

Covid-19 and NOS-HS Exploratory Workshop Design: Not just challenges but also renewal?

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE 2021
WORKSHOP CALL APPLICATIONS

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Aims

The global Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in considerable obstacles in organizing the NOS-HS exploratory workshops. Because of the fluctuating situation of the pandemic in different countries, and the variability of restrictions and epidemiological risk that follows from this, it has become impossible to predict when in-person workshops can be organized easily and safely.

To begin accounting for the changes brought on by the pandemic, NOS-HS decided on a policy on April 24th, 2020. This policy made it possible for project leaders and co-applicants to:

- 1) transform the in-person workshop format into an online or hybrid event where pandemic prevented in-person events, AND
- 2) to apply for an extension of the funding period where adjustments to the workshop design were not possible.

New additions to the policy were introduced in regard to the 2021 NOS-HS Exploratory Workshop Call, which ran from February 9th to March 31st, 2021. These additions kept the above changes and clarified the eligible costs that the grant could cover.¹ The updated instructions outline the following:

- whilst the grant cannot be used for salaries, limited amounts of the grant can be used for fees for temporary/part-time assistants to help with workshop organization and websites (e.g. one month per workshop)
- the grant can for the first time be used for costs associated with organizing online or hybrid workshops (both for direct costs, such as IT support and software/hardware purchases, and for indirect costs such as training for participants)
- technical assistance in preparing joint publications deriving from the workshop series is eligible for funding

However, it was noted in the policy that the approval for IT costs was a temporary exception due to the exceptional situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic. The funding could also be used for unforeseen and unavoidable costs caused by the pandemic, mainly cancelled travel.

These policy adjustments have provided ongoing funded projects with necessary tools to react as the world is being changed by a global pandemic. It could be said that with the 2021 Workshop Call applications, we are faced with a new situation: for this Call, the pandemic has been ongoing for long enough that applicants were able to plan their applications with the pandemic in mind for the first time. They were able to reflect on the effects of the pandemic so far as well as take into account the policy changes that the pandemic has introduced to NOS-HS, such as the possibility for hybrid and online workshops. Because of this, the 2021 Workshop Call provides a novel chance to assess how the pandemic is impacting the planning of the exploratory workshops.

¹ The supplementary budget proposal document is provided in Appendix 1.

This report takes this novel chance and sets out to assess the 2021 Workshop Call applications for the impact of the pandemic on the exploratory workshop design so far. Thus, the starting point of this report is the notion that changes caused by the pandemic might not act only as a source of challenges but also as a source of renewal. To assess the 2021 applications for potential renewal, this report asks:

- a) how has the pandemic affected the ways in which applicants plan to design their exploratory workshops?
- b) how has the pandemic affected the ways in which applicants plan their research collaboration and network building?
- c) have the budget policy adjustments made applicants direct costs towards different uses than before in their budget proposals?

The report will present findings that show how researchers have adapted their workshop plans to find new ways of collaborating amidst the pandemic. It is hoped that this information could be useful in the future development of the NOS-HS Workshop grant.

This report has been independently prepared by Mari Lehvä as an intern at the NOS-HS Secretariat and does not as such represent the opinions or policies of the NOS-HS Committee.

1.2 Methodology and Data

The latest NOS-HS Workshop Call ran from February 9th to March 31st, 2021. 52 applications were submitted during this time. One application was later withdrawn, bringing the total to 51 applications. These 51 applications make up the empirical data for this report.

Direct quotes from the data are used in reporting the findings. All quotes have been fully anonymized and are intended to act as an overview of the recurring themes found in the applications in relation to this report's questions. The analysis and writing up of the report took place in October 2021.

When conducting analysis, emphasis was placed on certain sections of the applications based on the scope and focus of this report. The sections selected for final analysis were: Abstract, Budget Proposal-page and the Workshop Plan sections Nordic Added Value, Exploratory Workshop Set Up and Process, and Outcomes of the Workshop Series.²

The 'Scientific Quality and Novelty of the Project' section of the workshop plans was reviewed in the first stage of the analysis but was subsequently excluded due to the report's focus on different workshop designs and forms of collaboration in relation to Covid-19. The contents of the 'Scientific Quality and Novelty of the Project' could have been used to address the pandemic's effects on research themes, but this question is beyond the scope of this report. This decision is not meant to indicate that the design aspects of workshops could somehow be disconnected from the scientific themes and research questions of the workshops. The design and methods of a workshop can of course have an integral role in influencing what kind of knowledge is produced.

² The Workshop Plan Template outlines the structure of the application and can be found in Appendix 2.

However, the central finding of this report is that applicants are combining online and in-person workshop design in new ways. This is resulting in new opportunities for collaboration in the current applications, which in future could inspire applicants to undertake new kinds of research questions or to extend the scope of the projects undertaken during the funding period. So, whilst this report focuses on the renewal happening in the workshop design and collaboration tools used by applicants, the influence of this renewal on research topics would be an interesting possibility for further research.

