

# Request for Proposal

## Activation Partners

**May 2024**

## Introduction

We are pleased to invite you to take part in this Request for Proposal (RFP) for ARIA's Activation Partners.

Launched in January 2023, ARIA is a Research & Development (R&D) funding agency. We fund teams of scientists and engineers to pursue research at the edge of the possible. From climate change to AI and bioengineering, society faces enormous challenges and opportunities that can be uniquely addressed by science and technology. ARIA was created to activate the UK's world-class R&D talent in new ways, so that we can meet these head on.

To fulfil our mission, we must ensure our scientific and technical breakthroughs translate into widespread impact. This relies on creating the conditions within our [opportunity spaces](#) for science entrepreneurship (*we define entrepreneurship to mean ambitious organisation builders and value creators, regardless of whether that is philanthropic/non-profit or for profit*) to effectively drive translational value. We're early in our journey, but believe that now is the time to invest in creating such conditions.

We're looking for ~5-8 highly ambitious partners ('Activation Partners') to help us unlock latent ideas, empower technical talent, support promising new ventures, and provide insights and connectivity across the opportunity spaces we're exploring – and new ones we have yet to shape.

Success for these partnerships will be gauged by their ability to cultivate entrepreneurial and translation-focused momentum within our opportunity spaces. But it's not just about hitting metrics; it's about working alongside us to foster the environment that propels our opportunity spaces – and the UK – towards massive social and economic impact.

## Activation Partners

Activation Partners will work alongside ARIA to help drive momentum in the research areas we are exploring. We will provide funding for partners to carry out new, bespoke activities across one or more of our opportunity spaces. Any activity needs to align with your expertise and incentives. We welcome proposals where our funding can be catalytic, enabling you to do bigger things than you're able to do right now.

## Who you are

We don't have hard constraints on the type of organisation we will work with. You might be a: nonprofit organisation, startup/established company, fellowship programme, deeptech investor, incubator/accelerator, venture creator, a combination of these, or something else.

What we do know is that we are looking for partners who have:

- A deeply technical focus.

- An appetite for the highly speculative.
- A commitment to operate as founder/scientist friendly.

More tangibly, we're interested in hearing from potential partners who:

- Have a track record of translating research into real, meaningful impact.
- Take an intentional approach to community/network building.
- Have a clear thesis on technical talent identification and activation.
- Bring routes to high-quality market knowledge (on both talent + ideas), and/or capital.

## Scope

During contract negotiations we'll agree specific success metrics and milestones, but our requirements are broadly split into two: specific deliverables for ARIA and targeted opportunity space activity.

### Specific deliverables for ARIA

We want partners to contribute to our foundational work, providing us and our R&D Creators, (the individuals, teams or organisations who are recipients of ARIA programme or opportunity seed funding) with additional connectivity and knowledge tailored to meet our needs.

From all partners we'd be looking for the following deliverables – these deliverables will be refined during negotiations with measures and metrics agreed:

- Spend dedicated time with our Programme Directors and R&D Creators. Support their success through, for example, entrepreneurial training/resource sharing and access to high quality market knowledge and connectivity.
- Contribute where required to the selection of future ARIA Programme Directors, through talent pipeline building + expertise/evaluation.
- Collaborate with other Activation Partners to share learnings.
- Participate in ARIA convenings and community activity.

### Targeted opportunity space activity

Funding provided to partners should be used for new activity within our opportunity spaces. These are areas led by ARIA Programmes Directors that we believe are likely to yield breakthroughs. Within these, ARIA will have undertaken initial work on scoping the space, building talent pipelines and dedicating circa £10-100 million to focused R&D. An ARIA opportunity space is:

- Important if true (i.e. could lead to a significant new capability for society).
- Under-explored relative to its potential impact.
- Ripe for new talent, perspectives, or resources to change what's possible.

Our current opportunity spaces can be found [here](#). That said, these are not 'fixed' – they are flexible areas to be shaped over time.

