![MS Society logo]

MS Society Data Discovery Awards

Applicant guidance

You should use this guidance document with the 'help' sections on our online application system CC Grant Tracker.

January 2023

Let's stop MS **together**

Contents

1.   Introduction

The UK MS Register is the world's first register to combine information collected directly from people about their MS, with clinical and NHS data.

Over 17,000 people have joined so far since its launch in May 2011. The Register collects data from:

1   People with MS recording information about their MS directly via questionnaires every 6 months
2   A growing number of hospitals (over 40) across the UK linking consented website participants' medical records with their questionnaire responses
3   Routinely collected NHS data e.g. via the SAIL databank

The types of data you can access include:

Patient-reported data	Clinical data
• Demographics • Onset and diagnosis information dates • Education, Employment and Care details • 'Core' PROMs - Hospital Anxiety and Depression Score (HADS), EQ5D, MSIS29v2, FSS • Ad Hoc PROMs - Medication, webEDSS, Comorbidity, Symptoms	Minimum data set • Demographics • Ethnicity • Onset date • Diagnosis date • MS Type at diagnosis
Expanded dataset	**Routinely collected Data (Wales)/ Other linkable data sources:**
• Current/previous DMT • MS Type at visit • Smoking status • EDSS • Relapses • Walking assessment • Onset localisation/symptoms	The SAIL Databank is a world-class system for the robust secure storage and use of anonymised person-based data for research to improve health, well-being and services. (SAIL Data Bank use requires an additional application and cost) Current list of linkable data: • Inpatient and Outpatients (Patient Episode Database for Wales (PEDW)) • GP Data • ONS Information • Indicies of deprivation • Pathology data

You can find more information about the data held by the UK MS Register on their website.

The UK MS Register is a valuable piece of research infrastructure funded by the MS Society. We launched the Data Discovery Awards to stimulate the use of register data and support the building of data science capability among the UK MS research community.

These Awards aim to further our understanding of risk factors for MS. This will move us towards a more consolidated approach to assessing MS risk and ultimately towards the development of preventative strategies.

We're also aware that there are many other MS datasets in the UK and we believe that by collaborating with the UK MS Register, you can draw from a wider pool of data to support your work.

We don't make any decisions on the scientific quality and relevance of applications. These are made by independent peer and lay reviewers. As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities we adhere to the Principles of Peer Review. You can read more about our approach to reviewing applications on our website.

You should use this guidance document with the "Help" sections in the application forms on our online application system CC Grant Tracker.

We try to make sure that the information in this guidance is accurate. But changes are possible and the most up-to-date guidance is available on our website.

If you have any questions, please email us at research@mssociety.org.uk or call us on 020 8438 0822.

2. Data Discovery Awards Scope

These awards are for up to £50,000 for up to 12 months in duration.

Your Award should start before December 2023 and will typically be finished within 12 months.

Your application must include use of data from the UK MS Register either alone or in combination with other existing datasets. We encourage collaboration with other local, national or international MS datasets or other relevant data repositories.

You should directly address one of the following aims:
1. **Uncover new risk factors for developing MS**. We are particularly interested in modifiable risk factors that could be relevant for primary prevention.
2. **Further characterise known MS risk factors in a way that will take us forwards towards prevention strategies.** Applications addressing this aim should clearly explain how the new information produced will move our understanding forward in a way that will help the community tackle MS prevention.
3. **Increase our understanding of modifiable risk factors and comorbidities that influence the likelihood of MS progression**

Investigations into pharmacological interventions licenced for MS are **out of scope of this call.** Applications relating to these won't be accepted.

You must involve people affected by MS in the development of your application.

2.1 Award Terms and Conditions

You should also read our Award Terms and Conditions. This document contains our:
- **Open Access Policy**: We're committed to open and unrestricted access to the results of our funded research. We require any research papers based on our funded research to be published in an open access environment.
- **Grant Award Conditions**: The Award Conditions, together with the Award Letter and the Policies, set out the terms and conditions on which we make Awards.
- **Intellectual Property Policy**: This Intellectual Property (IP) Policy document sets out principles that we're guided by when considering questions relating to intellectual property and research matters.

