

Request for Proposal: Enduring Atmospheric Platforms

20 April 2026

V.1.2

SECTION 1: THE REQUIREMENT AND CONDITIONS

Introduction

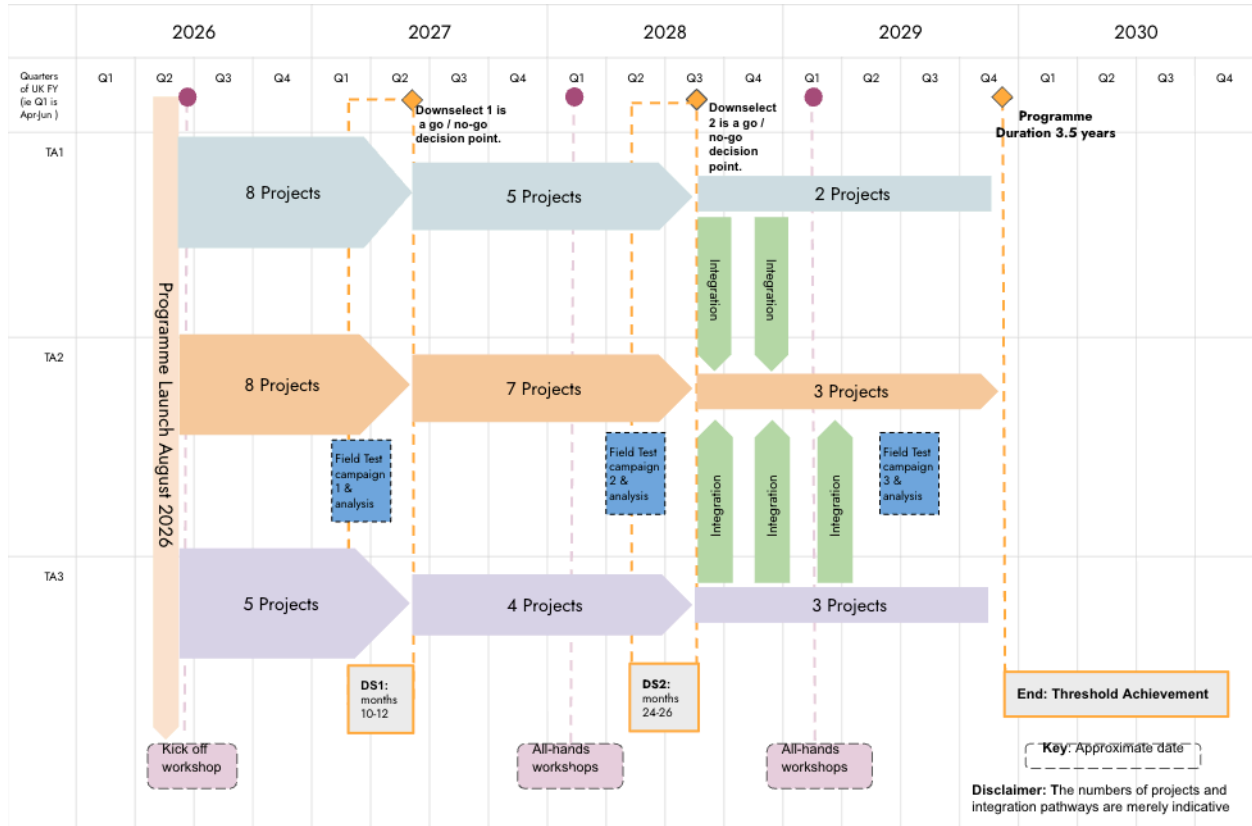
We are pleased to invite you to take part in this Request for Proposal (RFP).

Launched in January 2023, ARIA is a Research & Development (R&D) funding agency designed to take bold bets that complement and amplify the UK's world-class research ecosystem. We fund transformative science and technology capabilities that will benefit the UK and help humanity thrive.

This RFP seeks proposals from aerospace test sites, organisations, and consultants to support the [Enduring Atmospheric Platforms](#) (EndAP) Creators (the organisations and researchers funded by ARIA to build, test, and deliver breakthrough ideas) in their field demonstration of innovative approaches creating scalable high altitude communications infrastructure.

