



# Data Discovery Awards applicant guidance

Updated February 2025

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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, you can email us at [research@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk) or call us on 020 8438 0822.

We're the largest charitable funder of MS research in the UK. We welcome applications for projects that will increase understanding of the cause of MS. And find new effective treatments or prevention strategies. As well as projects improving care and services for people affected by MS too.

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.

- [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 Grant Tracker. There's a list of key terms used throughout this guidance and their definitions in the appendix.

- [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)

## 1. Data Discovery Awards purpose and scope

Data Discovery Awards have a maximum duration of 24 months and have an upper funding limit of £100,000.

- Data Discovery Awards provide support for exploratory, data-driven research projects. And aim to build data science capability in the UK.
- Projects must have a clear emphasis on data science. And should use data analysis techniques to mine, interrogate and integrate large datasets to answer questions relevant to our research strategy.

**We strongly encourage you to use the UK MS Register in your project.** This offers significant advantages including:

- A wealth of longitudinal data from over 20,000 people with MS, providing an extensive and unique dataset for analysis.
- Advisory support from the UK MS Register team. They can provide expertise to help you get the most out of the Register dataset. And advise on appropriate data analysis.

You can find details about the UK MS Register and ways you can use it in Section 2.

**Highlight notice:** We're also particularly interested in receiving applications with a focus on MS risk reduction and prevention. You can find details about this highlight notice in Section 3.

Laboratory-based approaches won't be considered for this funding call. And we won't fund applications relating to pharmacological interventions for MS. If your application includes these it'll be automatically rejected.

## 1.1. Our Research and Organisational Strategies

Your application should fit with our Research Strategy. And you must explain how the project helps us to achieve these aims. We also have an organisational strategy to guide our work. We're in the process of updating our research and organisational strategies for beyond 2024. But in the meantime, we'll consider any applications that are relevant to our current strategies. You should read and strongly consider these documents when writing your application.

- [Download our 2023-2024 Research Strategy Extension from our website.](#)
- [Read our 2020-2024 Organisational Strategy on our website.](#)

## 1.2. Our James Lind Alliance Partnership (JLA) research priorities

In 2013 we completed a James Lind Alliance Partnership (JLA) to identify research priorities that are important to people affected by MS and healthcare professionals.

- [Read about our JLA research priorities on our website.](#)

We don't exclusively restrict our funding to these priorities. We continue to support research into the causes of MS, and all aspects of treatment and care for people affected by MS. However, we do favour applications that specifically address these priorities. You will need to outline which, if any, of the JLA priorities your application addresses.

## 2. The UK MS Register

The UK MS Register is a valuable piece of research infrastructure that we fund. It's the world's first register to combine data collected from people with MS with clinical and NHS data.

Over 20,000 people have joined since its launch in May 2011. The Register collects data from:

1. People with MS: Register participants complete online questionnaires to provide information about their MS every six months.
2. Clinical sites: Participating hospitals across the UK link consented Register participants' medical records with their questionnaire responses. Over 50 hospitals currently take part and this number is growing.
3. Routinely collected NHS data. Such as via the SAIL databank.

There are a number of different ways you can include the UK MS Register in your project. Such as:

- Using existing data from the UK MS Register, either as a standalone dataset or in combination with other datasets.
- Contributing new data into the UK MS Register to add value to this resource. For example, hosting surveys that Register participants can complete.
- Linking the UK MS Register with other relevant datasets (for example, genetic, environmental, MRI, patient reported or clinical data).
- Collaborating with the UK MS Register team as co-applicants or advisers to benefit from their data science expertise.

**If you plan to use the UK MS Register in your project you must contact the Register team as soon as possible to check the feasibility of your proposal.** The process for this is detailed in section 5.1.

- [Find out more about the data held by the UK MS Register on their website.](#)

### 3. Highlight notice: Risk Reduction and Prevention

We'll accept projects that address any area of our Research Strategy. But we're particularly interested in receiving applications with a focus on MS risk reduction and prevention. This could include:

- Exploring risk factors and comorbidities that influence MS onset
- Investigating predictive tools to assess MS risk and identify those who may go on to develop MS. For example, the development of 'risk' scores or the identification of predictive markers to be used to identify those at high risk of developing MS.
- Using epidemiological or biological data from historical or real-world cohorts to investigate potential preventative interventions that may reduce MS risk or delay onset of MS.
- Further characterisation of the prodromal or preclinical phases of MS to understand the biological events leading to MS in at-risk individuals.

### 4. Our award conditions and policies

You should also read our Award Conditions and Policies. 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.
- **Research 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.
- [Download our Award Conditions and Policies from our website.](#)
- [Read more about how to manage an MS Society Research Award](#)

#### 4.1. Our position on researcher leave

We strongly believe that researchers should be supported to take periods of leave when they need to. And part-time opportunities should be available for early career researchers to give more people the chance to progress their careers. As part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan for MS Society research we're sharing our position on leave for our funded researchers.

We're supportive of our funded researchers taking leave. For example, family leave (maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave) and sick leave. This includes PhD students working on research we fund.

This is our position on researcher leave. It outlines our viewpoint and our expectations, but it's not a policy. Researchers working on our funded projects aren't our employees. So you should check and follow the relevant leave policies at your institution.

- [Read more about our position on researcher leave on our website.](#)
- [Read more about our work to improve EDI in MS research.](#)

## 4.2. Our position on generative AI in research

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could bring benefits to MS research. But there are risks associated with their use, particularly in research funding and application review. We support the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.

You should note:

- If using generative AI tools in developing your application, you must use them responsibly. And in line with relevant legal and ethical standards where these exist or as they develop.
- You must acknowledge any outputs from generative AI tools in funding applications.

We're committed to maintaining confidentiality in our research funding processes. As this is essential for safeguarding the sharing of scientific opinions and assessments. It's not clear whether anything put into generative AI tools remains confidential. So, our applicants, reviewers and panel members must not put any part of any application under review into these tools. This includes for the purposes of review assessment, applicant responses or other purposes.

- [Read the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.](#)

## 5. Submitting your application

Your application should be carefully considered and show a high level of grantsmanship. You should thoroughly review it before submission and ask any co-applicants to do the same.

Your application must be submitted through Symplectic Grant Tracker. You must complete all sections of the application form. If sections aren't completed adequately, we'll return your application. Or it might not be validated for review.

- [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)
- [Download guidance on how to use Grant Tracker from our website.](#)

### 5.1. Process for applications using the UK MS Register

If you choose to use the UK MS Register in your project you must check the feasibility of your proposal with the UK MS Register team. This feasibility check must be done before you can submit your application to us through Grant Tracker. You'll need to:

1. [Complete and submit an initial Expression of Interest form to the UK MS Register team.](#) They'll then contact you to arrange a call to discuss your proposal further.

2. If your proposal is suitable, the UK MS Register team will ask you to complete a Data Discovery Award (DDA) Feasibility Assessment Form. This'll provide them with more information on your project aims, methodology/protocol and statistical analysis plan.
3. If your proposal is confirmed as feasible by the UK MS Register team, they'll send you a PDF copy of your DDA Feasibility Assessment Form. **This must be uploaded to your Data Discovery Award application form.**

The project aims, methodology/protocol and statistical analysis plan that you submit in the DDA Feasibility Assessment form mustn't change once they've been reviewed by the UK MS Register team. You must copy these sections verbatim into the relevant sections of your Data Discovery Award application form on Grant Tracker.

**Please be aware that the UK MS Register team must receive details about your project at least four weeks before our application submission deadline. So please make sure you factor time in to complete these UK MS Register feasibility checks.**

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 proof of consent or institutional approval to upload that data must be included with your application.

## 5.2. Who's eligible to apply?

Both junior and established researchers are eligible to apply as Lead Applicant for the 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. Your application must have an applicant with a tenured position at the host institution for the duration of the Award. This doesn't have to be the lead applicant.

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.

## 5.3. Patient and public involvement in your research

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 working **in partnership** with people affected by MS to shape, design and oversee a project.

- [Read the NIHR's guide to public involvement in funding applications](#)
- [Read the NIHR's 'Briefing notes for researchers - public involvement in NHS, health and social care research'](#)
- [Read 'A practical guide to patient and public involvement in lab-based research' online](#)

- [Find more resources on NIHR's Learning for Involvement website](#)

In your application you need to describe:

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

### **Pre-application involvement**

Before applying, you should involve people affected by MS in the development of your proposal. This ensures:

- Your research questions are relevant to their experiences
- Your lay summary is accessible and understandable to our lay reviewers
- 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 how you'll 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 your project. And advise 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
- Advise on the best approach for recruiting participants
- Work as a peer researcher in your team to be involved throughout the duration of the project (if appropriate)

### **Budgeting for involvement**

Involving people in research requires time and money. It's important to account for the costs of involvement when setting your budget. As without an adequate budget 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:

- 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 (including the cost of carers or personal assistance to also attend face-to-face meetings), broadband and childcare costs for online meetings.

- 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 your PPI contributors to join you at conferences and events.

- Payment

It's 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 depends on several factors. For example, how often they are going to be involved and what level of responsibility they will have.

- [Read the INVOLVE guidelines for payment and recognition for public involvement on the NIHR website.](#)

You should 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 you with people affected by MS and to carry out activities. [Get in touch with us by emailing researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk)**

## 5.4. Writing your lay summary and lay summary development scheme

You need to write a clear lay summary for your proposal. People affected by MS will review your application alongside experts in your field. Our funding panels also include researchers without direct expertise in your area of research.

If your lay summary is too brief or too complex, it'll be difficult for them to comment on and score your application. And this will affect whether it might be funded.

We encourage you to use Plain English when writing your lay summary. This will make your writing as accessible as possible to all panel members. You can [read about how we use plain English to be more accessible on our website.](#)

- [Read more about Plain English and see some examples on the Plain English Campaign's website.](#)
- [Read our 'Tips for writing a good lay summary'](#)

### Our Lay Summary Development scheme

Our optional Lay Summary Development scheme can help you to write a high quality and accessible lay summary and involvement plan. People affected by MS from our Research Network can give feedback on your draft before you submit.

They can comment on:

- How well you have communicated your research proposal
- The importance of the topic to people affected by MS
- How well you have thought through and communicated your involvement plans

You don't have to complete Lay Summary Development if you don't want to. You can still apply without it. It's not part of our review process but can help you to improve your lay summary.

If you'd like to go through Lay Summary Development, you'll need to submit a completed Lay Summary Development request form. This needs to be submitted before the scheme closes. You'll get feedback on your summary around four weeks before the grant application submission deadline.

- [Find more information about the Lay Summary Development scheme, including the guidance notes and request form on our website.](#)
- [You can find the Lay Summary Development scheme closing date on our Funding page.](#)

For all enquiries about involving people affected by MS in any stage of your research, [you can email our Public Involvement team on researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk).

## 5.5. Equality diversity and inclusion in your research

We're committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research. We want research findings to be as relevant as possible for everyone with MS in the UK. And to ensure that everyone affected by MS has the opportunity to take part in or engage with MS research. Increasing the diversity of our funded research is one area of focus of our EDI in research action plan.

- [Find out more about our EDI in research action plan and progress on our website.](#)

We expect you to consider EDI at all stages of your project. You'll be asked to describe how you've considered EDI in the following areas in your application:

- Public engagement and outreach activities
- Participant recruitment (if applicable)

We've published blogs highlighting the importance of doing more inclusive research. And showcasing examples of how our funded researchers are putting this at the heart of their projects:

- [Read our blog: 'Meet the researchers who want seldom-heard groups to be at the centre of their research into fatigue'](#)
- [Read our blog: 'Who is MS research missing?'](#)
- [Read our blog: 'Improving MS care for people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds'](#)

You can include costs for EDI activities in your application. These activities can be especially important early in your project. But should be considered for the lifecycle of your research.

## 5.6. Finances 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. The sections below outline our list of acceptable and unacceptable costs. You should read it carefully, including the notes column. [You can request the costs guidance table in an alternative format by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk.](#)

**Please note:**

- All requested budget items must be fully justified in your application.
- We may reduce or remove ineligible costs.
- If you believe that any of the ‘unacceptable costs’ should be seen as direct costs for your project, you must provide full and detailed justification for this in your application.
- 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, including increased salaries due to nationally agreed pay awards or inflation, once the award has been made.

**5.6.1. Staff members**

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salaries for staff who work specifically on the funded project, employed at the host institution.</li> <li>• These staff may include postdoctoral fellows, research assistants, data managers, PhD students, technicians and allied health professionals.</li> <li>• Staff time at other institutions for specific project work packages, such as specialist statistical analysis. This should be included as a non-salary “Consultant” cost in Consumables.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprenticeship levy isn’t covered.</li> <li>• Salary for the applicant team isn’t permitted. This includes co-applicants and advisers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are some circumstances where we’d consider a <b>proportion of salary for one member</b> of the applicant team. Their salary for research must be reliant on grant funding. And the request must be strongly justified for the benefit of MS research. Their institution must confirm their salary circumstances before we make an award. You should provide a copy of current salary scales in the ‘Supplementary Attachments’ section for all salaried staff.</li> <li>• You must quote an appropriate grading and salary, approved by the administrative office of the host institution. We need this even where staff members can’t be named.</li> <li>• The employing institution is responsible for providing maternity benefit and increases in salary costs other than annual increments and cost of living awards.</li> </ul>

## 5.6.2. Consumables

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection materials, if specific to the project.</li> <li>• Patient and public involvement (PPI) costs, including travel for PPI representatives.</li> <li>• Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activity costs</li> <li>• Consultant costs, such as statisticians.</li> <li>• Travel for named staff members on the award to carry out activities essential to the project, such as data collection.</li> <li>• Data sharing costs, such as archiving repository fees, data storage costs and data management services.</li> <li>• We'll consider paying some training costs on a case-by-case basis. Any such requests must be fully justified and essential to carry out the proposed research. Training costs shouldn't exceed £2,000 per grant year. If any essential training exceeds this amount you should contact us to discuss this before submitting your application.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Article publishing or open access charges.</li> <li>• Standard per unit IT charges.</li> <li>• First class travel or accommodation</li> <li>• Laboratory chemicals and materials (e.g. reagents, isotopes, peptides, enzymes, antibodies, gases, proteins, cell/tissue/ bacterial culture).</li> <li>• Regulatory licences and fees, such as those associated with ethical approval can't be included.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full justification is required for all consumables.</li> <li>• You should break consumables down as itemised costs rather than giving an overall estimated cost.</li> <li>• <a href="#">You can read more guidance on PPI and EDI costs on the NIHR INVOLVE website.</a></li> <li>• Data management and sharing costs must be reasonable and proportional in the context of the overall grant. Data sharing costs <b>don't</b> include open access publication costs.</li> <li>• Travel costs under consumables have to be directly relevant to carrying out the research (e.g. related to data collection, PPI or EDI activities). Any travel associated with visiting collaborators or conferences should be included under the 'Conferences and travel' budget.</li> </ul>

### 5.6.3. Equipment

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equipment that's specific to <b>this</b> grant and essential to carry out the proposed research</li> <li>Costs may include purchase, delivery and installation of scientific equipment where that equipment is specific to the grant.</li> <li>Personal computing costs for named staff members working specifically on the award. Funding for computer equipment or software is only allowed if absolutely essential for the project. And must be fully justified in your application.</li> <li>Equipment use costs where usage of shared/core equipment, services or research facilities is essential to the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equipment can't be requested for routine or service use.</li> <li>Annual software licencing fees aren't eligible for inclusion.</li> <li>Phone/computer accessories (drivers, cases, chargers, batteries).</li> <li>We won't pay for bench fees or annual access fees for shared facilities, equipment or infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Computing equipment costs are capped at £1,500.</li> <li>Each piece of equipment, including computing equipment, must be fully justified.</li> <li>The host institution is responsible for equipment. This includes its accommodation, operating and servicing costs, and any insurance that may be necessary.</li> <li>Equipment access costs: You can't include Directly Allocated costs. You can include fees relating to the use of core equipment, services or research facilities that are essential to the project. You must state the cost per sample/time period for these or they'll be removed.</li> </ul>

### 5.6.4. Conferences and travel

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A maximum of £1,000 (pro rata) can be requested each grant year for each member of salaried staff on the project.</li> <li>This can be used to cover travel, registration fees and/or accommodation for meetings/conferences. Or travel for other activities, like visiting collaborators, if essential to the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First class travel or accommodation</li> <li>Conference costs for the lead applicant, co-applicants and advisers aren't eligible for inclusion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferences costs are pro rata. For example, if a salaried member of staff is 50% Full Time Equivalent, they can claim up to £500 of fees in one year.</li> <li>Conference and travel costs can be moved between grant years if the maximum acceptable amount isn't exceeded.</li> <li>Meetings/conferences must be directly related to the funded research.</li> </ul>

