

The Expert Review Network (TERN)



Terms of Reference

Last updated in 2020

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of The Expert Review Network (TERN) is to be our expert, trusted independent source of scientific and lay review. And to make funding recommendations in the context of our Research Strategy for all response-mode research awards.

2. Background

- 2.1. The [Board of Trustees](#) help decide on our strategy and monitor our performance. With advice from our [Research Strategy Committee](#), the Board agrees our Research Strategy and is responsible for all research funding decisions.
- 2.2. TERN was set up in 2020 for our open, response-mode grant funding processes. It's made up of people affected by MS and people with scientific and other expertise across MS research.
- 2.3. We are committed to a modern, proportionate approach to application review. As such, we use TERN to help us achieve our vision of a world free from the effects of MS by:
- 2.4. Having a pool of trusted, expert reviewers who are familiar with our Research Strategy. This ensures we fund the research with the greatest potential to benefit people affected by MS
- 2.5. Reducing the burden of application review on reviewers and MS Society staff
- 2.6. Providing a forum for MS researchers and people affected by MS to come together to recommend the highest quality and most relevant research for funding.

3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1. TERN members will:
 - 3.1.1. Provide review and recommendations to us on whether individual research grant applications merit our funding. TERN members are expected to:
 - review individual research applications
 - attend meetings, teleconferences and/or interviews as reasonably requested. And take an active role in discussions on each application.
 - provide written comments and feedback if required.
 - This ensures that recommendations and feedback reflect the perspectives of researchers and people affected by MS.
 - 3.1.2. Recommend, where appropriate, alternative sources of funding for research projects which aren't directly linked to MS. And may still be eligible for funding by other health charities or grant-making organisations.
 - 3.1.3. Provide advice to us on funding procedures, types of award and refinement of our research funding processes.
 - 3.1.4. Ensure their recommendations have potential for direct benefit to people affected by MS and make effective use of charitable funds.

- 3.1.5. Work within our policies, plans and budgets at all times. And observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity. All TERN members must work in accordance with our Code of Conduct (see Annex 1).
- 3.2. We will operate with a “no surprises” approach, and keep TERN informed of all funding decisions made.
- 3.3. TERN members have a duty to independently judge applications at every stage of review and on all issues considered at virtual and face-to-face panel meetings.
- 3.4. On appointment, TERN members must comply with these Terms of Reference at all times. And act in good faith and in our best interests.
- 3.5. Unless otherwise stated, TERN members are appointed as individuals to fulfil the duties of TERN. They aren’t representatives of their profession, employer or interest group. They have a duty to act in our interests. Where members declare an organisation’s views rather than their personal view, they should make that clear at the time.
- 3.6. The role of TERN members isn’t limited by the expertise or perspective they were asked to bring to the application review process. Members are free to question and comment on the information provided or the views expressed by other members, even if these don’t relate to their own area of expertise.
- 3.7. All members of TERN should:
- 3.8. examine and challenge, if necessary, the assumptions on which scientific advice is formulated and ask for explanations of any scientific terms and concepts which are not clear
- 3.9. ensure that the panels have the opportunity to consider contrary scientific views, and where appropriate, the concerns and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken
- 3.10. share in the general responsibility to consider the wider relevance of their decisions to the field of MS research

4. TERN involvement in research award application review

- 4.1. Dates for TERN activity will be set as far in advance as possible, in consultation with the Chair(s). This includes the periods for reviewing grant applications or attending meetings, videoconferences or interviews.
- 4.2. Requests for review by TERN members will only be made where an application received falls within their area of expertise. And the member is available and free from any conflicts of interest. No TERN member will be overburdened with requests to review.
- 4.3. Application documents will be made available to allocated TERN members using [our online grants management system Symplectic Grant Tracker](#). Full instructions will be given for access. Paper copies will only be provided with satisfactory justification.
- 4.4. TERN members should provide independent electronic review and scoring on allocated applications within a pre-defined time period.
- 4.5. Where shortlisting of reviewed applications is appropriate, we’ll do this with the Chair(s) based on the mean TERN member review score.
- 4.6. Shortlisted applications are taken forward to a review panel meeting or interview (if appropriate) to determine recommendations for funding. TERN members who originally reviewed the shortlisted applications may be specifically invited to join the review panel meeting.
- 4.7. All relevant documentation for meetings, videoconferences and interviews will be provided in advance. This includes the agenda, all application documents along with written review comments, and other relevant documentation.

