Advanced Research + Invention Agency

ARIA

Opportunity Seeds: Engineering Ecosystem Resilience

Call for proposals

Date: 20 November 2025

v1.0

Advanced Research + Invention Agency ARIA

SUMMARY

Intro to opportunity seeds

Breakthroughs require finding people who think differently about what's possible – and empowering them to follow their vision.

To support scientific and technological breakthroughs, ARIA Programme Directors can award funding to small but highly ambitious projects, "opportunity seeds", to support ambitious research aligned to their opportunity spaces. To understand how opportunity seeds work within our broader funding model and complement our programme funding, see our research model.

For opportunity seed projects our Programme Directors are looking for bold ideas that could change the conversation about what is possible or valuable and provide steps towards new capabilities. If you have an important idea you're obsessed with, but you don't currently have the resources or support to take it forward, we'd like to hear from you.

Ideas could come from anywhere, so we welcome proposals from individuals and teams who are early in their career or who have atypical backgrounds. We care more about your idea and your intrinsic motivation than we do about your CV.

Engineering Ecosystem Resilience funding call

Programme Director Yannick Wurm's opportunity space, 'Engineering Ecosystem Resilience', asks: "*How can we become as precise and purposeful in our interactions with living systems as we are when we build buildings or software, so we can make ecosystems resilient and reverse biodiversity decline*?" We're looking to fund high potential proposals with up to £500,000 each[1]. We initially expect to fund around 10 opportunity seeds in this space.

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.

[1] inclusive of applicable taxes and all other costs such as overheads.

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.

SCOPE

Within the scope outlined in this section and our evaluation criteria, we're interested in what you *really* want to do. The guidance below is to help you assess whether your idea aligns with this funding call.

In scope:

+ Ideas that sit within the **'Engineering Ecosystem Resilience'** opportunity space. By this, we mean your proposal should show how your idea **either aligns with or challenges** the assumptions of the Summary, Beliefs, or Observations in the opportunity space.
+ Ideas that range from early stage curiosity-driven research through to translational and close-to-commercial science and technology.

Out of scope:

+ Ideas that target Yannick's goal of **Accelerating Adaptation,** as described in his programme thesis. By this we mean ideas which fit squarely within the programme.
+ Ideas that are likely to happen without ARIA support, for example, through other funding mechanisms.
+ Commercial products.

Examples of ideas we consider in scope:

- Detection, containment or control of invasive or pest species or their impacts.
- New approaches for measuring or modelling biodiversity/resilience/vulnerabilities/interactions.
- Understanding impacts of different Miyawaki micro-forest or green wall strategies.
- Reduce methane emissions from riverbed bacteria by creating tools that maintain dissolved oxygen levels.
- AI-enabled real-time sensing for adaptive rapid-response management.

Examples of ideas that would be out of scope:

- Developing a squirrel pox vaccine for red squirrels.
- Agricultural plants or animals.
- Improving renewable energy or greenhouse gas technologies.

Budget and length of projects

We provide funding between £10,000 to £500,000 per project, inclusive of VAT (where applicable) and all associated costs (both direct and indirect).

There is no minimum length for a proposed project; the maximum length is three years.

THE APPLICATION

We've designed a short and straightforward application that we hope takes no more than two-to-three hours to complete. You can find guidance in this section, and within the application portal.

You can answer all the questions directly in the application portal, so there's no need to format them in a particular way.

Part 1: Technical Proposal

This part consists of questions about you and your idea.

