



**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA**

**2020-2021 DISCOVERY RESEARCH GRANT (OPERATING GRANT) PROGRAM  
GUIDE**

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## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. MS SOCIETY OF CANADA

Established in 1948, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (MSSC) is a charity dedicated to providing services to people affected by multiple sclerosis (MS) and funding the highest-quality research to find the cause of MS and its potential prevention, repair and treatment.

The Mission of the MSSC is: “To connect and empower the MS community to create positive change.”

### 1.2. DISCOVERY RESEARCH GRANT (OPERATING GRANT)

The Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) program is intended to support research operations that will help to generate new scientific knowledge and applications that will improve health and quality of life of people affected by MS.

The Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) supports investigator-initiated research proposals and there are no topic restrictions imposed, other than the required demonstration of relevance to MS. For the Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) competition, it is also required that the proposed research pertains to one or more of the streams listed below:

#### **Biomedical Research:**

The Biomedical Discovery Research grant supports research which uncovers the biological, pathological, and mechanistic aspects of MS, and provides fundamental knowledge about the development, progression, prevention and treatment of MS disease. Studies can involve *in vitro*, animal, and/or human models.

Topics can include:

- **Treatment and Care:** Research that aims to advance treatment and care for people affected by MS (e.g., symptom management, diagnosing MS, developing new treatments and understanding their mechanisms)
- **Understand and Halt Disease Progression:** Research that aims to understand the mechanisms of MS, disease progression, progressive MS, and repair (e.g., myelin biology, neurobiology, neurophysiology, immunology, neuropathology, and imaging).
- **Prevent MS:** Research that aims to prevent MS (e.g. identifying risk factors and effective interventions for prevention and understanding their mechanisms).

#### **Clinical and Population Health**

The Clinical and Population Health (CPH) Discovery Research grant supports **clinical research** with the goal of improving diagnosis and treatment, and improving the health and quality of life of individuals, and encompasses research on, or for the treatment of, people affected by MS; and supports **population health research** that aims to understand the complex, biological, social, cultural and environmental interactions that determine the health of individuals and populations.

Topics can include:

- **Treatment and Care:** Research that aims to advance treatment and care for people affected by MS (e.g. symptom management, diagnosing MS, developing new treatments, mental health, wellness/self-care, rehabilitation, health services, clinical care practices, models of care, healthcare delivery/policy).
- **Enhance Well-being:** Research that aims to understand how to enhance the well-being of people affected by MS within communities (e.g. understanding the social determinants of health, health economics/cost benefit analysis on interventions and support structures and systems, community-based programs, health systems research/policy).
- **Prevent MS:** Research that aims to prevent MS (e.g. identifying risk factors, effective interventions for prevention, health economic/cost benefit analysis on prevention, and defining highest risk populations).

For smaller studies that aim to test new ideas and interventions, or pioneer new approaches and avenues of research in clinical and population health, please visit the [Pilot Grant webpage](#) for more information.

### **1.3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE DISCOVERY RESEARCH GRANT (OPERATING GRANT)**

The administration of the Discovery Research Grant (Operating 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 MSSC offers an annual research grants and awards competition which launches at the end of July and closes on October 1<sup>st</sup> 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 a university department but no specific rank is required. A postdoctoral fellow can be a co-applicant but must be in the same university department as the PI (or Co PI).

**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) Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) applications per competition. The PI can hold a maximum of two Discovery Research Grants (Operating Grant) 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 Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant), but the topics can be related.

### 2.3. TERM AND FUNDING

**Term:** The MSSC supports Discovery Research grants (Operating grant) for terms of one (1) to three (3) years.

**Amount:** The amount that may be requested for operating research grants is approximately \$ 100,000 per year.

### 2.4. RESUBMISSION AND RENEWAL

**Renewal Grants:** Support beyond the initial term of the grant will require submission of a new grant application that will be subject to review in direct competition with other new grant applications.

