



Multiple Sclerosis Research Australia

FUNDING PROCESS DESCRIPTION

1. Purpose

This paper explains MS Research Australia's (MSRA) process of assessing and allocating funding for applications, including:

- Project Grants
- Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Postgraduate Scholarships
- Incubator "seeding" grants
- Summer Vacation Scholarships

2. Overview of the Process

a. The Roles and Responsibilities of the MSRA Research Management Council.

The Research Management Council (**RMC**) is an independent 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. The RMC Chairman is responsible for the final budget recommendation to the MSRA Executive Director. Refer to the MSRA website for a list of members of the RMC.

A RMC Social and Applied Research Subcommittee (SARS) reviews and assesses the applications in this specific area of research. The SARS Chairman presents the outcomes of the meeting to the RMC Chairman for consideration. Refer to the MSRA website for a list of members of the RMC SARS.

b. Applications are reviewed by External Assessors

Once MSRA receives an application, it is sent for independent assessment by usually three External Assessors. External Assessors are qualified MS experts throughout the world providing comment on the merit, relevance to MS and feasibility of the application.

c. RMC Convenes to Review Applications

In October each year, the RMC convenes to debate each application. The SARS review applications specifically in the area of social and applied research. Each Reviewer gives an application a score and the total score of each application is used as a ranking. More information on the scoring system follows.

d. Recommendation for Funding Each Year

The Chairman of the RMC recommends a set of applications and a funding request to the Executive Director of MSRA and Board of the MSRA. The final decision is based on a balance between meritorious applications and available funding.

MSRA Funding Process

1. Applications are received

The application must be received by the MSRA Research Co-ordinator by the closing date stipulated on the application form. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

The application is advised to contact the Research Co-ordinator for an Identification Number (ID). the ID must use this number on the front of their application. The application is to be submitted electronically to the MSRA Research Coordinator.

Additionally, the applicant is required to send one hardcopy of the application containing original signatures within one week of the closing date. When both copies are received, MSRA accepts the application.

Exception:

- **Incubator Grants** have no specific closing date. MSRA accepts applications throughout the year. Contact the MSRA Research Coordinator for more information.

2. Nomination of External Assessors by the RMC and SARS

A subset of salient data in each application sufficient to facilitate nomination of external assessor's is sent to each member of the RMC. Each RMC member will nominate 2 to 4 External Assessors. The nominations including those offered by the applicant are collated by the MSRA Research Office.

Exception:

- **Postgraduate Scholarships** are not sent to External Assessors.

- **Summer Vacation Scholarships** are not sent to External Assessors.

The final funding decision on scholarships may be moderated by the final year results, which are unavailable from the applicant at the time of application submission.

- **Incubator Grants** will usually be sent to an External Assessor. The RMC may communicate out of cycle and decide. A quorum of the RMC with the most aligned skill set debate the decision for funding the application.

3. Lead Review for each application

The RMC Chairman appoints a Lead Reviewer for each application. It is the Lead Reviewer's responsibility to read and critique the application in detail. During the RMC meeting the Lead Reviewer guides the discussion, summarises the comments from the External Assessors, along with their own assessment of the application.

Exception:

- **Incubator Grants** received outside of the grant round, the RMC Chairman is the Lead Reviewer.

4. Selection of External Assessors.

The RMC Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and the SARS Chairman meet to consider the recommendations and shortlist External Assessors. There are normally three confirmed External Assessors for each application. The External Assessor is invited to independently assess the application according to defined criteria. When the contacted External Assessor agrees to review the application, the full application and the Assessment Criteria Form is emailed.

5. The Assessment Criteria

A copy of the criteria used to assess applications:

As a reviewer we ask you to provide written comments and score ratings 1-7 according to the definitions below. The exception to this is section F where a simple rating only is required for those reviewers not resident in Australia. Please use this form as a template or use category headings and rating as outlined below.

This review will be passed back to the applicant anonymised.

If you wish to make private comments to the Research Management Council please use Section G.

Definition of Score Ratings to be used	
1 = poor	5 = very good (in top 25% internationally)
2 = marginal	6 = excellent (in top 10% internationally)
3 = fair	7 = outstanding (in top 5% internationally)
4 = good (in top 30% internationally)	

CRITERIA : A. SIGNIFICANCE.

Please use a scale of 1-7 commenting of your reasons for the rating. Other comments that would help the applicant are also welcomed.

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

CRITERIA : B. APPROACH

Please use a scale of 1-7 commenting of your reasons for the rating. Other comments that would help the applicant are also welcomed.

Please indicate strengths and weaknesses of the approach

- B.1 appropriateness and feasibility of the research method
- B.2 evidence of preliminary data
- B.3 comment on strengths and weaknesses of the approach

C. FEASIBILITY. Please use a scale of 1-7 commenting of your reasons for the rating. Other comments that would help the applicant are also welcomed. Please indicate strength and weaknesses regarding feasibility

- C.1 likelihood of completion of the project within the given time
- C.2 feasibility of research proceeding if funding was only partly granted

D. TRACK RECORD. Please use a scale of 1-7 for this section and comment on why you assigned that rating. Other comments that would help the applicant are also welcomed.

- D.1 comment on the recent research track record of the applicant(s) and productivity of the applicant(s)
- D.2 factors which may have influenced the quality of recent publications of applicant(s)

E. OVERALL RATING. Please use a scale of 1-7 for this section and comment on why you assigned that rating. Other comments that would help the applicant are also welcomed.

F. BUDGET Please use a scale of 1-7 commenting on whether the requested budget is reasonable. Please see note above for reviewers not resident in Australia.

G. CONFIDENTIAL COMMENTS TO RESEARCH MANAGEMENT COUNCIL.

Please complete if required. These comments are private and confidential and will not be passed back to the applicant but will be circulated to the Research Management Council as part of the overall decision making process.

6. Applicant Response Opportunity

When all external assessments are returned, the Assessors name and their score are removed before it is sent to the applicant for a response. In instances where the assessor wishes comments not to be made available to the applicant (very unusual) this is complied with and clearly demarcated to the RMC.

The applicant is invited to respond with additional information or comments as appropriate within seven business (7) days. This ensures that the applicant has an opportunity to provide clarification to the RMC to assist the assessment process and ensure fairness.

The applicant response is not sent back to the External Assessor for re-comment, but is provided to the RMC.

Exception:

The Postgraduate and Summer Vacation scholarships are not sent externally. Feedback from the RMC is provided to the applicant.

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

7. RMC review application

Each application, its external assessments and applicant response (if any), is assembled and circulated to all of RMC members ahead of the RMC meeting.

8. Research Management Council Meeting

RMC and SARS review and familiarise themselves with applications before the meeting.

The Lead Reviewer guides the debate on each application. The Lead Reviewer will also give the application a score.

An RMC member who has an association with the application is asked to temporarily withdraw from the meeting (by leaving the room) while the application is being discussed and can not participate in the voting for that application.

RMC members are asked to indicate if they intend to vote within 2 points either way of the Lead Reviewers score. They will then need to explain their reasoning to the RMC. Each RMC member will then vote (with anonymity) on the application. The results are numerated and passed to the RMC Chairman.

The RMC and SARS are initially held independently. The SARS Chairman re-joins the RMC once the SARS has ranked its applications. The SARS Chairman will then update the whole RMC on the outcome and summarise the debate and SARS ranking.

9. Selection of Applications for Funding

The RMC Chairman will review the comments, and scores for all applications. The applications with the higher scores are more likely to receive funding. The RMC Chairman will prepare a list of applications and

the appropriate levels of funding for the MSRA Executive Chairman to review. The MSRA Executive Chairman will approve the budget based on the funding available.

The MSRA Executive Chairman and RMC Chairman will submit the final set of applications and requested funding for approval by the MSRA Board of Directors.

10. Communicating the Outcome

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

In previous years the External Assessor's review, without names and ranking, has been returned to the applicant. This will not be the case in 2009 as the applicant will have already seen the external reviews.

External Assessors will also be apprised of the result.

Exception:

- **Incubator Grants.** External Assessor's review will not be shared with the applicant.

- **Postgraduate and Summer Vacation Scholarships** are not sent to an External Assessor. Therefore this step does not apply.

11. 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 MSRA Funding. They are asked to sign an Acceptance, which acknowledges their award and stipulates timings for receipt of progress reports and timing to invoice MSRA for funding.

12. All Clearances must be received before funding will be released.

Before any funds are disbursed all required clearances as outlined in the application form must be satisfied.

13. Reporting

The applicant is required to report on their progress every six months.