

MS Australia Funding Process

1. Purpose

All applicants applying for MS Australia's grants must submit their application through the online grant portal (<https://grants.msaustralia.org.au/>).

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

Grant types:

- Incubator Grants
- Project Grants
- Targeted Call Grants
- Postgraduate Scholarships
- Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Senior Fellowships
- Paired Fellowships
- Ian Ballard Travel Award

2. Overview of the Process

The Roles and Responsibilities of MS Australia's Research Management Council

MS Australia's 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 Chair 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 for a list of members of the RMC at <https://www.msaustralia.org.au/about-us/our-people/research-management-council/>.

Two RMC panels are convened to review Biomedical Research applications and Social and Applied Research applications separately. The RMC Biomedical Research subcommittee reviews and assesses applications seeking ways to prevent, treat and cure MS by studying biological processes. The RMC Social and Applied Research subcommittee (SARS) reviews and assesses applications that plan to study real-world issues and problems and find practical solutions that can improve the lives of people living with MS (e.g., allied health). The SARS Chair presents the outcomes of the RMC SARS meeting to the RMC Chair for consideration.

Applications are reviewed by external assessors

Applications are sent to two to three external assessors for independent assessment¹. External assessors are qualified national and international experts in the field relevant to the application. They provide comments on track record, merit, relevance to MS and feasibility of the application. Please see the review criteria in the Appendix. Assessors may also make confidential comments on the application to the RMC only (not included in the rebuttal process below).

¹Please note: Ian Ballard Travel Award applications are not sent for external review. They are circulated for expert review and competitively assessed by the RMC.

Application Rebuttal

When external assessments are returned, the assessors name and scores are removed before being sent to the applicant for a response (rebuttal)². This excludes Incubator Grants and Postgraduate Scholarships. The applicant is invited to respond with additional information or comments as appropriate within two weeks or as advised. This ensures that the applicant has the opportunity to provide clarification to assist the assessment process and ensure fairness. The applicant's response is not sent back to the external assessor for recommendation but is provided to the RMC.

²Comments from Incubator Grant external assessors may be provided to the applicant, upon request, if the application is not funded.

RMC Convenes to Review Applications

In the third quarter of each year, the RMC Biomedical and Social and Applied Research subcommittees convene to assess each application.

Each application is appointed a Lead Reviewer from the RMC. 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. They summarise 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.

Following the discussion, RMC members are asked to indicate if they intend to score the application two or more points outside of the Lead Reviewer's score and their reasoning. Their reasons are then discussed. Each RMC member will then vote (with anonymity via the online 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/meeting) while the application is being discussed and cannot participate in scoring of that application.

For Incubator Grants and Postgraduate Scholarships, a quorum of the RMC, with the most aligned skill set, will debate the decision for funding the application. The review process is overseen by the Deputy Chair of RMC. If the Deputy Chair has a conflict-of-interest, the Chair of RMC will be the lead the overall review process.

Recommendation for Funding Each Year

The RMC Chair 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.

Communicating the Outcome

After the MS Australia Board approves the RMC Chair's recommendations, they advise the Grants Coordinator of the outcomes of the grants. The Grants Coordinator formally advises the applicants 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 MS Australia's Funding Agreement, which acknowledges their award and stipulates the timings for receipt of progress/financial reports and the timing of invoicing 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 Funding Agreement.

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 (or within 8 weeks of completing Incubator Grants or the Ian Ballard Travel Award). The reporting dates will be available in the Funding Agreement.

Appendix: 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

1. Comment overall on the application

CRITERIA F: BUDGET

Scale of 1-7

1. Comment on whether the requested budget is reasonable