3.   Key Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Lead Applicant	The named lead applicant is considered to be the project leader. In addition, the lead applicant will: - Be the contact person for all correspondence relating to the application. - Must accept overall responsibility for the award, if granted, and must be actively engaged in its direction.
Adviser	- You can add Advisers to your application. They can view and edit the application, and provide comments. - Advisers don't need to be actively involved in the project. - Advisers' CVs will be included in the application PDF and seen by reviewers. - They don't need to sign off the application before it's submitted.
Co-applicant	- A co-applicant is a researcher who'll be actively involved in the project should the funding application be successful. - Co-applicants can view and edit applications. - Co-applicants have to approve applications before they can be submitted.
Finance Officer	- A member of the host institution who is responsible for confirming and approving financial details of applications, acting as **FINAL SIGNATORY** for application submission. - They will be responsible for administering the grant if it is awarded.
Public Engagement	Where information and knowledge about research is provided and disseminated. Examples of engagement are: - science festivals open to the public - open days at a research centre - raising awareness in the media To find out more about engagement, see http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/

Public Involvement (PPI)	Where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations. Examples of involvement include when people affected by MS: - are involved in identifying research priorities - are members of a project steering group - comment on patient information materials To find out more about involvement, see www.invo.org.uk
Public Participation	Where people take part in a research study. Examples of participation include people being recruited to a clinical trial or other study, or completing a questionnaire as part of a study. To find out more about participation in trials, see https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/clinical-trials/
Research Network	The Research Network are a passionate group of individuals living with MS or caring for someone with MS. They're not required to have specialist scientific knowledge, but are trained to use their personal experiences of MS to review applications, ensuring that the research we fund is of the highest importance to people with MS.

4.   Submitting your application

Your application must be submitted through CC Grant Tracker. You can find guidance for how to use Grant Tracker on our website. You must complete all sections of the application form.

4.1   Applicant process

You **MUST** speak to the UK MS Register team before submitting an application for funding. This will help to confirm if the UK MS Register holds the appropriate data for your project and confirm the estimated cost of accessing the data. You should complete an application scoping form to arrange a discussion with the team. You'll receive a feedback form after this meeting. You must attach this form to your grant application form before submission.

If you wish to also use your own data, this can be uploaded to the Register Secure eResearch Platform (SeRP), where sufficient identifier linkages can be made with the UK MS Register data. You must confirm in your application that you have the appropriate approval to do this and provide details of consent or institutional approval to upload that data.

Full applications should be submitted via the MS Society CC Grant Tracker

4.2   Who is eligible to apply?

Both junior and established researchers are eligible to apply as Lead Applicant for Data Discovery Awards.

You're expected to have a contract (fixed-term or tenure) which covers the proposed duration of the grant. You must be based at an UK university or NHS institution and be the Principal Investigator of the project. International co-applicants, and collaborations with international datasets, are permitted.

The Lead Applicant can invite Co-Applicants and Advisors to join the application as Participants. For all applications the Lead Applicant **must** invite a Finance Officer who approves the application from the host institution and acts as the Final Signatory for application submission.

4.3   Patient and public involvement (PPI)

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research is when people with personal experience of health conditions work in active partnership with researchers or research funders like us.

Involvement isn't the same as recruiting participants to your study or sharing information with people through public engagement events. Involvement is about working in partnership with people affected by MS to shape, design and oversee a project.

1. In your application you need to describe: How people affected by MS have been involved in the development of your proposal (pre-application involvement)
2. How you plan to involve people affected in your ongoing study, if funded.

Pre-application involvement

Before applying, we encourage you to involve people affected by MS in the development of your proposal. This helps to ensure:

– your research questions are relevant to their experiences
– you can demonstrate the relevance of your work to people affected by MS
– your study design considers the needs of people affected by MS

Involvement in your ongoing study

As well as working with people to develop your application, you should also plan for how you will continue to involve people affected by MS throughout the project. For example, people affected by MS could:

- Join an advisory group to provide their perspective throughout the course of a project - advising on challenges as they arise
- Review participant information materials such as leaflets, posters, webpages, questionnaires (for clinical projects)
- Advise on the best ways to communicate and disseminate your findings

Budgeting for involvement

Involving people in research requires time and money. It's important to account for the costs of involvement as without them, you'll struggle to involve people effectively.

You should include the costs for any planned PPI activities in your application. For example, you should consider:

1. Expenses

You must cover any expenses that people will incur by getting involved in PPI activities. People should never be out-of-pocket. This may include, for example, travel, subsistence and carer costs for face-to-face meetings, broadband and childcare costs for online meetings.

2. Training and support

Training and induction sessions may be required so that people affected by MS are supported to carry out their role well. There are many free resources available online, but you should consider whether any paid training is required. You may also wish for Research Network members to join you at conferences and events.

3. Payment

It is best practice to offer payment for members of the public who get involved in your work, in recognition of their time, skills and expertise. How much to budget will depend on a number of factors, for example how often they are going to be involved and what level of responsibility they will have.

We recommend you read and work through the NIHR's payment guidance for researchers. This includes information on budgeting and example payment rates for different activities.

We can support you to plan and budget for your public involvement, connect with people affected by MS and carry out activities. Get in touch with us at researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk

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You should consider the following resources to plan effective involvement:
- NIHR – guide to public involvement in funding applications
- NIHR INVOLVE – payment and recognition for public involvement
- A practical guide to patient and public involvement in lab-based research

4.4   Lay Summary Development

You need to write a clear lay summary for your proposal. People affected by MS will review your application alongside experts in your field. If your lay summary is too brief or too complex, it will be difficult for them to comment and score your application. And this will have an impact on whether it might be funded.

Our Lay Summary Development scheme can help you. People affected by MS from our Research Network can provide feedback on your application before you submit, focusing on how well you have communicated your research proposal and the importance of the topic to people affected by MS. This isn't part of our review process, but is intended to help you to improve your lay summary before you submit.

If you'd like to go through Lay Summary Development, you'll need to submit a completed Lay Summary Development request form to researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk.

You must submit your completed form by the Lay Summary Development deadline. You will receive the feedback on your summary approximately two-four weeks before the deadline for submitting your grant application.

You can find the deadline, guidance notes and the request form on our funding page.

You can also find 'Tips for writing a good lay summary' to download from the sidebar of this page.

For all enquiries about involving people affected by MS in any stage of your research, please contact the Public Involvement Manager: researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk

4.5   Finance and costs

You should work with finance offices, clinical trials units, local NHS trusts and the local NIHR CRN network to ensure that all costs of research have been identified and appropriately paid for.

Please note the salary of the lead applicant can be claimed providing they are working on the project, and the project would not go ahead if their salary was not covered. If you are claiming for salary costs, the relevant salary scales must be attached in the Appendix section.

The cost of accessing the UK MS Register (up to £5,000) will be covered by the MS Society, separately to the individual awards. However, if the costs of accessing the UK MS Register exceeds £5,000, the additional costs **must** be included in the 'Consumables budget section.

Your application should comply with the below financial criteria:

CATEGORY	ACCEPTABLE COSTS	UNACCEPTABLE COSTS	NOTES
Staff members	- Salaries for staff who work specifically on the funded project, employed at the host institution. - Staff may include research, technical or other roles such as a project manager. - Staff time at other institutions for specific project work packages, such as specialist statistical analysis, etc., should be included as a non-salary "Consultant" cost in Consumables. Note: salary for the lead applicant providing they are working on the project, and the project would not go	- Apprenticeship levy.	- All applications must have an applicant that holds a tenured position for the duration of the intended project. - You should provide a copy of current salary scales in the 'Attachments' section at the end of your online application for all salaried staff. - An appropriate grading and salary, approved by the administrative office of the host institution, must be quoted even where staff members cannot be named. - It's the responsibility of the employing institution, not us, to provide for maternity benefit and increases in salary costs other than annual increments and cost of living awards.

CATEGORY	ACCEPTABLE COSTS	UNACCEPTABLE COSTS	NOTES
	ahead if their salary was not covered.		- Salaries must show the separate amounts claimed for basic pay, national insurance (showing % salary and total amount, at current rates), London weighting allowance where applicable and superannuation (which will not be higher than the rate used by the University Superannuation Scheme (USS) or NHS pension scheme).
Consumables	- Where justified, personal computing costs for named individuals engaged to work specifically on the grant. - Patient and public involvement (PPI) costs. - Consultant costs (such as Statisticians).	- Article publishing or open access charges. - Standard per unit IT charges. - Phone/computer accessories (drivers, cases, chargers, batteries).	- You can find further guidance on PPI costs on the NIHR INVOLVE website. - A full justification is required for all consumables.
Conferences	- Conference costs can cover a maximum of £1,000 per grant year for each member of salaried staff on the application. - Conference costs can be used to cover travel, registration fee and/or accommodation for meetings/conferences.	- First class travel or accommodation	- Conferences costs are pro rata i.e. if a salaried member of staff is 50% part time, they can claim up to £500 of fees in one year. - Only meetings/conferences directly related to the funded research.

