

ACTION STRATEGY ON VIRTUAL AND HYBRID NETWORKING

Action number: CA19110

Start and end date: 06/10/2020 – 05/10/2024

The pandemic period in the last 2 years brought completely new patterns in the working environment and in everyday life. Most of the networking activities were performed online, with fluctuating success in accomplishing the networking goals. As the restrictions are diminishing, some of the approaches used for virtual networking are kept and sometimes adjoined to the face-to-face events enabling options for either fully virtual or hybrid networking. Thus, to successfully reach the set of the Action objectives and deliverables, virtual networking aspects should be included in the implementation. At the same time, a careful selection of different tools should be performed in order to maximize their impact.

The objectives for research coordination and relevant deliverables can directly benefit from having different virtual tools in order to target specific scientific research tasks. They can also enable virtual interaction through shared documents and/or short virtual meetings that could be organized more frequently than live events. Capacity-building objectives and deliverables related to training and dissemination can benefit from allowing communication between relevant stakeholders by using different virtual networking platforms that, at the same time, enable sharing different kind of file formats. Moreover, various types of presentations on social media as well as organization of hybrid events can enhance the outreach of the activities of the Action.

The proposed virtual and hybrid networking activities will have aim to help developing a multidisciplinary research network within the Action in order to share new knowledge while maximizing networking among members. The virtual networking support will be structured in such way to be complementary to in-person events as they are inevitable for successful network development. When selecting virtual networking tools special attention will be devoted to facilitate young career researchers and innovators, female action participants and participants from Inclusiveness Target Countries. All activities will be fully in line with the COST strategy.

The main idea behind the strategy is to provide an added value for the Action by implementing virtual networking tools. At the same time, the participants will be given a very comprehensive set of new approaches for virtual networking that would upgrade the interaction at the in-person events. In case of re-establishing travel restrictions due to the pandemic, they would allow swift overcoming the emerging difficulties.

Some examples of possible virtual and hybrid networking tools:

- Short online survey on plasma and agriculture topics/opinions for participants at live and online events
- Hybrid or online events, such as discussions on standardization of methods/protocols/terminology between participants from plasma and agriculture fields; round table on specific topics of plasma agriculture; WG meetings; webinars, with possibility of

creating immediate online output (shared folder with documentation, literature, minutes, action plan etc.)

- Bibliometric evaluation related to the connections between plasma and agriculture
- Making descriptions that can facilitate production of content (e.g. short video clips, infographics etc.) for communication activities to be used on the action website, social media accounts or conferences
- Making proposals for organization of an online library with the most relevant works on plasma and agriculture
- Virtual mentoring of young researchers
- Organization of a weekly/monthly newsletter

Participation of the Action members will be supported and their creativity will be encouraged. Within the virtual mobility tools special attention will be given to production of the content suitable for performing a continuous promotion of the Action activities at the website and social media accounts. So far this way of promotion has resulted in effective reaching out to the Action members and external audience. On the other side, virtual networking activities will be also directed towards producing an easily-accessible and structured data that will be used for creating an extensive final report that will draw guidelines for the technology transfer and highlight issues and good practices.

The VNS coordinator will oversee the selection of the most appropriate virtual tools for each specific virtual activity (webinar, virtual conference, online library...). A guide to virtual tools selection will be prepared to help the participants select the most appropriate tool for their activity.

Overall the virtual action strategy can be regarded positively if it is resulting in completion of several activities that contribute in many different ways to advance towards the Action objectives and deliverables. Some good practices that should be implemented in virtual/hybrid activities are:

- It is important to promote in every possible way the activities of the CA. The combination of mailing list, website and social media accounts resulted effective in reaching CA members and external audience. Also direct invitation at in person events such as conferences resulted quite effective. While very effective, this omni channel approach results time consuming and therefore should be supported in any possible way with appropriated means (ex. dedicated software licenses, funding for advertisements, etc...)
- The time available to perform the VM grants should be as long as possible. Organizing an online meeting between the VM and VNS grantees right after the approval of the VM proposal is useful and favours time effective implementation.
- Sometimes the scheme and calls proposed by COST are hard to read and interpret. It is always useful to have the contact of a reference person to whom ask clarification. Moreover, to make calls effective, they should be simplified to the very key points when promoted among CA participants.
- The short surveys should be integrated in the registration form of the online events featuring discussion (e.g. round tables). This can provide useful information and data prior to the event. This approach can be further developed and should be always implemented to collect important data from the CA community.