**MND Research Australia Review criteria and scoring guide**

**Innovator Grant and Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize programs**

The objective of the Innovator Grant and Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize programs is to support innovative research projects ranging from discovery to implementation.

Although applicants at all levels are permitted to apply, the programs are intended to provide particular opportunities for early and mid-career researchers. It is still expected however, that the Principal Investigator (PI) will have the necessary leadership and skills to achieve the proposed project aims. The Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize is limited to mid-career researchers.

The programs are not intended to support research where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective.

**The Postdoctoral Fellowship and PhD Scholarship Top-up programs**

MNDRA’s Postdoctoral Fellowships aim to encourage young researchers to focus their interest on classical forms of MND. The program is targeted at postdoctoral scientists with a track record in MND or areas of neuroscience related to MND. Applicants must have no more than five years research experience from the date their doctoral thesis was passed.

The PhD Scholarship Top-Up scheme is targeted at providing additional incentive for outstanding PhD students working in MND research.

There is a strong focus on the capability and future potential of the applicant for these programs.

**Review criteria**

For all programs, applications will be scored against each of the four review criteria. “Capability” and “leadership” are intended to identify current and future high-flyers, and it is fully appreciated that many early and mid-career researchers may have had limited opportunity to demonstrate these attributes:

1. **Research Quality** - ‘Research Quality’ is the quality of the project aims and the proposed research plan. Given the focus on innovation, it is expected that the research proposals will include some element of risk; applicants should demonstrate an appreciation of those risks and incorporate strategies to address any uncertainties as part of their proposed research plan. With innovation and creativity as prime objectives, the scheme is not intended to fund research that has already been performed or to validate findings already established in other disease areas. Although preliminary results and pilot studies are not mandatory, applications should present a well-supported hypothesis. Such support can include preliminary data or be based on other studies.
2. **Innovation & Creativity** - ‘Innovation & Creativity’ measure the degree to which the research seeks to challenge and shift current paradigms and/or has a major impact on a health research area through one or more studies that creatively:

* develop or use novel research concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions,
* propose a reinterpretation, refinement, improvement or new application of existing theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions, or
* integrate and adapt concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions from other research fields or disciplines for a new purpose or in a new way.

Applicants should clearly explain their point of difference from current concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions in order to sufficiently demonstrate innovation and creativity in their proposed research.

1. **Significance** - ‘Significance’ is the extent to which the outcomes and outputs will result in advances that provide insight into the causes, management, cure or alleviation of MND. Applications must have direct relevance to MND.
2. **Capability** - ‘Capability’ is the appropriateness of the applicant team and its expertise, the resources and access to additional personnel necessary to achieve the project aims. Capability is a combination of traditional track record elements together with the ability of the PI and their team and resources to accomplish the proposed project.

Traditional track record elements include number and quality of publications, grants held, or conference invitations. Capability will be assessed relative to opportunity. Relative to opportunity takes into account career disruptions as well as different career paths and entry points. Further information on Relative to Opportunity can be found below. Applicants should be encouraged to present their productivity metrics in terms of their leadership contribution (see below) as well as the relevant impact of the research outputs on MND or related fields of research.

Further assessment includes demonstration of their ability to lead the project, the overall technical capability of the team and the availability of key resources.

**Leadership**

Relative to opportunity (including career stage) and to their field of research, the applicant demonstrates performance in:

* supervision, mentoring, training and/or career development of staff and/or students within and/or beyond their research group
* experience and contribution to the peer review of publications and grant applications, nationally and/or internationally
* contribution to community engagement, public advocacy, government advisory boards or committees, professional societies at a local, national and/or international level
* non-research contribution(s) to department, centre, institute or organisation e.g. leadership or membership of committee
* conception and direction of a research project or program
* building and maintaining collaborative networks necessary to achieve research outcomes within and/or beyond their institution.

**Scoring**

Each criterion will be scored as follows:

7 **Exceptional**

6 **Outstanding**

5 **Excellent**

4 **Very Good**

3 **Good**

2 **Satisfactory**

1 **Weak or limited**

**Score Weighting**

* For all MNDRA grant programs the above criteria will be assessed.
* Weighting of the criteria will differ for the various grant Programs.

**Innovator Grants and Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize;**

To reflect our strong focus on funding only the best and most innovative research, scores for each category will be weighted as following when calculating a final overall score;

* Research Quality - 40%
* Innovation and creativity - 30%
* Significance - 20%
* Capability - 10%

**Postdoctoral Fellowships and PhD Scholarship Top-ups**

To reflect our strong focus on supporting the most promising up and coming researchers, scores for each category will be weighted as following when calculating a final overall score;

* Research Quality - 20%
* Innovation and creativity - 20%
* Significance - 20%
* Capability - 40%

**MND Research Australia Relative to Opportunity Guidelines**

***Purpose***

The purpose of this document is to outline MNDRA’s Relative to Opportunity Policy with respect to;

* MNDRA peer review, and
* Eligibility to apply for Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize.

MNDRA’s objective is to support the best Australian MND research and the best researchers, at all career stages. MNDRA seeks to ensure that researchers with a variety of career experiences and those who have experienced pregnancy or a major illness/injury or have caring responsibilities, are not disadvantaged in applying for MNDRA grants.

***Policy approach***

MNDRA considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant’s track record and associated productivity and achievements relative to stage of career, including considering whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. It also means that applicants with career disruptions should not be disadvantaged (in terms of years since they received their PhD) when determining their eligibility for Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize and that their Career Disruptions should be considered when their applications are being reviewed.

Considerations should include;

* **Research opportunity**: Researchers’ outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and undertake the research they conduct.
* **Career diversity**: Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside of academia should not be disadvantaged. MNDRA recognises that time spent in sectors such as industry or care provision may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

The above principles frame MNDRA’s approach to the assessment of a researcher’s capability during review of grant applications and eligibility of applicants applying for Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize. MNDRA expects that those who provide expert assessment during peer review will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers to be funded. MNDRA recognises that life circumstances can be very varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption considerations during peer review.

***Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review of applications for funding***

During peer review of applications, circumstances considered under the Relative to Opportunity Policy are:

* amount of time spent as an active researcher
* available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities
* building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods that can impact on track record and productivity
* clinical, administrative or teaching workload
* relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact on research productivity
* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including ‘sorry business’
* the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question
* research outputs and productivity noting time employed in other sectors; for example, there might be a reduction in publications when employed in sectors such as industry or care provision
* carer responsibilities (that do not come under the Career Disruption policy below).
* disability (including mental health conditions and psychosocial disability) or illness
* calamities, such as pandemics, bushfires or cyclones.

***Career Disruption considerations during peer review and eligibility to apply for Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize***

A Career Disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant’s capacity to work, due to:

* pregnancy
* major illness/injury
* carer responsibilities.

The period of career disruption may be used:

* to determine an applicant’s eligibility for a Postdoctoral Fellowship and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize
* to allow for the inclusion of additional capability information for assessment of an application
* for consideration by peer reviewers.

To be considered for the purposes of eligibility and peer review, a period of Career Disruption is defined as:

* a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
* continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.

***Career Disruption and eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants***

A Career Disruption can affect an applicant’s eligibility to apply for a Postdoctoral Fellowship and the Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize. For such grants, the 5-year (Postdoctoral Fellowship) or 12-year (Betty and John Laidlaw MND Research Prize) time limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.