

FAQ - Virtual Networking Tools (VNTs)

Purpose and Scope: This document aims to provide a clear understanding of the new Virtual Networking Tools, namely, Virtual Networking Support Grants (VNS), and Virtual Mobility Grants (VM), that will be made available to all running COST Actions and COST Innovators Grants (CIG) until 31 October 2021.

WHAT?

1. What are the 2 types of Virtual Networking Tools (VNTs)?

The 2 new tools are: Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grants and Virtual Mobility (VM) Grants.

2. How many grants per Action are allowed?

- VNS: max 1 per Action per GP (up to 4,000 EUR per grant, max 4,000 EUR)
- VM: max 6 per Action per GP (up to 1,500 EUR per grant, max 9,000 EUR)).

Each Action can allocate up to 13,000 EUR excluding FSAC in total to fund Virtual Networking Tools per Grant Period.

How the Action will allocate these funds to individuals will be up to the MC after defining its own criteria. In addition, the MC can decide to lower the maximum amounts per grant if needed.

3. Can the Actions claim the maximum amount of 4,000 EUR for the VNS grant even if there are only 6 months or less left in the current Grant Period of an Action?

Yes, the maximum budget defined can be applied since this is a pilot scheme and in the current GP.

4. Is there a minimum number of Virtual Networking Tool (VNT) grants required from each Action?

No, there is no minimum required. The final budget allocation in the running Action will depend on the MC decision and their available budget. However, we recommend that this pilot scheme is promoted by the Actions as much as possible, to improve the virtual collaboration and compensate the low expenditure for the cancellation of other activities during the COVID pandemic.

5. Is COST going to support these new grants with extra budget?

No, COST is not providing extra budget for these new grants. The Actions are able to reallocate their funding in between budget lines, if needed.

6. Can the Action fund activities retroactively, meaning for work done in the past, with these new virtual networking tools?

No. The new grants refer strictly to activities starting from the launch of these grants as of 28 April 2021.

7. What expenses are the VNS and VM grants intended to cover?

Some examples of activities to be performed by the successful applicant are described in the Vademecum Section 10.1.3 (VNS) and 10.2.3 (VM).

8. For Action MCs, GH Managers or applicants: I am not sure if the activity I am proposing can be eligible, where should I check this?

Some examples of activities to be performed by the successful applicant are described in the Vademecum Section 10.1.3 (VNS) and 10.2.3 (VM). Also, in the Vademecum Section 10.3, there is a list of non-eligible expenses.

However, if there are still doubts, please always ask the Science Officer and the Administrative Officer of your Action before submitting/approving a request.

9. Is there any mandatory activity to cover with any of the grants?

Please refer to the Vademecum 10.1.3 (VNS) and 10.2.3 (VM)

10. Who should prepare the strategy on virtual networking for the Action?

The VNS grantee should prepare this activity as part of the responsibilities under the grant. There is a section in the application template where the VNS grantee should describe the outline of this strategy already at the grant application stage.

11. Is COST providing a template for the description of the strategy on virtual networking for the Action?

No, there is no template for the preparation of this document. It should be decided by the Action how this document should be prepared, similar to the selection criteria for activities, calls and others.

The MC has the liberty to come up with their own strategy template, similar to what they employ for the selection criteria for activities, call, and others.

12. Can the Virtual Mobility grant cover expenses for a specific trip, if needed?

There are no specific provisions to cover accommodation and meal expenses within these grants. However, as it is a grant, no justification of the expenses will be requested. Only the documents required in e-COST are needed for the justification of the payments.

13. Can I use the virtual mobility grant to attend virtual conferences since I do not qualify as a participant from Inclusiveness Target Country (ITC), nor a PhD or an Early Career Investigator (ECI)?

No, the VM grants do not have the purpose of covering the expenses of participating in external conferences. For such cases, COST has already 2 different networking tools (Dissemination Meetings and ITC Conference Grants) and its limits are well described in the Vademecum.

14. Can I purchase software license or set up a database for my Action using the grant?

No, the VNTs are not intended for these expenses. Currently, only license for online communication tools of up to a maximum of 500 EUR per Grant Period is eligible and it is covered from OERSA (Vademecum, Section 11.8). Databases are listed as not eligible expenses in the Vademecum, Section 11.8.1.

WHO?

15. Who is eligible to receive one of the new grants defined under Virtual Networking tools?

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. Eligible individuals must fulfil the requirements stated in the Vademecum subject to the approval of the Management Committee and availability of funds.

16. Is there any career limitation e.g. employed, MC members, ECI, PhD Student or postdoc to apply to for these new grants?