- 4.8. Recommendations for funding will be based on the mean score for each application, which has been submitted anonymously from attending TERN members. The Chair will have the casting vote in the event of a tie.
- 4.9. All funding recommendations, conditions of funding and feedback to applicants will be agreed at the panel meeting. Where necessary we'll ask for clarification of points or consideration of applicant responses from attendees following the panel meeting to aid funding recommendations. The Chair will retain responsibility for final funding recommendations.
- 4.10. In exceptional circumstances, TERN members will be asked to review progress or change requests for active research projects (such as costed extensions) outside of the advertised review timings.
- 4.11. From time to time, we may also convene separate review panels to review ad-hoc, large or strategically important research applications. Or in circumstances where the majority of TERN members have conflicts of interest.

5. Communicating funding decisions

- 5.1. Only the CEO, or MS Society staff authorised to act on their behalf, may communicate funding recommendations and decisions.
- 5.2. We'll keep contributions of individual TERN members confidential when reporting funding outcomes. This maintains the convention that any decision is the collective responsibility of each entire panel, in conjunction with safeguarding the reviewer anonymity.
- 5.3. Members of TERN shouldn't share information on how specific funding recommendations or decisions were made with any applicants.
- 5.4. For transparency, the final funding decisions and awards made from each funding round will be made available to all members of TERN.

6. TERN member recruitment, profile and term

6.1. Recruitment of TERN Members

- 6.1.1. We are responsible for the recruitment of TERN members.
- 6.1.2. Open calls for membership will be advertised on our website and any other appropriate communications platform. For example among our Research Network for lay members of TERN.
- 6.1.3. Where we find gaps in specific scientific skill sets or there are significant numbers of members with conflicts of interest, we may specifically recruit relevant individuals.

6.2. Profile of scientific TERN Members

- 6.2.1. TERN Members are expected to fulfil the following criteria:
 - Ongoing commitment to our aims and values.
 - Willingness to devote the necessary time and effort.
 - Extensive research experience either in clinical practice (including the allied health professions), or in a university where they have gained an in-depth knowledge in their specific research field.
 - At least a five-year publication record that can demonstrate an impact in their field of research.
 - Ideally, prior experience in reviewing funding applications and research manuscripts which have been submitted for publication.

- Success in obtaining and running effective research grants/awards.

6.3. Profile of Lay Members of TERN

- 6.3.1. Lay people who are experts by experience of living with MS will assess all applications. This ensures research funding is relevant to their needs and they remain at the forefront of our funding decisions.
- 6.3.2. Qualities, skills and experience of Lay Members of TERN may include:
- Willingness to devote the necessary time and effort.
 - An understanding of MS with appreciation of the day-to-day challenges of living with the condition.
 - Commitment to our aims and values.
 - Confidence in public speaking, with the ability to represent their views in balanced and impartial manner.
 - Experience of patient and public involvement (PPI) in research.

6.4. Term Length of TERN Membership

- 6.4.1. Individuals are invited to be members of TERN for a term of three years. This can be extended for up to three years upon agreement between us, the Chair(s) and the individual concerned. This ensures a rolling turn-over of TERN members.
- 6.4.2. TERN members should step down after two consecutive terms. They can apply for membership to TERN again three years after stepping down.
- 6.4.3. Individuals who fail to perform the duties required of TERN members to the expected standards will be removed from TERN. These decisions will be made by the Chair(s) and the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs.

