

Engineering Ecosystem Resilience: Pre-programme discovery Call for 3-month research project proposals

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v3.0

SCOPE

Programme Director Yannick Wurm's opportunity space, '[Engineering Ecosystem Resilience](#)', asks whether pairing advanced monitoring with resilience-boosting interventions could halt biodiversity loss and enable people and nature to thrive.

We are now looking to develop an ambitious £50m research programme within this space. To help guide our thinking and shape the programme development, we are inviting proposals for a series of short exploratory projects. We welcome proposals that:

- Deep dive on research directions relevant to the [Engineering Ecosystem Resilience space](#). Exploration should be oriented by a combination of your scientific interests and backgrounds, and the needs of programme development efforts.
- Explore technical feasibility, risks, identify gaps and opportunities in our opportunity space.
- Identify and explore ethical, governance and community engagement needs and concerns.

We expect proposed projects to take one of the following tracks (your proposal should clearly indicate your track):

- Projects whose main work substrate can either be literature and reports (scientific, technical, ethical, social sciences), or
- Projects that propose to explore a particular new data set or technique that has the potential to create novel insight.

We also expect successful applicants to spend part of their time:

- Producing and reviewing short reports on key topics.
- Participating in cohort-level round table discussions to challenge each other's thinking.

The guidance below is to help you assess whether your proposal aligns with the scope of this funding call (this is a non-exhaustive list):

- **In scope:**
 - Analysing existing (published or unpublished) data with a new approach, or a novel clearly defined hypothesis.

- Synthesising/reviewing work in a specific scientific, technological, or ethical area relevant to the opportunity space (e.g., evaluating the effectiveness of various established or potential biodiversity conservation interventions).
 - Running study groups or surveys to understand stakeholder perception of ecosystems, resilience, or potential ecosystem-support interventions.
 - Testing whether a new technology can be applied to a particular study system i.e., generating “proof of concept” pilot data that could underpin a new type of species support intervention or large-scale proposal.
 - Theoretical modelling or simulation work that connects to real ecosystem systems and resilience questions (e.g., impact of assisted migration).
 - Novel literature synthesis that generates new frameworks, identifies gaps, or challenges existing paradigms in ecosystem resilience.
 - Work that challenges the thinking we outlined in our [Opportunity Space document](#).
 - Social science research examining community engagement, stakeholder perspectives, or governance approaches for ecosystem interventions.
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- **Out of scope:**
 - Refining or improving an existing analysis or product.
 - Generating a new RNAseq or eDNA dataset for my study system.
 - Purchasing new equipment for long-term field data collection.
 - Routine monitoring or data collection without novel analytical approaches.
 - Standard conservation practice implementation (e.g., traditional habitat restoration without technology components).

Budget and timelines

We’re looking to fund proposals with up to £20,000 each (inclusive of taxes and all other costs), for projects up to a maximum length of 3 months. We expect to fund up to 10 projects.

Who can apply

We welcome proposals from across the R&D ecosystem, including individuals (including those not affiliated with an organisation), universities (including proposals from students, postdocs and staff), research institutions, small, medium and large companies, charities and public sector research organisations.

We're looking for applicants that:

- Have the ability to clearly express their ideas – and to constructively consider diverse opinions.
- In most cases pause their regular work activities for the duration of the project.
- May have backgrounds in conservation, ecology, evolution, gene engineering, ethics, or synthetic biology.
- Can be at any career stage with at least several years of post-MSc-equivalent work experience and achievements (i.e., they may be 2+ years into their PhD, or have been working for a conservation organisation for several years; they may also be much further along in their careers).

If you are an overseas applicant you should note that our primary focus will be on funding those who are based in the UK or those willing to conduct the majority (> 50%) of the project from the UK. In exceptional circumstances, funding can be awarded outside the UK if we believe the proposed project can significantly benefit the UK.

Approach to Intellectual Property (IP)

Our standard funding model lets funding recipient own any Intellectual Property (IP) generated as a result of our funding (you can find more on our normal approach to our FAQs [here](#)). This call is different, the short-term projects are designed to inform our programme development, so we need to own the IP to use it freely for those purposes. That said, we will grant the funding recipient a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, and irrevocable licence to use the outputs (or any portion thereof) for any purpose.

Project management

Research projects will be carried out remotely with applicants using their own IT and infrastructure where needed. Successful applicants will meet regularly with the Programme Director and as a cohort. These meetings will typically be virtual, though in person meetings may also be arranged.