The Enduring Atmospheric Platforms (EndAP) programme is a 3.5 year effort focused on technical de-risking for low-cost, long-endurance aircraft that enable scalable high altitude communications. Programme Partners are required to provide the necessary test sites and support, regulatory guidance, and validation to help ARIA funded Creator teams prove their experimental platforms can safely fly, maintain station at altitudes above commercial aviation, and continuously deliver 300W to a 20kg payload for a full week. For further context on the full programme scope, including Key Tasks and Key Deliverables, we strongly encourage you to review the complete [call for proposals](#).

Below, is the initial Gantt chart for the EndAP programme. The Creators, selected for the awards, fall into three Technical Areas (TA), TA1: Enabling technologies, TA2: Systems integration and testing, and TA3: Deployment and communications architecture planning. Programme launch is expected for August 2026.



Programme timeline from 2026 to 2030, showing the phases and number of projects within three technical areas (TA1, TA2, TA3), including go/no-go decision points (DS1, DS2), integration loops, and approximate workshop dates.

During execution of the programme we expect at least three major field test campaigns (FTC) occurring approximately every 12 months. Details of the scope and scale of these FTCs are under

The Requirement (the “Services”)

These FTCs will help support project down-selects as the programme matures, wherein during the third FTC the remaining creators will be assessed against EndAP’s Final Exam programme level metrics. The final exam’s primary programme metrics are:

Deliver **300W** of power to a payload over one continuous week while maintaining continuous line of sight to a fixed point on the ground.

Secondary metrics can be found here in the programme [solicitation](#).

We expect TA2 platform technologies in our programme to range from constellations of multicopters to blimps, fixed-wing solar powered gliders to fuel cell powered aerostats, remote power delivery systems from the ground to altitude in both the RF and optical electromagnetic bands, various

concepts of operations from fractionalised swarms to monolithic altitude-change–exploiting enduring platforms, and beyond.

This RFP seeks proposals from aerospace test sites, organisations, and test consultants to help guide, support, and execute the EndAP’s interim and final field demonstration exams.

First, we require field test sites and facilities that can provide suitable, likely segregated, airspace, range instrumentation & data services, specialised environmental & integration testing, operational and regulatory management, and logistics & ground infrastructure including over a large and sparsely populated area suitable for testing. These include services such as but not limited to:

- Precision tracking (optical and RF), telemetry, and data monitoring
- Electromagnetic clearance (RF, optical, comms), high intensity radiated field testing, stratospheric chamber testing
- Segregated airspace and the management of that airspace
- Support with safety cases, integration of safety equipment such as flight termination systems and regulatory applications
- Launch and recovery operations with targets and sensors
- Specialist personnel services: test planners, test engineers, test conductors, test-creator liaisons with regular meeting cadencies.

Second, we require a field testing agency or consultancy firm that can guide, aid, and embed with EndAP TA2 creators ensuring that their system integration, development, and test timelines are commensurate with those required by field test sites and the necessary regulatory processes. Our TA2 creators will be developing and modifying aerospace platforms that range from technology readiness levels (TRL) four to seven while integrating TA1 technologies which could range from TRL two to five. This means across the EndAP portfolio of technologies there will be creator teams who are experienced in the intricacies of building and testing experimental aerospace platforms, including regulatory approval, to creator teams whom this programme could be their first foray into the exciting world of aerospace prototype and design. Thus an agency or firm is desired who has experience across the spectrum of what it takes to go from idea to field demonstration.

Lastly, we require a field test agency or consultancy firm to assist ARIA in the independent verification and validation (IV&V) of Creator’s performance during the analysis periods following each field test campaign as well as for the evaluation of EndAP’s Final Exam. The Final Exam criteria and metrics to which ARIA will be assessing Creators against can be found [here](#) in the Programme Solicitation.

