



MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA

OPERATING GRANT PROGRAM GUIDE

BIOMEDICAL

Revised August 2015

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
Research Department
250 Dundas Street West Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2Z5
Telephone: 416-922-6065
Facsimile: 416-922-7538
Website: www.mssociety.ca
Email: msresearchgrants@mssociety.ca

1. BACKGROUND AND GRANT DESCRIPTION	3
1.1. WHAT IS THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA?	3
1.2. WHAT IS AN OPERATING GRANT?	3
1.3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE OPERATING GRANT	3
2. COMPETITION AND GRANT INFORMATION	3
2.1. MSSC COMPETITION SCHEDULE	3
2.2. ELIGIBILITY	4
2.3. TERM AND FUNDING	4
2.4. RESUBMISSION AND RENEWAL	4
2.5. PARTNERSHIP FUNDING	5
3. APPLICATION PROCESS AND GUIDELINE	6
3.1. HOW TO WRITE A BIOMEDICAL OPERATING GRANT	6
3.2. GENERAL CATEGORIES OF EXPENDITURES.....	6
3.3. ONLINE APPLICATION PROCEDURE.....	8
4. REVIEW AND RESULTS	8
4.1. REVIEW PROCESS.....	8
4.1.1. Independent Review Committee.....	8
4.1.2. Evaluation of Applications and Triage.....	9
4.1.3. In-Person Review and Final Recommendation	10
4.1.4. Final Approval	11
4.2. COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS	11

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 AN OPERATING GRANT?

The operating grant program is intended to support various research operations related to the proposal that will help to generate new scientific knowledge and applications that will improve health and quality of life of people affected by MS.

The Biomedical operating grant supports research which 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.

For Investigator-initiated research proposals, no topic restrictions are imposed, other than the required demonstration of relevance to MS. For the Biomedical operating grant competition, it is also required that the proposed research pertains to one or more of the topics listed above.

1.3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE OPERATING GRANT

The administration of the 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 in July and closes on October 1st at 6:00 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 need not 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. The PI may only submit one new operating grant application and one renewal operating grant per competition and can hold a maximum of two operating grants from the MSSC at one time. There can be only 1 (one) PI per grant application who will assume scientific and administrative oversight for the study. There are no restrictions as to the number of Co-Principal Investigators per application.

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.

Co-Applicant: The Co-Applicant contributes to the progress of the research, and conducts components of the project under the leadership of the PI. A Co-Applicant must have an appointment in the university department but no specific grade or rank is required.

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.).

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.

2.3. TERM AND FUNDING

Term: The MSSC supports operating research grants 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: Grants are not renewed automatically. Support beyond the term originally

approved is dependent upon submission and approval of a renewal application for a new grant. Renewal applications will be assessed according to the review criteria for a new application.

Resubmissions All applications that were unsuccessful in their previous submission to the MSSC operating grant competition, new or renewal, are considered resubmissions. Resubmitting an application is permitted under MSSC competition rules. Resubmissions will be assessed according to the review criteria for a new application. Resubmission applications must include a "Response to previous review" and should demonstrate substantive modification to the proposal addressing the reviewers' comments. A grant application can only be submitted three times (one submission and two resubmissions).

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

The current funding partnerships available include:

New Brunswick Health Research Foundation

The MSSC and the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation (NBHRF) aim to support a greater number of research operating grants to outstanding individuals in New Brunswick who wish to commence, pursue or sustain their research program in the field of MS. This support will be delivered through the co-funding of top operating grants applications submitted to the annual competition of the MSSC.

In order to be eligible for this partnership funding, an applicant must (1) submit an application for the MSSC Fall Operating Grants competition and (2) the research needs to be conducted at an institution in New Brunswick. Applications that are to be conducted at institutions located in New Brunswick will be automatically considered for funding for a MSSC-NBHRF partnership award. If successful in the competition, each partner will issue a letter of agreement with the Institution for the amount they contribute to the total award.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS AND GUIDELINE

3.1. HOW TO WRITE A BIOMEDICAL OPERATING GRANT

Consider the following when preparing a grant application:

Research Proposal: 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 explain:

- What you intend to do (central hypothesis, research question, specific objectives)
- Why this is a reasonable thing to do (review of previous work done on the subject matter, rationale)
- Why this is important (new knowledge to be obtained, improvements to health which will result, impact to the field of MS)
- How you are going to accomplish it (work plan, timelines, detailed descriptions of methods, sample size, power analyses, analysis and discussion/interpretation of results, pitfalls, ways around the pitfalls, alternative experiments and interpretation of data)
- Why you are qualified (relevant prior experience and skills, collaborators for technical gaps, preliminary data showing feasibility)
- What you and any other Co-Investigator(s) will do (description of roles)

Other Considerations:

- Your application should address the review criteria (section 4.1) as it will be evaluated against them
- Explain the use of one methodology over the other
- If appropriate, include gender and sex in your research design
- Justify team structure; your team should have the necessary expertise
- Address potential project limitations
- Provide strong budget justification
- Include pilot sample size, if appropriate

3.2. GENERAL CATEGORIES OF EXPENDITURES

Investigators may request funds for the following categories of expenditure: salaries for professional and non-professional personnel, patient costs, permanent equipment (\$5,000 or less), and consumable supplies and travel. The grant budget cannot include indirect costs or overhead costs (defined as costs associated with the institution's ongoing operating expenses such as facilities and basic utilities, the purchase and repair of office equipment, administration fees, etc.). Stipend support for postdoctoral fellowships, doctoral and master

studentships are not permissible.

