

## ARIA opportunity seed project review and selection process

To support scientific and technological breakthroughs, outside of programmes, ARIA Programme Directors can award opportunity seeds to support ambitious research aligned to the opportunity spaces they've identified.

This document outlines ARIA's approach to the review and selection of opportunity seed proposals and the process by which they will be evaluated. The process defined below applies specifically to proposals submitted in response to an opportunity seed funding call (for our approach to evaluating project proposals submitted in response to a programme solicitation, see [here](#)).

### Summary

- We empower Programme Directors to make robust selection decisions in service of their opportunity space.
- All Programme Directors follow a consistent review and selection process, designed and implemented by ARIA's central team.
- We take a criteria-led approach to selection: all proposals will be evaluated against consistent criteria. We expect proposals to spike against criteria, demonstrating different strengths and weaknesses.
- Expert technical reviewers (both internal and external to ARIA) evaluate proposals to provide independent views, stimulate discussion and inform decision-making. All reviewers are signed off by ARIA leadership as qualified and conflict-free, and their evaluations are carried out at arms length from the Programme Director.
- Programme Directors must justify their selection recommendations internally, for consistency of process and fairness.
- Programme Directors must recuse themselves from decision-making related to any party that represents a real or perceived conflict. They do not have access to any conflicted proposal information, and the evaluation of those proposals is led by an alternate Programme Director.

## Context: technical reviewers

In addition to the Programme Director, at least one other expert reviewer will be used during the opportunity seed review and selection process.

Expert reviewers will predominantly be internal to ARIA. However, external expert reviewers may be called upon where there is a conflict of interest or internal ARIA reviewers do not have the required technical expertise to review a proposal.

Any external reviewers will be subject to conflicts of interest checks and confidentiality agreements. ARIA leadership will approve the appointment of all external technical reviewers before their appointment.

### **The role of the technical reviewer:**

- The review is designed to generate additional data points to shape final decision-making.
- Expert reviewers will only review the specific elements of the proposal.
- They will be asked to provide scores/recommendations as opposed to stack ranking all applications.
- The Programme Director will review the scores and recommendations provided by the technical reviewers (and any subsequent discussion) and integrate that data into their final evaluation and justifications for final selection recommendations.
- No expert reviewer has the power to advance or reject candidates.
- An applicant cannot 'fail' or 'pass' an expert review.

## Context: use of criteria

- We take a criteria-led approach to selection – all proposals will be evaluated against consistent criteria.
- We expect proposals to spike against criteria and each demonstrate different strengths and weaknesses.
- Proposals will be evaluated against the criteria outlined in the solicitation.
- Reviewers will score each criterion and each proposal as a whole. Final scores are not numerical sums or averages, but an indication of their overall view of the proposal.

## Breakdown of review stages



### Step 1 – Screening

Opportunity seed applications will pass through an initial screening to verify identity, review any potential national security risks, and identify any conflicts of interest.

Applications will also be reviewed for compliance against the solicitation guideline – e.g. number of pages. Where it is clear the proposal is not compliant with the format, these applicants will be rejected prior to the compliance review.

*An ARIA staff member leads this step.*

### Step 2 – Scope review

Opportunity seed applications will be reviewed to ensure they are within the scope of the solicitation.

Where it is clear that a proposal is outside the scope, these applicants will be rejected prior to a full review on the basis they are not compliant or non-eligible.

*This step is conducted by a technical member of staff and reviewed by the Programme Director.*

### Step 3 – Full review of applications

Reviewers will assess the applications against the evaluation criteria identified in the solicitation.

This step will be conducted by the programme director and at least one other reviewer. Additional internal and external expert reviewers may be required and added where a COI arises or additional specific expertise is required.

The Programme Director will review the scores and recommendations (and any subsequent discussion) provided by expert reviewers and integrate that data into their evaluation and justifications of final selection recommendations.

## Step 4 – Shortlisting

The Programme Director and all reviewers will meet to discuss each proposal reviewed and to decide which applicants will be shortlisted.

If the Programme Director requires more information to help make a decision, specific questions will be sent to the applicant to help clarify understanding of their submission.

Each shortlisted applicant will be invited to meet with the Programme Director (typically this will be a 30 minute, virtual meeting). The meeting is an opportunity for the Programme Director to ask questions and learn more about the proposal, as well as for the applicant to bring their idea to life.

## Step 5 – Project selection approval

The ARIA review team, led by the Programme Director, is responsible for documenting the outcome of the review process and the final selection of applicants recommended for funding.

Final opportunity seed selection will be approved by ARIA's CEO.

## Stage 6 – Negotiation

At this stage you will be notified if you have or have not been selected for an award subject to due diligence and negotiation. If you have been selected for an award (subject to negotiations) we expect a 1 hour initial call to take place between ARIA's PD and your lead researcher within 10 working days of being notified.

We expect contract/grant signature to be no later than 4 weeks from successful/ unsuccessful notifications. During this period the following activity will take place:

- Due diligence will be carried out.
- The PD and the applicant will discuss, negotiate and agree the project activities, milestones and budget details.
- Agreement to the set Terms and Conditions of the Grant/Contract. You can find a copy of our funding agreements [here](#).