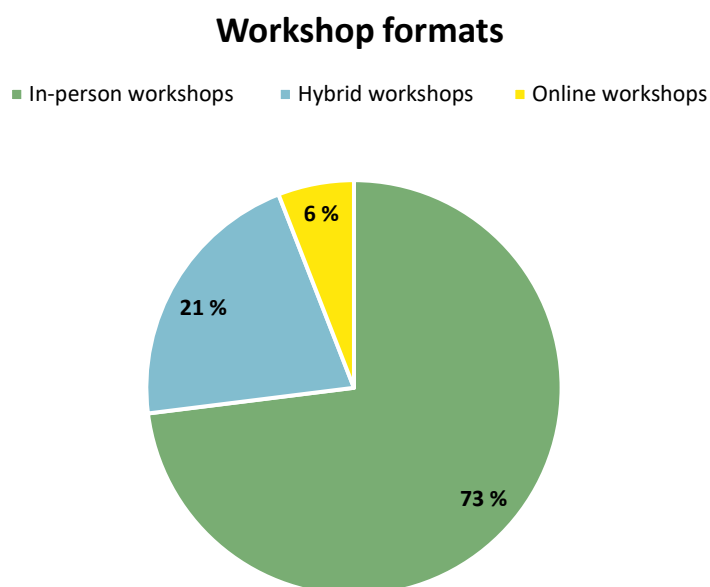
2 Findings

2.1 Workshop Design: In-person, online or hybrid?

One of the central questions of this report is whether the current Covid-19 pandemic has affected the ways in which NOS-HS grant applicants plan to design their exploratory workshops. In the 2021 NOS-HS Workshop Call it is highlighted that:

“The main features of the workshops are face-to-face meetings, creating and strengthening new connections and exploring ideas together. If travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic persist, interactive online workshops or hybrid forms of workshops are encouraged.”

The structure of the workshops presented in the 2021 applications reflects the Call’s emphasis on the centrality of face-to-face workshops. 51 applications were submitted to the Call, each planning a series of 2-3 workshops. In total, 152 workshops were planned across all the applications. Out of these 152 workshops, 111 were planned as in-person workshops, 32 as hybrid workshops and 9 as online workshops. *Graph 1* below demonstrates these numbers as percentages.



Graph 1. Workshop formats.

Thus, in-person workshops are still clearly in the majority and a main feature of the workshop design. However, applicants who planned only in-person workshops often prefaced this plan with an acknowledgment that the in-person workshops could be changed into online or hybrid formats if the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated it.

Moreover, the fact that most of the workshops are planned as face-to-face events should not be taken as an indication that the pandemic has had no effect on the workshop designs proposed. Since in-person workshops have been a default format in the past, applications planning online and hybrid workshops is a change in itself.

Another interesting change is that applicants frequently reflected on their reasons for choosing a specific type of workshop design. This was the case for all workshop types: in-person, online and hybrid. This finding is perhaps more interesting than the numerical values presented above, because it indicates that the possibility for online and hybrid workshops has resulted in a situation where in-person workshops are no longer taken as a given. Instead of automatically resorting to a certain workshop design, in the 2021 Call several applicants were actively deliberating which type of workshop design would provide the best fit for their collaboration, network building and exploratory scientific work. The appropriateness of a given workshop design was evaluated based on the benefits and opportunities it could provide the research network with. Next, the report will present the main opportunities and benefits applicants saw in different workshop arrangements.

2.1.1 Benefits and opportunities of the hybrid and online workshops

Several applications demonstrated the hybrid and online workshop models as providing the following benefits to the network:

1. The ability to include more participants in the workshops, resulting in a broader community of researchers and other stakeholders taking part
2. The ability to include more speakers and participants from outside the Nordic countries, thus increasing international engagement and collaboration opportunities
3. The ability to engage in activities that benefit from ongoing discussion over an extended period of time, such as drafting joint academic publications

The following quotes exemplify these new possibilities provided by the online or hybrid formats, as reported by the 2021 applicants:

“The second, online workshop connects with international partners outside of the Nordics, with the specific aim to build towards EU/Nordic/Transatlantic research funding.”

“The workshops will be arranged as hybrid meetings. By giving the participants the possibility to attend the WSs both in-person and digital we strive for a barrier-free possibility to participate independently of possible travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 situation and long-distances. “

“All workshops will be two full days and will mainly take place in person (if the COVID situation allows) but it will also be possible to participate online in the main activities of each workshop. This will make it possible for more to attend and contribute. [...] These workshops will include a virtual focal group of key participants from around the world as an original feature of this project. “

“This e-workshop takes place as a two-week running online discussion among publication contributors and is based on drafts of contributions to the edited volume. Each contributor reviews one other contributor’s draft; editors review all of them. The subsequent discussion is moderated by the editors. This e-workshop ensures consistency in the edited volume as contributors explores intersections between themes in the contributions.”

In ‘the Nordic Added value’ section of NOS-HS Aims and Objectives, it is remarked that opportunities for sharing ideas generate critical mass and are needed to participate in larger networks and apply for international funding. Applicants using online and hybrid workshops to open up their workshops for a broader community of researchers and stakeholders, to increase their international engagement and to create opportunities for international funding collaboration is an exciting development that could result in new partnerships between Nordic and international researchers and thus in a greater contribution of Nordic research on the global stage.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, two applications also underscored the importance of online and hybrid meetings in relation to sustainability issues:

“Our intention is to hold our workshops in person with a robust hybrid option for those participants that do not want to increase their carbon footprint with travel.”

“To promote the sustainable development goals, research team will meet physically only during the two workshops. Any other activities will take place online to reduce the negative environmental impact of travel.”

2.1.2 Benefits and opportunities of the in-person workshops

As with the hybrid and online workshops, in-person workshop design was also seen as important by applicants for its own reasons. When reflecting on the beneficial possibilities of face-to-face collaboration, applicants described in-person workshops as providing a chance for informal communication. In-person workshops were seen as a space where conversation could remain ongoing beyond the set structures of the workshop. This quality was seen as providing a fertile ground for sparking novel ideas and connections. Below are some examples of the ways in which applications talked about the importance of meeting in-person:

“[The Network] will arrange annual face-to-face workshops in 2022 and 2023. At these events senior faculty, junior faculty and PhD students have the opportunity to connect informally in order to form new collaboration and to discuss in-depth new research project opportunities. Face-to face events enable serendipity of unrelated ideas to cross-fertilize and facilitates new contacts.”

