Questions & Answers of the COST Webinar on VNTs 7 May 2021

(Q&A not answered live, extracted from the Zoom meeting Q&A function)

*The recording of the webinar is available in **YouTube**: https://youtu.be/Upxml75v_6s*

*Please find here the **links to the documents** to which many answers refer to:*

Vademecum - **VNT FAQ document** - **e-COST step-by step user guide**

ID	Question	Category (see VNT FAQ document)	Answer(s)
1	Can we pay salary to the Virtual Networking Support Manager	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The grants are not intended a salary, but a contribution to the activities carried out by the applicants. Actually, the grant does not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking the virtual networking coordination role. The grant payment does not require any justification. It is paid against the submission and approval of the required report. **See also VNT FAQ document questions 7 and 8.**
2	Is the grant retroactive? We (CA18112) had several successful online activities during the last months.	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No. The new grants refer strictly to activities starting from the launch of these grants as of 28 April 2021. **See VNT FAQ document question 6.**
3	If we reallocate part of our budget to the VNTs, can we consider receiving also the corresponding 15% FSAC?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Since this is part of the Action Scientific Expenditure in the budget, yes FSAC will correspond.
4	We are planning to have a training school for our COST action call for which we have costs for computing power and Zoom etc. Will we have to use this system?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	VNTs are not intended for costs already covered under other networking tools (Zoom license under OERSA), or non-eligible expenses (e.g. electricity, Internet fees). They are contributions as grants for Action participants to perform certain activities.

5	Can you give examples of actual expenses that can be covered by the VM grant?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Some examples of activities to be performed by the successful applicant are described in the Vademecum Section 10.2.3 (VM).
6	VNT and VM Grants may require for Grant Holders to enter specific additional arrangements with Grantees. Have you got guidelines for that?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The GH is expected to issue a Grant letter and to pay the grant upon approved report of the VM and VNS grant.
7	Can we have an online MC meeting reimbursed out of this VNT grants?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No, this is not the purpose of VNT grants. Grants are for individuals performing a specific activity, not to fund meetings. Please refer to examples of activities in the Vademecum section 10.
8	Can the Mobility grants be requested by the chair of the action to summarize and discuss outcomes of the projects? or does this "overlap" with its pure role as Chair of the action?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	It is not clear whether 'projects' refers to the COST Action, or possible applications for research projects jointly drafted by Action participants. Nevertheless, the tasks associated with the role of Action Chair (e.g. drafting a progress report) are not eligible to be funded via VNTs.
9	How much is the maximal amount of the VNT Grant? We are planning an online course within our Action.	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The maximum amount for a VNS grant is 4000 EUR; each VM grant (up to 6) has a maximum of 1500 EUR per grant.
10	To be clear clear, VMG do not replace STSM?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No, VM grants are not replacing STSMs. The Actions should promote both STSM applications and VNTs applications. STSMs require physical mobility which is not necessary in the VNTs.
11	Can we use the grant to upgrade our existing COST Action Zoom license (which goes up to 100 participants)?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No, this is not the purpose of these grants. ZOOM license are already covered under OERSA (maximum 500 EUR for virtual communication tools per Grant Period).
12	I somehow still don't understand what the funds are meant for? Most of us have technical networking facilities available thorough our affiliations. What else can we encode? Could I encode student helpers for coordination?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Please refer to the COST Vademecum section 10.1.3 (VNS grant) and 10.2.3 (VM grant) for examples of activities, and the **VNT FAQ document questions 15 and 16.**
13	Can activities related to hybrid workshop targeting urban stakeholders be eligible for the grant?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	It is not clear in the question which activities, besides the workshop itself, are associated to the referred event in particular. The hybrid workshop implementation can be funded with other COST networking tools (i.e. under meetings). For additional related activities, please refer to the COST Vademecum section 10.1.3 (VNS grant) and 10.2.3 (VM grant) for examples of activities.

