

Short Term Scientific Missions (STSM) within the COST ACTION CA15223 “Modifying plants to produce interfering RNA – iPLANTA”

What are STSM? Short Term Scientific Missions (STSM) are exchange visits aimed to strength the scientific objectives of the Cost Action, by supporting inter-lab exchange visits of young scientists in/between COST countries.

Objectives of STSM

- 1) To consolidate the existing networks and to create new network between institutions or laboratories of Action members in other COST countries (e.g. undertake research, to draft proposals and articles, etc).
- 2) To facilitate transfer of knowledge, training in new techniques (e.g. transformation systems, construct design, biosafety testing), the use of important new equipment, and experimentation in the lab and field. Furthermore, young scientists will benefit from a mentoring program, due to the presence of highly qualified scientists in this consortium with extensive mentoring experience and tutoring.
- 3) To foster personal connections and provide opportunities for future career development of the Early Career Investigators researchers (ESR).

Dates for applying a STSM For every Grant Period, two collection dates will be available for application. The first collection date will be until **30st April**, and the second **30th September**. The decision will be given up to one month later. The April and September calls for STSM should be announced at the website, and sent to all the MC participants for dissemination.

Eligibility criteria Exchange visits are possible between countries or institutions that have signed the CA15223 memorandum of understanding. Before applying, the applicant must check the countries and institutions participating in the Cost Action CA15223 (http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/ca/CA15223?parties). The different scenarios for eligibility of applicants are presented in the following table.

Home Institution	Host Institution
From a Participating COST Country	To another Participating COST Country
	To an approved NNC Institution
	To an approved IPC institution
	To an approved EC / EU Agency / an approached European RTD organization or an approved International Organization
From an approved NNC institution	To a Participating COST Country
From an approved European RTD organization	To a Participating COST Country

NNC – COST near neighbour country

IPC – International partner country

RTD – Any intergovernmental scientific research organization that is responsible for infrastructures and laboratories whose members are countries, and the majority of which are COST member countries or Cooperating state.

The Home and Host institution should be located in different countries. STSMs within the same country are not allowed.

Eligible for application are PhD students and Early Career Investigators (ECI; less than 8 years after PhD), whose research can be clearly associated to objectives of the Cost Action. There should be special considerations made by the MC with respect to supporting COST policies on promoting gender balance, enabling Early Career Investigators (ECI) and broadening geographical inclusiveness (see selection criteria). Other type of applicants can also apply but Early Career Investigators (ECI) and PhD students will be selected in priority order.

Scientific focus

The selection of successful STSM applicants must consider the scientific scope of the proposed mission and how the mission can support the Action in achieving its scientific objectives.

Proposals might cover a wide range species and biological, biosafety, socio-economical questions on RNAi technology, with focus on plants. The host institution organization has to have a clear link to one of the WORKGROUPS of COST CA15223 topics (Please check the Workgroups at the Memorandum of Understanding):

- WG1: RNAi technology
- WG2. Application of RNAi technology in GM plants
- WG3: Specific biosafety issues associated with RNAi
- WG4. Socio-economic Issues
- WG5: Communication platform on plant RNAi

A database of STSM proposals offered by Host institutions will be created to guide applicants in developing the STSM project and application. This list will not grant any priority for STSM grant attribution.

Evaluation of the proposals

The STSM Coordinator and the vice-leaders will receive the STSM grant proposals, and confirm the reception of all documents required for evaluations and the eligibility of the candidate.

The STSM committee (STSM coordinator, Grant Chair and Leaders of each Working group) will peer review the application, soliciting opinions when necessary.

Selection of the applicants will be based on the following selection criteria (criteria will be evaluated with a maximum of 5 points each):

- Scientific quality,
- Originality of the work plan,
- Training benefit for the applicant,
- Benefit for the iPLANTA Network.

The maximum score for the sum of these four criteria will be 20 points. A grant will be considered for approval if it reaches a minimum score of 12 points. If two or more grants get the same score, bonus points will be considered in order to benefit countries in regions of geographical inclusiveness (1 point) and lower funding required related to the city of the Host Institution (1 point), or type of applicant (Early Career investigator, 2 points; PhD student, 1 point; other type of applicants, 0 points).

The number of grants attributed every year will depend on the budget attributed annually to STSM, number of applications presented, and budget required by each proposal. For the first call, the number of grants attributed should be calculated in a way that the total financial support attributed to the approved grants does not exceed half of the annual budget for STSM approved by the Management Committee. If after the second call of the year

funding is still available for STSM, a third call will be open at the end of evaluation process of the second call.

In case of rejection, the STSM coordinator will inform the applicant by e-mail. In case of approval, the STSM coordinator will first inform the Grant Holder by e-mail. The Grant Holder will subsequently inform the successful applicants by sending them a Grant letter with an official approval of the STSM application, a "Payment Request" (to be completed after the completion of the STSM) and the level of the financial grant given. The Applicant has to confirm the acceptance of the grant by returning the Grant letter with his/her signature. **Resubmissions are accepted.**

Important Note: a fixed grant is made, in line with COST regulations, and is paid after the STSM has been completed and the report approved. The report should be send for approval within one month after the end of the STSM. The grant will be paid directly to the bank account entered in the e-Cost system.

Duration of exchange visits

Standard application: STSM duration can range from a minimum of 5 days to a maximum of 90 days.

For **Early Career Investigators** the visit can be extended to a maximum of 6 months, under additional provisions:

- 1) The mission should have a minimum duration of 90 days and a maximum of 180 days.
- 2) STSM must be within a single Grant Period and within the Action's lifetime.