“If the situation allows, the workshops will be held in-person, since of course this form of interaction is vital to establish a sense of exchange and common goals between participants who have never met before.”

“We believe physical meetings, despite the wide use of online meeting tools, are the best way to meet with colleagues and forge new personal and professional connections.”

“Each two-day in-person workshop will include invited presentations, collaborative small-group research activities, and time for informal interaction. [...] The current Covid-19 situation suggests that the three two-day workshops can all be organized as in-person meetings. We believe this format is most appropriate in light of our workshop activities, i.e. explorative group work.”

The strategy paper NOS-HS Aims and Objectives was approved by the NOS-HS Committee in their meeting on February 4th, 2021. It highlights the workshop grants as:

having contributed to Nordic collaboration by providing a low budget and medium risk platform for cross-disciplinary researcher-initiated cooperation based on joint research interest and problems built through personal contact and trust.

The above examples from this year’s applications demonstrate the relevance of these aims. They particularly highlight the birth of new ideas and researcher-initiated cooperation following from the in-person workshops, as they facilitate personal contact and trust.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that there were applications where the in-person meeting was essential because it directly linked to the scientific contents of the workshops and/or their ethnographic settings. Good examples of such cases were workshops that visited archaeological, ecological or geographical sites that were integral to their workshop topics, workshops where the innovative design required physical presence, for example walking seminars and other activities that engage the senses, and workshops that integrated the host institution’s physical archives or collections in their workshop activities or topics.

On the other hand, there is also likely to be situations where using online tools offer novel ways of setting up your workshop. A good example of such a case was an application where one of the workshops was organized as an online reading cycle that carried on over an extended period. Meeting up online is possible across vast distances and can happen without hinderance of travel

time or expenses, which can enable more frequent collaboration and an incorporation of on-going activities. The next section of the findings will look at how applicants utilized this possibility in the 2021 NOS-HS Workshop grant applications.

2.2 Strengthening the research network before, during and after the workshop series

In the previous section we saw that

- 1) the pandemic has resulted in diversification of available workshop formats
- 2) the options between online, hybrid and in-person workshops have inspired the 2021 applicants to consider which workshop format would best suit their network's exploratory work
- 3) applicants viewed the in-person and online workshops as providing different benefits for their research networks and as such, diversified formats can allow applicants to make the most of their collaboration during the funding period

This section will take these finding further. It will show that there were many cases in the 2021 Workshop Call applications where applicants were not choosing between formats but rather combining the benefits of different formats in imaginative ways to create strong and far-reaching research collaboration.

2.2.1 A snapshot of the hybrid workshop format

Firstly, there are the hybrid workshops which can combine the benefits of online and in-person workshops in innovative ways. In the workshop example below, we can see how the hybrid workshop gives the research network a chance to bridge global and local participant, bringing them into collaboration with each other in real-time.

“Each workshop will be a hybrid meeting so as to facilitate maximum international engagement. The speakers will be present in-person if possible (or digitally if necessary), while the talks and discussions will be live-streamed on Zoom. Talks will be chaired by graduate students, with one assisting in moderating questions from digital participants. We will also invite local participants, including student journalists, and those from outside academia, to help promote the research outcomes and maximize our engagement.”

There were also workshops where the structure of the series as a whole resembled a hybrid. In the workshop plan below, we see how online and on-site meetings alternate to create a continuum of collaboration between different communities:

“[The network] gathers young activists, artists, practitioners and researchers into a unique Nordic collaborative experimentation operating across bimonthly online forums and 3 onsite meetings. [...] Bi-monthly online reading groups bring scholars together during the first year. During the second year, online

meetings will include practitioners and activist representatives as well to experiment with the new language and think through its consequences for their own areas of activity. [...] Each on-site meeting employs a resident artist who participates in discussions and creates a creative and provocative space for experimentation.”

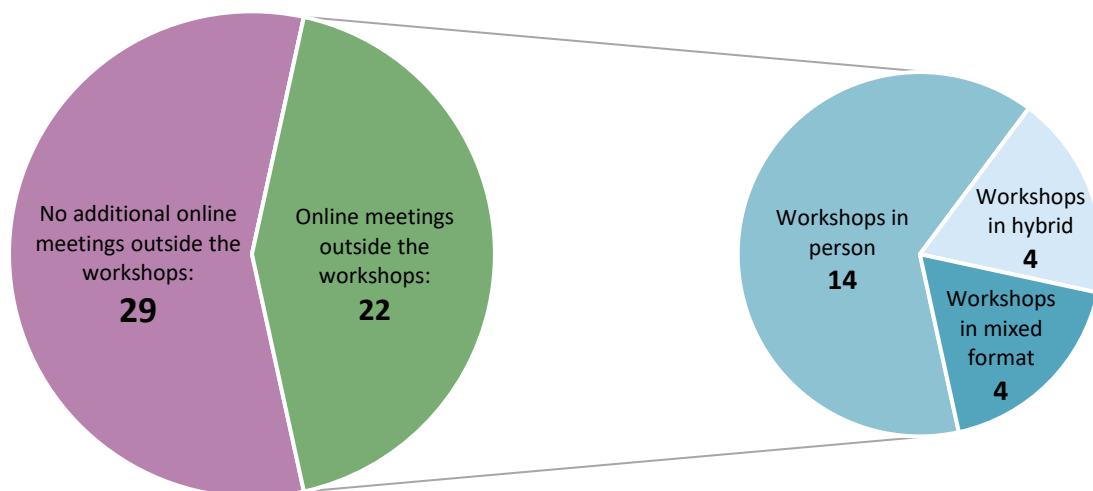
2.2.2 Ongoing online meetings make collaboration grow beyond the workshops

