MS | SP Canada

endMS Personnel Awards Review
Guidelines and Criteria

Revised October 2025

Review Guidelines and Criteria: endMS Personnel Awards

On behalf of MS Canada (MSC), we would like to thank you for agreeing to serve as a reviewer on the endMS Personnel Awards Review Committee. The success of the independent review process is made possible by dedicated people like you who generously give their time and expertise. Your efforts are greatly appreciated by MSC and our stakeholders.

1. COMPETITION OVERVIEW

MSC supports the training of doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows in research relevant to multiple sclerosis (MS).

endMS Doctoral Studentship Award: The Doctoral Studentship Awards serve to attract and retain young trainees early in their academic research career and provides the opportunity to gain research experience in the field of MS. The proposed Doctoral Studentship program should emphasize opportunities for research training and broadening scientific understanding of MS for the applicant.
- Maximum annual value of the Doctoral Awards: $22,000
- Maximum annual value of the Doctoral Awards (for MD holders): $50,500

endMS Postdoctoral Fellowship Award: The Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards are awarded to young researchers who have completed a graduate degree and open to those would have also completed a medical degree in order to attract and retain them in the field of MS. The proposed Postdoctoral program should emphasize opportunities to support new research training and development of skills to pursue an academic career.
- Maximum annual value of the Postdoctoral Awards: $41,000
- Maximum annual value of the Postdoctoral Awards (for MD holders): $50,500

2. COMMITTEE ROLES

The independent review committee will include the following roles:

- **Chair** will oversee the review process and act as a facilitator to establish a positive, constructive, fair-minded environment in which all applications under review are evaluated. The Chair is responsible for providing a report to the Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) outlining the outcomes of the review meeting.

- **Scientific Reviewers** are non-conflicted researchers recruited with specific technical expertise to provide a critical assessment of the scientific merit, feasibility, novelty, and the impact of each application assigned. Scientific Reviewers will participate in the review meeting to discuss and provide a quantitative assessment (score) for all non-conflicted applications.

- **Community Representatives** are people affected by MS who are invited to participate in the review and will evaluate, through a non-scientific lens, the comprehensibility of the non-scientific documents (Plain Language Summary and Applicant Training Overview sections of the application) and the relevance of the research to the MS community, and potential of the research to translate into meaningful impacts that will improve quality of life for people living with MS. Community Representatives will provide a qualitative assessment of impact and relevance of non-conflicted applications.

3. THE REVIEW PROCESS

The principles that guide the independent review at MSC are confidentiality and fairness.

The evaluation of applications for funding has two steps: (1) an **in-depth review** by at least two Scientific Reviewers (primary, secondary and possibly external, if required) and one Community Representative to produce written evaluations, which is done at home and (2) an in-person or virtual **review committee meeting** to discuss and assess the applications, from which MSC generates a rank-order priority list to inform funding recommendations.

Review of the applications will be based on the review criteria outlined below, and will be submitted by the committee via MSC's online grants platform ProposalCentral. The endMS Personnel Awards consist of a review of: (1) **New Applications** for funding and (2) **Progress Reports/Renewal** (trainees currently funded by MSC who are eligible for renewal of their award within the limits of their term).

After considering the review criteria, Scientific Reviewers will prepare written comments for each application to which they have been assigned as a primary or secondary reviewer and provide an overall preliminary score using the scoring chart below (see **Section 4**). This score may be used by the Chair of the review committee for streamlining purposes, if needed.

Community Representatives are asked to review relevant sections of all assigned applications (i.e. Plain Language Summary, Applicant Training Overview sections) and will provide written comments from a non-scientific perspective. The Community Representative will assess the sections based on comprehensibility, impact and relevance to MS, and a level of enthusiasm or overall score will be provided based on the specific review criteria provided (see **Section 4**).

The committee will convene for a **review meeting** which will go as follows:
- The Community Representative will state their enthusiasm level or overall score and discuss their assessment, highlighting any strengths or weakness of the non-scientific documents and describing their enthusiasm for the application.
- The primary and secondary Scientific Reviewers will state their overall preliminary scores.
- The primary Scientific Reviewer will present their assessment, describing the strengths and weaknesses of the application as a whole.

- The secondary Scientific Reviewer will follow, concentrating on points of agreement or disagreement and elaborating on points not addressed by the primary reviewer.

The Chair will then lead the committee into an overall discussion of the application. The Chair will seek a consensus score from the primary and secondary Scientific Reviewers. The Chair will re-engage the Community Representative and confirm if their enthusiasm level has changed as a result of the discussion. Non-conflicted scientific committee members, excluding the Chair and Scientific Officer, will cast an individual confidential score within ±0.5 of the consensus rating. The final score assigned to the proposal will be the average of these confidential scores. At the same time, the Community Representatives will also be requested to provide a final overall level of enthusiasm. A rank-order priority list will be generated of all applications, which will be used to make funding recommendations. The committee's recommendation will be brought forward to the Medical Advisory Committee for input and advice. MS Canada's Board of Directors makes all final funding decisions.

4. REVIEW CRITERIA

MSC will transmit the detailed comments from each reviewer to the applicants whose proposals they reviewed. Please ensure your review is clear, concise, constructive and uses objective and non-inflammatory language that includes a rationale for your score. Constructive advice from the Scientific Reviewers will allow the applicant to improve the quality and efficiency of the proposed research, while feedback from the Community Representatives will allow the applicant to potentially improve the quality of the non-scientific documents and better articulate the impact and relevance of the proposed research. In your written comments, please do not identify yourself to ensure the confidentiality of the research process.

This section is divided into two subsections: a) **New Applications** and b) **Progress Reports/Renewal** for both Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives. Please follow the instructions accordingly.

NEW APPLICATIONS

Scientific Reviewer

In your written assessment, provide a brief synopsis of the funding application, an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and comment on issues that should be flagged. Use the following three criteria with questions and weighting to guide your written assessment and overall preliminary score.

A. Candidate's Academic Track-record and Achievements (25%):

Reflect on the applicant's academic track-record and research achievements relative to their current stage of training by examining:
- Transcripts
- Candidate CV outlining honors, awards, and academic distinctions, publications, research experience and potential, including quality of training to-date
- Letters of Recommendation

NOTE: When reviewing international transcripts (from academic institutions outside of Canada), use the verified worldwide grade converter here. Selecting the Country of Interest (e.g., France) will allow you to view the U.S./Canadian Grade Equivalent.

B. Research Environment (25%):

Consider the following aspects of the proposed training environment:
- The training environment will provide high quality supervision, mentorship and opportunities for collaboration and educational opportunities
- Academic supervisor has strong qualifications and experience in conducting a research program, solid publication record, and track-record of productivity and impact
- Adequate and appropriate research facilities and resources in support of the candidate's research and training. The academic supervisor may indicate in the Letter of Recommendation if the applicant's proposed research project is supported in full or in part by an existing MSC funded grant, however MSC funding is NOT mandatory or required for success in the competition. All resources and supports should be considered.

C. Proposed Research Project (50%):

Evaluate the scientific merit of the research project in terms of:
- Relevance and impact of proposed research to the MS field
- Sound and logical rationale for proposed research project
- Feasibility and appropriateness of research for current stage of training
- Appropriate study design and methodology

Scientific Reviewers must consider all three above criteria and weighting in their evaluation while keeping in mind the training level of the applicant. Scientific Reviewers must provide a descriptive rating (i.e. Outstanding, Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor) for each of the three criteria in addition to a rationale.

Overall Preliminary Score:

Assigned Scientific Reviewers must provide an overall score using the scoring chart below. These preliminary scores will not be used for ranking purposes, but provide MSC and the review committee Chair with an indication of the quality of the proposals submitted. They also serve as benchmarks for determining which applications will be streamlined. Any application that receives a score below 3.5 from both the primary and secondary reviewers, or a suitable cut-off score as determined by MSC in discussion with the review committee Chair, will be considered for streamlining and may not be discussed at the meeting. We strongly encourage you to use the **full range of the scale** to focus discussion on priority applications with the most potential for funding. All review committee members will be asked to provide a final score on the day of the review meeting based on a consensus score.

SCIENTIFIC SCORING CHART

Descriptor	Range	Outcome
Outstanding	4.5 – 4.9	**May Be Funded**
Excellent	4.0 – 4.4	
Good	3.5 – 3.9	
Fair	3.0 – 3.4	**Not Fundable**
Poor	0.0 – 2.9	

Community Representative Reviewer

Read the following non-scientific sections of each application that has been assigned to you:
- **Plain Language Summary**
- **Applicant Training Overview**

Consider the following questions in your written assessment related to relevance and impact of the research and motivation of the trainee:

A. Relevance of the proposed research project to MS:

- Does the research project address an important problem or critical barrier to people living with MS?

- Does the research project address a critical gap in knowledge or barriers to progress in the field of MS?
- Does the application bring hope and excitement to you as a person who is affected by MS, and will the outcomes of the research resound with the MS community in a positive way?
- If successful, will this research change concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, and/or preventative interventions that will enhance progress in the MS field?

B. Potential impact of the research on people affected by MS and on advancements in the MS field:

- Does the application have the potential to make a transformative, lasting and/or important influence on the health and quality of life and/or quality of clinical care among people affected by MS and/or the field of MS research?
- Upon reading the non-scientific documents, is it clear that the application will have an impact on the lives of those affected by MS? If not, how could the impact of this study be improved?

C. Motivation and enthusiasm of the applicant for conducting the proposed research and justification of additional skills and experience that will be gained through the project:

- Has the applicant clearly explained his/her motivation to pursue research training in the field of MS and convey enthusiasm for conducting the research project?
- Does the applicant appear confident that they are bringing important skills and experience to the research project, and do they hope to gain new skills and experience over the course of their training?

D. Language and Accessibility:

Reflect on the application's language and accessibility by considering the following questions:
- Does the applicant clearly explain background information and key concepts that form the foundation for the study? If not, what is missing or what can be improved?
- Does the applicant use clear, appropriate language to explain how the findings of their project will benefit people affected by MS?
- What feedback can you provide the applicant or questions that you have based on your understanding that would assist them in making the non-scientific documents more accessible?

Overall Enthusiasm Level for Community Representatives:

Please provide an enthusiasm level based on the impact and relevance of the proposed research study for people affected by MS using the above criteria and chart below. You will be asked to provide a final enthusiasm level the day of the review meeting following discussion of the application by the committee.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE OVERALL ENTHUSIASM LEVEL CHART

Overall Enthusiasm Level	Definition
High (3)	Highly relevant with potential to impact health and quality of life for people affected by MS; there is high enthusiasm for this project.
High/Medium (2.5)	High to moderate relevance with potential to impact health and quality of life for people affected by MS; there is high to medium enthusiasm for this project.
Medium (2)	Moderate relevance with potential to impact health and quality of life for people affected by MS; there is medium enthusiasm for this project.
Medium/Low (1.5)	Moderate to low relevance with unclear potential for impact on health and quality of life for people affected by MS; there is medium to low enthusiasm for this project.
Low (1)	Low relevance and impact on health and quality of life for people affected by MS. Based on the plain language summary, the proposed research is not addressing a critical need or challenge relevant to MS; there is low enthusiasm for this project.

Additionally, please provide a rating for the language and accessibility of the non-scientific sections and any feedback that will allow applicants to improve these sections and better articulate the impact and relevance of the proposed research:

- High – No revisions needed. The plain language summary uses appropriate language and is accessible to a non-technical reader.
- Medium – Minor revisions are required to improve the plain language summary.
- Low – Requires major revisions to the plain language summary.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Scientific Reviewer

The review of Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowship Progress Reports should be primarily based on research progress made during the previous academic year or period. Reviewers will take into account time since the award was granted and other factors that might have affected research progress (e.g. leaves of absence, pandemic-related interruptions and delays). It is suggested that unless there are serious flaws or setbacks in the research program and the trainee has failed to demonstrate progress in their project or plan for progress, the trainee will be eligible for renewal of funding for an additional year.

The reviewer should provide a brief written commentary on the trainee's research progress. If any changes were made to the original research aims, comment on whether these aims were sufficiently justified and had a significant impact on the research project. If the progress of research and/or plan for progress is not deemed to be acceptable, please provide suggestions for bringing the project back on track. This could include potential goals the trainee could strive for in the next year (e.g. focusing on and refining a particular aspect of the study, revising their approach to data analysis and interpretation, etc.).

Each progress report will be evaluated by two Scientific Reviewers and a Community Representative. No scoring will be provided for Progress Report reviews. Instead, reviewers will either provide a recommendation to fund an additional year, or not provide a recommendation due to significant issues/concerns with rationale for termination of funding.

Community Representative

The review of Doctoral Studentship and Postdoctoral Fellowship Progress Reports should be primarily based on the **Plain Language Summary and Applicant Training Overview** sections.

The Community Representative should provide a brief assessment of the relevance and impact of any findings emerging from the study. Does the trainee articulate how these findings are relevant to the MS community and have a potential impact? Note that some trainees are in the early stages of their projects, so there may not be an immediate impact; nonetheless, you can use this opportunity to discuss your excitement for the potential outcomes once the project is complete. Does the applicant use clear, appropriate language to explain how the findings of their project will benefit people affected by MS? If not, how can the language be improved?

5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives shall abide at all times by MSC's *Conflict of Interest Guidelines* and *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy.*

Prior to being given access to the applications for review, Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives will be required to review, sign and submit MSC's Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Policy form. All reviewers will also declare conflicts of interest with applications. In instances where a Scientific Reviewer or Community Representative has declared a conflict of interest, they will not be allowed to review or comment on the application(s), and will be excused from participating in the review discussion or scoring of the application(s).

6. UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING

The Chair and Scientific Reviewers **are required** to complete the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) unconscious bias training module. This training module explains the various forms of unconscious bias and provides useful strategies to detect and mitigate unconscious bias in peer-review activities.

7. REVIEWING APPLICATIONS IN PROPOSALCENTRAL

The review process in ProposalCentral is comprised of two steps: (1) Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives will initially conduct a brief review of all submitted applications (New Applications and Progress Reports) and declare potential conflicts of interest. Additionally, Scientific Reviewers are required to indicate their level of expertise based on the brief description of the proposed project (i.e. High, Medium, or Low Expertise). (2) Based on this initial input, Scientific Reviewers and Community Representatives will be assigned to specific applications. The review committee will be asked to provide in-depth review and written evaluations of their assigned applications in ProposalCentral.

8. PROPOSALCENTRAL INSTRUCTIONS GUIDE

Scientific Reviewer:

Please refer to the following steps below, or watch the instructions video.

1. Following submission of conflicts of interest and expertise level, you will be assigned specific applications to evaluate. You can access the applications in the **'Assigned Applications'** section.

2. The **'App Details'** column will display the following links:
    *   **App details** – will display each section of the online application
    *   **All Attachments** – will include a complete PDF copy of the online application, including all upload attachments. We recommend Scientific Reviewers to primarily use this PDF copy when conducting the in-depth review.

3. The **'Submit Critiques'** column will display your role as a reviewer (Primary or Secondary Reviewer) and the status of your evaluation for each application. To access the evaluation template, click on the **'Your Critique'** link. Note that new and renewal applications will contain different evaluation criteria as specified in the *endMS Personnel Awards Review Guidelines and Criteria* document.

- **For New Applications (referred to as 'Personnel' under 'Program Abbreviation' column):** Please complete a written assessment based on the following three criteria – Candidate's Academic Track-Record and Achievements, Proposed Research Project, and Research Environment. Scientific Reviewers must provide a descriptive rating (i.e. Outstanding, Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor) for each of the three criteria in addition to rationale. We also ask that you provide a brief summary of your overall assessment and a preliminary overall score.

- **For Progress Reports of Renewal Applications (referred to as 'Personnel Ren' under 'Program Abbreviation' column):** Please provide a written commentary on the trainee's research progress during the previous academic year (or period) and indicate whether the trainee should be recommended for an additional year of funding. Reviewers can also indicate if there are significant issues/concerns to be discussed by the review committee.

4. Once all required information has been completed, you may either click the **'Submit'** button at the top of the evaluation page OR click on the **'Submit Critique'** button in the application homepage. Once submitted, all comments are considered final and cannot be altered.

Community Representatives:
Please refer to the following steps below, or watch the [instructions video](#).

1. Following submission of potential conflicts of interest, you will be assigned specific applications to evaluate. You can access the applications in the **'Assigned Applications'** section.

2. In the **'App Details'** column, please click on the **'App Details'** link to access the online application and view the following non-scientific sections:
   - **Applicant Training Overview tab:** Applicant Training Overview section
   - **Upload Attachments tab:** Plain language summary upload

3. The **'Submit Critiques'** column will display your role as a reviewer (Community Representative) and the status of your evaluation for each application. To access the evaluation template, click on the **'Your Critique'** link. Note that new and renewal applications will contain different evaluation criteria as specified in the *endMS Personnel Awards Review Guidelines and Criteria* document.

- **For New Applications (referred to as 'Personnel' under 'Program Abbreviation' column):** Complete a written assessment reflecting on the project's relevance and potential impact to MS and/or the field of MS research, comment on the applicant's motivation and enthusiasm to pursue research training in the MS field, and provide a rating of the application's language and accessibility. Additionally, provide a preliminary overall score or enthusiasm level based on your overall impression of the application's impact and relevance to people affected by MS.

- **For Progress Reports of Renewal Applications (referred to as 'Personnel Ren' under 'Program Abbreviation' column):** Please provide a brief summary of your overall assessment of the relevance and impact of any findings emerging from the trainee's research project to date.

4. Once all required information has been completed, you may either click the **'Submit'** button at the top of the evaluation page OR click on the **'Submit Critique'** button in the application homepage. Once submitted, all comments are considered final and cannot be altered.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about how to assess the applications, please contact us at msresearchgrants@mscanada.ca.

For questions related to site technical support, contact ProposalCentral customer support at: 800-875-2562 (Toll-free U.S. and Canada) or by email at pcsupport@altum.com. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday between 9:00 to 16:00 ET.