7. TERN Chair(s) Recruitment, Profile and Responsibilities and Term

7.1. Recruitment of Chair(s)

- 7.1.1. Up to three separate TERN Chairs will oversee funding types, with one Chair per award type.
- 7.1.2. When a Chair position becomes vacant, we'll invite applications from suitable candidates. Applications will be assessed by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs, or an alternative deemed appropriate by the above.
- 7.1.3. The Chair(s) can't apply to us for research funding as a Lead Applicant during their term of office.
- 7.1.4. Vice Chair(s) are appointed by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs and the Chair to take over if the Chair is unavailable or has a conflict of interest with an application. They are eligible to apply for our funding, either as a lead or co-applicant. If a Chair can't attend the Review Panel meeting and the Vice Chair is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant under review, we will appoint an interim Chair.

7.2. Profile of TERN Chair(s)

- 7.2.1. The Chair(s) are expected to fulfil the following criteria:
- Commitment to understanding our organisational and research strategies and helping us deliver on them.
 - Research experience either in clinical practice (including allied health professionals) or in a university.

- At least a seven-year publication record.
- Success in obtaining research grants/awards.
- Experience of chairing groups or demonstrable chairing skills.
- Broad experience of peer review and the work of research funding panels.
- Good leadership, communication and interpersonal skills.
- Willingness and availability to devote the necessary time and effort.
- Evidence of previous patient and public involvement.

7.3. Responsibilities of TERN Chair(s)

7.3.1. The Chair(s) are responsible for ensuring that TERN members are effective and accountable. They also provide strategic leadership in matters such as:

- Ensuring that each member of TERN requested to attend panel meetings has the opportunity to be heard. And that no view is discounted or ignored.
- Ensuring that the full range of opinions, especially those of people affected by MS, are appropriately considered. This includes unorthodox and opposing views.
- Ensuring conduct is of the highest standard, and panel members act in accordance with these Terms of Reference.
- Ensuring that any significant diversity of opinion among panel members is fully explored and discussed. And accurately summarising where this couldn't be resolved in the minutes.
- Ensuring where a decision can't be reached between applications of comparable scientific merit, and where both can't be funded due to budget constraints, that the panel refers back to the mean lay score.

7.4. Term Length of TERN Chairs terms

7.4.1. Chair(s) will be invited for an initial term of three years, regardless of previous time served as a regular member of TERN (if any). The term can be extended for up to three years upon agreement with the MS Society.

7.4.2. Chairs who fail to perform the duties to the expected standards will be removed from TERN. Such decisions will be made by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs.

8. Conflicts of interest policy

8.1. We strive to uphold high standards of integrity. Members of the charity and wider public require TERN members to avoid situations where their duties and other interests conflict or where there could be a suspicion of conflict.

8.2. Briefly, absolute conflicts of interest where TERN members shouldn't review or comment, is when they are:

- Are a close friend, patient or relative of the applicant(s).
- Are directly involved in the work the applicant proposes to carry out and/or have assisted the applicant with their application for funding. Such as being named as a co-applicant. Or providing constructive feedback on applications prior to submission, including Patient and Public Involvement prior to submission.
- Have worked closely with or have recently collaborated with the applicant(s)
 - For example: if you were the PhD supervisor/student of the applicant.

- For example: if you've published with, or held a research grant in collaboration with, the applicant(s) within the last three years.
- Are located at the same department as the applicant(s).
- Are currently employed at the same organisation as the applicant(s). This includes honorary positions and contracts.
- Have been approached or agreed to be a member of a committee connected with the research project.
 - For example: an advisory group or steering committee (including PPI advisory groups).
- Have submitted an application to the same round for which you're being asked to provide a review
- Have a commercial or financial/pecuniary interest.
 - For example: if you are a member of an organisation that may benefit financially, directly or indirectly from any decision made.
- Have a personal or family interest relating to both financial/pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.
 - For example: if you have connections with bodies which have a direct financial interest, or from being a business partner, or being employed by a person with such an interest. Or any benefit or favour in kind including rising from membership of clubs or other organisations.

8.3. These restrictions apply equally to the lead applicant and any other members of the research team, including co-applicants, advisers and named collaborators, on the proposal.