An evaluation report of the NOS-HS Workshop funding scheme was commissioned by the NOS-HS Committee in 2019 with an aim to assess how the Workshop funding is meeting its objectives. In the NOS-HS 2020 Evaluation Report, it is mentioned that:

“Several projects report that it has been possible to organise an additional workshop. Initially, 2-3 workshops were planned, but a fourth workshop was arranged. This has been possible for instance due to a lower number of participants at some of the workshops. “

From the above quote, it is clear that in previous years applicants have organized an additional workshop where budget has allowed. Because the expenses of meeting online are low and distances are not a problem, online conferencing tools offer the network participants an opportunity to meet more often and to invest in a continuous working relationship. In the 2021 NOS-HS applications, many applicants are planning to use online conferencing tools to meet each other both in-between the workshops as well as before and after them.

Out of the total of 51 applications in this year’s Call, 21 applications planned to conduct one or several additional online meetings outside the workshops. In comparison, only 2 applications planned to conduct an additional in-person meeting outside the workshops. *Graph 2* below breaks down the 21 applications with additional online meetings by their workshop type. Where no online meetings were mentioned in the workshop plan, it was presumed that they were not being planned.

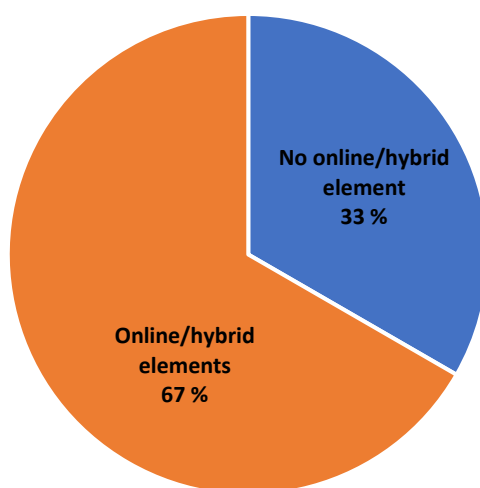


Graph 2. Number of applications with additional online meetings.

Graph 2 demonstrates that the workshop format chosen by applicants does not determine whether they decide to incorporate online meetings into their network collaboration. In fact, majority of the applications with extra online meetings are hosting their workshops as fully in-person. This is a great example of the way in which both the collaborative benefits of in-person and online meetings can be brought together to enhance a research network. Moreover, the graph shows that the collaboration is planned to take place both in workshops and beyond, and that additional online meetings are a feature that cuts across all workshop formats. When the online meetings are taken into account, it could be said that the collaboration planned by applicants defies simple categorization into online, in-person and hybrid forms. Thus, the overall nature of network collaboration has become more hybrid.

Graph 3 below demonstrates this shift. It shows the percentage of applications that are planning to include online or hybrid elements into their collaboration in some form: either by hosting workshops that are online or hybrid, or by hosting online meetings outside the workshop or, as was the case with some applications, by doing both. In total, this number came to 34 applications.

An application breakdown by online/hybrid elements



Graph 3. Number of applications with online or hybrid elements.

Next, the report will explore how applicants are planning to use these online meetings and what purposes they serve in research network creation.

2.2.3 What purposes do the online meetings serve in workshop organisation?

The first category of online meetings mentioned in the applications are meetings that happen before the workshop series begins and are used to plan the details of the workshops. Examples of activities undertaken during these planning meetings are developing the structure of the workshops, dividing tasks between applicants, organizing practical logistics for the workshops as well as drafting calls for participation and calls for papers. In addition, these planning meetings were used to get to know each other as well as to bring together network participants and key colleagues in order to discuss current developments in their fields and adjust the workshop themes

to these developments. This kind of ongoing planning can positively contribute to ensuring the novelty and state-of-the-art nature of NOS-HS workshops.

Some applicants conducted only one online planning meeting, whilst others established continuous contact already at this pre-workshop stage:

“The workshop series will include four workshops employing a hybrid model with one Zoom introductory meeting and three in-person workshops. [...] Introductory meeting, held in the first half of 2022, will be a two day Zoom meeting to kick start the project and include presentations from the applicants and their teams. Emphasis will be on getting to know each other, the different ways in which [topics] are explored across the groups and synergies across.”

“The content and organization of workshops 1-3 have been in the making through digital meetings since early 2020 – partly involving the six applicants and the project instigator and partly also engaging a broader reference group of 10 other academics.”

The second category of online meetings mentioned in the applications are meetings taking place during the workshop series. These meetings were planned as recurring after each workshop, including the final workshop in the series. In terms of their role in organizing the workshop series, these meetings were used to evaluate the previous workshops as well as to finetune the next ones. They were also used for coordination of tasks and for establishing continuous discussion between workshops. Below are three descriptions exemplifying these roles of the online meetings:

“During the two year period, three workshops will be held. In between the workshops we will arrange more informal digital feedback meetings, in order to adjust coming events, but also to catch up discussions that emerge during the WS-series.”