We request Key Tasks to include, but not limited to the following:

- High engagement in both a proactive and rapidly responsive manner with up to 8 assigned programme funded TA2 Creator projects to plan and prepare for FTCs

- Help test readiness coordination with TA1 and TA3 Creator teams whose technology may be integrated with the platforms of the assigned TA2 projects
- Build in-depth common understanding of assigned projects' ambitions and understand individual challenges for FTC success
- Conduct gated reviews with each Creator team for test readiness before the FTCs such as preliminary design reviews (PDR), critical design reviews (CDR), and System Requirement Reviews (SRR)
- Conduct gated reviews between the Creators and Test site conductors via test readiness reviews (TRR) and test review boards (TRB)
- Conduct FTC1 with up to eight Creator teams
- Conduct FTC2 with up to seven Creator teams
- Conduct FTC3 with up to three Creator teams.

Commensurate with the Key Tasks we request Key Deliverables to the Creators and/or ARIA to include, but not limited to the following:

- Progress reports after each milestone or review delivered to ARIA and Creator teams.
- Raw telemetry and sensor data streams in standard formats
- High-fidelity visual records (optical, radar, IR)
- Field demonstration meteorological data packages
- Formal evaluation and assurance reports including quick look and final reports as well as safety assessments
- IV&V reports.

Performance management and expectations

Programme Partners are expected to maintain high standards for responsiveness, proactivity, and continuous communication with ARIA and the Creator teams. ARIA will monitor performance throughout the contract period, with particular focus on the successful delivery of services and the satisfaction of the Creators working with the Programme Partner. Performance will be reviewed on this basis, with the aim of supporting high-quality outcomes and effective collaboration in line with the Key Contract Terms.

For purposes of initial RFP submission assume three major field test campaigns over the 3.5 year lifetime of the EndAP programme with the following major activities:

Phase one | 1 - 12 months (August 2026 - July 2027): subscale testing

- 1 - 8th month: field test preparation work with up to eight TA2 teams.
 - Regulatory activities
 - Flight safety engineering
 - Test site integration activities
 - Environmental testing

- Initial and pre-site gate reviews
- 9th - 11th month: Field Test Campaign 1 (FTC1) and analysis
 - One month testing window in which up to eight TA2 teams conduct testing from sub scale to full scale
 - Safety and go/no-go gate reviews
 - Altitude ranges: ground to below commercial cruising altitudes and above commercial cruising altitudes
 - Technology demonstration examples: power beaming, swarm operations, novel aerostat control, unique passive and active sensing modalities, automated flight control.
- 12th month: Post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way-ahead determinations

Phase two | 13th - 26th month (August 2027 - September 2028): subscale to fullscale testing

- 13th - 22nd month: field test preparation work with up to seven TA2 teams.
 - Regulatory activities
 - Flight safety engineering
 - Site integration activities
 - Environmental testing
 - Initial and pre-site gate reviews
- 23rd - 25th month: Field Test Campaign 2 (FTC2) and analysis
 - One month testing window in which up to seven TA2 teams conduct testing from sub scale to full scale
 - Safety and go/no-go gate reviews
 - Altitude ranges: ground to below commercial cruising altitudes and above commercial cruising altitudes
 - Technology demonstration examples: power beaming, swarm operations, novel aerostat control, unique passive and active sensing modalities, automated flight control.
- 26th month: Post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way-ahead determinations

Phase three | 27th - 42nd month (October 2028 - February 2030): fullscale testing

- 27th - 36th month: field test preparation work with up to three TA2 teams.
 - Regulatory activities
 - Flight safety engineering
 - Site integration activities
 - Environmental testing
 - Initial and pre-site gate reviews
- 37th - 39th month: Field Test Campaign 3 and Final Exam with IV&V analysis
 - One month testing window in which up to three TA2 teams conduct testing from sub scale to full scale

- Safety and go/no-go gate reviews
- Altitude ranges: above commercial cruising altitudes
- Technology demonstration examples: power beaming, swarm operations, novel aerostat control, unique passive and active sensing modalities, automated flight control.
- Post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way-ahead determinations
- 40th - 42nd month: Final Examination assessments

Implementation and Deployment Timeline

The supplier must be able to start work immediately following the targeted August 2026 programme launch date. The contracts will cover the full duration of the EndAP Programme, a period of 42 months (3.5 years)

In implementing this contract we require at minimum three Field Tests Campaigns to occur aligned to phases of the EndAP programme pending Creator readiness. To ensure sufficient capacity, bidders should plan for the availability to execute up to three field tests per TA2 Creator team per phase. However, with proper integration and high contact between the Programme Partners and the TA2 Creators we would desire additional field tests to be conducted when greater benefit can be realised from either an engineering, operational, or programme standpoint. Thus any field tests conducted beyond our minimum requirements will be additionally invoiceable by the Programme Partners, based on the unit costs and cost logic submitted in Section 2: Criteria.