### 5.6.5. Other

Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excess treatment costs</li> <li>• Institutional overheads</li> <li>• Financial services</li> <li>• Personnel services</li> <li>• Recruitment costs</li> <li>• Public relations</li> <li>• General institution libraries</li> <li>• Departmental services (administration, secretarial, printing, photocopying)</li> <li>• Telephone charges and postage or courier services</li> <li>• Journal subscriptions</li> <li>• Furniture</li> <li>• Home office licences and animal handling training.</li> </ul> <p>Due to the nature of this Award type, the following are also unacceptable costs for the Data Discovery Awards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal purchase and transportation costs, maintenance (including food) and experimentation costs.</li> <li>• Cost for the provision of human tissue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NHS should fund excess treatment costs (ETCs). If you're applying for a clinical research grant, you'll need to complete a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT). This will allow your grant to be eligible for the NIHR portfolio and the support this provides, including ETCs.</li> <li>• Animal and human tissue costs aren't permitted for Data Discovery Awards, but can be included in applications for our Project, Catalyst and Career Development Awards.</li> </ul>

### 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.

We won't fund the full economic costs of research (fECs), or a fixed proportion of these. We'll only pay for the Directly Incurred costs related specifically to the planned research to be undertaken in this grant. As a member of the AMRC we support their position statement on supporting research in universities outlining what charities pay for and why.

- [Read the position statement on charities supporting research in universities on the AMRC website.](#)

Directly incurred	Directly allocated	Indirect
<p>These include the familiar direct costs of research such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff (e.g. research assistant salaries)</li> <li>• Travel and subsistence</li> <li>• Consumables and Equipment (or specific access to equipment)</li> </ul> <p>We'll pay these costs, but you'll need to justify why they're needed for the research.</p>	<p>These are shared costs, based on estimates and don't represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis. As such we will not pay these costs. They were previously included as 'indirect costs' heading. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The costing of the time spent by the applicant and co-applicants</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Other Directly Allocated: these include the costs of shared resources, such as staff and equipment.</li> </ul>	<p>These costs are necessary for underpinning research but can't be allocated to individual projects. These include things like computing and information support, central services, general maintenance and other infrastructure costs. They'll 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.</p>

## 5.7. 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.

## 5.8. References

You should cite all essential references relevant to your proposal. We don't specify a referencing style. But you must include enough information in the reference list for reviewers to find the publication. DOIs alone aren't sufficient.

Copies of in-press or submitted publications relevant to the proposal should also be included. You can add these in the "Supplementary Attachments" section.

## 6. Criteria for review

Your application will be scored on the quality of science and relevance to MS. Applications will be reviewed and scored by both external peer and lay reviewers. And by members of the UK MS Register Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) and The Expert Review Network (TERN) in our review panel meetings. Our panels are made up of members with different expertise. Not everyone on the panel is an expert in your field. So, it's important to consider this when writing your application. We recommend writing in Plain English throughout your application



as this improves accessibility. And means that all panel members can fully engage with and understand your proposal.

- [Read more about TERN on our website.](#)
- [Read more about the SSC on the UK MS Registers website](#)

You can also suggest up to three potential peer reviewers for your application in the “Project Details” section of the online application form. And tell us any reviewers you don’t want to review your application, with justification.

- Once you’ve submitted your application, we validate it to make sure it fits the Data Discovery Awards remit. And to check that all sections of the form have been completed adequately. If you’re using the UK MS Register, we’ll also check that the UK MS Register Team have confirmed the feasibility of your proposal (see section 5.1.)
- If your application is eligible, we send it for independent, external review by members of the research community with relevant expertise and members of our Research Network.
- Based on the external review scores, applications go through a shortlisting process:
  - This involves the Review Panel Chair discussing the review scores and comments. It can also include a Vice Chair and a lay panel member, depending on the applications being considered.
  - They’ll recommend a shortlist of the highest quality and most relevant applications for further review. These will have the best chances of being fundable in this round.
  - The remaining applications will be rejected (triaged)
  - We’ll tell all applicants the triage outcomes around a month before funding outcomes are announced.
- If your application is shortlisted, you’re invited to provide a rebuttal to the reviewers’ comments. You’ll have 14 days to submit this and we’ll advise you of the rebuttal dates in advance.
- Shortlisted applications are considered by invited SSC and TERN members at the Data Discovery Awards Review Panel meeting. Experts from outside of the SSC and TERN may also be invited if required. For example, where there are conflicts of interest or additional expertise would be beneficial.
- The Review Panel 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 scoring guidance used by our reviewers is found on the next page. [You can request the scoring guidance for reviewers table in an alternative format by emailing \[research@mssociety.org.uk\]\(mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk\).](#)



## 6.1. Data Discovery Awards review criteria

### Scientific strategy

- How closely does the application meet the primary aim of building data science capability in the UK?
- Is the project data science driven, using data analysis techniques to mine, interrogate or integrate large datasets to address questions relevant to our research strategy?
- Does the project address the highlight notice (risk reduction and prevention)?
- **Note:** If there are two or more fundable applications, applications addressing the highlight notice will be prioritised.

### Plan of investigation

- Is the data selected appropriate to answer the proposed question(s)?
- 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?
- Have people affected by MS been involved in the development of the project? And are there clear plans for their ongoing involvement in the project?
- 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?

### Capacity building

- Will the project team bring new data expertise into MS? Or will it support the development of data expertise among existing MS researchers?

### Dissemination

- Are dissemination plans appropriate and ambitious? You should consider both academic audiences and people affected by MS/the wider public.
- Have people affected by MS been involved in development of dissemination plans?

## 6.2. Data Discovery Award scoring guidance for reviewers

All reviewers are asked to score applications between 1 and 5, corresponding to ratings of highly fundable, potentially fundable and not fundable. We've outlined the criteria used to score applications and their ratings below.

Rating	Generic criteria	Data Discovery Award-specific
<b>Highly fundable</b>  Scores of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5</li> <li>• 4.5</li> <li>• 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research question(s) are likely to result in significant benefit for people affected by MS. And/or advancement in our scientific understanding of MS</li> <li>• Research team is very strong, containing all relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes</li> <li>• Very good value for money</li> <li>• Proposal is clear and well written</li> <li>• People affected by MS are actively involved and influencing project at all relevant stages (PPI)</li> <li>• Proposal has a clear and realistic pathway to impact. Potential impact is highly significant and appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>• Research design is excellent, appropriate and highly feasible for the Award type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research design is excellent and highly appropriate for a Data Discovery Award.</li> <li>• The proposed study design, methods and analyses are appropriate to the project aims. They are adequately developed and justified. All aspects of the proposed study design are well-coordinated.</li> </ul>
<b>Potentially fundable</b>  Scores of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3.5</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2.5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research question(s) are likely to result in benefit for people affected by MS. Or some advancement in the scientific understanding of MS</li> <li>• Research team has relevant experience and contains most of the relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes</li> <li>• Acceptable value for money</li> <li>• Some elements of involving people affected by MS, where appropriate, but not well integrated or well supported</li> <li>• Elements of the application are unclear</li> <li>• Project would only be fundable with some changes</li> <li>• Proposal has a reasonable pathway to impact. Potential impact is significant and mostly appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>• Research design is acceptable for the Award type</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptable research design for a Data Discovery Award</li> <li>• Proposed study design, methods and analyses are acceptable but they are only partially coordinated.</li> <li>• Further explanation for how design fits with the aims of the project is required.</li> </ul>

Rating	Generic criteria	Data Discovery Award-specific
<p><b>Not fundable</b></p> <p>Scores of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1.5</li> <li>• 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research question(s) are irrelevant with no tangible benefit to people affected by MS.</li> <li>• Key skills missing from the research team</li> <li>• Poor value for money</li> <li>• Unclear application</li> <li>• Involvement of people affected by MS inappropriate or limited/ lacking</li> <li>• Pathway to impact is unclear and/or unrealistic. Little or no potential impact or poorly described/not appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>• Research design is unsuitable for the Award type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research design is unsuitable for a Data Discovery Award.</li> <li>• There are serious scientific concerns about the proposed research, for example: it's poor, flawed and/or duplicative.</li> <li>• Research design, methods and analyses aren't well developed or integrated</li> <li>• Further explanation is needed for how design fits with the aims of the project.</li> </ul>

## 7. Resubmission policy

Unless you're explicitly invited, 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 do we only allow one resubmission?

Over the past five years, less than 10% of resubmissions have been successful.

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. And the MS community by helping us select and fund high quality and relevant research that has an impact on people affected by MS.

### What do we consider as 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 Catalyst Award).

### Exceptions to our resubmission rule

We may invite a small number of further resubmissions if there is compelling evidence from peer review. And if advised by the TERN Review Panels.

### Preparing a resubmission

If you're preparing a resubmission, you must:

- Indicate this in the 'Other Support' section of the application form.
- Make sure that previous comments or considerations have been adequately responded to. This includes written review comments and/or panel feedback. Reviewers will have access to your previous application and review comments.
- Include a summary of any substantial changes to the application

If you don't include these, your application won't be eligible for re-review. And we'll automatically reject it.

### 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.

## 8. Contact us

Please let us know if you have any questions or need help. You can [email us at research@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk) or call us on 020 8438 0822.

Thank you for your interest in our research funding.

## Appendix 1: key terms and definitions

Term	Definition
Lead applicant	<p>The named lead applicant is the project leader. As lead applicant, you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the contact person for all correspondence relating to the application.</li> <li>• Have overall responsibility for the award and must actively engage in its direction.</li> </ul>
Adviser	<p>Advisers don't need to be actively involved in the delivery of project. But you must define their contribution (expertise, advice etc.) to the project team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They can view and edit the application, and provide comments.</li> <li>• Advisers' CVs are included in the application PDF and seen by reviewers.</li> <li>• They need to confirm their participation. But don't need to approve the application.</li> <li>• You can't request salary costs for advisers.</li> </ul>
Co-applicant	<p>A co-applicant is a researcher who'll be actively involved in the delivery of the project should the funding application be successful. You can't include them simply for supervisory purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-applicants can view and edit applications.</li> <li>• Co-applicants have to approve applications before they can be submitted.</li> </ul>
Finance officer	<p>This is a member of your institution who's responsible for confirming and approving financial details of applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They act as <b>final signatory</b> for application submission. Your application won't be accepted if it's not approved by the Finance Officer before the funding deadline.</li> <li>• They'll be responsible for administering the grant if it is awarded.</li> </ul>
Public engagement	<p>Where information and knowledge about research is provided and disseminated. Examples of engagement are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• science festivals open to the public</li> <li>• open days at a research centre</li> <li>• raising awareness in the media</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Read more about public engagement on the National Centre for Co-ordinating Public Engagement's website.</a></p>
Public involvement (PPI)	<p><b>Public involvement (PPI)</b></p> <p>Where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations. Examples of involvement include when people affected by MS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are involved in identifying research priorities</li> <li>• are members of a project steering group</li> <li>• comment on patient information materials</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Read more about involvement on the NIHR website.</a></p>
Public participation	<p>Where people take part in a research study. Examples of participation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people being recruited to a clinical trial or other study</li> <li>• people completing a questionnaire as part of a study.</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Read more about participation in trials on the NHS website.</a></p>
Research Network	<p>The Research Network are a passionate group of people 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 affected by MS.</p>

## **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](https://mssociety.org.uk)

### **Contact us**

MS National Centre 020 8438 0700

[info@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:info@mssociety.org.uk)

MS Helpline Freephone 0808 800 8000

(weekdays 9am-9pm)

[helpline@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mssociety.org.uk)

### **Online**

[mssociety.org.uk](https://mssociety.org.uk)

[facebook.com/MSSociety](https://facebook.com/MSSociety)

[twitter.com/mssocietyuk](https://twitter.com/mssocietyuk)

### **MS Society Scotland**

0131 335 4050

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### **MS Society Northern Ireland**

028 9080 2802

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### **MS Society Cymru**

[mscymru@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:mscymru@mssociety.org.uk)



### **Multiple Sclerosis Society**

Registered charity nos. 1139257 / SCO41990

Registered as a limited company in England and Wales 07451571

Registered office: Carriage House, 8 City North Place, London, N4 3FU