“Prior to the first workshop, the collaborators will have an online seminar to discuss the structure, draft a CfP [Call for Papers] and divide the tasks”

“Each workshop will be associated with an on-line evaluation form to get participants and audience feedback about elements of design. This information will be used to recalibrate the design of the second workshop and both evaluations will be used to shape the parameters for a future scenario workshop (see below). The fine-tuning of workshop plans will be organized in a series of on-line meetings that will review the agenda and will include a mix of the main applicants, senior researchers and younger/earlier career scholars.”

2.2.4 What purposes do the online meetings serve in building the research network?

The online meetings happening in-between the workshop series and after the completion of the series presented the research network with an opportunity to foster closer and more continuous collaboration by gathering together regularly. The two quotes below describe this process:

“While the two face-to-face workshops are important arenas for the birth of new ideas, contacts and projects (including future research applications), the ambition for [the network’s] activities go beyond the annual meetings. The second organizational element is an online seminar series running in-between the annual workshops. We aim for organizing 10-12 seminars of about 1.5h each over the 2 year project period. The online format allows scholars to contribute and participate at low cost and without requiring long-distance travel.”

“Two weeks after each workshop, we will create an interactive (non-budgeted) online discussion with breakout rooms to reflect on various ideas and synergies. This application partially reflects a process in which inputs were received from precisely this mix of participants. The evaluations, on-line planning meetings and workshop deliberations will help establish a foundation for ongoing co-creation and input.”

When reflecting on this continuous collaboration, applicants often described the online meetings as having important purposes for the research network which went beyond the organizational work of preparing and running the workshops. Applicants planned to use the online meetings to further the discussions happening in the workshops and to ensure a stronger collaborative working relationship. The continuity of communication that the online meetings facilitated was seen to be supportive of developing research questions further and of strengthening the interdisciplinary nature of the network’s scientific work. It was also seen as facilitating a space where applicants could co-operatively work on both their own research output and on the network’s joint publication aims. Below are examples that highlight these important purposes of the online meetings:

“The series contain three in-person workshops, each followed by a virtual ‘carry-on’ meeting. [...] The sessions of collaborative empirical exploration provide a basis for co authoring of publications, and in a wider perspective they will facilitate the development of more advanced interdisciplinary research questions and nurture collaborations on future research projects. To support such outcome, one of the organizing members will collect and document the findings from each workshop, share it and bring main results to discussion/evaluation with all the members in a virtual, ‘carry on’-meeting two months later.”

“The one-day digital meetings between the workshops will play a crucial role for the progression of individual projects as well as the network at large. They will follow up on problems identified during previous presentations and discussions, refine the research questions in the individual projects over time, promote the development of nuances in the written texts and enduring issues about documentation and ethics. The responsibilities for organizing the three workshops, communication between the meetings and small-scale dissemination assignments will be shared among the applicants.”

“The plan of action also includes regular video conferences during the granting years to accomplish the publications and to follow up on the research outcomes explained in section 4, including exploring ways to continue and enhance research and networking in this area beyond 2023.”

From the last quote above we can see that the continuous working relationship is also something that applicants are planning to maintain beyond the funding period. Thus, the use of online meetings outside the workshops could result in setting aims long-term and in building long-lasting research networks with a strong focus on future collaboration.

This possibility of continuous collaboration through online meetings could be particularly beneficial to the more formative research networks described in the NOS-HS 2020 Evaluation report. The 2020 Evaluation report found that the previous history of the network can affect its concrete outcomes during the funding period. For the more formative networks the main important outcome was networking and creating new connections, whereas the more mature networks reported new grant applications and new ambitious proposals to international publishers as their outcomes. In the 2021 Workshop Call applications it seems that applicants are actively utilizing online meetings to enhance their opportunities for networking. This online networking can start in preliminary meetings, continue in-between the workshops and extend beyond the funding period. This could result in networks being able to mature more easily during the funding period and the ease of coming together simply by logging online can provide all networks with more space to work on a publication record, grant proposals and other dissemination activities.

Overall, it can be said that the 2021 applications show promising developments in terms of the aims of NOS-HS Workshop grant. The 2020 Evaluation Report found that:

“The workshops were instrumental in maintaining and strengthening these research communities and the continuity of long-term collaboration.”

If the impact of the workshops was this strong already in the in-person format, it is likely further strengthened by the fact that the 2021 applicants are combining in-person, hybrid and online meetings in ways that further promote research collaboration and support the development of new research areas and programs. The 2020 Evaluation Report also mentioned that:

“Continuity of longer-term collaboration is needed for the complex issues to be studied in a sustained systematic joint endeavor.”

The 2021 applications have found the continuity of collaboration through online meetings and this development could enhance the novelty and renewal of research in Humanities and Social sciences. Firstly, the online meetings provide ease when collaborating continuously long-term. In addition, applicants plan to use the online meetings to create further spaces for in-depth discussion in order to explore complex issues and formulate new research questions.

2.3 An overview of common and novel digital platforms

This section will provide a short overview of the online platforms that applicants are planning to utilize when conducting their hybrid and online activities. It will summarize both common and novel digital platforms used, as well as touch on how digital platforms are used in dissemination.

2.3.1. Digital platforms used for meetings and workshops

PROJECT WEBSITE – A project website was the most commonly mentioned digital platform. Some applicants planned to use it only for dissemination, but many also mentioned using it as a contact point for the research network, where they would develop collaboration and share resources with one another. One applicant mentioned that the website would be used ‘to maintain community’ so that the project remains active outside the short durations of the workshops. Another application even specified that they will have a public facing project website and an intranet for the research network’s dialogue.