14	Are newsletters created by an Action member for the Action members and circulated monthly in the Action eligible for VM grant? The newsletter is a 'capacity building' objective and to foster new collaborations and keep the community updated on the advancement of the different scientific activities.	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Content creation and coordination of a newsletter (not its design, or printing) is in principle an eligible activity, but the VM application must clarify how this would contribute to Action MoU objectives and deliverables, and the MC will assess how this activity stands compared to other proposed ones (see evaluation criteria described in Vademecum 10.1.2). Note that these grants do not cover activities done in the past (see **VNT FAQ document question 6**).
15	Where are the examples listed?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Please refer to the COST Vademecum section 10.1.3 (VNS grant) and 10.2.3 (VM grant) for examples of activities.
16	Is the grant justified against presentation of PM (person months)?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The grant payment does not require any justification of person-months because it is not meant to be a salary. It is paid against the submission and approval of the required report.
17	Why is the VN limited to 13.000€? Large physical meetings are highly unlikely until the end of the grant period, so it would be good to spend more budget on VN.	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	There is indeed a budget limitation as part of the VNT Pilot as approved by the European Commission. The outcome of the VNT Pilot will be evaluated and taken into account as one of the inputs for the future COST networking tools.
18	The amount for the grant for the VNT manager can be paid as a service to that specific person? And the maximum amount will be 4.000 Eur, correct?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The grant payment does not require any justification because it is not meant to be a salary. It is paid against the submission and approval of the required report. For the VNS grant, the maximum amount is 4,000 EUR.
19	ACI still don't understand that VM grands don't pay for work time, software, hardware... What can it be used for? The example in the Vademecum is computational activity...which is worktime, hardware and software...	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Please refer to the COST Vademecum section 10.1.3 (VNS grant) and 10.2.3 (VM grant) for examples of activities. If the eligible individual is certain he/she can perform or deliver the activities, we encourage submitting an application with the grant amount within the set limit.
20	Do you need more than one applicant for the VNS grant?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Every Action can have a max of 1 VNS grantee per GP. However, the number of applicants (as in any other grants) is not a factor that depends on the Action, but on the interested participants. We invite the Actions to promote the VNTs as much as possible but keeping in mind that only 1 applicant can get the VNS grant in this GP.
21	Could we use these grants to pay for upgrades in our website to facilitate networking?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	The VM grants are not meant to cover activities already covered by other networking tools such as web-site development/design.

22	Could a VM grant be used to engage an Action member to run social media?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Content creation and coordination of Action social media is in principle an eligible activity, but the VM application must clarify how this would contribute to Action MoU objectives and deliverables, and the MC will assess how this activity stands compared to other proposed ones (see evaluation criteria described in Vademecum 10.1.2). Note that these grants do not cover activities done in the past (see **VNT FAQ document question 6**).
23	Is it possible to use this budget to buy a zoom webinar license to be able to transmit conference meetings?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No, the VNTs are not intended for this expense. Online communication tools such as Zoom can be claimed under OERSA. Up to max 500 EUR can be claimed per Grant Period by the Action for such tools.
24	Can OERSA be used to pay V.A.T.?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	No, VAT is not an eligible expense using COST Funds.
25	Can a VM grant be awarded to an Action participant coordinating the preparation of the preparation of dissemination videos or videos promoting the infrastructures available in each COST participating country (which are also being paid by the Action)?	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Content preparation and coordination of science communication activities is within the scope of VM grants. However, if the activity (in this case, the production of a dissemination video) can be funded under other existing networking tools (Action dissemination budget), it should not be included in an application for VM grants.
26	can we use this budget to promote events such as webinars on FB / Instagram"	WHAT (Financial eligibility, type of activities)	Content creation and coordination of Action social media is in principle an eligible activity, but the VM application must clarify how this would contribute to Action MoU objectives and deliverables, and the MC will assess how this activity stands compared to other proposed ones (see evaluation criteria described in Vademecum 10.1.2). Note that these grants do not cover activities done in the past (see **VNT FAQ document question 6**).
27	Can these grants be shared? Eg. if three members are responsible of coordinating an activity.	WHO (Applies/Gets VNT Grant)	Only 1 applicant can be granted for a certain activity. However, the grant payment does not require any justification. It is paid against the submission and approval of the required report. The responsibility for submitting the report stays with the grantee, and the payment is done only to the grantee's bank account.
28	Can a GH scientific representative be VNT Manager?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	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. **See also VNT FAQ document question 19.**
29	Can the Action chair and the VNS manager be the same person?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Yes, this is possible if well justified to the MC as the best approach for the achievement of the Action MoU objectives

