

Multidisciplinary consortium to accelerate plant cell wall knowledge (PlantWallK) - CA24116

1st Call for applications for Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)

Call opens: 2026-03-01

Deadline: 2026-08-01 (or until funds are used)

Period to carry out the STSM: 2026-04-01– 2026-08-31

Report deadline: within 30 days after the end of the STSM

1. Purpose

PlantWallK supports Short-Term Scientific Missions that allow Action Participants researchers and innovators to visit a host organisation in a country other than their country of affiliation, in order to carry out a defined piece of scientific work within a set time frame. The grant supports capacity building and knowledge transfer through bilateral or multilateral collaboration. It also supports activities that contribute to the objectives and deliverables of the PlantWallK Memorandum of Understanding. STSMs enable access to expertise, equipment, or techniques not available at the home institution and support project work with an international team, with scope for longer-term collaboration. The STSM must be completed in full within a single Grant Period.

2. Who can apply

The Grant Applicant must be PlantWallK COST Action participant with primary affiliation to a legal entity located in a [COST Full or Cooperating Member country](#), or in a [Near Neighbour Country](#). In addition, the applicant's country of affiliation must be different from that of the STSM host institution.

3. Eligibility and financial conditions

- STSM must contribute to the Action MoU objectives
- The STSM need to be carried out fully within a single Grant Period and always within the Action's lifetime.
- The STSM must have a minimum duration of 5 calendar days that includes travel (typical range 5–90 days).
- The STSM grant is a fixed financial contribution (up to ~€4,000 unless otherwise specified) towards overall costs linked to the mission, including travel, accommodation, subsistence, project implementation, report preparation, and the overall effort required to complete the mission.
- STSM grantees are responsible for all matters related to personal security, health, taxation, social security, and hotel arrangements.
- The COST Association and the Grant Holder do not act as an employer - STSM grant is not a salary.
- A scientific report must be submitted within 30 days after the end of STSM and the report must be approved before reimbursement can be issued.

4. How to apply

Applicants must have an [e-COST profile](#) and the applications must be submitted online via [e-COST platform](#). The following documents are required:

1. STSM Application Form filled in on e-COST
2. Supporting documentation (must be uploaded at e-COST):
 - A **Grant Application** describing goals, description of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected results (outcomes) and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives ([Grant Application form](#))
 - **Confirmation by Host** on the agreement from the host institution in receiving the applicant ([template for Host approval](#))
 - The Grant applicant's *curriculum vitae* (max 3 pages).
 - In the case of PhD. students, a support letter from home institution.

5. STSMs Evaluation Committee

STSM applications for PlantWallK will be evaluated by a **Grant Awarding Committee (GAC)** consisting of the Grant Awarding Coordinator, Action's STSMs Coordinator, Working Group leaders, and relevant experts. Each application is reviewed by at least three GAC members.

6. Evaluation Criteria

Only eligible and complete applications will be evaluated.

STSMs applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

A. Relevance of mission to PlantWallK Scientific Objectives:

- ♣ Directly contributes to cell wall research challenges defined in PlantWallK's MoU.
- ♣ Strengthens multidisciplinary collaboration and bridges research gaps across biology, modelling, biomechanics, imaging, and data science.
- ♣ Addresses technical/methodological bottlenecks in visualization, analysis, or modelling of cell walls.

B. Scientific Quality and Feasibility of the Work Plan

- ♣ Clarity and coherence of the research question, objectives, and methods
- ♣ Feasibility of completing the mission in the proposed timeframe
- ♣ Realistic timeline and achievable milestones
- ♣ Technical soundness of approaches (e.g., microscopy pipeline, modelling workflow, data analytics strategy)

C. Added Value and Suitability of the Host Institution:

- ♣ Host offers expertise, equipment, or datasets not available at the applicant's home institution
- ♣ Potential for long-term collaboration (e.g., joint publications, shared tools, interoperable datasets)
- ♣ Relevance of the host to PlantWallK's objectives

D. Applicant Profile, Motivation, and Expected Benefit

- ♣ Strength of CV and previous experience
- ♣ Alignment between applicant's background and STSM goals
- ♣ Priority to Early Career Investigators (≤ 8 years post-PhD)
- ♣ Potential to disseminate outcomes and build lasting collaborations

