

## VIRTUAL NETWORKING SUPPORT (VNS) GRANT APPLICATION TEMPLATE

This application is submitted by the VNS grant applicant for evaluation to the Action MC.

Action number: CA18211

Applicant name: Sandra Nakić Radoš

### Describe how the COST Action can benefit from developing virtual networking activities

Focus should be on:

- Progress towards the Action objectives and deliverables.
- COST Excellence and inclusiveness Policy, especially towards the support of researchers in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries
- Stakeholder engagement and promoting the participation of researchers from NNC<sup>1</sup> and IPC<sup>2</sup>.

*(max.500 words)*

The main goal of the COST Action “Perinatal Mental Health and Birth-Related Trauma: Maximising best practice and optimal outcomes” (DEVOTION CA118211) is to establish a multidisciplinary pan-European Research Network dedicated to minimising birth trauma and optimising birth experiences. One of the main goals is to provide the best practices that can be shared across Europe to reduce the psychological adversities for the parents and families and the societal and economic burden arising from birth-related negative/traumatic experiences. The first step to developing such best practices is to collect up-to-date evidence on determinants and consequences of birth trauma and means for prevention, minimising and resolving birth-related trauma.

To contribute to the above objectives, researchers from DEVOTION have written several important papers that have been published or are in progress. However, the ongoing pandemic has substantially changed possibilities for in-person meetings, thus impacting plans to address the objectives of the Action. In that, virtual networking activities can make a significant turnover to act as a tool for overcoming the physical distance and the obstacles imposed by the pandemic. Furthermore, virtual networking activities can be an excellent platform for researchers to collaborate more efficiently, share their knowledge, work on their current scientific tasks, prepare the upcoming activities and work toward

<sup>1</sup> NNC: Near Neighbour Country

<sup>2</sup> IPC: International Partner Country

the deliverables of their working groups. All these should, in the end, foster collaboration, strengthen the existing network and expand it even more.

Furthermore, all members of the Action network might not be affected by the ongoing equally. Namely, senior researchers already have a strong network and may find ways to overcome changes in their work modality more easily. On the other hand, changes due to pandemics may impact early career researchers more strongly, as they did not have a chance to create a strong network through meetings and training schools that were supposed to happen in person in the last year and a half. This is even more true for researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries. Therefore, the Action would benefit from the virtual networking activities focused on early-career investigators, especially from Inclusiveness Target Countries. The advantage of virtual activities is that it is available to anyone without the necessity of travelling and dedicating extra time in already crowded schedules. Therefore, the benefits of the virtual activities should be taken, delivering them to the participants at hand in their offices. This is, even more, an opportunity to engage interested parties from non-COST countries, including Near Neighbour Countries and International Partner Countries, to expand the cross-border networking of researchers and make it more visible throughout Europe and beyond. It is imperative to engage different stakeholders to ensure that the scientific knowledge on birth-related trauma can be translated to the best practice for optimising the birth experience.

### **Outline of the strategy on virtual networking**

The applicant needs to propose an outline of the strategy on virtual networking, including:

- An approach for coordinating Virtual Mobility Grants (where relevant) by:
  - Opening calls and managing the evaluation process for awarding Virtual Mobility Grants
  - Supporting and advising beneficiaries of the Virtual Mobility Grants.
- A plan for coordinating and reporting any planned COST Action events that will be held online (e.g., Annual Meeting or Conference) and how they fit the overall Action strategy.

*(max.500 words)*

An open call for Virtual Mobility Grants will be distributed via the dissemination channels of the Action DEVOTION to promote virtual networking activities. This will be performed in close collaboration with WG6 on Communication and Dissemination, mainly through the internal weekly newsletter, the Action website, official social media (Twitter and Instagram), and word of mouth.

The call will be open by August 27th 2021 and all applications evaluated by September 6th. The Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Manager will assess each received VM grant application in cooperation with the STSM Committee.

The selection of a successful grantee shall be based on the following criteria:

- quality of the proposal
- contributions to the overall objectives of the Action as per Memorandum of Understanding
- specified working plan and plan for participation

Priority will be given to:

- Researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)
- Proposals that include stakeholder engagement and participation of researchers from Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPC; i.e. states that are neither COST Members nor COST Near Neighbour Countries)

Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Manager will be available for the interested applicants to ensure support and advice in the process of application for Virtual Mobility Grants.

As early-career investigators (ECI) make 49% of the Action DEVOTION network and may be significantly impacted by the ongoing changes due to the pandemic, a series of online events will be designed for them. This will foster their involvement in the Action and collaboration with other colleagues. Three online interactive webinars (on Tuesdays 13-14 CET in October) will be organised for ECIs. The first webinar will be focused on possibilities for advertising published scientific research through social media and networks for scientists and the use of video to promote academic research. The second webinar will be focused on presenting the project proposal to a grant board and how to give an “elevator” pitch. These webinars will be interactive, with 2-3 invited 10-minute presentations, followed by time for Q&A and practice. All materials will be available for dissemination via a video webinar for internal share through the COST DEVOTION network and output public on the Action website for open share. The third webinar will be organised as an informal café for ECIs to facilitate an introduction, foster the network and share experience. Participants will be divided into groups per 3 with tasks to present themselves and get to know other colleagues, share some of their problems in academic life and research. This webinar will be designed as a peer-support meeting where all participants will be asked to share their solutions and advice, collected later on and put into leaflets to be spread out for ECI both from the DEVOTION network and outside.

The next Main Meeting of the COST Action will be held online from September 29-30<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. Again, the Virtual Networking Support Manager will help in the coordination and reporting of the meeting.