30	Can VNS Manager belong to the MC?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Yes.
31	What about the VNT Coordinator/Committee mentioned in the last Vademecum? Can they be responsible for the selection of the VM grantee?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	The VNS grantee will take the role of Virtual Networking Support Manager, a new leadership role. The VNS manager will elaborate a virtual network strategy to be approved by the MC and coordinate the evaluation of VM grants applications. **See VNT FAQ document question 22**
32	If the VNS grant is used to conduct a survey/discussion among the members in the action, who actually gets given the grant? the organiser of the survey?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Indeed, the responsible for the task (in this case, the survey) is the one applying to the VM grant. This person should be the one preparing, coordinating, and analysing the results. All this work should be clearly described in the activity report submitted.
33	Does the VNT Manager have to be an MC member? Will this be an official 'leadership role', like WG leader?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	The VNS manager is a new leadership position, which was created to support the Action in the implementation of an effective virtual collaboration strategy. This position is taken by the VNS grantee, if any. Unlike Action Chair or STSM Coordinator, it is however an optional one because the Action can decide whether to use VNT grants or not. Please, note that the grants are intended to be a contribution to some participants to perform certain activities approved by the MC, not meant to be a salary or a payment to hold a position simply.
34	Like for STSMs, is it possible for people outside MC to apply to VNT? Are these grants exclusive for MC members?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Yes, 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.
35	Can the GH pays someone in the institution who is an expert on online communication and dissemination?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Yes, as long as the applicant fulfils the general eligibility requirements (see VNT question 15) and can perform the envisaged activity. It is important to keep in mind that the VNT grants are not meant to be a salary.
36	Can ITC grant manager, STSM coordinator or the communication manager hold these positions?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	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. However, please note that the grants are intended to be a contribution to some participants to perform certain activities approved by the MC, not meant to be a salary or a payment to hold a position simply.
37	Thank you for your presentation! As GH Manager, until now I have worked for organising all the virtual meetings. Thus, I think this grant is for the one who will	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Activities of the VNS grant shall not overlap with the activities carried out by the GH manager or local organisers (of virtual events). However, if there are extra tasks that can be funded under the VNTs, please discuss this option with the Action MC. The VNS Manager shall oversee and coordinate activities such