THE APPLICATION

Part 1: Technical Proposal

Applicants are required to provide a 1 page proposal that outlines:

- Your background and motivation for helping to shape a large research programme related to Engineering Ecosystem Resilience.
- A description of what you feel your main focus should be.
- Detail on the proposed team to complete the work, explaining how your time will be structured between the research project's needs and other pre-existing obligations you may have.

Please note: Supporting data, preliminary data, journal articles, blogs, code or other materials are not required, but may be referenced or linked to in the submission if they directly support your application. However, ensure that your proposal stands on its own.

How to Format your proposal

- Page count: 1 page (including diagrams, excluding references)
- Single line spacing, standard character spacing (neither expanded nor condensed)
- Font: Arial. Colour: black. Size: 11-point font or larger
- Margins: At least 0.5" margins all around
- File Type: PDF

Part 2: Timeline, budget and administrative questions

This part consists of questions about the execution and delivery of your proposed project.

Application questions	Guidance
How long do you expect your project to take (in months)?	<i>There is no minimum duration for a proposed project. The maximum duration is 3 months.</i>
How much funding do you need?	<i>To answer this question, please provide a cost breakdown by completing the table in the application portal.</i> <i>Prior to completing this template you should review ARIA's Eligible cost guidance here.</i> <i>Note: Funding will be provided via a service contract (not a</i>

	grant) so please ensure you include VAT where applicable.
Does your proposal depend on background (pre-existing) IP?	If yes, give us an indication of: • What background IP is required • Whether you currently have rights to that IP
Have you already secured funding for related ideas or projects or are you currently in the process of seeking support from other funding sources for the same idea?	If yes, tell us more about the funding you already have or are applying for.
Are there any other factors or restrictions that might impact your freedom to operate and deliver the idea?	These might include, for example: potential conflicts of interest; import/export restrictions; legal and regulatory restrictions that you are aware of.
Are you planning to give a portion of the work to external subcontractors?	If yes, let us know what work you plan to give to a subcontractor. Subcontractors are any proposed third parties that you plan to enter into a contract or agreement with for services necessary for the delivery or management of the project.
Where are you currently operating and are you proposing to perform the majority of the proposed project outside of the UK?	Our primary focus is on funding those who are based in the UK. For the vast majority of applicants, we therefore require the majority of the project work to be conducted in the UK (i.e. >50% of project costs and personnel time). If you are currently not operating in the UK, but the majority of the work will be conducted in the UK, we would like to know the proposed plan for achieving this. For example, are you intending to establish operations inside the UK, or partner with a UK based organisation. We can also award funding to applicants whose projects will primarily take place outside of the UK, if we believe it is

	<i>unique/compelling and/or the UK would miss out if not funded.</i> <i>If you're planning to carry out the majority of the project outside of the UK, we'd like to know your location and your perspective on how the funded project would benefit the UK either immediately or in the long term.</i> <i>Benefits may include:</i> • <i>enhancing economic growth in the UK</i> • <i>fostering scientific innovation in the UK</i> • <i>enhancing the quality of life in the UK (or both in the UK and internationally)</i>
Have you read and understood our funding terms?	<i>Our goal is to ensure your research projects can get going quickly, so we want to ensure a fast negotiation and award process. We must have agreements signed within 1 week, which we recognise can be much faster than standard at some organisations.</i> <i>Before proceeding, please confirm that you have read and understand our funding terms for this project.</i> <i>Note: Funding will be provided via a service contract (not a grant). ARIA will not negotiate these terms and conditions.</i>
Additional questions about you/your organisation that can be found in the application portal.	

SELECTION CRITERIA

Once you have submitted your application, it will pass through an initial review to ensure it is within the opportunity space identified above. At this stage we will carry out some checks to verify your identity and review any national security risks.

If a submission is not considered to be within the [scope](#), it will be rejected prior to a full review.

In evaluating your proposal, we'll consider the following criteria:

- a) The proposal aligns with or challenges ideas related to [Engineering Ecosystem Resilience](#).
- b) The applicant demonstrates intrinsic motivation, skills/knowledge in the subject matter and the proposal is credible and feasible.

As part of our evaluation, we will also consider:

- Portfolio fit – consider how your proposal & expertise complement those of others we are funding and the diversity of applicants across the portfolio.
- If you're not currently operating in the UK we'll also assess the extent to which the proposed work will benefit the UK (see further guidance [here](#)).

TIMELINE

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	02 September 2025
Application deadline	18 September 2025 (14:00 BST)
As part of our review we may invite applicants to meet with the Programme Director or another team member to discuss any questions 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	26 September 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	03 October 2025

Please note, contracts must be signed on, or before, this date for the project 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 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](#).