Programme Partner performance assessments will be monitored continuously and can lead to termination of the contract, in particular if Creators feel undersupported in terms of the responsiveness, pro-active planning, and quality of support by programme partners.

Key Contract Terms

Terms and Conditions

The contract will be placed on terms and conditions (T&Cs) provided by ARIA to the preferred bidder. The proposed terms will include the following principles:

- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract for convenience upon ninety days' prior notice.
- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract where the supplier fails to provide the service contracted, upon thirty days' prior notice.

- Foreground IP generated during the performance of the contract may need to be assigned or licensed to ARIA and/or ARIA Creators, depending on the nature of the work and its intended use. This approach is intended to support collaboration, enable effective programme delivery, and ensure that innovations can be further developed and commercialised.
- The supplier shall indemnify ARIA, its employees, officers and agents against the supplier's infringement of third party Intellectual Property Rights.

All information shared with the supplier shall be subject to confidentiality terms.

SECTION 2: PROPOSAL RESPONSE STRUCTURE AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants are invited to set out how they propose to deliver the Services outlined within this RFP.

The format below is set out as a guide and represents a maximum length response. If bidders chose to respond in a different format this will be acceptable as long as sufficient information is provided to be comparable to this format of response.

The appointed provider will be selected against both their written response and presentation according to the criteria as set out below with the following weightings.

Executive Summary

Summarise how you will deliver the key services you are proposing and how these relate to ARIA's requirements set out in section 1 above.

Criteria A - Background, Profile, and Experience (15% weighting)

- A clear demonstration of delivering similar requirements for fast-paced and rapidly scaling organisations, including existing client information, this should include:
 - A brief overview of the company structure, history, values, and mission statement.
 - What are your approximate revenue, staff numbers, and client numbers linked to the Services.
- Provide information on your overall client base; for example, other clients supported including relevant experience for similarly sized, fast-paced, and rapidly scaling organisations.

Criteria B - Your Approach to Service Delivery (45% weighting)

- A clear articulation of what you see as our requirements and how you would meet them, setting out the delivery model you would use for this service including your proposed plan for delivery and any tools or technologies to be used.
- Provide your management and oversight structures that you would apply to this service.

Case studies

- Provide a minimum of two examples/reference customers, ideally one in the private sector and one in the public sector, where your organisation has provided a similar service. With their consent, provide a summary of key successes, issues, mitigating actions and overall learnings for the ARIA contract (please attach these case studies as an annex to your proposal, which will not be included in the maximum page count).

ARIA may choose to verify case studies with the reference customers as part of the proposal review process. We will ask for your consent and suitable contact details beforehand.

Criteria C - Demonstration of Resource (15% weighting)

- Demonstrate your expertise and resources for delivering the services, including:
 - Your ability to provide operational and executional resources without requiring internal ARIA resources, with supporting examples.
- Evidence of how you will meet the required experience, specialist subject matter, or market expertise.

Criteria D - Commercial Proposal (25% weighting)

- Commercial terms that demonstrate value for the tax-payer, through transparent pricing models with no hidden costs and a proven ability to offer cost-effective solutions without compromising quality.

Use the [Pricing Template](#) provided to present all field test costs, materials costs, and rate cards as well as any underlying calculations. In your proposal, include a clear written narrative to support your fees against the specified criteria and identify any critical assumptions, dependencies and exclusions you require in order to successfully execute any resultant Contract.

- This should include a clear pricing structure, including:
 - Cost per Creator team prepared for field test (ex VAT) per phase (see table below).