Application questions	Guidance	Word Limit
What is the research you propose to do, and why is it of scientific or technological importance?	• *What's the hunch or big idea you can't get off your mind? Is there a problem space you want to explore? A hypothesis you want to test? A new method, tool, or technology you want to create?* • *If it works out, how would it disrupt the current frontier of knowledge or supersede the state-of-the-art?* • *What capabilities or future work could it unlock?*	*350*

How does your proposed research align with or challenge the assumptions of the 'Engineering Ecosystem Resilience' opportunity space?	• *How does your idea either align with or challenge the assumptions of the Summary, Beliefs, or Observations underpinning the opportunity space?*	200
Why hasn't it been done yet?	• *Have recent developments only now made it possible? Has the research community overlooked it? Perhaps no one has put the pieces together like this before?* • *How is your approach different or unusual compared to what's being funded or developed elsewhere?*	*200*
If you are selected for an award, what are the steps you would take to deliver this research proposal?	• *Where will you start and what steps will you take?* ○ *Consider things like hiring a team, hiring lab space, securing equipment* • *What are the technical challenges?* • *What does success look like to you and how will you measure it?*	*200*
Why are you the right person (or team) to work on it?	• *Where does your insight come from?* • *Do you have any examples that showcase your motivation, niche expertise, or ability to commit?* • *If you're looking to extend your team, what key expertise should the next member bring?*	*200*
[Optional] You can include diagrams or graphics as part of your proposal.	• *Consider including one or more visual aids that help us understand your innovation. Examples could include: a diagram, schema, graph, graphical abstract, etc.*	

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.

Part 2: Timeline, budget and administrative questions

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

<table>
<tr><th>Application questions</th><th>Guidance</th></tr>
<tr><td>Why is ARIA funding essential for the success of the project?</td><td>Our goal is to empower and champion researchers and engineers to push the boundaries of what's possible. To better understand your project, we'd like to know why it is unlikely to happen without ARIA's support, and why our funding is essential compared to other potential sources, such as government research grants or venture capital.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Can you tell us more about you and your team?</td><td>We want to know who will be doing the work (not just the principal investigator or project lead) and what portion of their time will be dedicated to this project. We usually prefer project leads or other key researchers to be spending at least 50%, ideally 80%, of their time on the project. The project lead is not required to have any particular degree of seniority, though we do want to see that they have the requisite skills, expertise and motivation. When forming your teams we encourage you to consider the diversity of your team and who is best placed to lead the project.

We understand that early-stage ideas may not yet have a full team in place. So if you don't know the individuals, just list the required roles. An example of how to answer this question is below:

<table>
<tr><th>Individual</th><th>Role/ expertise</th><th>Already in place? If not, how long after project kickoff are they likely to start?</th><th>FTE (%)</th><th>Total time on project (months, rounded)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Sophia Fleissig</td><td>Synthetic biologist, project lead</td><td>Currently assigned to a different project ut could transfer to this project with 6 weeks notice</td><td>80</td><td>26</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unknown</td><td>Expert in plant tissue culture and transformation</td><td>To be recruited, aiming to start within 3 months</td><td>100</td><td>33</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
<tr><td>How long do you expect your project to take (in months)?</td><td>There is no minimum length for a proposed project. The maximum length is 36 months.</td></tr>
</table>

	We value speed, so if you think you could do the work faster with a greater budget, we'd prefer you to bias your proposal in that direction. *It's ok if you're not sure – you can input an estimate or range.*
What key milestones will mark your proposed projects progress?	*Our aim is to help your research get started quickly, so we're committed to a fast negotiation and award process. To support this, we'd like you to propose two to three milestones, including the timelines for their completion, that will help track the progress of your project.* *You can find guidance on how to draft your project milestones here.* *You can find more information on what it means to be an ARIA Creator including how our Programme Directors will work with you here.*
How much funding do you need? (optional)	*To answer this question, please provide a cost breakdown by completing the spreadsheet here.* *We're asking for a breakdown now, so you're confident that your project budget will be sufficient to deliver your goals and minimise your need to rescope.* *The minimum funding amount is £10,000. The maximum amount is £500,000. Ask for the amount of funding needed to get your idea somewhere exciting. Don't be afraid to be ambitious.* *It's ok if you're not sure – give your best estimate or if you are unable to provide a breakdown please move to the next question.* *Prior to completing this template you should review ARIA's Eligible cost guidance here.*

