Frequently Asked Questions: Request for Applications (RFA) on Detecting Multiple Sclerosis Before the Onset of Neurological Deficits – March 2021

Q. Who is eligible to apply for this RFA?
A. Applicants should possess an M.D., Ph.D., or equivalent and be considered eligible by their institution to apply for grant support. Postdoctoral fellows, residents and other trainees are not eligible to apply. Please see the RFA instructions or Society Policies and Procedures for exceptions for project managers at for-profit institutions.

Q. Are postdoctoral fellows eligible to apply for the RFA?
A. No.

Q. Is this open to researchers outside of the U.S.A.?
A. Yes.

Q. When will granted awards begin?
A. We expect awards will start October 1, 2021.

Q. What is the budget?
A. A maximum of $300,000 USD (direct cost) over 2 years.

Q. What is the indirect cost rate?
A. 10% - note that indirect costs are only available for awards made to U.S. institutions.

Q. Can I use the award to start a new MS cohort or registry?
A. No – given the scope and timeframe of the award, applicants are expected to utilize existing cohorts or registries if needed to conduct their proposed studies.

Q. Can applicants propose studies in animals for this RFA?
A. Animal studies are allowed, however, the applicant will be expected to make a compelling case for the translational value of the approach (i.e. to advance early detection of MS). Of course, any laboratory animal studies would be required to follow strict animal care guidelines as outlined in our Policies and Procedures manual.

Q. How many will be awarded?
A. The number of awards for funding consideration depends on committee review, plus availability of funds. Based on past experience, we anticipate awarding the top-ranked 15% to 20% of applications received.

Q. Is there a recording of the March 17 Town Hall Webinar?
A. Yes – follow this link https://youtu.be/eUtjnSeiOL8

Q. Will clinical studies be given priority over work with animal models?
A. There will not be any specific priority given to an application just because it is a clinical study.
Q. Are co-applicants allowed?
A. Yes. However, we require one individual to be the principal investigator. Other investigators can be listed as co-investigators or collaborators. Co-investigators at other institutions will need to be listed as subcontractors.

Q. Are foreign collaborations possible?
A. Yes. However, foreign collaborators will need to be subcontractors. The PI’s institution will be responsible for managing subcontractor payments.

Q. How does the RFA address underserved populations?
A. This RFA calls out the need to understand any racial or ethnic differences in the prodromal or preclinical periods. The Society offers these resources for increasing diversity in MS research.

Q. Is the NIH-style biosketch required?
A. Yes, and a template is available in the online application.

Q. Does the scope of this RFA include risk factors related to the transition from relapsing to progressive MS?
A. No, this focuses on the period before any type of MS has been diagnosed.

Q. Who should I contact for questions about suitability of my research to the RFA?
A. Initial communication should be with Walt Kostich, Director Commercial Research (walter.kostich@nmss.org) or Mark Allegretta, VP Research (mark.allegretta@nmss.org).

Q. How will the Community Review be incorporated into the full review process.
A. This group will individually rate and then collectively tier – according to degree of relevance to people affected by MS – all proposals deemed to be of scientific merit through the scientific peer review process. Community reviewers will also help us to identify participant-centered concerns about proposed research, such as unduly burdensome protocols or outcomes of low interest to people affected by MS. These insights, along with the outcomes from the peer review, will be taken together to inform the final funding recommendations.

NOTE: The Community Review Committee will have access to the entire application, but will rely heavily on the Plain Language Description of proposals. Applicants are advised to utilize the many resources the Society had provided on how to write a successful Plain Language Description found here.

Q. With the Community Review, does applied research have an advantage over basic science?
A. No. Members of the Community Review Committee will receive training focused on broad scientific concepts, as well as how these concepts relate to a community perspective, prior to the evaluation of applications. In addition, basic science and clinical studies will be evaluated and tiered separately.

Q. Will applications from commercial entities be evaluated differently from those from academic institutions?
A. Yes. Commercial applications that address the aims of the RFA are encouraged. Proposals from commercial entities will be expected to address questions related to commercial strategy and intellectual property, in alignment with the Society’s commercial funding program, Fast Forward.

Q. What is the financial relationship between the Society and commercial entities that they fund?
A. Because the Society considers a commercial project's likelihood for future development as a component of the review, awards to commercial entities are considered investments rather than grants. For more information, contact Mark Allegretta, VP Research (mark.allegretta@nmss.org).

Q. Is this Request for Applications the only funding opportunity being offered by the National MS Society in 2021?
A. No. As part of our commitment to support the research workforce, we plan to offer the annual opportunity for fellowships and early career funding opportunities in summer 2021.

However, other than the fellowships, early career opportunities, and the Request for Applications on the early detection of MS, we are not planning to offer new investigator-initiated Research grant or Pilot grant funding opportunities this year.

We anticipate offering new research support opportunities in the future that advance our Pathways to Cures Roadmap, and we expect that these opportunities will align with many of the themes that MS researchers are actively pursuing. Once our budget and plan for FY22 is complete, by fall 2021 we will have a clearer picture of what opportunities to advance research we can offer next fiscal year, and we will share these new opportunities as they become available.

Q. Is there an opportunity for follow-on funding after the award is complete?
A. There is currently no specific program for follow-on funding. However, the Society is interested in taking advantage of opportunities and may consider providing additional funding of projects with outstanding preliminary results.

Updated 3/24/21