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- COST -**

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NOTE

To : COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

Subject : COST Outreach Strategy

Delegations will find attached the COST Outreach Strategy approved by the CSO at its 170th meeting on 12-13 March 2008.

COST Outreach Strategy

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COST Outreach Strategy

0. Introduction

The COST Outreach Strategy describes the COST outreach principles and the need for a responsible and flexible approach with pragmatic implementation models that fit the needs of the different target audiences through a wide range of – highly adaptable – communication channels on the one hand while working towards the objectives described on the other hand. The necessary communications platforms and action plans will be developed as the implementation of the strategy evolves.

1. Objectives and Communications Principles

The COST Outreach Strategy aims to meet the following objectives:

- To improve COST's visibility, addressing the target audiences described below.
- To disseminate results of current and previous COST Actions.
- To inform about the opportunities offered by COST.
- To inform about and engage target audiences in the role played by COST in its contribution to the European Research Area.
- To ensure transparency¹ in COST's implementation.
- To inform the target audience about the role played by the COST Member States in cooperation with the European Union (DG Research) and the assistance provided by the 7th Framework Programme through the ESF-EC contract.
- To support the COST Actions in reaching the objectives set out in their communication strategies where appropriate.
- To set up the necessary external communications platforms and bottom-up strategies for the accomplishment of the above and make them available to the target audiences as appropriate.
- To set up the necessary internal communications platforms and strategies for the accomplishment of the above and make them available, through training or instructions, as appropriate.

The COST Outreach Strategy follows the COST communications principles which are inspired by the integrated communications approach.

- Customer-oriented: The COST Office commits to the customer/stakeholder by focusing on customer-friendly and customer active communication. The starting point of this two-way communication is the need of the customer rather than the needs of the organisation.
- Consistent yet adaptable: COST Office messages need to be consistent (especially when explaining COST) yet adaptable as different target audiences require different information – e.g. some require a specific terminology whereas others require jargon-free information – to receive the same intended message.

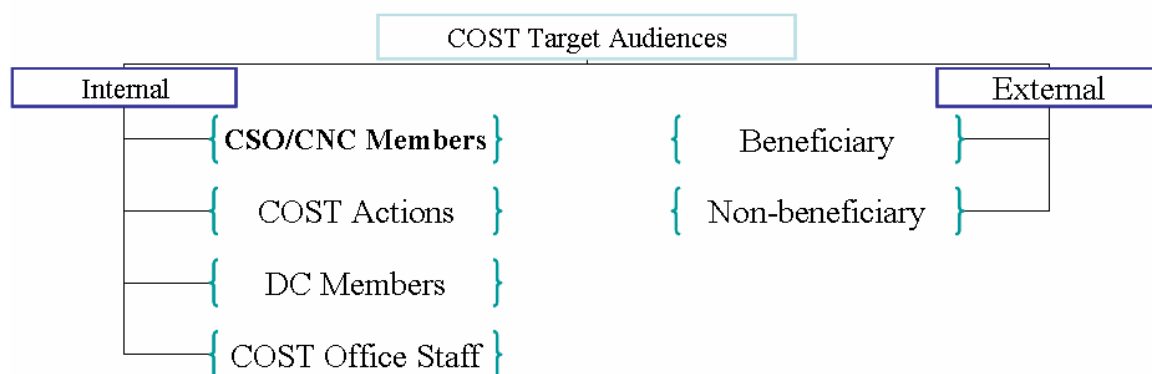
¹ In line with the Green Paper European Transparency initiative presented by the European Commission (COM (2006) 194 final, Code of Good Administrative Behaviour – Relations with the public.)

- **Innovative yet appropriate:** the success of a message or (an innovative) communications activity relies on its appeal but also on how well it aligns with the promise it delivers to the stakeholder.
- **Feedback-oriented:** through the four dimensions of the feedback programme – ongoing data collection, continuous aggregation of data, periodic trend analysis and making information available – the outreach strategy will be adapted to arising needs and internal (e.g. provision of specific guidance to some internal target audiences) and external communications processes (e.g. the development of a new service) improved.

2. Target Audiences

The COST Outreach Strategy will adapt the nature of the message to its target audiences. Target groups are expected to evolve as COST Activities evolve and innovative ways to address them will be sought.

The following internal and external target audiences have been identified:



The Outreach Strategy tends to focus on activities to reach external target groups. A description of the external target audiences is provided in [Annex 1](#).

It is important, however, to stress that the internal target groups play a pivotal role in external communications or have the potential to do so. The CSO members and the COST National Coordinators (CNC), for example, also reach beneficiary and non-beneficiary target audiences as do the Domain Committee members and (the researchers involved in) the COST Actions.

Following the communications principles mentioned above, it is important to provide these groups with the appropriate levels of customer-oriented service or training opportunities so that they can transfer a consistent COST message adapted to their needs.

