

OPERA COST Action

“EurOPean NEtwork foR Innovative and Advanced Epitaxy”

CA20116

Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) – OPERA COST Action

STSM Objectives:

A short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM) consists in a visit to a host organization by a Researcher or Innovator to carry out a specific scientific task for a well-defined period of time. The host organization and the Researcher/Innovator affiliation countries must be different. The STSM programme aims to actively contribute to reach the scientific objectives of the OPERA COST Action.

STSM will support visits and exchanges with the objective to:

- Strengthening the network;
- Improving the access to the scientists to infrastructures, experimental techniques and/or methodologies not available in their own institution/laboratory;
- Fostering collaborations and creating synergies between different countries. STSM will lead to enhanced knowledge creation and transfer.

STSM will benefit to:

- STSM Grantee: receives funding for implementing a project with an international team and gains new knowledge or access to equipment or techniques not available in the home institution;
- STSM Host: receives an international partner in their institution to create or develop a long-lasting collaboration.

Who is eligible to take part in an STSM?

A STSM applicant must be affiliated to a research institution/laboratory, company, or legal entity, having a research activity directly in relation with epitaxy, characterization of epitaxial materials, or modelling/simulation to understand growth processes and epitaxial structures.

Participation of Young Researchers and Innovators – defined as scientists under the age of 40 – and PhD students in the STSM program is strongly encouraged. Nevertheless, the STSM program is also open for senior scientists. As a matter of fact, as a novelty with respect to previous grant periods, during the 4th grant period there will be specific calls for senior scientists (scientists above the age of 40) running in parallel to the standard STSM calls. For more information, See below **“Specific STSM calls for senior scientists”**.

In the attribution of STSMs proposals, the participation of scientists from ITC will be promoted as well as that of women scientists to reach as much as possible an equal proportion between men and women grantees. Due to the large number of participating countries and the limited budget, **former OPERA STSM grantees are welcome to apply** for a new grant, but: (i) new applicants will be given preference in the evaluation process, and (ii) previously funded applicants must have presented their STSM results during a STSM webinar or face-to-face workshop organized by the COST action OPERA.

Under the Home and Host Institutions conditions, the eligibility conditions of STSM applications depends on:

- The country of the Researcher’s primary affiliation (as registered on their e-COST profile/STSM application/C.V.).
- Where the researcher is currently performing his/her main strand of research (Home Institution).
- The country of the Host Institution.

The eligibility conditions of STSM applications in term of Home and Host Institutions are as follow:

Home Institution	Host Institution
Located in an institution in a COST Country or Cooperating State participating to the OPERA COST Action	In another COST Country or Cooperating State participating to the OPERA COST Action
	In an approved Near Neighbour Country (NNC) institution

	In an approved International Partner Countries (IPC) institution In an approved Specific organization
Located in an approved NNC institution	In a COST Country or Cooperating State participating to the OPERA COST Action
Located in an approved European RTD Organisation	In a COST Country or Cooperating State participating to the OPERA COST Action

Organizational and financial aspects

Funding conditions of the STSM.

Eligible STSM must have a minimum **duration of minimum 5 working days**. The financial support will be allocated in the form of a fixed grant. The grant provides a contribution for travelling, accommodation and subsistence expenses. **The financial support on offer is a contribution to the overall expenses incurred during the STSM and may not necessarily cover all the associated outgoings.**

The following funding conditions apply and must be respected:

1. The **maximum total amount requested to the Action for each grant should not exceed EUR 2895**: Maximum EUR 2275 for accommodation, meals and global expenses, and Maximum EUR 620 for travelling.
2. For accommodation, meals, and global expenses, **we kindly recommend each applicant to request a maximum amount of EUR 114 per day for missions of up to 8 days, and EUR 91 per day for missions longer than 8 days**. The STSM program will only cover the daily expenses for the actual mission dates and the day immediately before (after) the mission in case of traveling those dates. Unjustified weekend days will not be funded. **The recommended daily allowance could be further reduced for senior scientists by the OPERA Action Core-Group to maximize the number of STSM grants.**
3. STSM activities must be completed within the defined timing (see below).
4. STSM grantees are allowed to receive additional funding from their home and host institutions.
5. To be refund after the STSM, grantees must accomplish with the STSM [engagements described below](#).

The amounts granted for each individual STSM will be determined during the evaluation process by the OPERA Action Core-Group. **The selection of applicants is based on the scientific scope of the STSM application, which must be clearly in line with the overall objectives of the Action.** The Action Core group, under suggestion of the STSM committee, might redefine for each approved grantee the duration of the STSM and the amount to be allocated, also on the base of the cost of living in each respective country and of the duration of the stay. It is assumed that for stays of several weeks, cheap and possibly self-catering accommodations can be found with the help of the Host Institution.

