

Call for Proposals: ARIA Innovator Circles

INTRODUCTION

ARIA: Who we are and why we exist

ARIA funds scientists and engineers to pursue research at the edge of the possible to address the enormous challenges and opportunities society faces. From climate change to bioengineering and AI, we believe these can be uniquely addressed by science & technology. ARIA exists to activate the UK's world-class research and talent in new ways, so we can meet these head on.

Cultivating a culture of ambition

To unlock breakthroughs that can transform society, a culture that empowers talent to conceive and pursue groundbreaking ideas is crucial. History shows us that informal self-organised peer groups can uniquely push individuals towards such high-ambition work, for example [a group of electronics hobbyists](#) that became instrumental in computing, a [regular meeting of 12 people](#) which shaped the scientific process, or a [university student-club](#) that was foundational for cyberculture. These spaces that allow novel, frontier ideas to emerge by:

1. Pushing individuals to be their most ambitious by surrounding them with similarly ambitious peers;
2. Allowing serious discussion of incomplete ideas and hypotheses, no matter how counterintuitive they may be to the wider ecosystem.

However, these spaces are rare in the research ecosystem. Community building in R&D often centres on attending talks/conferences to hear from established speakers. All too rarely do we see the formats, such as informal discussion groups or reading groups, that facilitate aspirational individuals to convene in high-trust environments.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Innovator Circles

We believe that to generate massive societal impact through science and technology we need people willing to think differently about what might be possible. To cultivate this level of ambition we want to create more groups like those described above - which we call Innovator Circles - with greater diversity and focused in the UK. Through this, ***we want to create high trust, technical groups in the UK that raise the ambition of everyone involved and enable new, societally-impactful ideas to emerge.***

Last year, we tested our hypothesis with a small, focused experiment. You can [read our Substack essay here](#) about how we set this up, what happened during the experiment, and what we learnt.

Now, we're launching an open call for individuals (Innovator Circle Leads) who'd like to build new Innovator Circles in the UK. We don't want to set constraints on their formats as we want to be directed by those who'll lead and benefit from these. To spark inspiration, examples are:

- Scientific journal clubs + reading groups;
- Seminars + talks focused on a research topic/field;
- Technical-themed dinners to discuss a frontier technical area;
- Presentations/showcases on members' latest ideas and/or work.

Who you are

Alongside a strong track-record in either the scientific topic of interest or in technical community building and being based in the UK, you may be:

- An individual with well-reasoned scientific ideas that you think could change the world but they're fuzzy or not taken seriously in the mainstream;
- An ambitious scientist who can't discuss their boldest ideas with those you normally work with but feel you could build a group of like-minded individuals;

- A scientist who knows and is comfortable with ambitious peers, but lacks a way to regularly convene them to discuss technical topics;
- A technically-grounded individual with bold, interdisciplinary ideas which you want to build upon with similarly ambitious people who'll challenge and push you.

What you'll do

As an Innovator Circle Lead, you'll be the catalyst for a UK-based group of ambitious, technically grounded individuals and provided with support to organise and run it.

The primary aim you should strive for is that your circle catalyses world-changing breakthroughs/collaborations/startups through collectively raising the ambition of a group of high-agency, technically-minded individuals.

To create a *great* Innovator Circle, you'll ensure that:

- The format(s) facilitate open discussion, collaboration and expansion of networks as well as technical explorations, providing a space to discuss groundbreaking scientific ideas irrespective of how developed or mainstream they may be;
- Outputs of discussions are oriented to real-world outputs that can make ideas a reality, such as scientific collaborations, publications, and building novel software;
- There is an intentional approach to convening exceptional talent and fair curation of the group - i.e. you will reach outside your direct networks and encourage new participants if their skills and interests are aligned;
- A high-trust environment is created between participants;
- There is a regular cadence of gatherings and committed attendance from the organiser(s) and attendees.

How ARIA will support you

We understand the critical value of self-direction and bottom-up organisation. To maximise our catalytic effects, we'll be open to providing support such as:

- Covering expenses such as those listed in scope in the [Budget and timelines](#) section below (we also welcome applications which do not need expenses);

- Helping source venue/space;
- ARIA branding & presence at events/gatherings;
- Building collaborations between Innovator Circles and the wider ARIA ecosystem.

What does success look like for ARIA?

Creating cultural change goes beyond specific deliverables: this isn't a metric-focused activity. We'll focus on how Innovator Circles create spaces that support bold ideas and pursuits as outlined in the "[What you'll do](#)" section above.

Additionally, examples of success we believe can come out of the circles are:

- Contribute frontier ideas for ARIA's current and/or future spaces;
- Contribute to the ARIA talent pipeline by surfacing exceptional talent;
- Provide opportunities for ARIA to engage with the community by e.g. giving talks;
- Broaden ARIA's connectivity and network beyond established channels.

