



**European Cooperation  
in the field of Scientific  
and Technical Research  
- COST -**

**Secretariat**  
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**COST 252/06**

**NOTE**

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From : COST Office

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To : COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

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Subject : 165th CSO meeting on 27/28 June 2006, agenda item 14  
- Proposal for a Pilot call for specific COST Actions “Young Investigators Networks”

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Delegations will find attached a proposal for a Pilot call for specific COST Actions “Young Investigators Networks” to be presented to the 165th meeting of the CSO for approval.

## **Proposal for a Pilot call for specific COST Actions “Young Investigators Networks”**

### **I. Motivation**

#### **1. Background**

The Mid Term Review Panel 2005 requested COST to focus more strongly on the networking of younger researchers at an early stage of their career. The basic COST networking scheme could offer complementary opportunities to the individual mobility and excellence schemes of the European Framework Programme and other initiatives, like the EURYI awards. In particular the proposed “starting independent researchers” scheme (SIR) by the ERC could be complemented by a new type of dedicated COST Actions. The programmes run by the European Commission within the “People” Specific Programme of FP7 (currently branded ‘Marie Curie’ Actions) aim at enhancing the mobility of PhD students in e.g. Research Training Networks. The EURYI scheme consists of an award to excellent teams. The SIR support by the ERC will target the most excellent teams in Europe. None of these schemes are aimed at networking activities to be funded out of these awards.

Therefore a specific special type of COST Action could complement the other schemes in Europe, which aim exclusively at outstanding scientific excellence (SIR, EURYI, MC Re-integration Grants, etc.), by providing a networking instrument for young investigators.

The COST Office took the initiative, in close consultation with the ESF and Commission Services (in particular with the Marie-Curie programme), to prepare a proposal to explore the demand for an activity of this kind. During the Marie-Curie conference in Manchester 10 – 12 April 2006 the idea was presented by COST-Office as the part of the panel discussion of Marie Curie Fellowship Association (MCFA) and received strong support from the audience. The Board of MCFA discussed the concept in more detail and offered support concerning the practical implications. The impressions gathered are in favour for a specific type of COST Action exclusively run and managed by researchers in the early stages of their careers.

#### **2. Target group**

The term academically “young” for the target group addressed refers to researchers up to five years after their PhD or equivalent qualification. This might be seen as too rigid – SIR stipulates PhD plus ten years – but it would encourage researchers at the early stages of their academic careers to make full use of the networking opportunities through COST to foster their fields of research.

Permanent jobs are a problem at this academic age. Therefore a permanent job is no prerequisite to propose or participate in a Young Investigator Network – nevertheless, all participants are required to work on nationally funded research projects. The nominated participants of the network would remain members even if they moved between institutions. For the grant holding institute and the grant managing scientist individual solutions will be applied in case of a move to suit the need of the YIN participant in the same way as for other COST Actions in case of a change of the grant holding institute and/or scientific manager.

### **3. Added value**

Special training demands were articulated by the target group on many occasions. The target group of young researchers' efficiency can be greatly improved by a structured training in research management. This will enhance the slow learning-by-doing process which is common practice in Europe at present. Potential training suppliers for potential such a centrally organised added value activity within the YINs are being contacted by the COST Office. A further widening of the scope of activities is the proposal of annual YIN Conferences to which all YIN participants could be invited. These could be held in conjunction with the proposed ESII conferences. Another added value prospect could be an agreement to offer to a small number of YIN participants (say 20 p.a.) funding to attend special high-level conferences (e.g. to attend the Lindau Nobel laureates meetings as already positively discussed with the organisers).

### **4. Budget implications of the test call**

All COST Actions funded under the FP7 contract are expected to receive annual grants in the order of magnitude of 90.000 €. This estimate is valid for the five pilot YINs as well. No additional funds will be required as these pilot cases would form part of the allocations for new COST Actions.

Since the two stage assessment procedure is web-based to large extent, the additional workload for the Domain Committees is minor and can be incorporated easily into the agendas for assessments by the DCs.

### **5. Selection procedure for the test call**

Selecting the most promising COST Actions of the "YINs" type across the nine COST Domains will follow the normal procedure as outlined in COST 235/06 with a strong emphasis on external expertise, as it is common practice in Europe. The criteria developed for the COST Open Call will form the basis for the assessment during the pilot call for YINs. Aspects such as potential impact, network interaction to foster new fields of research and added value through interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as geographical integration will particularly be considered.

### **6. Monitoring and assessment of the test call**

A continuous monitoring and an assessment of the effects of this test call are required in order to enable the CSO to draw conclusions. Therefore, a monitoring group should be established by the CSO. It will produce a report to the CSO with suggestions how to make best use of the experiences gained from the pilot call.

## II. Proposal

### Pilot Call for COST Actions of the type “Young Investigators Networks”

1. The CSO is invited to approve a Pilot Open Call to test a specific type of COST Action, the “Young Investigator Networks”. This will be launched on 15 July 2006 to explore the demand for, and potential impact of, a specific activity of this type. The two-stage procedure will be the same as for all other COST Actions. This call is to be published using the appropriate media, following the outline in Annex.

