



MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA

**2019-2020 endMS PERSONNEL AWARDS
PROGRAM GUIDE**

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1. BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF AWARDS

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 AN endMS PERSONNEL AWARD?

Support from an endMS Personnel Award provides an important platform for training and broadening of scientific knowledge among graduate students and postdoctoral fellows who are keen to pursue research in MS. The endMS Personnel Awards program attracts and retains promising young researchers – or trainees – in the MS field, while providing them with the tools and resources required to advance their academic and clinical careers. The endMS Personnel Awards allow them to cultivate and sharpen their scientific skills, think innovatively about conducting research that will translate into real-world applications, and secure a bright future in MS research and healthcare.

The MSSC welcomes applications from trainees enrolled in graduate and post-graduate training, and who are conducting research in MS. They must be eligible under their host institution and MSSC eligibility requirements to apply for an endMS Personnel Award.

1.2.1. Description of Awards

The following awards are offered as part of the endMS Personnel Awards program:

- endMS Master’s Studentship Award
- endMS Doctoral Studentship Award
- endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Award

Applicants must be enrolled in the appropriate graduate or post-graduate level program at a recognized institution and under supervision of a principal investigator whose research focus is in MS (See Eligibility). Based on the nature of the research, the applicant may apply to one of the following streams:

Biomedical: Research that uncovers the biological, pathological, and mechanistic aspects of MS, and provides fundamental knowledge about the development, progression, and treatment of MS disease. Topics include myelin biology, neurobiology, neurophysiology, immunology, neuropathology, imaging, and studies can involve *in vitro*, animal, and/or human models.

Clinical and Population Health: Research that focuses on topics such as epidemiology, health economics, risk factors, health care delivery/policy, treatment monitoring and health assessment, symptom management, rehabilitation and social aspects of MS.

1.3. TERM AND FUNDING

In 2016, the MSSC replaced the original renewal application process with a more streamlined process. Initial funds will be issued upon submission of a signed letter of agreement for the initial term. Funds for additional terms will be issued upon demonstration of research progress as determined by the MSSC endMS Personnel Awards review committee through assessment of a completed endMS Personnel Awards Progress Report (referred to herein as progress report). The progress report is submitted annually and is due November 5th.

What does this mean for prospective endMS Personnel Award holders?

Trainees who are applying for a new endMS Personnel Award must submit a new application. Trainees who did not submit a renewal application in 2016 and experienced an interruption in funding must re-apply as a new applicant. If the application is successful, the awardee will be awarded funding upon submission of an executed letter of agreement. Please note that the deadline for all new submissions are October 1st at 16:00 ET.

What does this mean for current endMS Personnel Award holders?

Letters of agreement will continue to be issued every year for each additional term indicating the amount awarded for that term, upon submission of a progress report. Additional terms and amounts are awarded every year based on availability of funds and upon demonstration of research progress as determined by the MSSC through assessment of a completed progress report due November 5th.

Funding Table:

endMS Personnel Award	Maximum Term	Award Amount Per Term
endMS Master’s Studentship Award	2 years (1 new and 1 renewal)	\$20,000
endMS Doctoral Studentship Award	4 years (1 new and 3 renewals)	\$22,000
endMS Doctoral Studentship Award (for M.D. holder)	4 years (1 new and 3 renewals)	\$50,500
endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Award (for Ph.D. holder)	3 years (1 new and 2 renewals)	\$41,000
endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Award (for M.D. holder)	3 years (1 new and 2 renewals)	\$50,500

1.4. FUNDING CONDITIONS

Awardees are eligible for additional funding at the MSSC’s discretion up to a maximum number of terms outlined in the Funding Table in section 1.3. To qualify for additional funding beyond the initial term, the following criteria must be met:

- A. The awardee must continue to meet MSSC's eligibility criteria;
- B. MSSC must be satisfied with the progress of the research project, as recommended by the endMS Personnel Awards review committee, and;
- C. MSSC must approve the progress report.

Funding conditions are subject to change without notice.

2. MSSC COMPETITION

2.1. ADMINISTRATION OF endMS PERSONNEL AWARDS

The administration of the endMS Personnel Awards program is the responsibility and function of the MSSC'S Research Department at the National Office.

2.2. COMPETITION TIMELINE AND FUNDING SCHEDULE

Application: The MSSC offers an annual endMS Personnel Awards competition which opens in late Summer and closes in the Fall. The deadline for submitting new applications is October 1st at 16:00 p.m. ET for all awards, while the deadline for submitting renewal applications is November 5th at 16:00 p.m. ET. In the event the deadline falls on a weekend, the deadline is the following Monday. Receipt, completion and MSSC approval of the progress report is mandatory for release of additional funding beyond the initial term. A letter of agreement will be issued to notify the awardee to confirm that an additional term will be funded.

Funding Schedule: Funding begins on July 1st for new and renewal awards, once the award is approved and the letter of agreement signed. Awardees can request an alternative start date but must provide proof of degree granted prior to funds being released (see Eligibility). Payments are made to the institution on a quarterly basis every year; the institution is responsible for disbursing the funds to the awardee based on the institution's disbursement schedule.

2.3. ELIGIBILITY

2.3.1. endMS Studentship Awards

Applicant: The endMS Master's and Doctoral Studentship Award competitions are open to those that are working towards a Master's, Doctoral or related degree pertaining to research in MS. M.D. applicants must hold degrees that are recognized by the medical regulatory authority in the Canadian province or territory where they practice. For students admitted to a Doctoral program at the time of application but not yet enrolled, a Doctoral Studentship will only be activated once the MSSC has received written notification from a university or professional school and/or supervisor that an appropriate transfer of degree, direct entry or Master's degree has been granted.

