

## Comms + Engagement Support RFP

### FAQs from the webinar

The ARIA team hosted a webinar to provide an overview of the RFP objectives, scope, and application process, and to give potential applicants an opportunity to ask questions. The following questions were submitted:

Category	Question	Answer
<b>Audience, Strategy &amp; Objectives</b>	<b>When you say you want to reach new talent - but also 'communicating pride in what ARIA is funding' - who is the audience you want to reach? General public?</b>	ARIA communicates with multiple audiences. For funding calls, the focus is on engaging highly specialist ecosystems. For brand-level communications, the informed public and policymakers are key audiences to build pride and trust in ARIA's work.
	<b>If you were to summarise the core objectives of these programmes and the campaign, what would they be?</b>	The core objective is to create enormous societal impact and benefit for the UK by funding leading-edge science. The work here is to ensure specialist communities + the R&D ecosystem know about the work, while making the informed public and policymakers feel proud, excited, and optimistic. Maintaining trust as a public body doing ambitious work is also paramount.

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**How do you define success? e.g. after one year of comms support, e.g. a public poll to measure how the public understands ARIA's role, or (a target number of) media citations & appearances?**

Success would not be measured by national public polling, as ARIA is not trying to become a household name. Instead, success involves positive sentiment around news stories, attracting the right talent and partners, minimising misinformation, forging new partnerships, and building positive understanding with policy audiences.

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**If you could sum up the job to be done in year 1 with a new partner, what is it?**

The partner should continue current media engagement and reputation management, but significantly deepen storytelling to bring the actual science and its impacts to the forefront. For policy, year one should focus on demonstrating early proof points and building foundational relationships with regulators.

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**Are there any organisations in your peer set, or adjacent spheres that you feel are communicating well and what is it that you admire?**

Google X is viewed as a great example of how to successfully communicate advanced research and storytelling.

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**How do you currently measure effectiveness of your communications efforts with your incumbent agency? Can you speak about specific success metrics you would expect from a partner?**

Media monitoring, social analysis and sentiment analysis. Growth of owned platforms. New partnerships.

Success would be seeing positive sentiment continue to grow, increased tier 1 coverage.

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**The RFP mentions monitoring misinformation and narrative drift. Has ARIA already experienced hostile narratives, and if so, from where: media, political, activist, or academic? Or is this more about future-proofing?**

We would be happy to discuss these points with shortlisted candidates.

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**How do you think about ARIA's relationship with the broader political environment? Do you see the agency's comms as needing to actively build a constituency of support, or is this more about profile and awareness?**

We see our role as actively contributing, being complementary and adding value to the R+D ecosystem. Therefore, building a good understanding and appreciation of our unique role among broader political audiences, particularly in the science, research and innovation environment, is important.

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**If you are able to share - what are the biggest risks to ARIA's reputation at the moment?**

We would be happy to share risks with shortlisted candidates.

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**Agency  
Requirements &  
Structure**

**How important is past contract  
experience with UK government  
agencies?**

Past government contract experience is not essential, but it is useful. However, demonstrating a deep understanding of how to navigate government—including working with civil servants, other public research organisations and parliamentary scrutiny—is critical.

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**Any minimum team size and  
revenue requirements for agency  
partners? If nothing rigid, do you  
have an idea in your heads at least  
of what you're expecting?**

There are no rigid minimums, but ARIA expects a dedicated core team capable of delivering the work on a daily basis. ARIA values agility and prefers a deeply embedded core team, with quick access to additional resources and expertise, over an overly large team that creates onboarding complexity.

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**Can the supplier be an individual or  
does it have to be a media  
organisation?**

Based on the high volume of work and the need to move quickly, an individual would likely struggle to meet the resource requirements.

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**Are you looking for a partner who is  
UK-based or open to a partner  
working remotely but who is in the  
UK time zone?**

ARIA strongly prefers an in-person relationship; we currently meet with their incumbent partner weekly and value that arrangement.

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**If a supplier feels it can deliver to a high degree in a specific aspect of the RFP, but doesn't have 'even capability' across the full stack, is it possible to bid in the event of a chosen supplier that might be weaker in that area... might there be a consortium that comes about through the bidding process itself?**

Yes, ARIA is open to consortiums to strengthen proposals. However, ARIA will only contract with one lead supplier to ensure there is a single "front door" for both policy and communications.