A full description of our Conflicts of Interest policy including examples of conditional conflicts is available in Annex 2.

9. Confidentiality

- 9.1. Any review of applications, deliberations and decision-making made by members of TERN are confidential. This allows free and frank expression of opinions and individuals in conjunction with avoiding premature disclosure of intentions. Members of TERN must treat all electronic and printed correspondence and documents sent by the MS Society as confidential. This may include members of TERN receiving pre-publication or confidential information or proprietary information owned by the applicants.
- 9.2. 'Confidential information' refers to any information contained in the documents and applications in printed and electronic format. This includes pre-publication information or confidential information or proprietary information owned by the applicants.
- 9.3. Such 'confidential information' should be used solely for assessing and making recommendations for research funding on our behalf.
- 9.4. TERN members won't, without written consent from both us and the applicant, disclose the fact that an applicant has applied to us for support.
- 9.5. TERN members won't, without written consent from both us and the applicant, either disclose confidential information to any third party or use confidential information for any purpose other than the purpose described above. In this context a third party means any party other than our employees or a fellow panel member. This specifically includes others in a panel member's place of work.

- 9.6. It's understood that the foregoing restrictions on the use and disclosure shall not apply to information which:
- was in the public domain or which subsequently becomes part of the public domain by publication or otherwise, except by your wrongful act
 - was in a panel member's possession and was not acquired directly or indirectly from us or the applicant
 - was received by a panel member from a third party who did not acquire the same directly or indirectly from us or the applicant and who did not require you to hold the same in confidence
- 9.7. Papers and minutes in any media format must not be disseminated or discussed outside of the review process. These should be kept secure and appropriately disposed of after the review process is complete (electronic files should be deleted securely, and paper copies shredded and recycled).
- 9.8. We won't use comments provided by TERN members for any purpose other than is necessary for the review / funding process and won't disclose them to any person except as is required for the peer review / funding process. Or as is required under the Data Protection Act 1998 (or any other law or regulation to which we are or may become subject).
- 9.9. We'll only release anonymised comments made by TERN members to applicants. We won't release TERN members' names in connection with any specific comments that are released under the Data Protection Act 1998 without first obtaining permission to do so.
- 9.10. A list of TERN members and professional affiliations (where applicable) is publicly available on our website. Further details of panel members will only be provided following permission from the member.

10. Expenses

- 10.1. Where possible, all meetings involving TERN will be virtual. However when physical attendance is requested, we'll reimburse reasonable expenses – for example the cost of standard class travel and if necessary overnight accommodation. For full details see our expenses guidelines.
- 10.2. Members are expected to take reasonable steps to minimise expenses – for example booking travel in advance to take advantage of discounted fares.

11. Secretariat

- 11.1. Secretariat to the group will be provided by staff from the MS Society.
- 11.2. For enquiries, the first point of contact will be:

Research Team
Multiple Sclerosis Society
Carriage House
8 City North Place
London, N4 3FU

Email: research@mssociety.org.uk

Annex 1: Research funding application review – Reviewer Code of Conduct

Background

We aim to ensure that research proposals are assessed objectively and impartially. An essential part of our decision making process is review of applications by external reviewers and members of our trusted, independent review panels. Our Board of Trustees relies on the advice and recommendations given by members of the MS community through external review and our review panels to make funding decisions.

Our Code of Conduct outlines our commitment to impartiality and the integrity of our review process. If we have reason to believe that an external reviewer or member of a review group has breached this Code of Conduct, then we'll ask them to step down.

