



MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA

2019-2020 PILOT GRANT PROGRAM GUIDE

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1. BACKGROUND AND GRANT DESCRIPTION.....	3
1.1. WHAT IS THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA?.....	3
1.2. WHAT IS A PILOT GRANT?	3
1.3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PILOT GRANT	3
2. COMPETITION AND GRANT INFORMATION.....	3
2.1. MSSC COMPETITION SCHEDULE	3
2.2. ELIGIBILITY	3
2.3. TERM AND FUNDING.....	4
2.4. RESUBMISSION AND RENEWAL	4
2.5. PARTNERSHIP FUNDING.....	5
3. REVIEW AND RESULTS	5
3.1. REVIEW PROCESS	5
3.1.1. Independent Review Committee	5
3.1.2. Evaluation of Applications and Triage	6
3.1.3. In-Person Review and Final Recommendation	7
3.1.4. Final Approval	8
3.2. COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS	8

1. BACKGROUND AND GRANT DESCRIPTION

1.1. WHAT IS THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA?

Established in 1948, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (MSSC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing services to people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and their families and funding the highest-quality research to find the cause and cure for this disease. The MSSC is empowered to make grants of money for use by individuals within lawfully established agencies or institutions to further its mission.

The Mission of the MSSC is: “To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.”

1.2. WHAT IS A PILOT GRANT?

The pilot grant program awards seed funding that allows researchers to develop and test new and innovative research questions and pursue pioneering approaches that have the potential to impact the MS field in topics related to Clinical and Population Health (CPH). Objectives of the pilot grant program are to enable researchers to test novel and high-potential MS research ideas, collect key preliminary data to support further research, test the feasibility of a study design, concept, or intervention on a small scale, and to provide researchers a trajectory to larger grant competitions. Projects that are extensions of ongoing research that have ample supporting data will not be considered.

Currently, only pilot grants related to topics that fall under the CPH domain are being accepted to this competition. These include epidemiology, health economics, risk factors, health care delivery/policy, treatment monitoring and health assessment, symptom management, rehabilitation and social aspects of MS.

1.3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PILOT GRANT

The administration of the pilot grant program is the responsibility and function of the MSSC'S Research Department at the National Office.

2. COMPETITION AND GRANT INFORMATION

2.1. MSSC COMPETITION SCHEDULE

The pilot grant competition is launched as part of the annual research and awards competition that also includes Operating Grants and endMS Personnel awards. The MSSC offers an annual research grants and awards competition which launches at the end of July and closes on October 1st at 4:00 p.m. ET. In the event the deadline falls on a weekend, the deadline is the following Monday. For full details visit the [MS Society website](#).

2.2. ELIGIBILITY

Principal Investigator (PI): The PI is listed as the primary applicant/contact and is responsible for overseeing the research conducted as part of the proposal. The PI must be considered eligible by his or her institution to apply for a research grant. The PI does not have to be a Canadian citizen but must be conducting research in a Canadian institution which is recognized by the Tri-Council Agencies, made up of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The PI is autonomous regarding their research activities, has a faculty appointment that allows the individual to pursue the proposed research, and is equipped to supervise trainees and publish research activities. There can be only 1 (one) PI per grant application who will assume scientific and administrative oversight for the study.

Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI): The Co-PI is as an individual who shares responsibility for the direction of the proposed research project with the PI and meets the eligibility criteria of a PI. There are no restrictions as to the number of Co-PI per application.

Co-Applicant: The Co-Applicant contributes to the progress of the research, and conducts components of the project under the leadership of the PI. The contribution of the Co-Applicant must be clearly outlined. A Co-Applicant must have an appointment in the university department but no specific rank is required (e.g. postdoctoral fellow).

Collaborator: A Collaborator is an individual external to the research team whose role is to provide a specific service to support and advance the proposed research (e.g. access to equipment, training in a specialized technique, statistical analysis etc.). Collaborators are required to provide a letter of collaboration which outlines their role on the project. Collaborators can be recruited from international institutions only if their role fills an unmet need that is not available in Canada.

