

ARIA project review and selection process

To build a programme at ARIA, each Programme Director directs the review, selection, and funding of a portfolio of projects, whose collective aim is to unlock breakthroughs that impact society.

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

Summary of our approach

- We empower Programme Directors to make robust selection decisions in service of their programme's objectives.
- 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 conflict-free, and their evaluations are carried out at arms length from the Programme Director.
- Programme Directors make final selection recommendations to optimise the programme portfolio as a whole and its alignment with the overall programme goals and objectives, the diversity of applicants and benefit to the UK.
- 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, technical reviewers will be used during the project

review and selection process.

Technical reviewers are external to ARIA, and 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 technical review is designed to generate additional data points to shape final decision-making.
- Technical reviewers will review the technical elements of the proposal only.
- 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.
- At least one Merit reviewer must be based in the UK (to ensure knowledge of the UK eco-system).
- No technical reviewer has the power to advance or reject candidates.
- An applicant cannot 'fail' or 'pass' a technical 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 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.

TA2 PHASE 1: PROPOSAL REVIEW



Step 1 - Initial screening of proposals

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

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

Step 2 – Scope & quality review of proposals

Proposals will be reviewed to ensure they are within the scope of the solicitation and are of sufficient quality.

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.

The proposal will also be reviewed to ensure that it is of sufficient quality to progress to the next stage. Where it is clear that a proposal is not of sufficient quality, 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 the Programme Director and a technical member of staff (independent of each other), both reviewers must agree the proposal is not of suitable quality for it not to progress to the next stage.

Step 3 - Merit review of proposals

Reviewers will assess the full proposals against the evaluation criteria identified in the solicitation. At least one merit reviewer must be based in the UK (to ensure knowledge of the UK eco-system).

This step will be conducted by the Programme Director and at least three other expert reviewers, two of whom must be external to ARIA. 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 – Merit review meeting

The Programme Director and all reviewers will meet to discuss each proposal reviewed. If during the merit review meeting the Programme Director identifies that to finalise selection recommendations further clarification is needed related to specific proposals, depending on the nature of the clarification a discussion with the applicant can be arranged or written questions can be submitted to the applicant.

Step 5 – Project selection approval

Having completed the evaluations process and finalised discussion of all proposals with technical reviewers, Programme Directors will develop, document, and present a hypothesis of the optimal programme portfolio and recommended funding recipients. A formal project selection meeting is held to test the hypothesis and selections to ensure the review has been done fairly and robustly, and to ensure that project selection is in line with the programme's objective. Programme Directors can make changes based on discussion in that meeting. Final project selection will be approved by ARIA's CEO.

PHASE 2: PROPOSAL REVIEW



Step 1 and Step 2 – Initial screening & compliance review of phase 2 proposals

The same process detailed above for Step 1 and Step 2 will be followed.

Step 3 - Merit review of Phase 2 proposals

Reviewers will assess the full proposals against the evaluation criteria identified in the solicitation. This step will be conducted by the programme director and at least two other technical reviewers. Additional internal and external technical reviewers may be required and added where a COI arises or additional specific technical expertise is required.

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

Step 4 – Meeting with phase 2 applicants

The Programme Director and reviewers (including external reviewers) will meet the shortlisted applicants.

Step 5 – Merit Review Meeting

The Programme Director and all reviewers will meet to discuss each shortlisted proposal. This discussion will include an overview of the proposal, along with a discussion on the technical and governance aspects of the proposal.

Step 6 – Project selection approval

Having completed the evaluations process and finalised discussion of all proposals with technical reviewers, the Programme Director will develop, document, and present their case for the recommended funding recipient.

A formal project selection meeting is held to test the recommendation to ensure the review has been done fairly and robustly, and to ensure that project selection is in line with the programme's objective. Programme Directors can make changes based on discussion in that meeting.

External reviewers may be present and provide insight on proposals at the selection meeting.

Final project selection will be approved by ARIA's CEO.