Eligible individuals must fulfil the requirements stated in the Vademecum (See Q15) subject to the approval of the Management Committee and availability of funds.

17. Are approved MC Observers from international Partner Country (IPCs) or International Organisations (IO) in your Action eligible for these grants?

No, they are not eligible.

18. Are COST Innovators Grants (CIG) participants eligible for VNTs?

Yes. The same eligibility criteria will apply.

19. Can the GH Manager of the Action apply for any of the grants?

Yes, since these grants are open to all Action participants with a primary affiliation to an institution located in a COST Full Member country or Cooperating Member. However, the tasks related to the successful completion of these grants should not overlap with the standard Grant Holder Manager tasks.

20. Who is going to evaluate the applications for the VNS grant within an Action?

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 evaluation and selection criteria defined by the Action's MC should be communicated to all potential applicants.

21. Can the MC Chair apply for a VNS grant?

Yes, the Action Chair can apply if the MC considers that this is the best approach for the achievement of the Action MoU objectives.

During the submission of the application, the Action Chair will get a notification in e-cost informing about the potential conflict of interest. The Science Officer and Administrative Officer of the Action will also be notified. Therefore, any other information about the selection criteria could be requested for this particular application.

22. Who is going to evaluate the applications for the VM grants within an Action?

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

VM grants should be assessed against the scope of the MoU objectives, COST policy, and also the approved strategy on virtual networking for the Action. These criteria should be communicated to all potential applicants.

23. What if there is no VNS grantee in my Action? Who can take this role?

If the Action does not have a VNS grantee, the default VNS Manager for the evaluation of the VM grants will be the Action Chair. All the decisions about the roles need to be approved by the MC.

24. Can a recipient of a Virtual Networking Support grant also apply for a Virtual Mobility grant in the same Grant Period?

Yes, but only under very exceptional circumstances when it is very well justified, and only if the MC considers that this is the best approach for the achievement of the Action MoU objectives.

If this is the case, the evaluation of the VM grants in the same call cannot be coordinated by the VNS Manager. The Action Chair should review these applications.

25. Can the same applicant receive more than one Virtual Mobility grant in the same Grant Period?

The same person can exceptionally apply for multiple Virtual Mobility grants only if it is very well justified and if the MC considers that this is the best approach for the achievement of the Action MoU objectives.

If this is the case, it is important to note that the same individual cannot benefit for multiple VM grants running in parallel. Each grant must follow the next one, after one has ended.

HOW

26. What is the process to apply for these grants?

Please refer to the VNT User Manual [here](#).

27. Can an Action launch a call for a Virtual Networking Support grant of 4,000 EUR but not for Virtual Mobility grants?

Yes, it is possible to have a VNS grant and no VM grants, if the Action MC decides to do so, or there are no candidates for the VM grants. The max of 4,000 EUR per grant, and max 1 grant will then apply.

Preparing and validating the detailed strategy on virtual networking for the Action is still, under this circumstance, a mandatory activity to cover.

28. What about the opposite: there are no applicants for the VNS grant, but only requests for VM grants, is this possible?

This is also possible, if the Action MC decides to do so, or there are no candidates for the VNS grant. The max of 1,500 EUR per grant, and up to 6 grants, will then apply.

In this case, preparing and validating the detailed strategy on virtual networking for the Action is not a mandatory activity (even if it is highly recommended).

29. What do I need to report if I apply for a VNS / VNM grant

A detailed template is provided in e-COST for the activity reporting.

A VNS Grantee has 15 calendar days from the end of the Grant Period to submit a report to the Action Chair / the appointed Coordinator / Committee and to the Science Officer of the Action.

The VM grantee should submit a report within 30 days after the completion of the Virtual Mobility.

30. When will I get paid the grant?

The Grant Holder shall pay the approved grant to the grantee after the MC has approved the grantee's report and no later than 15 days from the end of Grant Period.

31. Can the grant be paid to a personal account?

Yes. Please make sure the correct bank details are registered in e-COST.

32. Can the Grant be paid to an institution account?

Yes. Please make sure the correct bank details are registered in e-COST.

33. In case the GH Manager receives one of these grants, how should this be paid?

The GH Manager can choose whether to be paid to a private account or institution bank account, just like any other successful applicant.

34. In the case of an audit by COST, what documents will be asked form the Grant Holder institution?

Only the documents required in e-COST are the documents that will be checked for audit.

35. Are recipients of either Virtual Networking Tool grants subject to audit by COST?

No. Auditing of an individual will be up to the requirements of the Grant Holder Institution involved.