STSM Financial support

For each STSM Grant a fixed financial contribution will be attributed that will take into consideration the budget requested by the applicant and the output of the evaluation of the STSM application. STSM Committee can approve different country rates to cover accommodation and meal expenses based on the perceived cost of living in the host country. This can be used to increase the number of STSM grants.

STSM Grantees must make their own arrangements for all provisions related to personal security, health, taxation, social security and pension matters.

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

Standard application:

- up to a maximum of EUR 2 500 in total can be afforded to each successful STSM applicant;
- up to a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses. Costs must reflect the living cost of the city where the Institution is placed (funding required will be considered in the cost–benefit evaluation for the Action).

For **ECIs**, the calculation for an increased financial contribution must respect the following criteria:

- up to a maximum of EUR 3 500 in total can be afforded to ECIs for missions with a duration of between 91 and 180 days;
- up to a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses (funding required will be considered in the cost–benefit evaluation for the Action).

Any exception needs special justification and prior approval from the appointed STSM committee.

Application Process

- 1) The applicant must obtain the agreement of the host institution before submitting the STSM application, and provide a signed statement from the Host Institution. STSM grantees must make their own arrangements for all health, social, personal security and pension matters. A database of STSM proposals by the HOST Institutions will be developed to help the applicant to find the right Institution for STSM.
- 2) The applicant must request for STSM on-line at www.cost.eu/STSM, after registering at the e-COST system (<https://e-services.cost.eu>).
- 3) The STSM application **MUST** include the following documents:
 1. STSM registration form downloaded from the on-line registration system.
 2. Short CV (**max 1 page**) including:
 - date of birth,
 - clearly specified number of years since obtaining PhD Degree, when applicable,
 - current position,
 - brief description of the current research line at Home Institution
 3. Full work plan (**max 2 pages**, including motivation and budget – single space and Times New Roman 12pt).
 4. List of (relevant) publications (**max 1 page** – single space and Times New Roman 12pt).
 5. Signed Statement from the Host Institution that agrees hosting the mission.
 6. Reference letter of the supervisor of the Home Institution.
- 4) The PDF application file needs to be named as follows:
Application_COSTSTSM-CA15223_LastNameFirstName.pdf
- 5) The STSM application **MUST** be sent electronically, as **one single e-mail with one single PDF attachment**, to:
 - the STSM Coordinator Jorge Paiva (jpai@igr.poznan.pl)
 - the STSM Vice-Coordinators Vesna Tumbas Saponjac (vesnat11@gmail.com) and Marko Petek (marko.petek@nib.si)
 - the Host institution of the STSM

After the STSM is completed

After completion of the STSM, the grantee is required to submit the following documents **within 4 weeks after his/her stay**, as a single pdf file (please name the file **REPORT_COST-STSM-CA15223_LastNameFirstName.pdf**):

- 1) The **STSM scientific report** (A4 format, single space and Times New Roman 12pt, maximum 3 pages). This report should contain the following items:
 - STSM Application number:
 - STSM Grantee:
 - STSM title:
 - Home Institution:
 - Host Institution:
 - STSM period:
 - STSM purpose:
 - Description of the work carried out during the STSM:
 - Description of the main results obtained:
 - Mutual benefits for the Home and Host institutions:
 - Future collaboration with the Host institution (if applicable):

- Foreseen publications or conference presentations expected to result from the STSM (if applicable):
- 2) **signed and dated statement from the Host Institution** (both the Head of the Department and supervisor) confirming the successful execution of the STSM (free format).
 - 3) An additional “Output of the STSM” file should be provided containing a summary of the STSM report (DOC-file; please name the file **Outcome_COST-STSM-CA15223_LastNameFirstName.doc**)
 - **STSM application number:** please report the number assigned by the system to your application, e.g. COST-STSM-CA15223-####
 - **ENTER WG:** please write the number of the WG within which the cooperation was meant to be established.
 - **Objective of the collaboration:** you can report the STSM title and maybe expand it a little bit to make it clearer, if necessary (maximum 150 characters with space).
 - **Results of the collaboration:** please write a very concise synthesis with the outcomes (*maximum 400 characters with spaces*). Be aware that this information is meant to be presented as a record of a big table for the whole STSM programme; it is not necessary to extend descriptions as they are already reported in the STSM scientific report.

Both documents (the Report PDF file and the Outcome DOC-file) need to be sent electronically, as **one single e-mail** to:

- the STSM Coordinator Jorge Paiva (<mailto:stsm@igr.poznan.pl>). Available at the beginning of March 2017.
- the STSM Vice-Coordinators Vesna Tumbas Saponjac (vesnat11@gmail.com) and Marko Petek (marko.petek@nib.si)
- Please note that successful applicants will be invited to prepare a short cover story (with photos preferably) to be placed on the Action’s Webpage (max 1 page A4), after the completion of the STSM. The applicants of the best cover stories might be invited to share their experience during the COST Action events.

The STSM coordinator will approve the final report, after advising with the vice-coordinators. Once approved, the Coordinator of the STSM will send a "notice of completion" of the STSM together with the short scientific report to the Grant Holder. The Grant Holder will then execute the payment of the fixed grant directly to the grantee or the host institute, as requested in the application.

Acknowledgments Please add the following acknowledgment “This work was partially funded by the COST Action CA15223 Modifying plants to produce interfering RNA”, if the results from STSM visit will be published in a scientific journal or presented at any national or international conference (oral or poster). Please, inform the STSM Coordinator (jpai@igr.poznan.pl) when any of this dissemination tools are used.

NB: the text was produced with input of different sources such as the COST VADEMECUM, as well as the texts for STSM prepared in the frame of different COST ACTIONs, namely IC1302, ES1205 and FA1306.