As we've never run this initiative before, beyond the deliverables above, we have no preconceptions on what activity we'll fund. We want to be led by your instincts and experience – and ask you to be creative with how you imagine interacting with our spaces. To spark ideas, here are some examples:

- Embed capital and new talent from your ecosystem and network into the spaces we've defined.
- Run a dedicated science entrepreneurship programme (or sub-programme) dedicated to our opportunity spaces. This might focus on venture creation or talent activation.
- Work with the technical talent in our opportunity spaces to commercialise/spin out research, and support existing startups through e.g. mentorship, commercial insights and capital.
- Collaborate with ARIA on shaping and evaluating our current opportunity spaces as well as scoping future ones, through activity such as technical/ecosystem mapping + expertise building/sharing.
- Deliver community building activity such as a focused series of convenings, or providing spaces for entrepreneurial scientific and technical talent to collaborate.
- Build new types of research environments/institutions in our spaces to enable scientific work that may not otherwise be possible (e.g. focused research organisations).

We're open to submissions that propose a spectrum of flexible options. We're also open to multiple proposals from the same applicant.

### **What does success look like?**

Success for these partnerships goes beyond specific deliverables; it's about working alongside us to foster the right environment for our opportunity spaces and the research we fund within them, to deliver breakthroughs that benefit everyone. At a high level, success over time will mean our partnerships have:

- Unlocked latent ideas: higher volume, higher quality and higher variance ideas within opportunity spaces.
- Empowered talent: new and/or upskilled entrepreneurial talent to drive impact in our spaces.
- Supported promising new ventures: higher volume of well-funded startups, with a diversity of founder-friendly capital available.
- Provided insights and connectivity: more value-informed and connected opportunity spaces and communities.

## Things to note

### Costs

We're looking to fund ~5-8 partners over a period of three years (with the option to extend if both parties agree). We anticipate a budget of circa £30 to £50 million (inc VAT where applicable) for this first call. The ultimate funding allocation will depend on the proposals received. Funding awards will vary in size and these figures are meant to serve as general guidelines – we encourage you to request the resources you need to carry out the project, don't hesitate to be ambitious.

If you don't need funding but want to contribute to our opportunity spaces, we're also interested in working with you and encourage you to submit an initial proposal.

There are a few constraints on this funding:

- We'll fund your costs (see our [eligible cost guidance](#) for more details) on a time and materials basis. We will not fund investment capital or incorporation costs of establishing a UK presence.
- The funding can be provided in phases that allow you to ramp up over time.

Our funding should be used to catalyse self-sustaining activities that will aim to outlive our funding term. This could be through complementation of our support with match funding and/or activities to enable other funders to come in alongside or after us.

### Partnership

In order for us to partner with an organisation we will need to see significant interest and commitment from their leadership team (e.g. time commitment by founder/principal).

We welcome joint proposals involving more than one organisation, however we ask that a lead organisation is identified with all other collaborators identified as proposed subcontractors/sub grantees to the project. You could alternatively choose to form a consortium or create a special purpose vehicle.

Our priority and focus is on funding activity that takes place in the UK. For applicants not based in the UK we expect you to build/establish a UK presence or work with a UK based partner, in any case most of the funded activity should be conducted in the UK.

### Implementation

We're eager to start making an impact in our opportunity space as soon as possible. As such we want our partners to start work on implementing their plans immediately post-award.

## IP + Legals

Any pre-existing IP or foreground IP generated throughout the partnership will remain the property of the originator. However, where funded activity results in a standalone brand identity, ARIA shall own any resulting IP such that it could operate the project independently of the partner if required.

ARIA's priority has been to create an approach to intellectual property that is science-founder friendly. We expect our partners to follow the spirit of this founder friendly approach.

ARIA does not intend to enter into a legal partnership, joint venture, or relationship of agency in respect of the in-scope activities, and any relationship with successful Activation Partners will be contractual.

## How to apply

Interested organisations should submit an initial two page proposal. Organisations shortlisted based on their initial proposals will be invited to meet with ARIA to discuss and refine their approach. You can submit a full proposal even if you did not submit an initial proposal or you are not shortlisted for discussion.

During this discussion period we may introduce you to other potential partners where we believe this would be of benefit (provided you are content for us to do this, there will be no obligation to meet with these matches). Shortlisted organisations will then be invited to submit a full proposal incorporating feedback from the discussions.