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**Do you anticipate ever needing support in other languages?**

It is not essential, but it could be useful for specific niches, such as major international forums (like COP) or understanding policy landscapes in other countries where ARIA projects operate.

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**I understand you work with an existing agency. Are they repitching?**

ARIA has an incumbent supplier but cannot confirm whether or not they are repitching.

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**Are respondents required to fulfil the entire delivery programme or can they bid on individual elements of the brief?**

We require a partner, whether as an individual entity or as a consortium to deliver the full scope of work. We are open to consortium approaches but require a lead partner.

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**Of the three workstreams, where do you see the main resource of this contract e.g. Workstream A: 30%, Workstream B, 30%, Workstream C: 40%?**

Each of these is critically important. Media engagement and policy drive a high volume of weekly outputs and so would likely require more resources.

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**Scope of Work  
& Capabilities**

**Are there any learnings from your previous agencies? What worked? What did not?**

ARIA highly values senior strategic counsel, particularly for navigating tricky reputational moments and audience shaping. While ARIA handles many functional communications internally, we rely heavily on our partner for media engagement and quick execution on the public policy side, including deep regulatory expertise.

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**Is paid media/media buying in scope to support the earned? / Are you anticipating any paid digital advertising within this contract?**

No, paid media and advertising are not in scope. ARIA achieves its reach through earned media.

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**The RFP references national/international media, specialist outlets, and emerging platforms like Substacks, newsletters and podcasts. How does ARIA think about the balance between traditional media relations and these newer earned channels?**

Both are important, and ARIA takes a "horses for courses" approach. Specialist publications are highly valued for reaching specific technical talent, while traditional national media is critical for brand storytelling and reaching policymakers.

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**How important is technical knowledge of your opportunity spaces?**

Deep technical research knowledge (like having a PhD) is not required, but "technical fluency" is absolutely essential. The agency must be able to rapidly synthesize highly complex topics and translate them into accessible narratives for the media, the public, and parliamentarians.

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**The RFP speaks to media relations support at both the national and international levels. Presently, where are most of your inbound media activities coming from? How much of your media is proactive efforts on ARIA's part versus managing inbound media inquiries?**

Currently, there is an even split between inbound inquiries (often driven by high-risk programs) and proactive pushes around programme milestones. ARIA hopes to maintain strong UK and specialist international coverage while exploring new storytelling formats like video or documentaries to highlight the science.

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**Is it important to demonstrate the agency can connect ARIA to MPs/parliamentarians who lead in science & engineering, to connect ARIA to industry & business experts, or both?**

ARIA is already well-connected to government through its sponsor team in DSIT. The agency does not necessarily need to provide introductions, but they must have deep knowledge of the landscape to advise ARIA on exactly *who* we should be speaking to.

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**How do you currently engage with different political parties considering changes in government, different priorities over election cycles?**

ARIA is an apolitical organisation. If and when it engages with different political parties, it does so on an impartial basis. It is important to appreciate a wide range of stakeholder perspectives that may influence the ecosystem it operates in.

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**Are there any confidentiality issues with the research projects, or are you/your supplier able to talk about them freely with external audiences?**

We are generally able to communicate freely about our projects.

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**What would you say has been highly successful in terms of media coverage so far for ARIA?**

There is a healthy interest in science and research, and we've had positive engagement with our work and our Programme Directors. We've generally been successful in communicating the potential and value of our science.

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**How much support are you seeking for your own channels, or will this be primarily focused on media relations and partners?**

It will be mixed, we are looking for support with storytelling across owned channels, but the functional comms requirements of programmes such as webpages, socials, etc. are covered by our in-house team.

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**Internal  
Operations**

**What is the size of your in house comms team? Can you tell us about the roles and capabilities there?**

The in-house comms team has approximately 9 people, with a dedicated comms lead for each program. We rely on our agency partner entirely for the media engagement/press office function. The policy team is smaller (2 people, but growing) and focuses on deep regulatory engagement.

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**Do you have creative freedom from govt. to do things other orgs may not be able to do - campaigns or ads etc. or do things need to be sort of 'signed off' or cleared by DSIT/Cabinet Office on big creative moves?**

ARIA has a high degree of creative and legal freedom. We do not require our sponsor (DSIT) to approve messaging, though we must still maintain transparency and be mindful of public scrutiny.