CATEGORY	ACCEPTABLE COSTS	UNACCEPTABLE COSTS	NOTES
Other	- The inclusion of funds for computer equipment or software is permissible only if absolutely essential for the project. However, such costs should not exceed £1,000 per item unless absolutely necessary and a robust justification is provided (excessive costs may be reduced or removed).	- Excess treatment costs - Institutional overheads - Financial services - Personnel services - Recruitment costs - Public relations - General institution libraries - Departmental services (administration, secretarial, printing, photocopying) - Telephone charges and postage or courier services - Journal subscriptions - Furniture - Annual software licencing fees.	- The NHS should fund excess treatment costs (ETCs) - Researchers applying for clinical research grants will need to complete a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT) to be eligible for the NIHR portfolio and the support this provides including ETCs. - You will need to factor in the time to complete a SoECAT and have an AcoRD Specialist sign it so that you can upload it as part of your application.

If you believe that any of the 'unacceptable costs' above should be seen as direct costs for your project you must provide full and detailed justification for this in your application.

Increase in costs
We won't be responsible for any increase in the costs of research (whether caused by increased consumables costs, increased personnel costs or otherwise). We won't increase the award to reflect increased research costs, once the award has been made.

Full economic costs
Unlike some other funding bodies, such as the research councils, AMRC member charities, including us, won't fund the full economic costs of research (fECs), or a proportion of these. We'll only pay for the Directly Incurred costs related specifically to the planned research to be undertaken in this grant.

Please see below for guidance on the types of costs. Your institution's finance team should be able to provide further guidance on costings. If you are unsure please get in touch with us. Including ineligible costs may delay application submission or approval of award.

Directly Incurred	These include the familiar direct costs of research such as: - Staff (e.g. research assistant salaries) - Travel and subsistence - Equipment
Directly Allocated (Previously called "in-direct costs)	These are shared costs, based on estimates and don't represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis. Previously, these costs came under the 'indirect costs' heading but the following items are now calculated separately: - Applicants: the time spent by the applicant and co-applicants will be calculated and costed. - Estates: the way these are calculated may vary between institutions. Different categories of space will be costed differently, for example laboratory space will be different to office-based costs. - Other Directly Allocated: these include the costs of shared resources, such as staff and equipment.
Indirect Costs	These costs are necessary for underpinning research but can't be allocated to individual projects. These costs account for things such as computing and information support, central services, general maintenance and other infrastructure costs and will be calculated separately by each Higher Education Institution (HEI), according to TRAC methodology. We won't cover Indirect Costs or any other non-attributable overhead costs in your budget. However, such costs may be eligible under the Charity Research Support Fund.

4.6 Co-funding applications

We're open to co-funding applications with other funders. You should provide full details of the co-funder and amount they would be contributing.

4.7 References

You should cite all essential references relevant to your proposal. Please enter all references in the following format:

1st Author: Year: Title: Journal: Volume: Pages
Copies of in-press or submitted publications relevant to the proposal should accompany the application, please add these in the "Attachments" section.

5. Criteria for review

Your application will be scored on the quality of science and relevance to MS. Applications will be reviewed and scored primarily by members of UK MS Register Scientific Steering Committee (SSC), who have relevant expertise. This includes review by lay members.

- Once you've submitted your application, we validate it to make sure it fits the remit of the Data Discovery Awards round.
- If your application is eligible, we send it for independent review by members of the MS Register SSC, including lay members who have relevant expertise.
- Applications will then be considered by the SSC members at the Review Panel Meeting.
- The SSC Review Panel Meeting provides a recommendation to us about which applications should be funded.
- Our Board of Trustees then considers their recommendations for funding.
- Following approval by the Board, we'll communicate official funding offers, awards are made and projects start.

The generic scoring guidance used by our reviewers is found on the next page.

The reviewers will also be scoring the applications in line with criteria specific for the Data Discovery Awards including:

Scientific strategy	- How closely does the application meet one of the three aims? - How much will the project take us forward towards prevention strategies? - Please note, if there are more than two fundable applications, then applications relevant to primary prevention (addressing aims 1 or 2 in the scope) will be prioritised.
Plan of investigation	- Is the data selected appropriate to answer the proposed question? - Does the team have the correct permissions in place to access and analyse the data? - Is the data analysis plan realistic in the proposed timeframe? - Are the planned outputs appropriate to answer the proposed question? - How have people affected by MS been involved in the development of the project? And how will they be involved in the project delivery? - Have all requested costs been fully justified and represent value for money?
Research environment and track record of success	- Does the project team have a track record of success in this area? - Do the team have access to appropriate support/research environment for this project? - If conducting the analysis themselves, do the team have the appropriate skills/experience to do this?