During this initiative, we'll have regular check-ins to allow you to share updates and wins. This will also help us ensure you're moving in the right direction and to see if ARIA can support you further in taking things to the next level.

Budget and timelines

We're looking to support **~10 Innovator Circles for up to 10 months**.

We are open to covering expenses of up to £2000/month to cover materials costs such as those outlined below, which will be further detailed in the [terms and conditions](#).

The guidance below is to help you assess the scope of the expenses we can provide for (this is a non-exhaustive list):

In scope expenses:

- Venue/space hire;
- Food & drinks for gatherings;

- Relevant software subscriptions;
- Reading materials;
- Speakers' travel costs.

Out of scope expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Personal expenses;
- Undertaking wet-lab experiments including procuring lab space and materials;
- Purely recreational expenses.

Approach to Intellectual Property (IP)

We do not expect any IP to be generated as a result of these contracts. However if IP is generated within an Innovator Circle, we expect the circle members to agree on ownership amongst themselves. ARIA will not own any of the IP generated.

THE APPLICATION

Please see the [How to Apply](#) section for details on submitting your application. These will be sent to ARIA via an application portal. Email applications will not be accepted.

Applicants will be required to answer the following questions:

1. **Why do you want to lead an ARIA Innovator Circle?** What resonates with you in this call and what has encouraged you to apply? (max. 150 words)
2. **Tell us a bit about what you're currently working on and why you're the right person to lead the proposed ARIA Innovator Circle?** How do you align with what we're looking for in our Innovator Circle Leads and the talent we'd like to support? (max. 200 words)
3. **What is the proposed topic of focus for your group and why?** This can be high-level (e.g. theory in biology) or a specific field/domain. This can be dynamic and change during the initiative if suitable. (max. 200 words)
4. **How will you run your Innovator Circle?** Please cover the format(s) you'd like to use/experiment with, the cadence, the proposed timeline, and anything else you think would be useful to share. (max. 150 words)

5. **How will you curate your Innovator Circle?** Please cover how you'll source members and what your strategy would be for finding and including voices that are not typically heard in this field? (max. 200 words)

SELECTION CRITERIA

We'll select applications against the following criteria:

1. **Scientific and technical focus.** We're looking for applications where the topic(s) of focus for the proposed group are scientific field(s) that may be underappreciated relative to their impact or counterintuitive/not mainstream. We're interested in links to ARIA's [opportunity spaces](#), but this is not a requirement - we'd like to discover future directions too.
2. **Motivation and commitment.** We want to understand your motivations as well as interest and commitment to the proposal. We're looking for individuals with expertise in the topic(s) of interest, and/or high intrinsic motivation to build a community of like-minded ambitious individuals. Previous experience in building peer-groups, small or large, is desirable but not required - we know the best leaders may not have run these before.
3. **Format and participant curation.** We want to understand how your proposed format (reading groups, journal clubs, dinners etc) could create an environment that supports individuals to do their boldest scientific thinking whilst building trust and collaborations. This includes the planned cadence of your initiative and any other ideas you have. We're looking for thoughtful approaches for how you plan to convene exceptional talent regularly, and reach beyond your existing networks to uncover individuals who should be part of the group regardless of background or career stage. We also want to see how your proposal is differentiated from other societies/communities and why this group will be additive to the ecosystem and couldn't exist without ARIA's support.

Timelines

This call for proposals will be open for applications as follows (we may update timelines based on the volume of responses we receive):

Applications open

25 September 2025

Clarification Questions deadline

16 October 2025

Application deadline

23 October 2025 13:00 BST

As part of our review we may invite applicants to meet with ARIA team members prior to final selection — this discussion can happen virtually or we may seek clarification on certain aspects of your proposal via email.

Successful/Unsuccessful applicants notified 17 November 2025

At this stage you will be notified if you have or have not been selected for an award subject to due diligence. Please note, for those applicants not selected for shortlisting or award we will not provide feedback.

Award

17 December 2025

Please note, contracts must be signed on, or before, this date for the Innovator Circle Lead to be funded by ARIA, the offer of funding may be withdrawn if contracts cannot be signed by this date. ARIA will not negotiate the terms and conditions.

How to Apply

Before submitting an application, please read this call for proposals and [FAQs](#) in full.

Please read the [portal instructions](#) and create your account before the application deadline.

[APPLY HERE](#)

If you have any questions, please email clarifications@aria.org.uk.

If you are disabled or have a long-term health condition, we can offer support to help you engage with ARIA, navigate our funding application process, or carry out your project, you can find more information [here](#).