Citizenship: Applicants proposing to do graduate training at a Canadian institution need not be Canadian citizens; however, applicants proposing to go abroad must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada. The MSSC reserves the right to request documentation indicating

citizenship.

Supervisor and Institution: It is the responsibility of the applicant to make all arrangements for the proposed training with an appropriate supervisor and institution prior to submitting an application. Studentships must be held in a recognized post-secondary institution or their affiliated institutions including hospitals and research institutes. The applicant must be responsible to an appropriate supervisor who is in a field relevant to MS he/she wishes to study.

2.3.2. endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards

Applicant: The Postdoctoral Fellowship Award competition is open to those that hold, or are candidates for, a Doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent). M.D. applicants must hold degrees that are recognized by the medical regulatory authority in the Canadian province or territory where they practice. A Fellowship will not be activated for a Doctoral candidate who has been accepted to a Postdoctoral position until the MSSC has received written notification from a university or professional school that an appropriate Doctoral degree has been granted. Applicants must have completed their Doctoral degree **within three years** of the competition deadline in order to be eligible.

Citizenship: Applicants proposing to do fellowship training at a Canadian institution need not be Canadian citizens; however, applicants proposing to go abroad must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada. The MSSC reserves the right to request documentation indicating citizenship.

Supervisor and Institution: It is the responsibility of the Applicant to make all arrangements for the proposed training with an appropriate supervisor and institution prior to formal application. Fellowships must be held in a recognized post-secondary institution or their affiliated institutions including hospitals and research institutes. The applicant must be responsible to an appropriate supervisor who is in a field relevant to MS he/she wishes to study. The MSSC will not fund Postdoctoral training in the same laboratory under the same supervisor where a Doctoral degree was obtained.

2.4. 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 will specify the amounts to be contributed by both MSSC and the partner.

Current funding partnerships available include:

Fonds de Recherche du Québec - Santé (FRQS)

MSSC and FRQS aim to support a greater number of Master's, Doctoral and Postdoctoral trainees by providing awards to outstanding individuals in Québec who wish to commence or pursue their research training in the field of MS. This support will be delivered through the co-funding of top endMS Personnel Awards applications submitted to the annual competitions of the MSSC and FRQS. All Awards

will be co-funded (50/50) by MSSC and FRQS. Postdoctoral Fellowships offered to those who conduct their training outside of Québec will benefit from a supplement of \$10,000 per year.

In order to be eligible for funding through this partnership, (1) applicants must apply to both FRQS and MSSC annual competitions, (2) FRQS candidates must indicate in their application that they wish to be considered for an MSSC partnership award and MSSC candidates must indicate in their application to the MSSC that they wish to be considered for the FRQS partnership award; (3) FRQS applications must be approved for relevance by the MSSC; and (4) candidates must receive a fundable score from the independent review of both FRQS and MSSC research competitions.

3. REVIEW AND RESULTS

3.1. REVIEW PROCESS

3.1.1. Independent Review Committee

Applications and progress reports submitted to the endMS Personnel Awards 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 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 to public stakeholders. The committee also 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.

Scientific reviewers assess the scientific merit, feasibility, novelty, and the human and research impact of each application. Community Representatives review aspects of the application and progress report which are intended and have been prepared for a lay audience. These sections describe the overall project, its significance in improving quality of life of people affected by MS and advancing the field, and information about the applicant and their motivations. Approval and funding of awards is subject to review and approval of the lay sections by the Community Representatives.

3.1.2. Review of New Applications and Progress Reports

Once all applications and progress reports have been submitted, the MSSC in collaboration with the review committee Chair assigns applications and progress reports to the reviewers based on their expertise. Those reviewers who are in conflict with an application or progress report 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

Scientific reviewers will evaluate the full application based on the following criteria:

- Academic achievements, productivity, and track record of the applicant.
- The environment in which the research will be conducted.
- Scientific merit of research in terms of relevance to the field, feasibility, and appropriateness for the academic level.

Review Criteria for Community Representatives

For new endMS Personnel Award applications, Community Representatives review the Lay Summary, Relevance to MS, and Training Overview sections of each application. For progress reports, Community Representatives will review the Lay Summary and Impact and Relevance sections of the progress report. Community Representatives will provide an enthusiasm level rating and comments based on the following:

- Relevance of the project to MS.
- Potential impact of the research on people affected by MS and on advancements in the MS field.
- Motivation and enthusiasm of the applicant for conducting the proposed research.
- Justification of additional skills and experience that will be gained through the project.

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 does 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	

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 to minor 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.

Annual Progress Report Review Criteria

Each progress report will be evaluated by two scientific reviewers and a Community Representative. They will assess whether there has been any deviation from the original approved project and, if so, whether appropriate justification has been provided. No scoring will be provided for progress report reviews, only the recommendation to fund an additional term or to terminate funding.

3.1.3. In-Person Review and Final Recommendation

Once the scientific reviewers and Community Representatives conduct their evaluation of each application, the review committee meets to engage in an open discussion about the applications. For each application, the primary and secondary reviewers and Community Representative discuss their comments and raise any issues that should be deliberated by the committee. The primary and secondary reviewers then agree on a consensus score, after which each committee member (except for the Chair and Community Representatives) votes within 0.5 points above or below the scientific consensus score. The Community Representatives also have an opportunity to provide their enthusiasm score which is appended to 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 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 reviews 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 endMS Personnel Award applicants (new and those requesting additional term funding) are informed by email of the funding status of their applications, regardless of the outcome. In addition, the MSSC provides each applicant with anonymized evaluations of their application from the scientific reviewers and Community Representatives.

For **successful applications only**, the MSSC will post limited information on the Web (e.g. 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. Questions and Support

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