- Cost per unit field test executed (ex VAT), aligned with the assumed capacity of up to three tests per Creator per phase (see table below).
- Cost logic/breakdown (e.g., hourly rates for specific personnel) for how the prices are calculated
- Rates per hour (ex VAT)
- Any additional costs which are likely to be incurred through the life of the contract.
- Applicants should ensure that all costs are inclusive of overhead and profit, and separately state the overhead percentage and profit percentage applied.

Note: any resultant contract will be priced on a capped time and material basis.

When preparing cost estimates use the following table as a guide that aligns with our Programme timeline, Key Tasks, and Key Deliverables:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Phase 1, Months 1 - 8 | Field test preparation work, including gate reviews | Price per TA2 Creator team (max 8 teams) |
| Phase 1, Months 9 - 12 *potential ancillary tests if desired by Creators could precede this window | Field Test Campaign 1 (FTC1) and analysis, incl. post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way-ahead determinations | Price per TA2 Creator team and field test (max 8 teams) |
| Phase 2, 13th - 22nd month | Field test preparation work, including gate reviews | Price per TA2 Creator team (max 7 teams) |
| Phase 2, 23rd - 25th month *potential ancillary tests if desired by Creators could precede this window | Field Test Campaign 2 (FTC2) and analysis, incl. post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way ahead determinations | Price per TA2 Creator team and field test (max 7 teams) |
| Phase 3, 26th - 36th month | Field test preparation work, including gate reviews | Price per TA2 Creator team (max 3 teams) |
| Phase 3, 37th - 39th month *potential ancillary tests if desired by Creators could precede this window | Field Test Campaign 3 and Final Exam, incl. post flight test debriefs, assessments, and way-ahead determinations | Price per TA2 Creator team and field test (max 3 teams) |
| Phase 3, 40th - 42nd month | Final Exam Independent Verification and Validation analysis and reports | Final costs |

Additional requirements

The Bidder shall confirm as part of its submission adherence to the following requirements. Evidence in the form of copies of relevant certification must be provided as part of the submission and can be uploaded directly into the spaces provided in application portal:

Mandatory

- Support teams are required to be available to all creators for first line support
- All ARIA data to be stored within the UK, EEA or Australia
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plans
- Confirmation of adherence with the [Government's Supplier Code of Conduct](#)
- [Cyber Essentials](#)

Format of Proposal Submission

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Format | PDF. Pages should be numbered, and the response should include the bidder's name inserted as a header |
| Page Guide | Up to 5 pages + Pricing Template , plus maximum 2 page annex for case studies. |
| Responses to | ARIA's application portal In case of any technical issues with the portal please contact clarifications@aria.org.uk |

SECTION 3: TIMELINES, REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Procurement Timeline

The dates in the following timetable are provisional and may be subject to change at the reasonable discretion of ARIA.

| Event | Date |
|--|-------------------------|
| Deadline for submission of clarification questions | 14 May 2026 (14:00 BST) |
| Deadline for proposal submission | 22 May 2026 (14:00 BST) |
| Notification of selection for presentation | 05 June 2026 |
| Presentation by bidders to ARIA selection panel | 15 to 19 June 2026 |
| Preferred bidder chosen and informed | 24 June 2026 |
| Target Award date | 31 July 2026 |
| Target Contract Start date | 19 August 2026 |

Review Stages

This review is intended to consist of 4 stages:

- Stage 1 - Written proposal
- Stage 2 - Presentation (in-person or virtual) by four shortlisted respondents per service (Test Sites & Facilities, Creator Guidance, and IV&V) to the ARIA selection panel. Applicants shortlisted for multiple services will provide a single presentation covering all services.
- Stage 3 - Preferred bidder chosen and informed.
- Stage 4 - discussions and negotiations with preferred bidder, onboarding planning and contract agreement.

The ARIA selection panel will be chaired by the Programme Director, Rico Chandra.

Clarification Questions

Bidders are urged to review the RFP documentation, identify and submit any clarification requests no later than 14 May 2026 (14:00 BST), via email to clarifications@aria.org.uk. Clarification requests received after this date will not be reviewed.

Any clarification request or responses containing information that is of relevance to all bidders will be provided to all bidders that confirm their intention to participate. Answers to clarification requests

will also be posted to the [ARIA website](#), following the deadline for submission of clarification requests. If bidders do not wish a query or response to be disclosed to other bidders, they must communicate this and the reason why, with the clarification question.

