



# Additional guidelines – STSM applications in ERNEST

May 12, 2021

**Preamble.** Before applying, all applicants must carefully and completely read section 8 of the COST Vademecum's April 2021 edition (pages 32 & 33), Short Term Scientific Missions. Some citations from the Vademecum are provided below, but do not represent the complete guidelines. Updates to the official Vademecum automatically take precedence over the sections quoted here.

## 1 Scope & Eligibility

From the Vademecum:

Short Term Scientific Missions (STSM) are institutional visits aimed at supporting individual mobility, fostering collaboration between individuals. STSM applicants shall be engaged in an official research programme 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.

**In ERNEST:** STSMs are a major performance indicator for a COST Action and therefore highly encouraged. Please note that STSMs **always** have to cross an international border.

## 2 Criteria for an STSM

From the Vademecum:

STSM must respect the following criteria:

- They must have a minimum duration of 5 calendar days that includes travel.

- STSM need to be carried out in their entirety within a single Grant Period and always within the Action's lifetime.

**In ERNEST:** The Grant Period of ERNEST runs from the beginning of May until the end of April of the following year. For Year 1, the dates are May 01, 2019 to April 30, 2020. Please bear in mind that an STSM is finished not on the last day of your stay at the host institution, but rather with the recording of the payment. Hence, the last day of your stay has to be planned such that submission of the report (cf. 6), its evaluation, and the processing of the payment are still possible within a Grant Period.

### 3 Financial support

From the Vademecum:

An STSM Grant is a fixed financial contribution which takes into consideration the budget request of the applicant and the outcome of the evaluation of the STSM application. STSM Grants do not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking a given mission. A STSM Grant is a contribution to the overall travel, accommodation and meal expenses of the Grantee.

The calculation of the financial contribution for each STSM must respect the following criteria:

- Up to a maximum of EUR 3500 in total can be afforded to each successful applicant;
- Up to a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses.

**In ERNEST:** The amount of the grant is decided by an evaluation committee composed of the Chair, Vice-Chair and STSM coordinator (see below 5).

Payment of the grant takes place *after* the STSM is finished (except for researchers from an Inclusiveness Target country (ITC), who can request a pre-payment of 50 %) and is *conditional on the submission of a short scientific report* (cf. 6).

### 4 Application procedure

From the Vademecum:

Eligible STSM applicants must submit their STSM applications online at the following web address: <https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm>.

**In ERNEST:** Applications will be processed all year-round, i.e. there is no application deadline (except the condition that the entire STSM has to take place within one Grant Period, cf. 2).

The application needs to be submitted at least *four weeks* before the expected starting date. Applicants are however encouraged to apply as early as possible, since STSMs are

evaluated on a first-come, first-served basis. The necessary supporting documents should be in .pdf format and are:

1. Scientific CV, 1-3 pages
2. Work plan, 2-6 pages depending on the length of the STSM. The work plan is in free format but expected to include: Aims and Objectives, Scientific background, Implementation (site of research, specific tasks and work plan, timetable), relevant national and international collaborations.
3. Motivation letter, 1-2 pages. The letter should clearly mention: purpose of the STSM, its expected outcome (publication, patents, scientific impact), its duration (e.g. expected start and end dates), the amount applied for, its “added value” in terms of collaborations, as well as any other relevant information.
4. Budget, 1 page. The budget should clearly indicate the expected costs (e.g. transport, accommodation, living costs) and the amount of support already received.
5. Publication list
6. Other relevant documents may be attached.

**Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to the STSM Coordinator (Peter Kolb, peter.kolb@uni-marburg.de) via email.**

## 5 Evaluation of applications

From the Vademecum:

The evaluation of each received STSM application is performed by the Action MC. The [...] Committee can assume this responsibility if the Action MC gives them the mandate to perform this task on their behalf. The evaluation criteria defined by the Action MC should be communicated to all potential applicants.

The selection of successful STSM applicants must be done so in consideration of the scientific scope of the proposed mission and how the mission can support the Action in achieving its scientific objectives. There should be special considerations made by the Action MC with respect to supporting COST policies on promoting gender balance, enabling Early Career Investigators (ECI), broadening geographical inclusiveness.

**In ERNEST:** Proposals will be evaluated for their quality and for their relevance to ERNEST objectives. Proposals will be evaluated by a committee composed of the STSM Coordinator, the Action Chair and the Action Vice-Chair. In case of conflicts of interest, the evaluation committee member(s) involved will be replaced by the Equality and Inclusiveness Officer. The evaluation committee will also confer with the Equality

and Inclusiveness Officer regarding the fair distribution of the STSMs across research groups, countries, and genders .

For this reason, it is unlikely that more than one proposal by a single applicant will be accepted during one Grant Period. The amount granted will be based on the budget requested by the applicant, as well as the funds available for STSMs in the overall ERNEST budget. Since longer STSMs are more likely to be associated with higher costs, the duration of the STSM will also be considered when deciding the granted support. The evaluation committee will provide (brief) feedback about the evaluation to the applicants.

## 6 Submission of the STSM report

From the Vademecum:

The STSM Grantee has 30 calendar days from the end date of the mission to submit a scientific report to the [...] appointed STSM Coordinator [...] and to a senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution. Payment of the Grant is subject to a STSM scientific report being approved on behalf of the Action's MC by the delegated person(s) responsible and by a senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution. Written approval of the STSM scientific report by the aforementioned persons must be uploaded in e-COST for archiving purposes.

**In ERNEST:** Besides detailing the scientific findings in this report, it is equally important to present the importance of the visit in terms of personal development, networking and capacity building (e.g. collaborations). **Failure to send the report within 30 days will automatically cancel the grant.** Payment of the grant should be expected 2-4 weeks after submitting the report.

The report should contain:

- Purpose of the STSM;
- Description of the work carried out during the STSM;
- Description of the main results obtained;
- Future collaboration with the host institution (if applicable);
- Foreseen publications/articles resulting from the STSM (if applicable);
- Confirmation by the host institution of the successful execution of the STSM;
- Other comments (if any).

The scientific report must be sent to the STSM Coordinator (Peter Kolb, [peter.kolb@uni-marburg.de](mailto:peter.kolb@uni-marburg.de)), who is responsible for approving the scientific report and informing the Grant Holder that the STSM has successfully been accomplished.

## 7 Frequently asked questions

1. *Can I postpone my STSM?*

No. STSMs can only happen during the period that has been applied for. If the originally intended period is not feasible, then the current application needs to be canceled and a new STSM applied for.

2. *I don't know when I would like to go. Can I just apply for three weeks during a period of one month (or similar)?*

No. STSMs have to have fixed start and end dates. Moreover, all supporting documents (cf. 4) need to explicitly mention these dates.

3. *Where do I upload my tickets after I have returned from the STSM?*

*Do I have to prove that my mode of transportation was the most economical?*

You do not have to provide any receipts for travel or accommodation. STSM grants are paid as lump sums, so no documentation is needed.