ZOOM – most of the additional online meetings as well as the online and hybrid workshops were listed as happening in Zoom. Multiple applications remarked that the pandemic has made conferencing tools like Zoom very familiar, which is useful for workshop design.

TEAMS – one application mentioned using Teams for the preparatory meetings ahead of the workshop series.

CLUBHOUSE – this new social audio app allows its users to move between unlimited rooms hosting different discussions. An application planned to use this for online panel discussions before and after workshops and described it as ‘useful for roundtable discussions.’

GATHER – Gather allows you to build a customized virtual venue, anything from a space station to a library. Participants have avatars and can move around the venue as if in a physical space, mingling between groups and joining different conversations. When joining a group, a video chat for that specific conversation loads up. One application planned to use Gather to run an online workshop and another planned to use it if they had to move their in-person workshop online due to the pandemic.

2.3.2. Digital platforms used for dissemination

WORKSHOP RECORDINGS – Multiple applications planned to record some or all of their workshops. Some of these recordings were planned to be used for data analysis, but more commonly the plan was related to dissemination: posting the recordings on the project’s website, blog or YouTube so that the workshops can reach a wider audience. Some applications also mentioned that they would be streaming the workshops live.

PROJECT WEBSITE – Websites were used for dissemination purposes such as documenting the work of the research network and posting the workshop results and discussion points online. Some applications planned to use existing institutional websites for dissemination instead of setting up their own.

SOCIAL MEDIA – Twitter was the most commonly mentioned social media platform. Some applications planned to set up a Twitter account to advertise the workshops beforehand and to tweet live from the workshops. Some applications also planned to use Facebook’s targeted advertising features to advertise their workshop series.

NEWSLETTERS – Applications planned to utilize existing disciplinary newsletters and mailing lists to disseminate information about the workshops. Some networks also planned to set up their own newsletter.

BLOGS – Some applicants planned to set up a blog to feature written pieces from the workshop participants and network members. Examples of blog post topics were network’s ongoing research, new avenues for exploration generated during the workshops/network collaboration as well as discussion points and outcomes from the workshops more generally.

PODCASTS – Multiple applications planned to create podcasts. Some planned a podcast on a specific workshop whilst others planned a podcast series. The podcasts centered around workshop themes. One application also mentioned that it was a way to incorporate the museal expertise of the network members in their dissemination.

VLOGS, INTERVIEWS AND NEWS ARTICLES – One application offered their participants the possibility to create vlogs and another planned to record short interviews with workshop participants to be published online. Some applicants also planned to give interviews and write think pieces or workshop highlight reels for magazines and general news media.

DIGITAL EXHIBITION – One application planned to combine images, drafted papers and other materials from the workshops to create a digital exhibition which would connect the online user to the project’s themes.

VIRTUAL REALITY APP – The same application that was planning the digital exhibition also planned a follow-up grant application to develop a virtual reality app with a headset. The network was planning to use this VR app to turn their project’s architectural features into a 3D virtual reality experience where participants can interact with them. The network envisioned making the app available to museums and university courses.

2.4 Budget policy and its prevalence in the cost structure of 2021 applications

The third and final question that this report investigates is whether the budget policy adjustments have made applicants direct costs towards different uses than before. Because the workshops were held in-person before the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the grant used to be directed towards travel expenses, accommodation, catering and physical conference facilities.

For this question, all the budget proposals in the 2021 Call were analyzed to see how applicants had reacted to the pandemic-related policy changes in NOS-HS Workshop grants. The new purposes the funding can be used for due to the pandemic are:

- fees for temporary/part-time assistants preparing and running the workshops and websites (only limited amounts of the grant as honorarium, e.g. one month per workshop)
- technical assistance for preparing joint publications deriving from workshop series
- costs associated with organizing online or hybrid workshops: direct costs, such as IT support or purchasing required hardware and/or software, and indirect costs such as training for participants

The possibility to include fees for a part-time assistant in the budget proposal was quite a popular change. 35 out of 51 budget plans (41 %) included fees for a part-time assistant. The main roles for the assistant were listed as helping with running online and in-person workshops and helping maintain the project website and/or social media channels.

In technical assistance, 32 applications (63 %) budgeted funds towards some type of dissemination cost. These were wide ranging. For example, costs related to academic publications included journal fees and quality assurance, such as language revision, proofreading and editorial assistance. Examples of dissemination costs related to public outreach are technical assistance with website construction, blog graphics and blog language revision, fees for an external podcast producer and fees for an illustrator hired to visualize the workshops.

As we saw previously in *Graph 3*, 34 applications (67 %) planned to incorporate online or hybrid meetings into their network collaboration in some capacity, either by hosting online or hybrid workshops or by hosting online meetings outside the workshops, or both. However, only 7 applications (14 %) explicitly mentioned costs in relation to hybrid or online meetings. Thus, most of the online and hybrid elements were unbudgeted and the popularity of online and hybrid meetings did not bring with it a proportional shift in the cost structure of the grant.

This finding could be related to the fact that the budget template encourages applicants to budget specifically for workshops and majority of the workshops are still being planned as in-person. Indeed, one application explicitly mentioned that it would have to reallocate its workshop budget if the workshop had to be moved online. Additionally, the online meetings happening outside the workshops were often mentioned by applicants to be self-financed and non-budgeted. However, it is not possible to determine whether some applications included costs related with online/hybrid formats under their general ICT costs without explicitly mentioning it. In addition, the detail to which applicants fill in their budget proposals at the application stage varies. Thus, these results should be taken as indicative, not wholly representative.