Personnel: All personnel paid from grant funds shall be in accordance with the prevailing policies of the grantee institution. However, budgets for multi-year studies cannot include cost-of-living or similar salary increases for personnel working on the project. Requested salaries are not to be used to replace salaries or portions of salaries already assured by institutional or other funds. Grant funds may not be used for purchasing, accounting, financial record keeping, laundry or student and tuition costs. All personnel must be funded within a Canadian Institution.

Professional Support: The MSSC will not pay salaries of the Principal Investigators, Co-Applicants, Collaborators and Faculty members. Investigators are not considered employees of the MSSC but rather of the institution where the research is conducted. The research grant is to be administered in accordance with the prevailing policies of the sponsoring institution, including policies regarding statutory deductions, vacations, sick leaves, holidays, etc.

Technical and Non-professional support: Salaries for technical and non-professional personnel may be requested in proportion to the time they will spend on the research directly supported by the grant. All technical and non-professional personnel must be funded within a Canadian Institution.

Equipment and Supplies: The MSSC allows a maximum request of \$5,000 per grant for scientific equipment. The cost of installing equipment purchased with funds of the grant is not allowed unless such funds were requested in the application and specifically approved in the budget of the grant awarded.

Office equipment, personal computers, office supplies, books and journals may not be purchased with grant funds unless included in the application and specifically approved in the budget of the grant awarded.

Consumable supplies may include any type of laboratory supplies, including purchase, breeding, and maintenance of experimental animals.

Travel: Expenses for domestic or foreign travel related to the successful performance of the research may be charged to a grant only when included in the application and within the amount specifically approved in the grant. Travel expenses whenever charged to grant funds shall be in accordance with grantee institutional Policies and Procedures.

Other: Any other expenditure directly related to the cost of conducting the proposed research may be requested in the application for a grant but must be properly justified. Construction or renovation costs are not permissible expenditures under any circumstances.

Reallocation of Funds: Transfers between and among categories of the budget approved in the grant may be made as follows: (1) transfers between personnel and consumable supplies categories may be made at the discretion of the grantee institution, but (2) no transfers may be made without prior approval in writing by the MSSC for equipment, travel, or other items not specifically identified in the approved budget. Unless prior written approval has been obtained from the MSSC, expenditures are likely to be disallowed for items not specifically included in the budget of the grant awarded.

3.3. ONLINE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The MSSC uses an online research grants and awards management system that enables researchers to apply for, and review, applications on the Web. The system is called **Easygrants** and can be accessed through the following website: <https://www.mscanadagrants.ca>. No hard copies of any documentation will be accepted.

Interested applicants must create a profile on Easygrants through which they can complete the application process. Page limits, list of required documents and other important application information can be found in the [Online Application Guidelines](#). Note that all required documents must be fully completed and uploaded on Easygrants prior to the due date for the application to be considered. Additional documents will not be accepted past the deadline except for manuscripts which have been reviewed and are pending publication. All documents must adhere to the word or page limits assigned. Any content that surpasses the word or page limits will not be considered.

French Applications: The MSSC accepts applications in French; please refer to the MSSC Operating Grants Application Guidelines (Programme de subventions de recherche lignes directrices relatives a une demande de financement) for more information.

4. REVIEW AND RESULTS

4.1.1. REVIEW PROCESS

Independent Review Committee

Applications submitted to the Biomedical 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 and due diligence in the use of MSSC funds.

The MSSC engages the scientific and clinical communities as well 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 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. Approval and funding of grants is subject to the receipt of the revised lay documents.

Evaluation of Applications and Triage

- 4.1.2. 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 lay summary, relevance to MS and brief project

description of each application. Community representatives do not score; rather, they provide comments based on the following:

- a. What are the goals of the research study, and why is the study important to people living with MS?
- b. What feedback can you provide the researcher that would assist them in making the lay summary more understandable and relevant to the general public?

Scoring and Triage

In addition to providing an evaluation, the scientific reviewers must also assign a preliminary score for each application they review based on the scoring chart below. The Chair, SO and community representatives do not assign preliminary scores. The scores provide the MSSC and committee Chair with an indication of the quality of the proposals submitted. They also serve as grounds for triage. Any application that receives a score below 3.5 from **both** the primary and secondary reviewer will be considered for triage, and will not be discussed at the review meeting.

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	

4.1.3.

In-Person Review and Final Recommendation

Once the scientific reviewers and 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 and secondary 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 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 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.

Final Approval

4.1A recommendation for funding is presented by the review committee 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.

4.2. 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