



MS Australia Funding Process Description

1. Purpose

All applicants applying for MS Australia funding must submit their application through the on-line Grant Portal (<https://grants.msaustralia.org.au/>)

This document explains MS Australia's process for assessing and allocating funding for applicants.

Grant types:

- Project Grants
- Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Postgraduate Scholarships
- Incubator Grants
- Paired Fellowships
- Senior Fellowships

2. Overview of the Process

The Roles and Responsibilities of the MS Australia Research Management Council

The MS Australia Research Management Council (RMC) is an independent, voluntary body of experts who review and assess all applications received for funding based on merit. The RMC comprises of experts in MS research, or in a related field, from a broad range of disciplines. The RMC Chairperson is responsible for the final budget recommendation to the MS Australia Board of Directors through the Chief Executive Officer. Please refer to the MS Australia website (<https://www.msaustralia.org.au/about-us/our-people/research-management-council/>) for a list of members of the RMC.

Two RMC panels are convened to review Biomedical Research applications and Social and Applied Research applications separately. The RMC Social and Applied Research Sub-committee (SARS) reviews and assesses applications from the fields of psychosocial, allied health, etc. The SARS Chairperson presents the outcomes of the meeting to the RMC Chairperson for consideration. Refer to the MS Australia website (<https://www.msaustralia.org.au/about-us/our-people/research-management-council/>) for a list of members of the RMC SARS sub-committee.

Applications are reviewed by External Assessors

Applications are sent to two to three External Assessors for independent assessment*. External Assessors are qualified national and/or international experts in the discipline and field relevant to the application. They provide comment on the track record, merit, relevance to MS and feasibility of the application – see review criteria below. Assessors may also make confidential comments on the application for the RMC only (not included in the rebuttal process below).

*Please note: Postgraduate scholarships are not sent for external review. They are circulated for expert review and competitively assessed within the RMC.

Application Response Opportunity

When external assessments are returned, the Assessors name and their score are removed before it is sent to the applicant for a response (rebuttal).

The applicant is invited to respond with additional information or comments as appropriate within seven business days or as advised. This ensures that the applicant has an opportunity to provide clarification to the RMC to assist the assessment process and ensure fairness. The applicant response is not sent back to the External Assessor for recommendation, but is provided to the RMC.

For Incubator Grants, feedback from the RMC may be provided to the applicant if it is not to be funded.

RMC Convenes to Review Applications

In October each year, the RMC Biomedical and SARS panels convene to assess each application.

The RMC Chairperson appoints a Lead Reviewer for each application. It is the Lead Reviewer's responsibility to read and critique the application in detail. During the RMC meeting the Lead Reviewer guides the discussion on that application, summarises the comments from the External Assessors and the Rebuttal, along with their own assessment of the application, including their overall score for the application. The application is then opened for discussion amongst the RMC panel.

Following discussion, RMC members are asked to indicate if they intend to score the application 2 or more points outside of the Lead Discussant's score and their reasoning. Their reasons are then discussed with the RMC. Each RMC member will then vote (with anonymity via the grant portal) on the application.

An RMC member who has an association or conflict-of-interest with the application is asked to temporarily withdraw from the meeting (by leaving the room) while the application is being discussed and cannot participate in scoring of that application.

For Round 1 Incubator Grants that are received outside of the main grant round, the RMC Chairperson will be the Lead Reviewer. A quorum of the RMC, with the most aligned skill set will debate the decision for funding the application.

Recommendation for Funding Each Year

The Chairperson of the RMC recommends a set of applications and a funding amount for each application to the Chief Executive Officer and Board of MS Australia. The recommendations are based on final scores as per the process above and available funding.

The Assessment Criteria

Criteria used by external reviewers and RMC members to assess applications

CRITERIA A: SIGNIFICANCE

Scale of 1-7

1. Relevance of the project to multiple sclerosis
2. Significance of the project and value of hypothesis to be tested

CRITERIA B: APPROACH

Scale of 1-7

1. Appropriateness and feasibility of the research method
2. Evidence of preliminary data
3. Comment on strengths and weaknesses of the approach

CRITERIA C: FEASIBILITY

Scale of 1-7

1. Likelihood of completion of the project within the given time
2. Feasibility of research proceeding if funding was only partly granted

CRITERIA D: TRACK RECORD

Scale of 1-7

1. Comment on the recent research track record of the applicant(s) and productivity of the applicant(s)
2. Factors that may have influenced the quality of recent publications of applicant(s)

CRITERIA E: OVERALL RATING

Scale of 1-7

CRITERIA F: BUDGET

Scale of 1-7 commenting on whether the requested budget is reasonable.

Communicating the outcome

The RMC Chairperson formally advises the applicant and the administering institutions of the outcome by email.

The Responsibilities of a Successful Applicant and Administering Institution

The successful applicant and the administering institution are advised of the payment cycle and conditions of MS Australia Funding. They are asked to sign the Letter of Offer, which acknowledges their award and stipulates timings for receipt of progress reports and timing to invoice MS Australia for funding.

If the level of grant-in-aid funding necessitates a slight change in scope of the research project, this must be noted and approved in the returned Letter of Offer.

Clearances

Before any funds are paid all required clearances outlined in the application form must be satisfied (ethics approvals, residency requirements, etc).

Reporting

Successful applicants are required to report on their progress every 12 months. The reporting dates will be available in the Letter of Acceptance.