E. Budget Appropriateness and Justification

- ♣ Costs (travel + accommodation) are reasonable and well justified
- ♣ Alignment between budget and mission duration

F. Inclusiveness, Policy Alignment and Previous Grant History

- ♣ Participation of Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)
- ♣ Gender balance
- ♣ Opportunities for broadening geographical inclusiveness
- ♣ First-time STSM applicants within PlantWalkK

7. Expected Outputs and Reporting

Within 30 days upon STSM completion, grantees must submit via [e-COST platform](#) a **scientific report** ([template to STSM report](#)) including:

- Description of the activities carried out during the STSM and any deviations from the initial working plan.
- Description and assessment of whether the STSM achieved its planned goals and expected outcomes, including specific contribution to Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the STSM. Planned future follow-up collaborations.

Approval of the report is required for reimbursement.

Each publication produced with support of a STSM must acknowledge the support of the COST Action and include on slides and posters the COST and PlantWalkK logos

Acknowledgement text:

“This publication is based on work supported by the COST Action CA24116: Multidisciplinary consortium to accelerate plant cell wall knowledge (PlantWalkK).”

PlantWallK STSM Scoring Matrix

Category Overview

Category	Weight (%)
1. Relevance to PlantWallK Objectives	30
2. Scientific Quality & Feasibility of Work Plan	25
3. Host Institution Suitability & Added Value	15
4. Applicant Profile & Motivation	15
5. Budget Justification	10
6. Inclusiveness, Gender Balance & Prior Funding	5

1. Relevance to PlantWallK Objectives

Assesses alignment with the Action's MoU and cross-disciplinary priorities in plant cell wall research.

Score	Description
0-1	Weak or generic relevance; limited link to PlantWallK themes.
2-3	Reasonable alignment, mission fits a Working Group but has limited scientific or cross-disciplinary integration.
4-5	Strong and explicit contribution to multiple PlantWallK domains; clear advancement of imaging, modelling, biomechanics, or data infrastructure; high potential for long-term collaboration.

2. Scientific Quality & Feasibility of Work Plan

Based on quality, clarity, methodology, timeline, and feasibility.

Score	Description
0-1	Vague objectives; insufficient methodology; incomplete plan.
2-3	Clear objectives and methods; feasible but could be improved; timeline adequate.
4-5	Excellent clarity, well-structured methods; ambitious but feasible timetable; strong expected outputs (data, protocols, models, tools).

3. Suitability & Added Value of the Host

Assesses whether the host provides equipment, expertise, or resources not available at home institution.

Score	Description
0-1	Host relevance unclear or overlapping with applicant's home facilities.
2-3	Host provides needed expertise/equipment; moderate added value.
4-5	Host uniquely enables mission (e.g., advanced microscopy, biomechanical testing, specialised modelling); high potential for lasting collaboration.

4. Applicant Profile & Motivation

Evaluates applicant CV, scientific background, motivation, and ECI prioritization.

Score	Description
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0-1	Weak motivation; unclear benefits; limited background for proposed work.
2-3	Good CV and motivation; clear gains for applicant and Action.
4-5	Strong CV; excellent motivation; clear stepping-stone for scientific development; ECI status adds value.

5. Budget Justification

COST requires reasonable and well-justified budgets for travel and subsistence.

Score	Description
0-1	Overestimated or poorly explained budget.
2-3	Acceptable budget; justification adequate.
4-5	Fully justified, cost-efficient, proportional to duration and objectives.

6. Inclusiveness, Gender Balance & Prior Funding

COST mandates that inclusiveness and gender balance be considered.

Priority may be given to first-time STSM applicants

Score	Description
0-1	No contribution to COST inclusiveness goals.
2-3	Applicant from an ITC or contributes to gender/geographical balance.
4-5	Strong alignment with inclusiveness + first-time STSM applicant.

Final Weighted Score = Cat1x0.30+ Cat2x0.25+Cat3x0.15+Cat4x0.15+Cat5x0.10+Cat6x0.05

Final Weighted Score Interpretation

Total Score	Rating	Recommendation
4.5-5	Outstanding	Highly recommended for approval
3.5-4.4	Strong	Recommend funding
2.5-3.4	Moderate	Fund if budget allows
<2.5	Weak	Not recommended