The deadline for Preliminary Proposals for the thematically open pilot call will be 31 October 2006.

The assessment of the proposals will follow the same procedure as for the COST Open Call.

A tight timetable will be needed in order to enable the CSO to decide as soon as possible, and to ensure the start of the YINs in 2007, funded out of the ESF/COST contract for FP7:

- collection date for Preliminary Proposals: 31 October 2006
- allocation of preliminary proposals to the DCs: early November 2006
- invitation for 15 full proposals: end-November 2006
- deadline for full proposals: 15 February 2007

In order to meet the June 2007 CSO meeting the following preliminary time table is planned:

- assessment of full proposals by external expert panels (EEP): beginning March 2007
- ranking of full proposal by DC end April 2007
- JAF shortlist to CSO: end May 2007
- CSO approval of up to five YIN type Actions: meeting in June 2007

2. The CSO is invited to ask the JAF group to act as a **monitoring group** to this pilot call. This group is asked to present a report for the June 2007 CSO meeting on the process, the achievements in terms of the overall strategy of COST of this pilot call and present conclusions in order to optimise the COST instruments accordingly.

## Outline of the Pilot Call for COST Actions "Young Investigators Networks"

The following Open Call is to be published in appropriate media, including the Marie-Curie portal. (Final layout to be prepared)

### **COST Pilot Call for Proposals to Support European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research of Young Investigators Networks (YINs)**

COST brings together research teams in different countries working on specific topics. It finances networking of nationally funded activities in supporting meetings, conferences, short term scientific exchanges and outreach activities. COST therefore does NOT fund research itself. Currently more than 200 scientific networks (Actions) are supported.

Developing stronger links amongst European scientists is crucial to building the European Research Area (ERA). COST's main objective is to stimulate new, innovative, interdisciplinary and broad scientific networks in Europe. COST activities are carried out by research teams to strengthen the foundations for building scientific excellence in Europe.

COST invites in this pilot call proposals for a new type of COST Action called "Young Investigators Networks" (YINs) contributing to the scientific, economic, cultural or societal development of Europe by academically young networks? (Networks of young academics?). Proposals playing a precursor role for other European programmes are welcome. This pilot call is to explore the demand for such a dedicated activity. Up to five new Actions of the YIN type are foreseen for this pilot call.

COST is organised in nine scientific and technical Domains (Biomedicine and Molecular Biosciences; Chemistry and Molecular Sciences and Technologies; Earth System Science and Environmental Management; Food and Agriculture, Forests, their Products and Services; Individuals, Society, Culture and Health; Information and Communication Technologies; Materials, Physical and Nanosciences; Transport and Urban Development). Proponents are invited to indicate their preference for one Domain. Proposals not fitting this broad disciplinary structure are also welcome and will be assessed separately.

Proposals should be submitted by a minimum of 8 researchers at postdoc level, (PhD + max. 5 years preferably with international experience) from a minimum of five COST member states and should network nationally funded research activities. Their work plan should include no more than four targeted Working Groups and include activities such as meetings, short term scientific missions, work shops, conferences and outreach activities plus special "YIN Conferences" and research management training for the participants (organised and funded by the COST Office). On average financial support of some € 90.000 p.a. as grant for up to 4 years can be expected.

A two stage process will be followed to assess proposals. *Preliminary Proposals* (maximum 1500 words/3 pages), submitted using the on-line template at [www.cost.esf.org/opencall/YIN](http://www.cost.esf.org/opencall/YIN) should provide a brief overview of the proposal and its impact. Proposals will be screened for eligibility, and those not conforming to the eligibility criteria of COST (e.g. requesting research funding) will be excluded. A pre-selection will rank the remaining Preliminary Proposals of which some 15 will be invited to submit a *Full Proposal*. These will be peer reviewed according to the assessment criteria which can be found at [www.cost.esf.org/opencall/YIN](http://www.cost.esf.org/opencall/YIN). The decision will normally be taken within six months of the collection date below and the Actions should expect to start about six weeks thereafter.

The deadline for Preliminary Proposals is 31 October 2006. Full Proposals will be invited by 30 November 2006 for submission by 15 February 2007.

Proponents may wish to contact their national COST Coordinator (CNC) for information and guidance. **Proposals must be submitted on-line to the COST Office web site.** For details including the criteria, a list of COST Member States and contact details for the COST National Coordinators see [www.cost.esf.org/cnc](http://www.cost.esf.org/cnc).

COST receives financial support for its coordinating activities from the EU RTD Framework Programme, and funding of this call is conditional upon the EU contracting to support COST in the Seventh Framework Programme. The COST Office, established by the European Science Foundation (ESF), acting as the implementing agent for COST during the 6th FP on RTD, will provide the scientific secretariat for COST activities.