The roles of the internal target audiences in external communications can be expected to be:

CSO/CNC Members:

Dissemination of information on COST Activities (publications, website updates etc); promotion of COST through own activities (e.g. COST Days, presentations etc); provision of information (e.g. for publication by the COST Office) upon request; regular visits to the COST Website including subscription to its services as well as the provision of feedback on its efforts for monitoring purposes.

COST Actions:

Include outreach activities such as dissemination of information on COST Action activities and other relevant COST Activities or the publication of expert publications in the work plan of the Action; promotion of COST through COST Action activities (e.g. COST Action conferences, presentations etc); provision of information (e.g. for publication by the COST Office) upon request; maintain a COST Action website and regular visits to the COST Website including subscription to its services as well as the provision of feedback on its efforts for monitoring purposes.

DC Members (directed via the DC Chair):

Dissemination of information on COST Activities (publications, website updates etc); promotion of COST through own COST Domain activities (e.g. Domain progress conferences, presentations etc); provision of information (e.g. for publication by the COST Office) upon request; regular visits to the COST Website including subscription to its services and contributions to the Domain sections as well as the provision of feedback on its efforts for monitoring purposes.

The COST Office is requested to seek active engagement of the internal target audiences, provide support for these activities and to integrate relevant CSO decisions² into the outreach strategy.

3. Publicity and Information Channels and Activities

This Outreach Strategy provides a non-exhaustive overview of the channels identified. Some channels have already been implemented, others only partially or not at all. The Outreach Strategy lists broad categories of activities as well as a few specific activities currently foreseen.

The COST Office is requested to develop additional channels and activities where necessary and adapt activities when required. Further developments have to adhere to standard personal data protection and copyright regulations³ and respect the efforts made to date.

3.1 COST Online

The COST Online strategy focuses on new and updated technologies, interactions between users and a shift in content focus.

3.1.1 COST Website

The COST portal website will continue to be COST's main communication channel. A number of measures have to be taken to increase the accessibility and the usability of the COST website. The aim is to provide a more modern and consistent experience for online visitors as well as a site that is easy to navigate, understand and recognise.

² Such as the outcome of the discussion on "Strengthening communication between the COST Office and the CSO members/CNCs".

³ More specifically: Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18.12. 2000, Directive 2002/58/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12.7. 2002 and Directive 2006/24/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15.3. 2006 as well as relevant national regulations.

The website will be user-friendlier for returning visitors and intuitive for new visitors – encouraging them to return. The goal is to increase the website’s usability and interactivity thus increasing visibility as well as the total number of unique visitors⁴ to the website. In parallel, loyal COST website visitors will experience increased service levels.

This will be achieved through a website redesign, focussing on the features and functionalities and, secondly, adapting the “look and feel” of the website where necessary and taking into consideration the COST Corporate Identity. The redesign will be modular, allowing for smooth integration with other online COST tools as they become available (e.g. CGS or Action websites) and for clustering of content at a later stage.

A site evolution plan will ensure consistency with the existing content; will follow the evolution in COST Activities from a technical (e.g. development of new online tool or introduction of a new feature) and content point of view; will address issues raised through the monitoring efforts and, for example, react to customer feedback

The COST Website addresses internal and external audiences.

3.1.2 eCOST

eCOST, the working name for the COST Grant System and other online tools that require a login, addresses internal target audiences.

Integration with the COST online strategy in terms of functionality and design will be ensured.

3.1.3 COST Corporate Identity

The introduction of the new COST Logo has been successful and is helping to establish COST as a brand in European Research circles. A COST brand centre consisting of a Corporate Identity Manual and the necessary templates and detailed instructions will be established to assist various internal and external target audiences with their dissemination efforts.

The COST Corporate Identity targets internal and external target audiences.

3.1.4 Promotion

A number of steps will be taken to promote the COST website address—online and offline. The goal of website promotion is to increase the number of unique visitors to the COST Website.

Website statistics are the most important monitoring tool for the COST Website. In addition, a number of feedback tools such as online questionnaires could be implemented to obtain more detailed customer feedback on the website, its subsections or applications, or on other COST activities.

⁴ Refers to a person who visits a website more than once within a specified period of time. Unique visitors are measured according to their unique IP addresses, which are like online fingerprints, and unique visitors are counted only once no matter how many times they visit the site.

A number of standard – often free – methods to promote the COST Website will be applied such as search engine optimisation and (viral) marketing techniques.

Website promotion addresses internal external target audiences.

3.2 Programme Publications

3.2.1 Expert Publications

The longstanding tradition of COST to produce a number of Action publications will be continued following the process described in the COST Corporate Guidelines (Vademecum). Where appropriate, alternative communication channels such as CD-ROMs or memory sticks will be decided on.