Institution: Institutions are the official recipients of grants made for the support of specific research by the PI. MSSC only accepts applications from Canadian post-secondary institutions and their affiliated institutions including hospitals and research institutes.

Concurrent Grant Submissions: The PI may concurrently submit a maximum of one (1) new pilot grant application and two (2) operating grant applications (one new operating grant and one renewal operating grant) per competition. The PI can hold a maximum of two operating grants and one pilot grant at any one time. Data and outcomes that will be derived from the pilot grant should not overlap with those from an operating grant, but the topics can be related.

2.3. TERM AND FUNDING

Term: The MSSC supports pilot research grants for terms of one (1) to two (2) years. Pilot grants are non-renewable.

Amount: The amount that may be requested for pilot research grants is approximately \$ 50,000 over the term of the grant.

2.4. RESUBMISSION AND RENEWAL

Renewal Grants: Pilot grants are non-renewable. Grants submitted to the operating grant competition

that build on preliminary data obtained from a pilot grant are considered new operating grant submissions.

Resubmissions Applications that were unsuccessful in their previous submission to the MSSC pilot grant competition are considered resubmissions. Resubmitting an application is permitted under MSSC competition rules. An application is considered to be a resubmission if the overall research plan (hypothesis and aims) are similar to what was outlined in the first submission. The MSSC may choose to reclassify a new application as a resubmission if it is very similar to a previous application from the PI. Resubmissions will be assessed according to the review criteria for a new application, and must include a "Response to the previous review" demonstrating substantive modification to the proposal addressing the reviewers' comments. A Pilot Grant application can only be re-submitted once, for a total of two submissions.

2.5. PARTNERSHIP FUNDING

The MSSC reserves the right to establish funding partnerships with relevant provincial and federal funding agencies for any or all of its funding opportunities. Applicants will be notified in a timely manner of partnership terms and conditions.

The ratios for matching the partner's financial contribution (in cash and, if applicable, in-kind) will vary depending on the funding opportunity. The letter of agreement or amendment to the agreement will specify the amounts to be contributed by both MSSC and the partner. Please visit the MS Society's website for information on available partnership funding.

3. REVIEW AND RESULTS

3.1. REVIEW PROCESS

3.1.1. Independent Review Committee

Applications submitted to the CPH pilot grant competition are reviewed by members of an independent review committee selected by the MSSC. The overarching principles inherent in the allocation of MSSC funds are excellence, equity of opportunity, impact and due diligence in the use of MSSC funds.

The MSSC engages the scientific and clinical communities as well as the public in the review process. Individuals affected by MS who serve on the review committee are called community representatives. Involvement of community representatives ensures transparency of the review process and effective communication with public stakeholders. The committee includes a Chair, an established researcher in the MS scientific community who oversees the entire process and presides over the review meetings to guide the committee to a consensus rating. The committee also includes a scientific officer (SO), who is a senior MS researcher tasked with taking detailed notes throughout the review process.

Scientific reviewers assess the scientific merit, feasibility, novelty, and the human and research impact of each application. Community representatives review the lay summary, relevance to MS and the brief project description of each application. If the lay documents of an approved grant are deemed to be unsatisfactory by a community representative, the applicant will be notified of conditional approval of

their grant, and funding of the grant is subject to the receipt and approval of revised lay documents.

3.1.2. Evaluation of Applications and Triage

Once all applications are submitted, the MSSC collaborates with the committee Chair to assign applications to reviewers based on their expertise. Those reviewers who are in conflict with an application are re-assigned to a different application to avoid bias. Each application is reviewed by two scientific reviewers – referred to as the primary reviewer and secondary reviewer – and one community representative based on the following review criteria:

Review Criteria for Scientific Reviewers

- A. **Research approach:** clarity of research questions, completeness of literature review and relevance to study design /research plan, clarity of rationale for the research approach and methodology, appropriateness of research design and methods, feasibility of research approach.
- B. **Originality of the proposal:** novel idea that has not been previously explored to a great extent for MS, with potential to create new knowledge and test a new approach, intervention, or concept that will advance the MS field.
- C. **Impact of research:** addresses a significant need or gap in health research with potential to improve quality of life for people with MS, and provide a strong foundation for further research.
- D. **Investigator(s):** qualifications of applicant(s), experience in the proposed area of research, scientific productivity, ability to disseminate research findings, appropriateness of team of applicants.
- E. **Resources and environment:** availability and accessibility of personnel, facilities and infrastructure required to conduct the research, suitability of the environment to conduct the proposed research and for the training of personnel.
- F. **Budget:** realistic in terms of aims and methodology, items justified and comply with MSSC [policies](#).

Review Criteria for Community Representatives

Community representatives review the lay summaries of each pilot grant application. They provide an enthusiasm rating and comments based on the following:

- Comprehension/accessibility of the lay summary
- Relevance to critical needs and challenges faced by people affected by MS
- Capacity for the project to yield outcomes that will improve the health management of quality of life of people for people affected by MS.

Scoring and Triage

In addition to providing an evaluation, the scientific reviewers and community representatives assign a preliminary score or enthusiasm rating respectively for each application they review based on the charts below. The Chair and Scientific Officer (SO) do not assign preliminary scores. The scientific scores provide the MSSC and committee Chair with an indication of the quality of the proposals submitted.

They also serve as benchmarks for determining which applications will be triaged. Any application that receives a score below 3.5 from **both** the primary and secondary reviewer will be considered for triage, and triaged applications not be discussed at the review meeting. The community representative’s enthusiasm rating provides an indication of relevance to MS, potential impact, and comprehensibility to a lay audience.

Scientific Scoring Chart

Descriptor	Range	Outcome
Outstanding	4.5 – 4.9	May Be Funded
Excellent	4.0 – 4.4	
Very good	3.5 – 3.9	
Acceptable	3.0 – 3.4	Not Fundable
Needs revision	2.5 – 2.9	
Needs major revision	2.0 – 2.4	
Seriously flawed	1.0 – 1.9	
Rejected	0.0 – 0.9	

Community Representative Overall Enthusiasm Level Chart

Overall Enthusiasm Level	Definition
High	Highly relevant with high potential to impact health and quality of life for people affected by MS; lay summary is well written using clear, understandable, and engaging language. No to minor revisions needed to lay documents.
Moderate	Good with some relevance and potential for to impact health and quality of life for people affected by MS; lay summary is adequate in terms of using clear and engaging language, but still uses some technical language. Moderate revisions needed to lay documents.
Low	Low relevance and little potential for impact for people affected by MS; poorly written and excessive use of technical language. Requires major revisions to lay documents.

3.1.3. In-Person Review and Final Recommendation

Once the primary and secondary scientific reviewers as well as the community representatives evaluate the applications “at home”, the review committee meets in person to engage in an open discussion about the applications. For each application, the primary, secondary and community representative reviewers discuss their comments and bring up any issues that should be deliberated by the committee. The committee Chair then asks for a consensus score (a score that the two scientific reviewers can agree upon based on the discussion), after which each committee member (except for

the Chair, SO and community representatives) votes within 0.5 points above or below the scientific consensus score.

Once all of the scores are tallied, the committee discusses a cut-off score for funding depending on the distribution of scores of the applications. Those applications that fall above the designated cut-off score are recommended for funding. Committee members who were identified as having a conflict of interest with a particular application must step out of the room during the review and scoring of the application.

3.1.4. Final Approval

A recommendation for funding is presented by to the MSSC's Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) – a team of senior researchers and clinicians who oversee scientific and medical matters that impact the MSSC and its stakeholders. In this case, the MAC assesses the review committee's recommendation through a wider lens of emerging trends in research and priorities of the MSSC, and provides a final recommendation to the MSSC's National Board of Directors for approval.

3.2. COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

All applicants are informed by email of the funding status of their grant applications regardless of the outcome. In addition, the MSSC provides each applicant with the scientific and lay evaluations of their application (which are anonymized), as well as notes from the SO.

For **successful applications only**, the MSSC will post limited information on the Web (i.e. name of the applicants, department, institution, term and amount of award, project title, and a summary of the research proposal). Results are not released over the phone. The MSSC does not publish or otherwise disclose details related to unsuccessful applications.

Questions and Support

Please direct all inquiries regarding the funding opportunities to msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca