



COST Action – CA24135

**European Atmospheric Research Lidar COoperation on Science
and Technology (EARLICOST)**

**Open Call for Virtual Network
Support Grant (VNS)**

Important Dates:

Application deadline: 06 September 2026

Notification of Results: 10 September 2026

VNS Activity Period: 10 September 2026 – 16 October 2026

Report submission deadline: 19 October 2026

About EARLICOST:

The Action aims to deepen our understanding on atmospheric composition and improve the capabilities of atmospheric lidars to address critical gaps in aerosol characterization, temperature, and water vapor profiling. The vertical distribution of these key atmospheric variables provides crucial insights on air quality, public health, weather, and climate. In particular, aerosols are among the most significant drivers of climate change, and one of the largest sources of uncertainty in climate models which stems from their complex interactions with radiation and clouds. Thus, it is widely recognized that the spatiotemporal variability of aerosol properties plays a major role in numerous atmospheric processes that affect our lives. Despite breakthroughs in atmospheric lidar design and capabilities, achieved by independent research groups and the industry, there is still a need to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration between the different communities. The Action aspires to address this gap by fostering a collaborative network that brings together academic researchers, industry experts, policymakers, commercial and scientific end-users. Through this multidisciplinary approach, the Action builds on and extends the current state of the art in lidar technology, seeks to harmonize methodologies across measurement networks, standardize aerosol, water vapor, and temperature lidar retrievals, and develop new techniques to improve the accuracy of atmospheric profiling monitoring. The Action will play a pivotal role in advancing lidar technologies, fostering technological innovation and improved data-sharing practices, and will enhance the understanding of atmospheric processes, ultimately delivering broad societal benefits through more accurate climate predictions, environmental policies and enhanced air quality monitoring.

To learn more about **EARLICOST**, please look at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here: https://e-services.cost.eu/files/domain_files/CA/Action_CA24135/mou/CA24135-e.pdf

Specific Description :

Number of Grants: 1

Specific Goals: Virtual networking support

Outputs: 1 Report

Grant amount: 4.000€

This call intends to provide 1 grant to 1 grant holder to develop the tasks described herein.

General context:

Effective networking is at the core of the EARLICOST Action. While face-to-face meetings, workshops and scientific exchanges remain essential for building collaborations, sustainable cooperation also requires well-designed virtual networking mechanisms that enable continuous interaction, knowledge exchange and collaboration between Action participants throughout the lifetime of the project.

With members distributed across numerous countries and Working Groups, EARLICOST generates a significant amount of scientific knowledge, presentations, reports, meeting outcomes and collaborative activities. To maximise the long-term value of these resources, the Action aims to establish efficient virtual networking practices that facilitate cross-Working Group collaboration, reduce duplication of effort, promote the sharing of expertise, methodologies and resources across the four EARLICOST Working Groups, and ensure that valuable knowledge remains accessible to all members throughout the lifetime of the Action.

The Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grant focuses on the strategic development of these networking activities. The VNS Grant holder will develop practical approaches for strengthening virtual collaboration, improving interactions across Working Groups and designing sustainable mechanisms for knowledge sharing.

A key objective of the grant is to develop and present a strategic framework for the planning and implementation of virtual networking meetings within EARLICOST, supporting continuous collaboration and knowledge exchange across all Working Groups and Action participants. Furthermore, the Grant Holder will contribute to the conceptual design of the Action's future Virtual Knowledge Base, which will serve as a central repository for organising scientific resources, networking outputs and collaborative material generated throughout the lifetime of the Action.

The proposed activities should contribute to creating a more connected, collaborative and resilient

research community by facilitating information exchange, encouraging cross-Working Group interactions and supporting the long-term accessibility of knowledge produced within EARLICOST.

Objectives of the VNS Grant :

The Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grant aims to strengthen collaboration across the EARLICOST network by supporting the development of sustainable virtual networking practices that complement face-to-face meetings and facilitate continuous knowledge exchange throughout the lifetime of the Action.