Code of conduct

When accepting our invitation to review, or participate in a review panel, you are agreeing that documents and correspondence relating to applications for funds and funding are strictly confidential. Therefore:

- You shouldn't disclose that an applicant has submitted a funding proposal to anyone else.
- You shouldn't discuss any documents with anyone else during review, or either before or after the Review Panel meeting. Reviewers and/or panel members shouldn't discuss anything related to the applications except during the meeting.
- We will provide feedback to applicants (successful or unsuccessful). You shouldn't under any circumstances provide feedback directly to applicants.
- You shouldn't disseminate any documents provided to you for the purposes of review.
- Any materials on electronic devices, or any printouts, must be kept securely. You must permanently delete or dispose of these securely after the decision has been reached.
- If you have a vested interest (organisational, collaborative, personal or other) in the outcome of a grant application, you must tell us as soon as possible by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk.
- You mustn't use any of the application or review documents, or other information discussed at the meeting specifically relating to an application, for the benefit of yourself or others.
- You have a right to expect that your comments will be treated in confidence by us and other members of the review groups
- Grant applicants will receive anonymised feedback from the reviewers and review panel. The identity of external reviewers won't be shared with applicants or our review panels.
- While membership of The Expert Review Network, who form our funding panels, is publicly available, the identity of reviewers in relation to specific grants will be kept confidential.
- Where conflicts of interest are identified, reviewers or review panel members with conflicts will be withdrawn from review of that application. They won't have access to any documents, identity of other reviewers and panel members, and won't provide a review or score for that application. They will be asked to leave the meeting while the conflicted application is discussed. Any details of the discussion will be removed from any papers the reviewer or review panel member receives.

Annex 2: Research funding application review – Conflict of Interest Policy

- It's important that all reviewers are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process. We do our best to identify conflicts of interest and won't select reviewers or panel members if there is a clear conflict. However not all conflicts are obvious, and there may be circumstances we're unaware of that give the impression of a conflict of interest.
- Before accepting a review, you should consider whether there are any potential conflicts of interest. This isn't limited to conflicts of interest between reviewers and applicants. But also includes circumstances that might give the impression of a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest aren't unethical, but we must make sure that they're recognised and dealt with accordingly. **If any reviewer or panel member feels that they are conflicted, they must tell us as soon as possible.**
- You'll have a better understanding of whether your work or duties outside of reviewing may represent a conflict of interest. You could ask yourself, "Will I benefit either directly or indirectly if this grant is awarded or not awarded?" If you're not clear in any circumstances, you can discuss with us by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk.
- A conflict of interest occurs for a reviewer when you:
 - Are a close friend, patient or relative of the applicant(s).
 - Are directly involved in the work the applicant proposes to carry out and/or have assisted the applicant with their application for funding. Such as being named as a co-applicant. Or providing constructive feedback on applications prior to submission, including Patient and Public Involvement prior to submission.
 - Have worked closely with or have recently collaborated with the applicant(s)
 - For example: if you were the PhD supervisor/student of the applicant.
 - For example: if you've published with, or held a research grant in collaboration with, the applicant(s) within the last three years.
 - Are located at the same department as the applicant(s).
 - Are currently employed at the same organisation as the applicant(s). This includes honorary positions and contracts.
 - Have been approached or agreed to be a member of a committee connected with the research project.
 - For example: an advisory group or steering committee (including PPI advisory groups).
 - Have submitted an application to the same round for which you're being asked to provide a review
 - Have a commercial or financial/pecuniary interest.
 - For example: if you are a member of an organisation that may benefit financially, directly or indirectly from any decision made.
 - Have a personal or family interest relating to both financial/pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.
 - For example: if you have connections with bodies which have a direct financial interest, or from being a business partner, or being employed by a person with such an interest. Or any benefit or favour in kind including rising from membership of clubs or other organisations.

- **These restrictions apply equally to the lead applicant and any other members of the research team, including co-applicants, advisers and named collaborators, on the proposal.**
- Before being asked to review applications and all funding panel meetings, you'll be asked to declare any conflicts of interest. If you don't feel that you're an appropriate reviewer for the application, you can discuss with us by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk. Similarly, if you're not sure whether there is a conflict or not, you should contact us.
- Where conflicts exist, you won't take part in the review process of the application you are conflicted for.
 - You won't have access to the application or review documents.
 - You'll be asked to leave the room, or put in a virtual waiting room, during any discussion for that application.
 - You won't know who else has reviewed the application or read the reviewers' comments
 - You won't score the application. Or contribute to recommendations or decisions affecting the application.
 - You won't be given details of the discussion regarding that application after the meeting.
- If our Review Panel Chair has a conflict of interest, they'll be asked to leave the room, or put in a virtual waiting room, during any discussion for that application. The Vice Chair will chair that application instead.
- All conflicts of interest, and any decisions related to these, will be recorded in the meeting minutes. The Chair is responsible for making sure this is done.
- If you have any concerns about someone else's potential or actual conflicts of interest, you should raise this with the panel Chair (in private, if possible). This includes any issues concerning MS Society staff.