How much funding do you need in total?	*If you are unable to complete the above breakdown, please provide a total estimate in GBP (inclusive of VAT where applicable and all other costs) of what you consider a reasonable funding amount for your goals.*
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.*
What are the ethical and social responsibility considerations for your idea?	*Please detail the ethical/social responsibility issues you have considered and your proposed plan for meaningfully engaging with these. These might include, for example: unintended, irreversible or harmful consequences to our ecology, biodiversity, wildlife, animals, human health; requirements for engagement with the public, specific communities and stakeholders; questions on equity and environmental justice; governance and accountability etc.*
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 unique/compelling and/or the UK would miss out if not funded.* *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.* *Benefits may include:* • *enhancing economic growth in the UK* • *fostering scientific innovation in the UK* • *enhancing the quality of life in the UK (or both in the UK and internationally)*
Have you read and understood our funding terms?	*Our goal is to ensure your research can get going quickly, so we want to ensure a fast negotiation and award process. We aim to have agreements signed within 6 weeks, which we recognise can be much faster than standard at some organisations. Before proceeding, please confirm that you have read and understand our funding terms.*
Additional questions about you/your organisation that can be found in the application portal.	

Please be aware that ARIA is subject to the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and may disclose or publish all or part of your application proactively or in response to information requests made under these regulations.

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 opportunity space or is outside of the scope, it will be rejected prior to a full review.

We will evaluate the proposal against the criteria outlined below, rather than scoring each answer separately. We expect proposals to spike against our criteria, and to have different strengths and weaknesses. Final selection will be based on an assessment of the proposal as a whole.

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

a) **The project unlocks something scientifically and technically important and actionable**
   - We're looking for ambitious and/or consensus-shifting ideas that have the potential to change the conversation about what's possible or valuable. So we want to understand: if your idea worked out (and we know it might not), would you learn or demonstrate something important? Might it provide a step towards unlocking an important scientific or technical capability? If initial results are promising, would we be compelled to double down on the bet with additional funding or support?

b) **The applicant shows strong motivation, distinctive expertise, and a credible, feasible proposal.**
   - This doesn't mean your CV or credentials. Instead, we'll be looking for whether you can demonstrate deep problem knowledge, a well-considered plan, and intrinsic motivation to work on the idea.
   - We are also looking for proposals to identify potential ethical, legal or regulatory risks, and that planned mitigation efforts are clearly defined and feasible.

c) **The project is unlikely to be funded or as successful without ARIA**
   - We're looking to support ideas that would be unlikely to happen without us; for example, because they are particularly speculative or are underserved by other funders. We also want to enrich the opportunity space, so we will consider the project's potential to diversify

skill sets and backgrounds that can contribute to the space.not at a research organisation.

As part of our evaluation, we will also consider:

- Whether the proposed plan or experimental design is likely to deliver on the goals of the proposal.
- The reasonableness and realism of the proposed budget and timeline.
- 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).

For more information on our opportunity seed review and selection process, see here.

TIMELINE

This call for opportunity seed funding will be open for applications as follows (we may update timelines based on the volume of responses we receive):

Applications open	**20 November 2025**
Application deadline	**2 February 2026 (14:00 GMT)**
Proposal review	**3 February 2026 - 5 March 2026**
As part of our review we may invite applicants to meet with the Programme Director 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	**6 March 2026**
At this stage you will be notified if you have or have not been selected for an award subject to due diligence and negotiation. 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 project activities, milestones and budget details will be finalised based on information provided in the application. • Agreement to the set Terms and Conditions of the Grant/Contract. Please note ARIA does	

not negotiate these terms. You can find a copy of our funding agreements here.

Please note, for those applicants not selected for an award we will not provide feedback.

Award	**6 April 2026**

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.

After this initial call for proposals, we will launch an open rolling call, allowing proposals to be submitted on an ongoing basis.

HOW TO APPLY

Before submitting an application, please read this call for proposals in full, the FAQs for opportunity seeds and the general ARIA funding FAQs.

Please read the portal instructions and create your account before the application deadline.

APPLY HERE

If you have any questions, please use the chat function on the funding call page for the quickest response. It can guide you to the right information or connect you with the ARIA team if needed.