CONDITIONS OF RFP

Confidentiality, Publicity, Conduct and Conflicts of Interest:

ARIA will treat the information you provide in your Proposal as confidential and will not disclose it other than as necessary for the purposes of this RFP, the associated procurement process and ARIA's functions. ARIA may use the information you provide to assess and compare submissions, administer this RFP, agree and manage any resulting Contract, and support ARIA's operational activities, including the development, testing and improvement of internal tools, systems and processes.

ARIA may share Proposals with relevant employees, contractors, advisers and third-party expert reviewers for evaluation purposes. Any such recipients will be subject to appropriate confidentiality, non-use and conflict of interest obligations. ARIA will process any personal data contained in your Proposal in accordance with applicable data protection legislation and its [privacy notice](#) and may contact individuals named in the Proposal using the details provided.

In support of its internal processes and operations, ARIA may use secure* generative AI tools. This may include using information from Proposals to assist with assessment, comparison, analysis, summarisation and identification of themes, risks or opportunities, and to support the development and improvement of internal tools and processes. Any AI-assisted outputs will be reviewed by ARIA staff and will not be used as the sole basis for contract award decisions.

*For ARIA, "secure" means enterprise-approved generative AI tools that have undergone ARIA's Technology Security Assessment Process to ensure appropriate security controls, transparency over data storage and processing, and that ARIA data is not used to train external AI models or shared beyond authorised environments.

Although ARIA will treat Proposals as confidential, bidders are advised not to submit potentially patentable or highly commercially sensitive information before appropriate protections are in place. ARIA may disclose confidential information where required in order to meet its obligations as a public body, including for parliamentary, ministerial, judicial or audit purposes (including disclosure to the Comptroller and Auditor General). ARIA may publish statistics or high-level information relating to this RFP or any resulting Contract, but will not publish confidential or personal data.

The contents of this RFP are confidential and must not be copied, reproduced, distributed or disclosed except for the purpose of preparing and submitting a Proposal. No publicity regarding this RFP or the award of any Contract will be permitted without ARIA's prior written consent. ARIA may use ideas or concepts contained in a Proposal for any reasonable purpose connected with this RFP or subsequent discussions, provided that it does not disclose the identity of the originating bidder.

ARIA reserves the right to amend, clarify or withdraw this RFP at any time and may extend submission deadlines where appropriate. ARIA may reject any non-compliant Proposal, disqualify any bidder guilty of serious misrepresentation, fraud, regulatory breach or conduct giving rise to material risk to ARIA, re-run the procurement on the same or an alternative basis, choose not to award any Contract, or amend the timetable, structure or content of the procurement process as it considers appropriate. ARIA will not be liable for any

costs, expenditure or effort incurred by bidders in connection with this RFP or the procurement process, including where the process is amended or terminated. It is at ARIA's sole discretion as to which, if any, Proposal is accepted.

Any attempt by a bidder or its advisers to influence the contract award process in any way may result in disqualification. Bidders must not enter into any agreement or arrangement with any other person as to the form or content of any other Proposal, offer any inducement to alter another Proposal, enter into arrangements that prevent or restrict another party from submitting a Proposal, canvass ARIA or its employees or advisers in relation to this procurement, or attempt to obtain confidential information concerning another bidder or Proposal. Bidders are responsible for ensuring that no actual or potential conflicts of interest exist between the bidder (or its advisers) and ARIA, its employees or advisers, and must declare any such conflicts in their Proposal. ARIA reserves the right to disqualify a bidder where a conflict cannot be appropriately managed.

ARIA staff (employees, secondees, individual contractors engaged by ARIA in a staff-like capacity, and Board members), and their immediate family members (including spouse, civil partner or unmarried partner; sibling; child whether biological, adopted or step-child; and parent) are not eligible to submit a Proposal. Any entity in which such an individual is a board director or person of significant control (as defined on gov.uk) is also ineligible. Any Proposal falling within these categories will be rejected on eligibility grounds.

Enduring Atmospheric Platforms RFP

Clarification Questions and Responses

Category

Question

Answer