The COST Office provides the COST Actions with support in terms of dissemination of their publications.

Since Expert Publications mainly address beneficiary target audiences, extra efforts could be made to address internal audiences routinely for information purposes and to enable non-beneficiary audiences to re-transmit information on the existence or content of the publication. Ideas include the inclusion of a publications section in COST Office newsletter and the set up of an electronic alert system on the COST Office website.

3.2.2 Corporate Publications

The COST Office produces a standard range of Corporate Publications such as the Annual Report, the general COST flyer, Domain flyers, the About COST brochure and the electronic COST Office newsletter for CSO and CNC members.

A range of general corporate publications such as multimedia presentations, flyers and information leaflets and specific corporate publications such as press releases, success stories, reports and fact sheets will also be developed following the COST Corporate Identity.

Corporate publications target beneficiary and non-beneficiary audiences with the aim to promote the COST programme and expand the pool of beneficiaries. Extra efforts will be made to disseminate corporate publications to a wider target audience. Ideas include the use of electronic alert systems and mailing lists. The electronic newsletter could be used to serve as a platform for news from the COST Member Countries as well.

COST also contributes to ESF corporate publications such as the Annual Report, the ESF corporate brochure and newsletters. With the development of joint COST-ESF activities, the number of joint press releases is expected to increase.

For the dissemination of press releases, contracts with Internet press centres such as AlphaGalileo and Euractiv have been signed. Internet press centres also play an active role in the COST website promotion described above.

Corporate Publications address internal and external target audiences. Especially for press releases, extra efforts could be made to address internal audiences routinely for information purposes.

3.3 Interpersonal Communication

3.3.1 Meetings and Events

Interpersonal communication through face-to-face meetings remains a very effective communication channel to foster a positive cooperation among the various entities involved in COST.

The COST Office will organise activities for beneficiary target audiences to provide them with the opportunity to exchange experiences or obtain more information. These activities relate to the organisation of COST conferences (including annual progress conferences); COST Strategic Workshops; COST Seminars; COST-ESF events and other outreach events (e.g. ESOF2008). These meetings are an excellent channel to promote COST and its activities.

The COST Conference Unit will contribute to the organisation of these meetings as well as to the aims of the outreach strategy. It will also contribute to the organisation of events that focus on outreach activities targeting the general public.

The COST Conference Unit was established alongside the ESF conference unit, recently relocated to Brussels. This practical synergy enables COST to embark on joint COST-ESF events.

3.3.2 Network of Disseminators

Through media monitoring and personal networks, the COST Office has established cooperation with a network of disseminators. This network is an external, non-beneficiary target audience which is expected to expand while contacts with existing disseminators (e.g. EUREKA, CORDIS, European Commission Information Units...) will be deepened.

Cooperation could include the organisation of joint exhibitions, workshops and events, contribution to newsletters, contribution to online presentations and joint information stands at selected events.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The COST Office is requested to monitor communications activities to measure their impact and identify new opportunities and changed priorities or needs.

Performance monitoring assesses the progress towards achieving the overall objectives by measuring achievements through standard feedback mechanisms such as media monitoring, web statistics or event evaluation procedures. Where necessary, specific feedback sessions through, for example, online questionnaires or focus groups may be organised. Depending on the aim of the feedback session, internal and external target audiences may be involved.

Indicative External Target Audiences

Audiences reached by the COST Outreach strategy but not necessarily directly by general COST activities (a.k.a. non-beneficiary target audiences). These audiences typically re-transmit information provided by COST with the aim to increase or even complete the pool of beneficiaries.

- Opinion formers and Research Policy decision-makers:
 - At local, regional and national level (e.g. through direct contact with CSO/CNC)
 - At European level (e.g. European Commission, European Parliament, Joint Research Centre, European Bodies such as ESF, EuroHorcs, ERC etc.)
 - In COST countries and beyond (e.g. through direct contact with COST Actions)
 - National Research Councils
- Media:
 - Scientific and non-scientific press
 - Radio, TV and digital media
 - Disseminators and multipliers such as disciplinary interest organisations
- General Public

Audiences reached by the COST Outreach strategy as well as directly by general COST Activities (a.k.a. beneficiary target audiences).

- Individual Researchers:
 - PhD students
 - PhD + 10 yrs = Early Stage Researchers⁵
 - Other researchers
- Universities/Research institutions/Academies
- Research funding/performing organisations (e.g. Science Parks)
- Industry (e.g. in cooperation with EUREKA)
- United Nations' Offices, Funds, Programmes and Regional Commissions

Target audiences will be reached directly or indirectly – in COST Countries and beyond – depending on the activity conducted or the topic addressed.

⁵ Doc. COST 212/07 “*COST Strategy towards increased support for early stage researchers*” approved by the CSO at its 167th meeting on 21- 22 March 2007.