Annex 3: MS Society Expenses Policy

You'll be reimbursed for any reasonable out of pocket expenses, in line with our expenses policy. Our expenses policy and HMRC require receipts are presented when any expenses claim is made.

Travel

Using your own car

If you use your own car on MS Society business you can claim the maximum allowed by HM Revenue Customs. This mileage rate covers the cost of fuel, wear and tear on your vehicle, depreciation, vehicle tax and insurance costs. You need to enter details of the exact journey undertaken onto the claim form and, if a diversion has been taken, details of the route.

It's recommended that you use public transport for journeys over 150 miles round trip. If you have to use your own car on a journey over 150 miles on our business, you need to explain why on the expense claim form and get approval beforehand from the branch committee or MS Society contact.

- We'll reimburse any reasonable parking costs and congestion charge (where this can't be avoided).
- We can't reimburse parking fines or late payment fines for the congestion charge.

Using Public Transport – trains and buses

You should obtain the lowest possible standard class fare for the journey you need to make. And where possible make use of cheap advance fares.

Using your Oyster Card

In order for this to be quick and easy, we require you to register your oyster card. This means any journeys using this can be tracked and therefore correctly reimbursed. You can obtain a copy of your journey statement by logging into your online oyster account.

- If you use a contactless card instead of an oyster card, you'll need to send your redacted bank statement to us. With both the oyster card and contactless card, please highlight the relevant journeys.
- To reclaim the cost of journeys from an oyster card, a TFL statement should be provided which details the journeys undertaken. We can't reimburse day travel cards as it is difficult to pinpoint the exact cost of one journey.

Using taxis

Taxi costs will be reimbursed in the following circumstances:

- Where there are access issues with public transport.
- Where a location has only limited public transport and/or safety considerations.
- The cost is cheaper than using public transport (which might be the case if there are a number people using the taxi).
- Where you need to carry equipment or other luggage.

Food/Drink and Accommodation

You'll need to be away from home for more than four hours to claim food and drink expenses. You can claim up to the following amounts:

- Breakfast up to £7.00
- Lunch up to £12.70
- Evening meal up to £31.75
- For other non-alcoholic drinks & snacks purchased there is a limit of £5 per day.
- Claims for alcohol won't be reimbursed.

Please be clear on the expenses claim why these expenses have been incurred.

Accommodation

Overnight accommodation shouldn't exceed £100 per night. Or £110 per night where breakfast is included. Incidental expenses whilst staying at overnight accommodation can't exceed £5.

Expense forms

Expense forms along with a Bank Details form will be provided before each in-person panel meeting.

- Please fill out the form correctly (referring to the checklist below) to prevent any delays.
- Once your expenses form has been correctly completed and approved, it shall be processed and the money will be sent to your account.
- In order to process your expenses claim as quickly as possible, it's important that your expenses form is filled out correctly.

When filling out the form, please follow the checklist below.

1. Write your name and home address at the top of the page
2. Write each claim in the boxes below with the date, what you are claiming for and the meeting you were attending.
3. Add up all claims and write the total in the box at the bottom of the page.
4. **Print, sign and date the form** (located at the bottom right of the page).

Electronic expense form submission

If you are submitting your expenses electronically please ensure that you have also attached a copy of all relevant receipts. You should also include the following wording in your accompanying email:

"I confirm that these expenses were incurred on behalf of MS Society business attending xxxx meeting on dd/mm/year and are accurate.