



endMS Personnel Awards Review Guidelines and Criteria

Revised November 2017

Review Guidelines and Criteria: endMS Personnel Awards

On behalf of the MS Society of Canada (MSSC), we would like to thank you for agreeing to serve as a reviewer. The success of the independent review process is made possible by dedicated people like you who generously give their time and expertise. Your efforts are greatly appreciated by the MSSC and our stakeholders.

COMPETITION OVERVIEW

MSSC welcomes applications for support of training graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in studies related to multiple sclerosis (MS). There are two streams of research: biomedical and clinical and population health. All MSSC studentship applications are reviewed by the endMS Personnel Awards Review Committee.

endMS Studentship Award: The Studentship Awards serve to attract and retain young trainees early in their academic research career. The Studentship provides the opportunity to gain research experience in the field of MS. The proposed Studentship program should emphasize opportunities for research training and broadening scientific understanding of MS for the applicant.

- Maximum annual value of the Master's Awards: \$20,000
- Maximum annual value of the Doctoral Awards: \$22,000
- Maximum annual value of the Doctoral Awards (for MDs): \$50,500

endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Award: The Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards are awarded to young researchers who have completed a graduate or clinical degree in order to attract and retain them in the field of MS. The proposed Postdoctoral program should emphasize opportunities to support new research training and development of skills to pursue an academic career.

- Maximum annual value of the Postdoctoral Awards: \$41,000
- Maximum annual value of the Postdoctoral Awards (for MDs): \$50,500

COMMITTEE ROLES:

The composition of the independent review committee will include the following:

- **Chair** will oversee the review process and act as a facilitator to establish a positive, constructive, fair minded environment in which all applications under review are evaluated. The Chair is responsible for providing a report to the Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) outlining the outcomes of the review meeting.
- **Scientific Reviewers** are non-conflicted researchers recruited with specific expertise to provide a critical assessment of the scientific merit, feasibility, novelty, and the human and

research impact of each application as well as constructive written feedback based on MSSC review criteria for applications assigned to them. Scientific Reviewers will participate in the review meeting to discuss and provide a quantitative assessment (score) for all non-conflicted applications.

- **Community Representatives** are people affected by MS who are invited to participate in the review meetings. The Community Representatives evaluate, through a non-scientific lens, the comprehensibility of the lay documents and discuss the relevance of the research to the MS community, and potential of the research to translate into meaningful impacts that will improve quality of life for people living with MS. Community Representatives will provide a qualitative assessment of impact and relevance of non-conflicted applications.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

The principles that guide the independent review at the MSSC are confidentiality, conflict of interest and fairness.

The evaluation of applications for funding has two steps: (1) an in-depth "at-home" review by at least two Scientific Reviewers (primary, secondary and possibly external) and one Community Representative to produce written evaluations, and (2) a committee meeting to discuss and rate the applications, from which the MSSC generates a rank-order priority list to inform its funding decisions.

Review of the applications will be based on the review criteria outlined below, and will be submitted by the committee via the MSSC's online grants platform [Easygrants](#). The endMS Personnel Awards consist of a review of (1) **new applications** for funding and for (2) **progress reports** (trainees currently funded by the MSSC and who are eligible for funding for additional terms).

After considering the review criteria, Scientific Reviewers will prepare written comments for each application to which they have been assigned as primary or secondary reviewer. They will provide a preliminary score using the scoring chart below. This score may be used by the Chair of the review committee for triage purposes, if needed.

The Community Representatives will provide written comments from a non-scientific perspective, and are asked to review relevant sections of all assigned applications. The Community Representative will assess the sections based on comprehensibility, impact and relevance to MS and a level of enthusiasm will be provided based on the specific review criteria provided.

The committee will convene for an in-person meeting which will go as follows: The Community Representative will state their enthusiasm level, after which the primary and secondary Scientific Reviewers will state their preliminary scores. The Community Representative will then discuss their assessment, highlighting any strengths or weakness of the lay documents and describing their enthusiasm for the application.