3 Conclusion

3.1 Summary of the report

The global Covid-19 pandemic has made it impossible to predict when in-person workshops can be organized easily and safely. This situation resulted in policy adjustments to the NOS-HS Workshop

Grant. The adjustments made it possible for project leaders and their co-applicants to organize the exploratory workshops in online or hybrid formats for the first time in the grant's history. It also made it possible for applicants to apply for an extension of the funding period where adjustments to the workshop design were not possible.

This report has analyzed the 2021 Workshop Call applications to assess the impact of the pandemic on the planning of the exploratory workshops so far. The 2021 Workshop Call presented a novel opportunity for such an assessment, because at the time of the Call the pandemic had been ongoing long enough for applicants to react to the challenges it poses as well as the NOS-HS policy adjustments related to the pandemic.

This report has been particularly interested in finding out whether the pandemic might not only be resulting in challenges but also in renewal for the exploratory workshops. It has investigated the following questions:

- a) how has the pandemic affected the ways in which applicants plan to design their exploratory workshops?
- b) how has the pandemic affected the ways in which applicants plan their research collaboration and network building?
- c) have the budget policy adjustments made applicants direct costs towards different uses than before in their budget proposals?

The report has found that the NOS-HS Workshop grant applicants are adapting their workshop plans to find new, imaginative ways of collaborating amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has resulted in renewal in the workshop design as presented in the 2021 Workshop Plans. The significant findings in relation to this renewal are:

1. In-person workshops continue to be a main feature of the grant but at the same time, the pandemic has also resulted in diversification of workshop formats
2. The possibility to organize hybrid and online workshops has inspired applicants to customize their workshop design based on the types of workshop formats that best suit their network's exploratory work. As such the option to choose between online, hybrid and in-person collaboration allows applicants to make the most of their collaboration during the funding period and beyond.
3. The applicants see distinct benefits in different workshop types:
 - a. The in-person workshops were described as important in building personal connection and trust as well as in creating informal, serendipitous social interaction.
 - b. The online workshops allowed applicants to open up their workshops for a broader community of researchers and other stakeholders to increase their international engagement, to generate international funding collaboration and to engage in activities that benefit from ongoing discussion, such as reading groups or joint publishing efforts.

- c. Hybrid workshops can combine the benefits of in-person and online workshop design in real-time.
4. Several applications are utilizing online conferencing tools to meet each other before, during and after the workshop series. These additional online meetings are a completely new feature to the grant and make network collaboration grow beyond the workshops.
5. Applicants are using these additional online meetings to establish close, continuous collaboration and to strengthen the research network throughout the funding period and beyond.
6. Additional online meetings are an aspect that cuts across all workshop formats.
7. The additional online meetings serve multiple important purposes for the research networks:
 - a. They help applicants in preparing, running and evaluating the workshops. For example, applicants used the meetings to develop and finetune the workshop structure, to divide tasks, to draft calls for participation and to bring network participants together to discuss current developments in their fields and adjust the workshop themes to reflect these developments.
 - b. They allow the network participants to create more in-depth, ongoing discussions around the workshop themes, to strengthen the interdisciplinary nature of the network's scientific work and to develop research questions further.
 - c. They are well suited for working on a publication record. Indeed, applicants planned to use them as a space to work both on their personal research output and on joint publication aims.
 - d. They enhance networking opportunities and provide applicants with an opportunity to remain in collaboration beyond the funding period. This can support the networks in setting long-term aims and securing a stronger focus for future collaboration.
 - e. They offer networks more opportunities to mature during the funding period and more space to work on their outcomes, such as networking, publication and future funding proposals.
8. 67 % of applications are planning to include some online or hybrid elements in their network collaboration, either by hosting online or hybrid workshops, by hosting additional online meetings beyond the workshops or by doing both.
9. The collaboration planned by applicants has begun to defy simple categorization into online, in-person and hybrid forms and the overall nature of network collaboration has become more hybrid.
10. The budget structure of the grant proposals is not showing changes proportional to the popularity of the hybrid and online collaboration. 67 % of applicants plan to include some hybrid or online elements into their collaboration, but only 7 % of applications explicitly mentioned costs in relation to hybrid and online elements.

11. The possibility to direct costs towards part-time assistant fees was quite popular. 41 % of applications included fees for a part-time assistant.

3.2 The possible impacts of the renewal

Going forward it will be exciting to see how the projects proposed in the 2021 applications are carried out and what effects the new modes of collaboration and workshop design might have on the outcomes of the networks.

In the current NOS-HS Aims and Objectives, it is mentioned that the focus of NOS-HS is on *'supporting flexible bottom-up research'*. Based on the 2021 applications, the policy decision to allow applicants to design online and hybrid workshops is a positive step in further enhancing the flexibility of the NOS-HS Workshop grant. It provides researchers with agency to design their workshops in a way that supports their network collaboration the most. By remaining open and supportive to hybrid and online collaboration, NOS-HS Workshop grant could provide applicants with further flexibility and remain in step with the curiosity that applicants are showing towards combinations of in-person, hybrid and online research work.

Moreover, applicants are planning to utilize online, hybrid and in-person collaboration in combinations that open up their research networks to a broader community of researchers and stakeholders, to increase their international engagement and to create opportunities for international funding collaboration. This development could have a positive impact on the Nordic Added Value of NOS-HS Workshop grants.