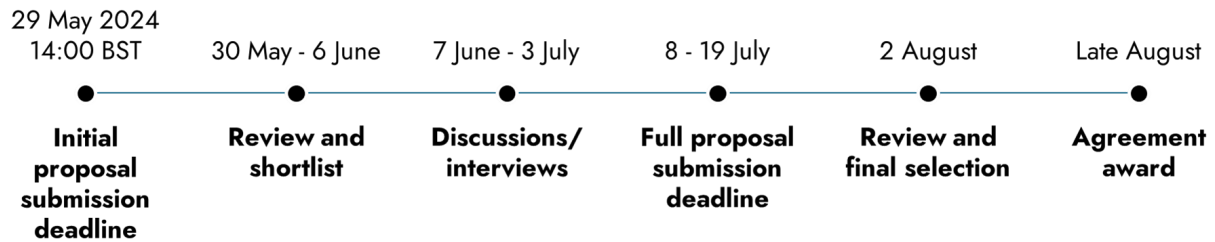
As part of your initial proposal we'd like to know:

- Who you are – a brief overview of your organisation and key individuals that would deliver the proposed activities.
- A short overview of your track record carrying out the types of activities outlined above.
- What you want to do – at a high level, the activities you'll undertake (this could be a spectrum of options), which opportunity spaces (this could be 1 or more) your proposed activity aligns with and how the proposed activities are novel or additive to the UK.
- How much funding you need/what your expected cost would be. This should be a high level figure or a range in GBP, we'll ask for more detailed costs at the full proposal stage.
- How long you would need to establish the proposed activities - a high level timeline estimate.
- If you are not based in the UK, an overview of your plan to deliver the activity in the UK.

As mentioned above, we're open to submissions that propose a spectrum of options. We're also open to multiple proposals from the same applicant.

## Timelines

This request for proposals will be open for submission as follows:



## How we'll choose our partners

We'll select partners against the following criteria:

- Relevance to one or more of our opportunity spaces + demonstrable benefit to the UK.
- Demonstration of the key attributes outlined in this document (strong track record of translating research into impact, a deeply technical focus, an appetite for the highly speculative and commitment to operate as founder/researcher friendly).
- (Even if nascent) the proposal's ability to give an idea of what the 'big win' scenario for this partnership would be (how will we know it has worked? What would the big wins in terms of driving impact for ARIA look like?)
- Evidence of your willingness to make a significant commitment to the partnership, and to invest energy/time/resources into our efforts and community (including at your leadership level)
- Evidence that the proposed activity is new or bespoke for this partnership or is likely to happen without ARIA's support. (i.e. the proposal is not for existing business as usual that is not redirected in some way)
- The reasonableness of the proposed cost and timeline.
- If you are not based in the UK, the credibility of your plans to build/establish a UK presence or partner with a UK organisation.

ARIA takes equity, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) seriously, and we want to partner with organisations who share our commitment. We may ask you questions related to ED&I as part of the process.

In addition to these criteria – to ensure a diversity of organisation type and opportunity space coverage – at each stage of the selection process we will apply a portfolio lens to our decision-making, with particular emphasis on this placed at the final stage.

Proposals that fall into the following categories are ineligible for ARIA funding:

- ARIA staff and/or their family members are ineligible to apply for any ARIA funding.
- Any entity in which an ARIA staff member and/or their family member is a board director or a person of significant control (as defined by [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website) is also ineligible to apply).

For the avoidance of doubt this does not include existing suppliers or ARIA advisors that may be consulted from time to time.

Proposals will be reviewed by members of ARIA's internal team led by our Chief Product Officer. We'll also use a number of expert external reviewers who'll review proposals and support discussions with potential partners. External reviewers will be subject to confidentiality agreements and conflict of interest checks.

### Still have questions?

If you still have questions you can send them to [clarifications@aria.org.uk](mailto:clarifications@aria.org.uk). Any questions or responses containing information that is of relevance to all potential partners that are not considered confidential will be provided to everyone that has started a submission. Answers will also be posted regularly on the ARIA website.

### Submission details

Format	Up to two sides of A4 pages (PDF)
Deadline for initial proposals	<b>29 May 2024 (14:00 BST)</b>
Responses to	Send your proposals to <a href="mailto:tenders@aria.org.uk">tenders@aria.org.uk</a>

If you require this document in an accessible format, please contact [clarifications@aria.org.uk](mailto:clarifications@aria.org.uk).