Tips for writing a great research grant application

You can use this guide to help you submit the strongest possible application to our Grant Round.

Our research funding is highly competitive. And the applications that we fund are of high scientific quality and relevance to people affected by MS in the UK. You can improve your chances of success by using the tips below, which we've compiled from the most frequently raised concerns of our grant review panels.

Involve people affected by MS in the design of your study (PPI)

You should involve people affected by MS as early as you can when designing your research. Involving people affected by MS is an essential part of our research strategy and application review process. This ensures the research we fund is relevant to their needs. We can help with this.

The scores from our lay reviewers are equally weighted to the peer review scores, so it is very important that your lay reviewers understand your application. Some of the key areas they consider include the strength of public-patient involvement (PPI) and the clarity of the lay summary.

Absent or weak PPI, and unclear lay summaries is common feedback from our reviewers. People affected by MS should be involved in all parts of your research, from the planning of the research project to the dissemination.

Remember that PPI members are often volunteers, who may not have been involved in research before. You should make sure that suitable support is in place and they won't be overburdened. These principles also apply to patient participants in your proposal.

We're here to help you with PPI. Our Research Network are people affected by MS who want to get involved with research. You can email researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk at any time to ask for support from the Research Network.

We also offer Lay Summary Development during our open application period. This scheme can help you write a clear lay summary for your application. You should be mindful that there are deadlines for Lay Summary Development ahead of submitting your application. You can find these on our funding page.

Demonstrate the relevance and potential impact of your application

While we also consider applications outside of these areas, our panel members look favourably on applications which align with the priorities set by people affected by MS and our research strategy. Your proposal should address a demonstrable gap in MS research.

Novelty and innovation is important, but our reviewers also look for applications that appropriately balance ambition and feasibility. You should have a clear and realistic pathway to impact. Your application should also be focused and

achievable within the proposed time frame and budget. For PhD Fellowships in particular, you should make sure that sufficient time has been considered for the student to learn a broad range of skills.

Show us the proposal is well-designed

One of the most common reasons for rejection is flaws in the experimental plan. We ask international experts in the field to peer review your application and scrutinise the scientific details.

The concerns they flag up vary depending on the nature of the application but may include issues with the techniques involved, area of focus (e.g cells or participant group), sample size, follow-up period or concerns regarding bias.

You should make use of the free NIHR Research Design Service which provides design and methodological review services to improve your application.

Give us more justification and details of your chosen methods (and statistical approach)

The most common reason for rejecting applications is a lack of detail or justification in the chosen methods or statistical analyses. You should explain and justify every method, sample size and analysis technique you use. We expect to see power calculations included in your application, unless justified. These details will help the panel to understand how scientifically sound and feasible your proposal is, as well as indicating value for money.

Do a spell and sense check before submission

Too many applications have poor spelling, grammar or inconsistent details which makes them difficult to understand. Your application submission should be a team effort so you should ask all co-applicants to thoroughly review it for spelling and logical flow before submission.

Get the right team together

You and your co-applicants should have expertise in MS as well as other expertise relevant to the grant (for example, statistical or digital skills). There should also be experience of managing grants in your team. You shouldn't assume that the panel will know your area of expertise. And you must make it clear what each team member will be doing.

For PhD Fellowship applications, we will scrutinise your supervisory experience. For Early Career Fellowships, we will also assess additional skills which are detailed in our ECR Applicant Framework, available on our funding page.

Justify any ethical or legal concerns

In your proposal, it is important to consider how your study will impact on the participants or animals (if you are doing an animal study). You should think about any particular risks that your participants may face, and how you will safeguard against this. This is especially important if you plan to work with particularly vulnerable groups such as children or those at the end of their life. You should also consider the laws around data protection. For animal studies, you must provide a robust justification for the use of animals. The National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) developed the 3Rs framework for performing more humane animal research.

Our researchers must address the 3Rs when submitting funding applications:
- **Reduce** the number of animals used to the minimum necessary for a valid result
- **Refine** experiments to minimise any pain, suffering or distress
- **Replace** animal experiments with alternatives wherever possible.
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The NC3Rs have an extensive library of resources for you to implement the 3Rs in your research. When planning animal studies, you should read their experimental design guidance. The ARRIVE (Animal Research: Reporting In Vivo Experiments) guidelines have been developed by the NC3Rs to improve how *in vivo* studies are reported. They ensure that data from animal experiments can be fully evaluated and used by other researchers. We expect our researchers to comply with them designing your experiments and reporting your research.

Other

- *Incorporating comments for resubmissions* - If you are resubmitting an application, you must make sure any concerns noted in the first submission have been resolved, or justify why they haven't. Panel members have access to your first submission and any associated feedback.
- *Further justification for costs needed* – Value for money is important for us when awarding grants. All the costs you claim for in your application will be carefully checked to ensure they are necessary for you to complete the research. You should also make sure that they comply with our Applicant Guidance (in particular, see Section 10 Finance and Costs of the Guidance).

We're the MS Society.
Our community is here for you
through the highs, lows and
everything in between.
We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

mssociety.org.uk

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►Let's stop MS together