The applicants are also showing initiative in rethinking networking opportunities through the collaboration that is happening outside of the workshops, in additional online meetings and on online platforms such as the project websites. Research networks innovating in the face of the pandemic could offer NOS-HS novel ideas in relation to the development goal of *'rethinking the notion of networking, among others by allowing innovative ways of establishing and sustaining networks'*, as outlined in the NOS-HS Aims and Objectives. The strive for continuous collaboration shown by applicants could also be supported to help research communities in the Nordics to expand the scope of their research and plan larger scale projects during the funding period and beyond.

All in all, the 2021 applications showcase exciting new developments in workshop design and research network collaboration. They point towards the possibility that the situation created by the pandemic could present NOS-HS with further opportunities of supporting renewal and strengthening Nordic collaboration in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

4 Appendices

Appendix 1. The Supplementary Budget Proposal Document



22 March 2021

Supplementary information to the budget proposal template

This instruction supplements the NOS-HS exploratory workshop call document 5 February 2021 Appendix 2, Workshop budget proposal (template 29 January 2021)

The NOS-HS workshop grant is intended to enable networking activities. It is not intended for ordinary research costs. The grant may be used to cover necessary and justified costs related to organising the workshop series (2 or max. 3 workshops) and disseminating the results. You may apply funding for the purposes listed here. **Please explain all costs on the budget proposal form.**

1. Networking costs

Examples of direct workshop related costs are e.g. travel, accommodation, conference facilities, and catering for participants and speakers, moderate fees for external keynote speakers, any relevant online conference costs. (Online form Tab 6, budget post Services; for travel, budget post Travel.)

When organising online or hybrid workshops during the Covid-19 pandemic, funding can be used for direct costs such as IT support service or to purchase required software or for indirect cost such as training for participants. Approval of IT costs will be a temporary exception due to the exceptional situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic. (Online form Tab 6, budget post Services; for software, budget post Other.)

2. Disseminating costs

Disseminating or publishing costs must be directly connected to the workshop series outcomes. Examples of such costs are publishing costs, including e.g. language revision and open access costs. Please be realistic and note that all costs must be finalized before the end of the funding period. (Online form Tab 6, budget post Services.)

3. Limited assistant fees

The grant may not be used for scholarships or any salary costs of the applicants. This network funding is not intended for salaries with university overheads either. Note that indirect (overhead) costs are covered up to a flat rate of 10 % of the total grant amount.

However, assistant fees may be included. Limited amounts of the grant (e.g. one month per workshop meeting) may be used for fees for temporary/part-time assistants preparing and running the workshops and websites and technical assistance for preparing joint publications deriving from the workshop series. (Online form Tab 6, budget post Services.)

Appendix 2. Workshop Plan Template 2021

The following information must be included as a separate PDF file (*Tab 7*). Please use the following structure, subheadings and numbering. The plan must be written in 12 pt. Times New Roman or a similar font and it must not exceed 6 pages.

1. Scientific quality and novelty of the project

- Describe the scientific contents of the workshops briefly. Explain the planned research initiative, including ideas for research topics, theories, methods and analyses. If relevant, present any ethical issues raised by the research and explain how they will be addressed.
- Give a clear description of the novelty of the project. What is novel in the scientific idea behind the workshop series? In what way is the initiative original? Is there an element of exploration in the idea? Why is the workshop series necessary?
- If you have previous or currently applied grants for the same research idea, describe how this proposed project differs from them. Note: since novelty is a key funding criterion, funding will not be granted for ongoing research projects with the same content. If the network already exists, there must be novel elements and breaking of new ground involved, and new participants to the network. If the applicants have worked together in the past, clearly explain the novelty of this project.

2. Nordic added value

- Include a short description: Which criteria for Nordic value added does your workshop series meet? What is especially Nordic in your application? Why must the series of exploratory workshops be organised at the Nordic level?

Please see NordForsk's definitions for Nordic added value in research (Appendix 3, p. 17).

3. Explorative workshops setup and process

Explain the setup.

- Present the suggested programme for the workshop series, including the purpose and brief tentative programme of each workshop. Specify which form each workshop will take: in-person, online, or hybrid meeting. Explain how your workshop plan includes novelty and exploration of new ideas, maybe even an element of risk.
- Describe the division of tasks between the applicants. Who is responsible for which workshop or workshop elements?
- How many workshop participants with different research career stages and different backgrounds will be included? Explain why these participants are important for the project.

Explain the process for how the workshops are organised.

- Explain how the *process of the workshops* and different elements of the workshop plan promote the research idea and novelty. Justify why each workshop is essential for the research idea. How does the workshop process as a whole lead to Nordic added value? We suggest that you collect feedback including development ideas from workshop participants after each workshop. Use the feedback in fine-tuning the workshop contents and process to reach optimal effectiveness during the workshop series.
- Explain how different parties involved in the workshop are engaged in the process for (optimal) knowledge co-creation. How do you plan to build and strengthen new networks?
- Describe the active roles of the early-career researchers.
- When relevant, also explain the role and contribution of the actors from outside academia.

Justify all costs on Appendix 2, NOS-HS workshop budget proposal (separate document).

4. Outcomes of the workshop series

Note that there may be a variety of short and long-term benefits and outcomes and that they may be specific for the topic.

- What explorative or innovative outcomes do you expect? Are concrete outcomes expected, such as co-authored publications, joint international funding applications or collaborative international conference activities? Further examples: websites, blogs, interactive social media, policy recommendations, collaboration with stakeholders, exhibitions, researcher exchange, co-supervised students, strong networks, etc.
- Present a tentative plan for dissemination and communication of the various results to the research community and the general public.