**Resubmissions** Applications that were unsuccessful in their previous submission to the MSSC Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) competition are considered resubmissions. Resubmitting an application is permitted. An application is considered to be a resubmission if the overall research plan (hypothesis and aims) are similar to what was outlined in the initial or subsequent submissions. 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. An Discovery Research Grant

(Operating Grant) application can only be re-submitted twice, for a total of three 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 Discovery Research Grant (Operating 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 AND STREAMLINING OF APPLICATIONS**

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:** potential for creation of new knowledge and originality of the proposed research.
- c. Impact of research:** research proposal addresses a significant need or gap in health research, potential for a significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of people with MS, plan for research dissemination and exchange.
- 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 impact and relevance to MS of each Discovery Research Grant (Operating 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 Streamlining Applications**

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 discussed at the in-person meeting. Any application that receives a score below 3.5 from **both** the primary and secondary reviewer may 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	<b>May Be Funded</b>
Excellent	4.0 – 4.4	
Very good	3.5 – 3.9	
Acceptable	3.0 – 3.4	<b>Not Fundable</b>
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 RECOMMENDATIONS

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 committee of the MS Society's Board of Directors - comprised of researchers and clinicians who oversee scientific and medical matters that impact the MSSC and its stakeholders. The MAC assesses the review committee's recommendation through a wider lens of emerging trends in research and the strategic 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.

### 4. ONLINE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The MS Society of Canada (MSSC) uses an online research grants and awards management system that enables researchers to submit, and review applications on the Web. The system is called **Easygrants** and can be accessed through the following website: <https://www.mscanadagrants.ca>

Interested applicants must create a profile on Easygrants through which they can complete the application process. Important things to note:

- If you have already created a profile and forgot your password, please contact [msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca](mailto:msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca) or select **Forgot Your Password?** on the home page.
- Please review the MSSC Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) [Policies](#) prior to submitting an application.
- Please ensure that your contact information (institution, primary address, phone number, and e-mail) are **correct** and **up to date**. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure the submitted application contains all required components.
- **Applications that are incomplete or do not adhere to the format and assigned page limits or are submitted after the deadline will be automatically disqualified from the competition.**
- **French Applications:** The MSSC accepts applications in French. French applications might be

translated into English for reviewer's convenience.

Below is a list of required information and documents as part of the Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) application. Satisfactory completion and submission of all documents is required for consideration in the competition.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all guidelines are followed and the submitted application contains all required components. **Failure to submit all required documents will result in an incomplete application and will be disqualified from the competition.**

#### 4.1. FIELDS TO BE COMPLETED IN EASYGRANTS

##### ELIGIBILITY QUIZ

- Applicants must successfully pass the Eligibility Quiz to access the application.
- False information will result in an application being disqualified

The following fields are to be completed in Easygrants. Ensure all word limits are adhered to, additional words will be removed. Do not copy and paste fields into Easygrants.

##### CONTACT INFORMATION

- Enter your name and the institution/organization at which you will be conducting the proposed research.
- Enter your contact information such as address, phone, email, etc.
- If you cannot find your institution in the menu, contact [msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca](mailto:msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca).
- Please ensure that your contact information (institution, primary address, phone number and e-mail) is **correct** and **up to date**.
- Some information may be pre-filled; please update the information as required.

##### PROJECT INFORMATION

###### Project Title:

- Enter project title. Ensure that the title accurately and concisely captures the overall objective of your research project.

###### Brief Project Description:

- Provide a brief description of the research project being proposed.
- Maximum 100 words.
- Please note that the Project Description will be sent to potential reviewers to identify conflict of interest and levels of expertise, therefore, ensure that the project description is a clear representation of the research project being proposed.

###### Project Subject and Research Area(s)

- **Required**, select **Clinical and Population Health** OR **Biomedical Research** from drop-down menu.

- **Required**, select additional subject area(s) that pertain to the project by selecting from the menu on the left and clicking the “Add” button.