The OPERA Cost action can provide in advance up to 50% of the grant awarded for the entire STSM in the case of grantees working at home institutions from *Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs)* (Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine). This advance can be processed before or during the STSM. In case the applicant is interested, it must be indicated in the extended STSM application form (see below).

STANDARD STSM CALLS

Application dates and STSM activity periods for the fourth grant period (1 November 2024 — 26 September 2025).

- **First standard call for 4th grant period (10th STSM OPERA STSM Call)**: Applications from 4 November to 1 December 2024. Response due to 20 December 2024. STSM period from 15 January to 1 April 2025.
- **Second standard call for 4th grant period (11th STSM OPERA STSM Call)**: Applications from 23 December 2024 to 1 February 2025. Response due to 1 March 2025. STSM period from 1 April to 15 June 2025.

- [Third standard call for 4th grant period \(12th STSM OPERA STSM Call\)](#): Applications from 3 March to 15 May 2025. Response due to 15 June 2025. Period for STSM from 15 June to 20 August 2025.

SPECIFIC STSM CALLS FOR SENIOR SCIENTISTS

Application dates and STSM activity periods for the fourth grant period (1 November 2024 — 26 September 2025).


- [First specific call for senior scientists \(1st STSM call for senior scientists\)](#): Applications from 4 November to 1 December 2024. Response due to 20 December 2024. STSM period from 15 January to 1 April 2025.
- [Second specific call for senior scientists \(2nd STSM call for senior scientists\)](#): Applications from 23 December 2024 to 1 February 2025. Response due to 1 March 2025. STSM period from 1 April to 15 June 2025.
- [Third specific call for senior scientists \(3rd STSM call for senior scientists\)](#): Applications from 3 March to 15 May 2025. Response due to 15 June 2025. Period for STSM from 15 June to 20 August 2025.

Unlike for the standard STSM calls, the **specific STSM calls for senior scientists allow to visit more than one host institution** during the STSM provided that it is properly justified in the extended application form. However, overall expenses remains the same (i.e., they are not affected by the number of host institutions) and, due to administrative reasons, **the applicant must choose only one host institution to fill the application/report forms.**

Engagements of the STSM Grantee.

The candidate / beneficiary of the STSM undertakes to respect, according to the imposed schedule, the steps and duties described in the following table:

<p>Information to be provided in the application</p>	<p><i>To be filled in e-COST platform:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title • Start and end date (within the active Grant Period); • Budget requested by the applicant; • Information about the host institution and contact person. <p><i>5 mandatory documents to be uploaded to e-COST:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STSM application form (template available on e-COST) describing: Travel and budget plans, goals, summary of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected outcomes and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives; • Confirmation letter of the host on the agreement from the host institution in receiving the applicant. This document should also state who the senior researcher in charge of the applicant at the host institution will be. Such a senior researcher will be appointed as tutor of the applicant for reporting purposes. In this letter it can be also indicated the mutual benefit of the STSM from the point of view of the host institution. (Template available on OPERA website). • A letter of support from the home Institution. In this letter it can also be indicated the mutual benefit of the STSM from the point of view of the home institution. • A full C.V. limited to 2 pages using the Europass template including: date of birth; current position: e.g. PhD student, Post Doc (specify date of PhD award), Assistant Professor, Employee, Research fellow..., the number of years since obtaining PhD Degree, where applicable, a list of academic publications. (Template available on OPERA website). • Extended STSM application form. This document is similar to the STSM application form described above but it contains further information necessary for the reviewing process. Besides providing here detailed budget and travel plans, the applicant is also asked to provide an extended scientific workplan (max 2 pages, including motivation) to properly describe the state of the art, the methods and the objectives. The workplan should highlight the expected added value (including training benefits and know-how transfer) for the host and home institutions and for the applicant. The STSM duration must be justified within the the work plan section. (Template available on OPERA website). <p><i>Non-mandatory documents to be uploaded to e-COST:</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In case of special circumstances that could be taken into account to extend the age for considering the applicant as a Young Researcher/Innovator (e.g., maternity and paternity leave, clinical training, long-term illness or national service), the applicant must submit the corresponding certificates.
During the STSM activity	The STSM beneficiary undertakes to perform the tasks in accordance with the approved request.
After the STSM activity	<p>(1) The STSM grantee submits the required documents in e-COST within 30 days after the end date of the activity or 15 days before the end of the Grant (26 September 2025), whichever date comes first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The STSM grantee submits the required report to the Action MC on the work developed, main achievements of the STSM and planned future follow up activities; The STSM grantee submits the relevant documentation in e-COST and claims the payment of the grant via e-COST. <p>(2) The STSM grantee undertakes to participate to a Workshop meeting of the OPERA COST Action to share his/her experiences and research results.</p> <p>(3) The STSM grantee must acknowledge the financial support received by the action when presenting results obtained during the STSM in publications and conferences. The following statement should be added in the acknowledgement section of publications and conference proceedings: <i>“We acknowledge the financial support provided by the European COST Action OPERA (CA-20116) through the short-term scientific missions program”</i>. At presentations, also the following logo should be included to acknowledge the action financial support:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><small>COST Action CA20116</small></p> </div> <p>(this logo can be downloaded from OPERA’s website: https://cost-opera.eu/)</p> <p>(4) The STSM grantee undertakes to inform the COST action OPERA when publishing results related to the work performed during the STSM. The corresponding publication or conference proceeding should be sent by e-mail to the OPERA STSM core-group (opera-coregroup@c2n.upsaclay.fr) indicating in the subject “publication funded by OPERA STSM program”.</p> <p>(5) The STSM grantee undertakes to fill up OPERA surveys on the STSM program.</p> <p>(6) The STSM grantee is strongly encouraged to submit a short video (<5 min) summarizing the work done during the STSM. This video will be published at the OPERA’s website.</p>