The VNS Grant will contribute to :

- strengthening collaboration across the four Working Groups
- improving knowledge exchange and reducing duplication of effort
- supporting the long-term preservation and accessibility of Action knowledge
- proposing sustainable virtual networking practices that can be implemented throughout the lifetime of the Action

General Activities:

The selected Grant Holder will help strengthen virtual collaboration within EARLICOST by developing strategic recommendations and practical approaches to support effective networking across the Action. The activities will include:

- Develop a strategic framework for planning and implementing virtual networking meetings across the EARLICOST Action.
- Assess the current networking practices and digital collaboration workflows and identify opportunities to strengthen collaboration between Working Groups and Action participants.
- Propose sustainable approaches for facilitating knowledge exchange and long-term virtual collaboration within the Action.
- Develop the conceptual design and organisational structure of the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base, including recommendations for the collection, organisation and long-term accessibility of Action resources.
- Support the Core Group in identifying good practices and recommendations for future virtual networking activities.

- Prepare a final report summarising the proposed virtual networking strategy, recommendations and the conceptual design of the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base.

The activities are expected to be completed within the first year of the Action and to provide recommendations that can be progressively implemented throughout the remaining duration of EARLICOST.

Specific Activities:

The selected Grant Holder will be expected to undertake the following activities:

- Review the current virtual collaboration practices within EARLICOST and identify strengths, gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Consult with the Key Action participants (Core Group, WG leaders, etc.) to identify networking needs, collaboration challenges and priorities.
- Develop a strategic framework for the planning and implementation of virtual networking meetings, including recommendations on meeting formats, participant engagement, knowledge exchange mechanisms and follow-up actions.
- Assess the current digital resources and collaborative platforms already available within the Action and identify opportunities for their improved use and integration.
- Map the existing knowledge assets generated within EARLICOST (e.g. presentations, reports, deliverables, workshop material, training resources, publications and best practices) and develop recommendations for their long-term organisation within the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base.
- Design the conceptual structure of the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base, including recommendations for:
 - organisation of scientific resources;
 - categorisation of networking outputs;
 - storage of presentations, reports and meeting outcomes;
 - documentation of best practices and collaborative resources;
 - long-term accessibility and sustainability.
- Identify examples of good practices from other COST Actions, European Research Infrastructures or international collaborative networks that could be adapted within EARLICOST.
- Develop recommendations for a governance model to support the long-term maintenance,

updating and sustainability of the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base, including roles, responsibilities and proposed workflows for content management.

- Prepare recommendations for strengthening collaboration and knowledge exchange between Working Groups through virtual networking approaches.
- Prepare a final report summarising the proposed Virtual Networking Strategy together with the conceptual design and implementation recommendations for the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base.

Expected Results:

The selected Grant Holder is expected to deliver the following outputs by the end of the grant period:

- **A comprehensive Virtual Networking Strategy Report** for EARLICOST, including recommendations for the planning, organisation and implementation of virtual networking meetings throughout the Action. The report will summarise the work carried out, the proposed strategy, the conceptual design of the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base and recommendations for future implementation.
- **A conceptual design for the EARLICOST Virtual Knowledge Base**, including its proposed structure, content organisation, resource categories and recommendations for long-term maintenance and sustainability.
- **Recommendations for strengthening collaboration and knowledge exchange** between Working Groups through virtual networking approaches and digital collaboration practices.
- **A review of suitable digital tools and platforms** that could support virtual collaboration, networking and knowledge sharing within the Action.

Eligibility criteria:

Applicants must fulfil the general eligibility requirements for COST Grants as described in the **COST Annotated Rules**.

In addition, applicants should demonstrate:

- Experience in the coordination or facilitation of research collaborations, scientific networks

or European projects.

- Demonstrated experience or a strong interest in virtual networking, knowledge management, collaborative digital environments or research community building.
- Excellent organisational and communication skills, with the ability to develop strategic recommendations and practical solutions for international research networks.
- Familiarity with digital collaboration platforms and online networking tools will be considered an asset.
- Very good knowledge of English (written and spoken).

The selected Grant Holder is expected to work closely with the EARLICOST Core Group throughout the grant period and submit all agreed deliverables by the end of the mission.

Evaluation Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated by the EARLICOST Grant Evaluation Committee based on the following criteria:

1. Relevance to EARLICOST and the VNS objectives (0–5)

To what extent does the proposed work contribute to the objectives of the Virtual Networking Support Grant and address the networking needs of the Action?

2. Quality of the proposed Virtual Networking Strategy (0–5)

How well does the proposal address the planning and implementation of virtual networking meetings, collaboration mechanisms and knowledge exchange across the Action?

3. Quality and feasibility of the proposed approach (0–5)

Are the proposed methodology, work plan and deliverables realistic, practical and achievable within the grant period?

4. Innovation and added value (0–5)

Does the proposal introduce innovative or effective approaches that could improve networking, collaboration and knowledge sharing within EARLICOST?

5. Applicant's expertise and understanding of the networking needs of the Action (0–5)

Does the applicant demonstrate relevant experience in virtual collaboration, knowledge management, international scientific networks or similar activities?

6. Overall coherence of the proposal (0–5)

Are the objectives, activities, methodology and expected results consistent and well aligned?

Additional Considerations :

The Evaluation Committee may also take into account the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy, including where applicable :

- Gender balance
- Participation of Early Career Researchers
- Participation from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs)
- Potential contribution to the long-term sustainability of the Action

Scale: 5-0 (5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed)

The report required for claiming the grant of Virtual Networking Support shall be submitted upon the completion of the activity and, at the latest 15 days after the end of the Grant period, and shall follow the template available on e-COST.

The Grant Awarding Coordinator verifies the validity and content of the report and coordinates approval of the report.

Guidance for COST Association are applicable for grant application evaluation awarding. For more information, please read section “Documents for running a COST Action” at <https://www.cost.eu/funding/documents-guidelines/>.

How to apply?

Virtual Networking Support (VNS) Grant is reserved exclusively for Action Participants* or other relevant individuals invited by the Core Group who develop the collaboration in online and hybrid settings, adding substantial impact to the work related to achieving main objectives and performing tasks of the COST Action.

Interested researchers should:

- Carefully read the funding rules on pages 98-100 in the Annotated Rules for COST Actions (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/11/COST-094-21-Annotated-Rules-for-COST->

Actions-Level-C-V3.0- 25-IX-2025.pdf) and Grant Awarding User guide (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/01/COST-Grant-Awarding-user-guide.pdf>)

- Register (or access your account) for an e-COST profile at <https://e-services.cost.eu/>
- Apply by filling in the information by logging into e-COST, clicking on the Grant Applications tab, and uploading the supporting documentation (VNS Conference grant application based on e-COST template)
- Must also fill in the information in the following link: <https://res.inoe.ro/apps/forms/s/J89WzMmGPPrkZ2dbQ8FLHN8W>
- The following document for the grant application are required: Virtual Networking Support (VNS) grant application (based on e-COST template). <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA24135/>

***Action Participants :** Any person being a Management Committee member, a Working Group member, or an ad-hoc contributor to the COST Action.

Contact People:

Grant Awarding Coordinator: Gladiola Malollari, email: gmalollari@ubt.edu.al

Science Communication Manager: Joelle Buxmann, email: Joelle.c.buxmann@metoffice.gov.uk

Grant Holder Manager: Katerina Alafodimou, email: kcalafod@noa.gr

Action Chair: Eleni Marinou, email: elmarinou@noa.gr

Action Vice Chair: Anca Nemuc, email: anca@inoe.ro

Sources:

- COST. ANNOTATED RULES FOR COST ACTIONS [www.cost.eu](https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/11/COST-094-21-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C-V3.0-25-IX-2025.pdf) (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/11/COST-094-21-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C-V3.0-25-IX-2025.pdf>)
- COST. Grant Awarding user guide. (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2025/01/COST-Grant-Awarding-user-guide.pdf>)
- ANNEX II – LEVEL A: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS APPLICABLE THROUGHOUT COST IMPLEMENTATION RULES GLOSSARY (<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2021/10/Annex-II-level-A-Glossary-REVISION.pdf>)

Acknowledgment:

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