#### BUDGET

- Enter the budget per year for a maximum of 3 years.
- Amount requested per year is approximately \$100,000.
- Use the **Notes** section to provide a Budget Justification:
  - Details and justification of all budget items relative to the proposed research are required.
  - In the **Appendix**, applicants may include electronic copies of quotations and other information useful to the reviewers.
  - The MSSC does not fund indirect costs. Consult the [MSSC Discovery Research Grant \(Operating Grant\) Policies](#) for all eligible expenditures.
  - If the research proposal is a clinical trial, the MSSC will consider a term longer than 3 years if appropriately justified; however, the amount requested must be approximately \$300,000 for the full grant term.

#### OTHER PERSONNEL

- Enter the names, institutions, address, and contact information for Co-Principal Investigator(s), Co-Applicant(s) and Collaborator(s) (if applicable),
- Consult the Eligibility section above and the MSSC Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) [Policies](#) for personnel definitions.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Indicate whether this grant application is a **New** or **Resubmission** (include EGID of previous submission)
- Select one of the following themes that apply to the project. This information will be used to track funding trends over time.
  1. **Symptom management and quality of life** (epidemiology, comprehensive care, pain and fatigue, exercise and diet, cognition, etc.)
  2. **Mechanisms of disease** (pathophysiology, inflammation, neurodegeneration, myelin repair, cell and animal models, etc.).  
If your grant theme is mechanisms of disease, please specify if it relates to:
    - Mechanisms of progression
    - Repair processes
    - Nerve damage and triggers of MS
  3. **Therapy and clinical tool development** (clinical trials, drug repurposing, diagnostics, imaging, health-based technological applications, etc.)
  4. **Cause and Risk Factors** (prevention, genetic, lifestyle, environmental, biological, etc.)

#### 4.2. UPLOADS

The documents that may be uploaded for this application are listed below. Note that some uploads will have templates available in Easygrants. Please log in to your account to view the templates in the Uploads section. Ensure all pop-up blockers are off when accessing the templates. **Do NOT upload any password protected, secured or encrypted documents as they will not upload properly to your application.**

**Upload Format:** Single spaced, 12-point font size, Times New Roman font style and margins that are ½” must be used for all uploads. *Pages in excess of the limit will not be reviewed.* **All uploads must contain relevant headers within the documents; e.g. Proposed Research Project, Training Overview, etc.**

#### **Scientific Summary of Research Proposal**

- Provide a scientific summary of the research proposal.
- One (1) page maximum.

#### **Research Proposal**

- Ten (10) pages maximum. Any content beyond ten (10) pages will be removed from the application and will not be reviewed.
- Provide a clear, concise description of your proposed activities in the Research Proposal attachment. The Research Proposal should stand alone (i.e. it should contain all of the information required to support your research plan and should contain a self-contained, complete description of your project).

In the Research Proposal you should include:

- A description of the objective(s), central research questions/hypotheses and scientific aims of the project.
- The rationale for the project and its relevance to MS (review of previous work done in this area and data generated, referencing relevant scientific literature).
- Expected outcomes and impact (what knowledge will be obtained, will there be improvements to health and quality of life for people affected by MS, and will the work impact the field of MS).
- Explanation of the study design, methods, data collection and analyses, discussion/interpretation of results, anticipated challenges, etc.
- Justification of qualifications of the lead investigator(s) and collaborators (if any), including description of relevant experience and skills, productivity in terms of publications and knowledge translation, collaboration experience, etc.
- Description of what the study team members will contribute to the project (description of roles, responsibilities, delegation and governance).

#### **Other Considerations:**

- Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) applications will be evaluated against the review criteria described below.
- Justification of the team structure; your team should have the necessary expertise
- Address potential project limitations
- Provide strong budget justification
- Where possible, include justifications for methodology, for example intervention and follow-up timelines, sample size, inclusion of individuals of a specific age and/or sex, use of specific assay or outcomes measure, etc.