The primary Scientific Reviewer will present their assessment, describing the strengths and weaknesses of the application as a whole. The secondary Scientific Reviewer will follow, concentrating on points of agreement or disagreement and elaborating points not addressed by the primary reviewer.

The Chair will lead the committee into an overall discussion of the application. The Chair will then seek a consensus score from the primary and secondary Scientific Reviewers. Non-conflicted scientific committee members, excluding the Chair and Scientific Officer, will cast an individual confidential score within ± 0.5 of the consensus rating. The final score assigned to the proposal will be the average of these confidential scores. At the same time, the Community Representatives will also be requested to provide a final overall level of enthusiasm. A rank-order priority list will be generated of all applications to make funding decisions.

The committee's recommendation will be brought forward to the Medical Advisory Committee and the Multiple Sclerosis Board of Directors for final approval.

REVIEW CRITERIA

The MSSC will transmit comments from each reviewer to the applicants whose proposals they reviewed. Please ensure your review is clear and concise, using objective and non-inflammatory language and include justification for your comments and suggestions. Constructive advice to the applicant from the Scientific Reviewers will allow him/her to improve the quality and efficiency of the proposed research, while feedback from the Community Representatives will allow the applicant to potentially improve his/her lay documents and better articulate the impact of the proposed research. Please do not identify yourself to ensure the confidentiality of the research process.

This section is divided into two subsections: a) **New Applications** and, b) **Progress Reports** for both Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives. Please following the instructions accordingly.

A. NEW APPLICATIONS

Scientific Reviewer

Provide a brief synopsis of the funding application, an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and comment on issues that should be flagged. Use the following instructions and questions to guide your assessment.

Achievements of the Candidate

Discuss the following points reflecting the applicant's scholarly and research achievements:

- Transcripts.
- Honours, awards and academic distinctions.
- Research experience and potential (for applicants in their first year or less of their graduate research program, most emphasis should be placed on academic achievements and reviewer's impressions of their potential for carrying out research):
 - Quality of applicant's research training experience
 - Potential to conduct research of a high calibre.
 - Productivity and quality of peer-reviewed scientific publications. (specifically pertaining to Postdoctoral Fellows).
- Letters of recommendation.

Candidate's Research Program

- Relevance of proposed research to MS
- Research proposal:
 - Sound and logical rationale
 - Feasibility
 - Appropriate study design and methodology.
 - Content of research is appropriate for candidate's current stage of scientific and professional development.

Mentor(s) and Environment

Discuss the following aspects of the proposed supervisor and training environment:

- Solid track record in providing supervision and mentorship for trainees.
- Strong qualifications and experience in conducting a research program.
- A strong publication record that indicates a history of productivity, impact and collaboration.
- Adequate and appropriate research facilities and educational opportunities, including collaborating faculty for the candidate's research.

Preliminary Score:

Please provide a preliminary score using the scoring chart below. The Chair does not assign preliminary scores. These preliminary scores will not be used for ranking purposes, but provide the MSSC and the 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 receive a score below 3.5 from both the primary and secondary reviewers, will be considered for triage, and triaged applications not to be discussed at the review meeting. You will be asked to provide a final score on the day of the review meeting based on a consensus score.

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

Please read the following sections of each application that have been assigned to you:

- **Lay Summary**
- **Relevance to MS**
- **Training Overview**

Address the following questions in your written assessment:

Language and Accessibility:

- Does the applicant use clear, appropriate language to explain how the findings of their project will benefit people affected by MS?
- Does the applicant clearly explain background information and key concepts that form the foundation for the study? If not, what is missing or what can be improved?
- What feedback can you provide the applicant that would assist them in making the lay documents more understandable and relevant to the general public?

Potential Impact and Relevance for People Affected by MS and on advancements in the MS field:

- What are the goals of the research study, and why is the study important to people affected by MS?
- Does the application have the potential to make a lasting influence on the health and quality of life and/or quality of clinical care among people affected by MS?
- In your view, does the application address a critical gap in knowledge or barriers to progress in the field of MS.

- Does the application bring hope and excitement to you as a person who is affected by MS, and will the outcomes of the research resound with the MS community in a positive way?
- Upon reading the lay documents, is it clear that the application will have an impact on the lives of those affected by MS? If not, how could the impact of this study be improved?

