This is NOT possible, under any circumstance, for grantees from COST member countries that do not belong to the ITC group.

## 5 . Glossary of COST terminology (ECI, ITC, NNC etc.)

**Management Committee (MC)** - For each Action a Management Committee, formed by national experts of the signatory countries, is in charge of implementing, supervising and coordinating the activities of the Action.

**Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSM)** - These Missions (Inter-laboratory Exchange Visits) aim at strengthening the existing COST Actions by allowing scientists to go to an institution or laboratory in another COST country to foster collaboration, to learn a new technique or to take measurements using instruments and/or methods not available in their own institution/laboratory. They are particularly intended for Early Stage Researchers.

**Grant Period** - Each COST Action runs for four years, starting from the date of the kick-off meeting. It is split up into four Grant Periods of one year each, always starting at the date of the original kick-off meeting (in our case May, 1st). Every Grant Period is handled separately, and the available funding for the following period is NOT known. It may increase, decrease, or stay the same. All activities of the Action must be strictly in one single Grant Period.

**COST Vademecum** - the official manual of COST with all important regulations regarding COST Actions. The relevant version for this Action is Version 5 from May 2018. It can be downloaded here:

<https://www.cost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/20180501-Vademecum2.pdf>

**Early career investigator (ECI)** - a researcher whose career span less than 8 years between the date of the PhD/doctorate (or similar experience) and the date of involvement in the COST Action. Periods of career leave have to be added to this time span.

**COST countries** - Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, the Republic of North Macedonia, and one cooperating state: Israel

**Near Neighbour countries (NNC)** - Any of these countries if they joined the action: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, the Russian Federation, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

**Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)** - Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia and Turkey.