	propose and organise the future meetings. Is that right?		as the ones described in the Vademecum section 10.1.3.
38	Can we allocate several smaller VNS grant to different partners (e.g. organizers of webinar) or is it only 1 grant to one partner?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	No, there is only 1 grantee for VNS grant with a max contribution of 4000 Eur. This amount can be lowered if the MC decides to do so. .
39	Can the 4000€ be spread between a suite of participants eg core group members	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	Only 1 applicant can be granted for a certain activity. However, the grant payment does not require any justification. It is paid against the submission and approval of the required report. The responsibility for submitting the report stays with the grantee, and the payment is done only to the grantee's bank account.
40	If the pilot is successful, can the person appointed as VNS manager change in the next GP?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	The VNS manager is appointed for the duration of the VNT pilot (until end of the current grant period, by 31/10/21 latest). If VNT grants are confirmed in the future and with the same format, a new VNS grant application and review process would be required.
41	STSM / Training School / ITC Grant Grantees can be applicants for Virtual mobility grants as ad-hoc participants?	WHO (Applies to VM Grant)	Yes, as long as the grants are not running in parallel.
42	Can the VNS manager apply for the grant?	WHO (Applies/Gets VM Grant)	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.
43	Can a VNS Manager apply for a VM grant?	WHO (Applies/Gets VM Grant)	Yes. **See VNT FAQ document question 24**
44	Is a VM grant awarded to one person, who engages a virtual audience?	WHO (Applies/Gets VM Grant)	Yes, a VM grant is paid to one person to perform certain activity. Please refer to the COST Vademecum section 10.1.3 (VNS grant) and 10.2.3 (VM grant) for examples of activities.
45	If the GH Manager receives the grant as a VNS Manager who is then to pay the grant? Cannot pay the grant to him/herself?	WHO (Applies/Gets VNS Grant)	The approval of the VNS grant is done by the MC Chair on behalf of the MC. The GH Institution will pay the GH Manager if he/she is selected to be the VNS grantee. A GH Manager can choose to be paid to a personal account of institution account.
46	In a virtual STSM, do both partners get a VM grant?	WHO (Applies/Gets VM Grant)	COST does not have the option of virtual STSM as such. The VM grant is paid only to the VM grantee, upon delivery and approval of the report related to the performed activity. If there are 2 applicants for a specific collaboration, there should be 2 individual applications and grants, if the MC decides to approve both.

47	Are there guidelines about the evaluation and selection of applicants? What should be the evaluation criteria for VNS and VM grants?	WHO (MC evaluation and selection)	Please note that the definition and implementation of the selection criteria for all the activities in a certain Action is always the responsibility of the Action MC. Please check Section 10 of the Vademecum. **See also VNT FAQ document question 20.**
48	What procedure should be followed for the MC to give mandate to the Action Chair or an appointed Coordinator / Committee to assume responsibility for the evaluation? E -Vote is ok?	WHO (MC evaluation and selection)	The evaluation of each submitted VNS grant application is performed by the Action's MC. You will find more information in the updated version of Vademecum 10.2. and in the e-COST step-by step user guide (see link at the top of the document), also available in the COST website. E-vote is accepted for the appointment of the VNS Manager as for any other MC decision when a MC meeting is not foreseen.
49	What should be the composition of the Committee for selecting VNT and VM grantees?	WHO (MC evaluation and selection)	Similar to STSM, it is up to the MC to decide the composition of a Committee for evaluating VNT grant applications.
50	Can the MC mandate the CG to make decisions on call, evaluation and selection of grantees?	WHO (MC evaluation and selection)	Yes.
51	Should the VNT manager be admitted to the Core Group?	WHO (MC evaluation and selection)	For the duration of the VNT Pilot, in case the grantee of the VNS grant is not already part of the Core Group, he/she can be invited to join if the MC agrees with that.
52	So, no invoices are requested?	HOW (Procedure/requirements for implementing, reporting, payment)	As it is a fixed grant, receipts and invoices are NOT required to be submitted.
53	If less money than 1500 is claimed per VM, can we then organise more than 6 VMs until the allocated budget of 9000 is spend? Or can we then just spend less money? So is the money the limit or the number?	HOW (Procedure/requirements for implementing, reporting, payment)	No. There is a limit in both the budget and the number of VM grants. For the VNT Pilot, a maximum of 6 Virtual Mobility Grants per Action per Grant Period can be awarded. Each Virtual Mobility Grant cannot exceed EUR 1 500.
54	or can we give less money to more grantees?		
55	If we do not deploy the VNS grant can we deploy VM grants? In that case should we define a virtual strategy?	HOW (Procedure/requirements for implementing, reporting, payment)	Yes, this is 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). **See also VNT FAQ document questions 27 and 28.**

56	What are the documents we need as proof for reimbursement of VNS and VM grants?	HOW (Procedure/re quirements for reporting, payment)	All the documents are submitted on e-COST: the VNT grant application form (before grant approval) and a scientific report (after completion of the activity and before payment). For the VNS grant, the uploading of the virtual networking strategy is also required.
57	I am still confused. Does the VNS need to provide invoices for his expenses, or is this to compensate the work he does such as preparing a document or reading manuals for online tools?	HOW (Procedure/re quirements for reporting, payment)	It is a grant. Therefore, no invoices nor receipts are required.
58	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." Can this be extended at the times when the VNS and VM grantees have also been given 15 days from end of Grant Period and 30 days from completion of VM Grant to submit their report?	HOW (Procedure/re quirements for reporting, payment)	No. All pending payments must be completed by the Grant Holder within 15 days after the end of the Grant Period. The sooner the draft Final Financial Report is submitted for validation, the better.
59	How can the grant amount be estimated? Even if as a grant the expenses do not need to be justified afterwards, for STSM and ITC Grants, the MC had an estimation of expenses	HOW (Procedure/re quirements for reporting, payment)	The grant amount is first estimated by the applicant, bearing in mind the limit for the VNS grant is 4,000 EUR and for the VM grant is 1,500 EUR. The amount may take into account the duration of the activity, its complexity (e.g., number of contributors involved, amount of data to process) and expected outputs. The grant does not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking the activity.
60	How are these grants paid? Is this invoice based?	HOW (Procedure/re quirements for reporting, payment)	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. As it is a grant, no justification of the expenses will be requested. Only the documents required in e-COST are the documents that will be checked for audit. Only the documents required in e-COST are the documents that will be checked for audit.
61	I find this Grant unfair. Activities described in the Vademecum for VNS have been done during all Actions voluntarily and sometime at professional or personal cost. Suddenly as a CHAIR I can say that some will receive a grant for the same work that was previously voluntary.	OTHER	The VNT Pilot was introduced as a set of measures aiming at addressing urgent and unmet needs from the Actions during the covid pandemic. It was the result of a long negotiation process with the European Commission, and the assessment of the VNT Pilot is expected to provide useful indications also for future development of COST networking tools in Horizon Europe. However, every Action can decide if these new tools, as the other ones, are useful to meet the

			Action needs or not, how to apply them and to whom to grant.
62	Don't you think that those having other roles (WG Leaders, Science Communication Officer, Training School Coordinator...) will feel disadvantaged as they do not have a grant?	OTHER	All Action participants, including those having a leadership role in the Action, are eligible to apply to any grant (VNTs, STSMs...), as long as they can carry out activities which are eligible and meet the Action needs. The VNS grant is not paying the leadership role, but the activities described in the work plan for the grant application (like in the case of the STSMs). It is up to the MC to discuss and encourage applications, knowing that in this pilot budget for VNT grants is limited. The MC may also decide not to make use of the VNS grant, for example, and implement only VM grants.
63	STSM and ITC grants are not taxed currently as they are reimbursements. Will this be different for VNTs?	OTHER	Similar to STSM and ITC Conference Grants, VNT are also grants. It is up to each beneficiary to declare this under their individual/company income declaration.
64	The timeline of this new idea is very very tight. MC Decision, VNS Manager Call, VM Call, Carrying out VM actions, reimbursement before 30.10.2021. Why wasn't this announced in January?	OTHER	The VNT Pilot has been approved by the European Commission on 23 March after a long negotiation process, and launched by COST on 28 April, with a strong encouragement and support to all Actions to immediately discuss how to implement the VNT grants.
65	Would slides be available?	OTHER	Yes, slides will be available. An email will be sent to the GH managers and Action Chairs.
66	Will this webinar be saved on YouTube?	OTHER	The webinar presentations will be available on YouTube: **https://youtu.be/Upxml75v_6s**