Training Overview and Applicants’ Motivation:

- Has the applicant clearly explained his/her motivation to pursue research training in the field of MS?
- Does the applicant appear confident that they are bringing important skills and experience to the research project, and do they hope to gain new skills and experience over the course of their training?
- What is your overall impression of the applicant? Does he/she convey enthusiasm for conducting the research project?

Enthusiasm Level

Please provide an enthusiasm level based on your overall impression of how impactful and relevant you find the application using the chart below. You will be asked to provide a final enthusiasm level the day of the review meeting.

ENTHUSIASM LEVEL CHART

Level of Enthusiasm	Description
High	Highly relevant with high potential for impact for people affected by MS; very well written in clear and understandable lay language; applicant demonstrates excellent qualifications and high degree of enthusiasm for conducting the research. No or minimal revisions needed to lay documents.
Medium	Good with moderate relevance and moderate potential for impact for people affected by MS; written adequately with some use of technical language; applicants demonstrate adequate qualifications and a reasonable degree of enthusiasm for conducting the research. 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 applicant does not seem adequately qualified and demonstrates little enthusiasm for conducting the research. Requires major revisions to lay documents.

B. PROGRESS REPORTS

Scientific Reviewer

The review of Studentship and Postdoctoral Fellowship progress reports should be primarily based on research progress made during the previous academic year. It is suggested that unless there are serious flaws or setbacks in the research program and the trainee has failed to demonstrate progress in their project, the trainee will be eligible for funding for an additional term.

The reviewer should provide a brief written commentary on the trainee's research progress (**one paragraph or less**). If any changes were made to the original research aims, comment on whether these aims were sufficiently justified and had a significant impact on the research project. If the progress of research is not deemed to be acceptable, please provide suggestions for bringing the project back on track. This could include potential goals the trainee could strive for in the next year (e.g. focusing on and refining a particular aspect of the study, revising their approach to data analysis and interpretation, etc.).

Each progress report will be evaluated by two scientific reviewers and the community representative. No scoring will be provided for progress reports reviews, only the recommendation to fund an additional term or to terminate funding.

Community Representative

The review of Studentship and Postdoctoral Fellowship progress reports should be primarily based on the **lay summary and impact and relevance to MS** sections.

The Community Representative should provide a brief assessment of the impact of any findings emerging from the study (**one paragraph or less**). Does the trainee articulate how these findings are relevant to the MS community and have a potential impact? Note that some trainees are in the early stages of their projects, so there may not be an immediate impact; nonetheless, you can use this opportunity to discuss your excitement for the potential outcomes once the project is complete. Does the applicant use clear, appropriate language to explain how the findings of their project will benefit people affected by MS? If not, how can the language be improved?

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Scientific Reviewers and Community representatives shall abide at all times by the Society's *Conflict of Interest Guidelines* and *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*.

Prior to being given access to the applications for review, Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives will be required to review, sign and submit MSSC's Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Policy form and declare conflicts of interest with applications. In instances

where a Scientific Reviewer or Community Representative has declared a conflict of interest, he or she will not be allowed to review or comment on the applications, and will be excused from the meeting during those committee discussions.

EASYGRANTS ONLINE SYSTEM INSTRUCTIONS

Register or log in to your account at <https://www.mscanadagrants.ca>. This will take you to the homepage.

Scroll down to the **My Tasks** tab; underneath you will see links to your tasks in blue. Select **Submit Review Comments**, which will take you to the **Main** page.

To view all of the applications, select **Download All** under the **Download Zip File** heading. Additionally, you can view each application individually by selecting **View PDF** under **Assignments**. Please note that you will only review and submit comments for the application(s) to which you have been assigned.

Select **Review** on the right side of each assignment. Provide a preliminary score or enthusiasm level in the space provided, and enter your comments. Select **Save and Close**. To submit your review select **Continue**. Under **Submission** select **Submit**.

To view your submission, select **View PDF** under **View All My Tasks**. Once submitted, all comments are considered final and cannot be altered.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact us at msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca.