



2025 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Advancing Women's Health Research in Multiple Sclerosis

The mission of the National MS Society is to cure multiple sclerosis (MS) while empowering individuals affected by MS to live their best lives. To achieve this mission, the Society helped support the International Advisory Committee on Clinical Trials in MS recently to highlight [priority research areas](#) related to women's health in MS that remain largely unexplored. The purpose of this request for applications (RFA) is to support the generation of preliminary data, perform secondary analysis of existing data, initiate feasibility studies, develop research methodology, or create tools to position the recipient to successfully apply for future longer-term funding of novel and impactful research that addresses significant knowledge gaps in women's health issues for people with MS.

Background: MS affects women approximately two to three times more than men. Additionally, women living with MS face a number of unique challenges balancing the management of their disease with traditional women's health considerations such as pregnancy and menopause. Despite an increase in research related to women's health in MS, critical deficiencies remain, particularly in areas beyond pregnancy, which has historically dominated the research landscape. The International Advisory Committee on Clinical Trials in MS identified priority research areas regarding women's health in MS that are understudied, including menopause, sexual dysfunction, gynecologic cancer, and the influence of hormonal changes in the context of multiple sclerosis. Early feasibility studies and preliminary data are needed to better understand these topics and research approaches before moving forward with larger-scale trials.

Purpose of this RFA: This initiative aims to address the knowledge gaps identified above by specifically supporting developmental projects with an eye towards leveraging results for future research grant applications. This will be accomplished through a **two-year** research grant style mechanism, with a **\$200,000 maximum budget**. Preliminary data is not explicitly required for this initiative. Instead, this funding can be used to generate preliminary data, build tools and demonstrate the feasibility of new approaches, or perform small, self-contained research projects to address these knowledge gaps. Project proposals can also leverage existing datasets to study aspects of women's health in MS. Ultimately, projects are expected to advance early-stage research in these areas, and ensure that future research aligns closely with the needs and priorities of women living with MS.

Areas of specific interest may include but are not limited to:

- Impact of menopause on MS progression and symptom management
- Potential use of innovative hormonal therapies

- Role of cancer screening in women with MS
- Unique health challenges faced by women with progressive MS
- Research questions highlighted in the [2024 Frontiers Neurology priority setting paper](#)

Areas NOT supported by this RFA include:

- Studies of sex differences in rates of disease
- Studies of health disparities in women unrelated to MS
- Studies of MS mechanisms, treatments, or symptoms not linked to women's health issues.
- Incremental extensions of ongoing research projects without new methods or approaches

Submission guidelines and process:

Qualified Institutions: This RFA is open to investigators at not-for-profit research institutions. Collaborations with commercial organizations are allowed.

Funding: Up to **\$200,000 USD direct costs** for up to 2 years (maximum of \$100,000 USD annually) of support will be provided and must be justified based on the scientific work plan.

Preliminary Data: Preliminary data is not explicitly required for this funding mechanism. Data may be included if available.

Important dates:

- Final date for acceptance of pre-applications: **August 20, 2025 | 5:00 PM ET**
- Final date for receipt of full applications: **August 27, 2025 | 5:00 PM ET**

A brief pre-application is required to determine if a proposal is aligned with the objectives of the RFA. Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Society scientific staff about their potential research project during concept development prior to submission (see contact information below). Applications are to be submitted through the National MS Society's online grant submission portal - MSGrants. All proposal information, including instructions for accessing MSGrants, can be found online. Upon review of pre-applications by staff, applicants proposing work aligned with the RFA objectives will be invited to submit full applications.

The reviewers will evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:

- **Rationale:** Are the hypotheses sufficiently justified? Would testing the hypotheses lead to a significant advance in knowledge relevant to Pathways to Cures?
- **Relevance:** How well does the proposal align with the objective of the RFA?
- **Research Team:** Are the lead investigator and collaborators qualified and well-suited to carry out the proposed research?
- **Scientific Plan:** Is the research plan sufficiently developed and appropriate to the project? Are the specific aims clearly defined? Has the investigator considered alternative outcomes and the impact on the plan? Is the analysis plan and statistical methodology appropriate for the project?

- **Environment:** Is the research environment appropriate and likely to contribute to the success of the proposed research? Does the environment foster collaborative arrangements that may support the proposed research activities? Is the research environment compliant with appropriate rules and regulations for study conduct?
- **Budget:** Is the proposed budget reasonable and justified relative to the proposed research?
- **Plain Language Description:** Applicants must provide a plain language description of the proposed project, responding to the following questions: What is the question and hypothesis(es) related to MS that you are addressing with this project? What are the aims of this project, and how do they address the question related to MS? Describe your experimental approach. For studies that include people, please describe what is involved for participants in this study. How might the results of this study potentially make life better for people affected by MS? The Plain Language Description will be used by volunteer community reviewers who will provide their perspective based on their lived experience with MS and that feedback will be used to as part of prioritizing scientifically meritorious applications for funding consideration.

Applicants can also contact Society scientific staff for clarification of any issues or questions.

Society Staff Contacts:

James Quinn, PhD

Director, Biomedical Research

james.quinn@nmss.org