Added value through collaboration	• How will the project develop new, or progress current collaborations in this area? • What is the potential for further collaboration following successful completion of the project? • Please note, letters of support should be provided to support collaboration statements.
Building capacity in MS research	• Will the project team bring new data expertise into MS, or develop data expertise among existing MS researchers?
Dissemination	• Are dissemination plans appropriate and ambitious? • Have people affected by MS been involved in development on dissemination plans? • Have the costs of dissemination been included and fully justified?

Generic Scoring Guidance for reviewers

Generic criteria	Rating	Score	
• Research question(s) are likely to result in significant benefit for people affected by MS and/or advancement in our scientific understanding of MS • Research team is very strong, containing all relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes • Very good value for money • Proposal is clear and well written • People affected by MS are actively involved and influencing project at all relevant stages (PPI) • Proposal has a clear and realistic pathway to impact. Potential impact is highly significant and appropriate to grant type. • Research design is excellent, appropriate and highly feasible for the Award type.	Exceptional	10	Highly fundable
	Excellent	9	
	High quality	8	
	Good	7	
• Research question(s) are likely to result in benefit for people affected by MS or some advancement in the scientific understanding of MS Research team has relevant experience and contains most of the relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes • Acceptable value for money • Some elements of involving people affected by MS, where appropriate, but not well integrated or well supported • Elements of the application are unclear • Project would only be fundable with some changes • Proposal has a reasonable pathway to impact. Potential impact is significant and mostly appropriate to grant type. • Research design is acceptable for the Award type	Above average	6	Potentially fundable
	Acceptable	5	
	Borderline acceptable	4	
• Research question(s) are irrelevant with no tangible benefit to people affected by MS. • Key skills missing from the research team • Poor value for money • Unclear application • Involvement of people affected by MS inappropriate or limited/ lacking • Pathway to impact is unclear and/or unrealistic. Little or no potential impact or poorly described/not appropriate to grant type. • Research design is unsuitable for the Award type.	Below acceptable	3	Not fundable
	Many identified flaws	2	
	Serious scientific weaknesses or other major concerns	1	
	Definitely not fundable	0	

6.   Resubmission Policy

Unless we explicitly invite you to resubmit your application, we only allow **one** resubmission of any previously unsuccessful application. If you are resubmitting an application, you should indicate this in the **'Other Support'** section of the application form and complete the text box according to the guidance.

Why?

Over the past five years, only 8% of resubmissions have been successful.

Your applications should be carefully considered and show a high level of grantsmanship. You should thoroughly review them before submission, and ask any co-applicants to do the same.
Our resubmission policy aims to promote a culture of high-quality submissions and high-quality reviews that will benefit you, our reviewers and us alike. This will benefit the MS community too, by helping us select and fund high quality and relevant research that has an impact on people with MS.

What constitutes a resubmission?

A resubmission is any application that was previously submitted to our Grant Rounds. This includes if you submit the same application under a different name. Or if you submit the same application under a different funding stream (e.g. changing a PhD Fellowship to a Data Discovery Award).

Exceptions
We may invite a small number of further resubmissions if there is compelling evidence from peer review, if advised by the SSC Review Panel.

Preparing a resubmission:

If you're preparing a resubmission, you must include the following in the 'Other Support' section
- Responses to any of the comments or considerations previously provided during the review process
- A summary of any substantial changes to the application

What constitutes sufficient change to qualify as a new submission?
We'll only qualify applications as a new submission if they contain major changes. It's not sufficient to include only minor changes or considering reviewer comments as a new submission.

Consequences of an Uninvited Resubmission:

If we feel that a new application is a resubmission, or if you submit an uninvited resubmission that has already been submitted twice, then we'll automatically reject it.

7.   Contact us

Please let us know if you have any questions or need help.

Email us at: research@mssociety.org.uk or call us on 020 8438 0822.

Thank you for your interest in our research funding.

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

Contact us

MS National Centre 020 8438 0700
info@mssociety.org.uk

MS Helpline Freephone 0808 800 8000 (weekdays 9am-9pm)
helpline@mssociety.org.uk

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►Let's stop MS together