Useful links.

- COST Members: <https://www.cost.eu/about/members/>
- Near Neighbour Country (NNC) & International Partner Countries (IPC): <https://www.cost.eu/about/cost-strategy/cost-global-networking/>
- Grant Awarding - User guide: <https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2021/12/Grant-Awarding-userguide.pdf>
- OPERA COST Action Website: <https://cost-opera.eu>
- OPERA Action Memorandum of Understanding: https://e-services.cost.eu/files/domain_files/CA/Action_CA20116/mou/CA20116-e.pdf
- STSM Grant - Application form: https://www.cost.eu/STSM_GrantApplication
- Report on the outcomes of a STSM: https://www.cost.eu/STSM_Report

Evaluation procedure

The core-group in charge of evaluating the STSM proposals is composed by:

Dr. Sergio Fernández-Garrido, STSM Leader; Dr. Zoran Jovanovic STSM Vice-Leader, Dr. Laurence Méchin, Grant Awarding Coordinator; Dr. Gavin Bell, WG1 Leader; Prof. Nini Pryds, WG2 Leader; Dr. Susana Cardoso, WG3 Leader; Dr. Paula Ferreira, Science Communication Coordinator; Dr. Lucian Pintilie, MC member for Romania; Dr. Yamina André, Grant Holder; Dr. Tamara Potlog, Vice-Chair; Dr. Noelle Gogneau, Chair.

Selection criteria for standard STSM calls (10-12th STSM call) will take into account:

- **Relevance to the OPERA COST Action scientific objectives, as outlined in the Action Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Fulfilling this criterion is mandatory.**
- CV and profile of the applicant including the fact of:
 - being or not being Young Researchers/Innovators – defined as scientists under the age of 40 at the time of the STSM call opening (properly documented circumstances such as for maternity and paternity leave, clinical training, long-term illness or national service can be considered to extend the age of Young Researchers/Innovators beyond 40);
 - being or not being a Woman Scientist;
 - coming or not from an ITC.
- Scientific quality of the proposed project and expected scientific impact.
- Expected benefit for both the applicant and host institution, and interest of the exchange visits (e.g. complementary of techniques, exchanges of samples, discussions about common results, etc).
- Overall balance between countries and genders.
- **Former OPERA STSM grantees are welcome to apply** for a new grant, but: (i) new applicants will be given preference in the evaluation process, and (ii) previously funded applicants must have presented their STSM results during a STSM webinar or face-to-face workshop organized by the COST action OPERA.

Selection criteria for specific STSM calls for senior scientists will, beside general requirements of the OPERA COST action, take into account:

- **Relevance to the OPERA COST Action scientific objectives, as outlined in the Action Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Fulfilling this criterion is mandatory.**
- **Candidates must be older than 40 years at the time of the STSM call opening.**
- CV and profile of the applicant including the fact of:
 - being or not being a Woman Scientist;
 - coming or not from an ITC.
- Scientific quality of the proposed project and expected scientific impact.
- Expected benefit for both the applicant and host institution, and interest of the exchange visits (e.g. scientific and technical knowledge exchanged between laboratories, preparation of project proposals, writing of joined manuscripts, creation of new collaborations, access to complementary techniques, exchanges of samples, discussions about common results, etc).
- Further specific benefits for the COST action OPERA, in particular, organization and writing of publications/special issues/reviews coordinated/proposed by OPERA.
- Overall balance between countries and genders.