#### **References**

- Include all references mentioned in the proposal
- There is no page limit
- Upload of references to the proposal is mandatory

## Figures

- Include tables, charts, figures, or photographs.
- There is no page limit.
- It is not mandatory to upload figures to the proposal

## Research Timeline (Use Template provided)

- Using the **template** provided on Easygrants, provide the expected timeline to achieve the aims of your project.
- If the grant is awarded, this timeline will be used to follow-up the progress of the research in the annual progress report.

## Impact and Relevance to MS (Use Template provided)

- Select one (1) priority areas that best describes the grant proposal from the following:
  - Diagnosis
  - Repair/Remyelination
  - Progression and/or Progressive MS
  - Cognition and Mental Health
  - Life-modifying therapies (wellness grants; not focused on drug therapies)
  - Cause of MS
- Select one (1) impact goal that best describes the grant proposal:
  - Advance treatment and care for people affected by MS
  - Enhance well-being for people affected by MS:
  - Understand and halt disease progression in MS
  - Prevent MS:
- Describe how your project will advance the MS research in the impact goal selected.
- Describe your project using non-scientific, plain language. Provide clear key messages about your research and the outcomes of the project, ensuring that they are relevant to people affected by MS and address important unmet needs and challenges faced by the MS community.
- Indicate how the proposed research can improve the health and quality of life of people affected by MS, uncover important knowledge of the biological, clinical, psychosocial and societal impacts of MS, and how it will advance the field overall.
- This information will be reviewed by the lay reviewers on the review committee, referred to as community representatives. The summaries are also used by the MSSC to inform stakeholders – including people living with MS, staff, volunteers, and donors - about the valuable research supported through its funds. Failure to meet the criteria of a satisfactory lay and relevance summary as determined by the community representatives will result in the applicant resubmitting this section for approval.
- Three (3) page maximum.

## Addressing Reviewers' Recommendations (REQUIRED for resubmissions only)

- An Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) application that was **unsuccessful in the previous competition** is considered a resubmission. A grant application can only be submitted a total of three times (1 original submission and 2 resubmissions).
- State how the reviewers' concerns (both scientific and lay), as outlined in the written critiques from the previous competition, have been addressed in the current application.

**The previous reviewers' comments will be provided to the review committee to ensure that the concerns have been addressed.**

- Two (2) page maximum.

## **CV**

The applicant is required to upload the CV of the Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator (if applicable) and Co-Applicants. The MSSC requires CVs to be submitted using the **Common CV format**, the template for which can be found at <https://ccv-cvc.ca>.

1. Please choose "MSSC" as the agency and select Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) Template, click next. Save the Common CV to your Desktop and upload it in Easygrants.
  2. The CV **must include** publications (relevant to your project) from the past five (5) years.
  3. Enter all the relevant and necessary information and click "**Done**". A validation will automatically be performed and errors, if any, will be displayed.
  4. Review the CCV data online via a preview of the PDF.
  5. When complete, click on "Submit".
  6. Record the confirmation number that is displayed with the status message (which can also be found under the "History" tab and on the first page of the CCV PDF).
- The CV must include a list of relevant publications. **For renewal applications**, list all publications resulting from the last funding period.

In addition to the CCV website, the CCV **must** be uploaded on easygrants.

## **Publications**

- Full publications and or manuscripts may be uploaded.
- Please upload the relevant publications in the order that you would like them to appear in your application from within the past 5 years.
- Any additional manuscripts that have been accepted for publication after the Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) submission deadline must be submitted by e-mail to [msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca](mailto:msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca) by January 6<sup>th</sup> to be considered.

## **Discovery Research Grant (Operating Grant) Required Signatures (Use Template Provided)**

- Signatures from the Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator (if applicable), Head of Department and Dean of Faculty or Institution are required.
- **Electronic signatures will be accepted.**
- A Template is provided on Easygrants.

## **Appendix**

- Additional relevant documents such as letters of support, quotes etc. may be uploaded in the Appendix.

## **Questions and Support**

Please direct all inquiries regarding the funding opportunities to [msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca](mailto:msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca)