Accelerated Adaptation
Call for proposals

Date: 13 February 2026
V1.0

SECTION 1: Programme Thesis and Overview

This solicitation is derived from ARIA's Accelerated Adaptation programme thesis which is part of ARIA's Engineering Ecosystem Resilience Opportunity Space.

Over 25% of assessed animals and plants are at risk of extinction within a century [1]. This potential loss is shaped by intensification of human-driven changes in land use, movement of species and their pathogens, pollution, and climate change. Indeed, our activities create environmental pressures that now exceed the abilities of many species and ecosystems to adapt sufficiently to persist [2], and we have surpassed seven of nine proposed biophysical limits linked to stable life on Earth [3]. Biodiversity losses affect both the extent of ecosystem service provision [4], and the ability of those ecosystems to respond to disturbance [5]. Hence, these environmental changes put under existential threat the irreplaceable benefits every nation needs from nature [6], including pest control, carbon sequestration, clean water, and the production of food and materials [7].

Nature protection typically focuses on conserving, recreating and/or rewilding habitats. Such efforts, and those to reverse environmental pressures back to pre-industrial levels, are essential. However, well-established nature protection efforts may struggle to match the scale and pace needed to prevent breakdown of our ecosystems and the services they provide. Furthermore, established nature protection approaches are often unable to consider the detailed mechanistic bases of an ecosystem's resilience.

New technologies could unlock new pathways that can complement and enhance well-established nature stewardship approaches. Indeed, genomics, assisted selection, and biotechnology have transformed agriculture, how we perform research on human disease, and how we diagnose individual patients. Similarly, robotics and AI-enabled automation have transformed supply chains. Applications of modern technologies are substantially improving our ability to measure and model nature; they are also creating market recognition of biodiversity and of nature's services. Such improvements can drive needed policy and behavioural changes. At the same time, if species are on track towards extinction, or ecosystems at risk of collapse, our intervention options are extremely limited.

We thus now also need to be able to help vulnerable species acquire beneficial traits; preparing them for known environmental pressures, or building resilience to less predictable environments. Applying this new capability judiciously can help the focal species survive so they continue to deliver critical ecological traits or ecosystem services. These outcomes in turn help the many other species that depend on them. Ultimately, maintaining and improving redundancy in the provision of ecological traits and ecosystem services increases overall ecosystem resilience.

This ARIA programme aims to create tools to accelerate adaptation in wild species and ecosystems and to deliver detailed case studies in contained settings. To achieve this, we will unite cross-disciplinary teams of experts in ecology, evolution, biological engineering, conservation, ethics, robotics, and AI. Applications could focus on strategically chosen vulnerable species, such as trees [8], which can support hundreds of other species, and/or on critical functional groups such as pollinators or soil nutrient cycles that underpin ecosystem services [4].

Alongside technical research, we will incorporate ethical and governance dimensions from the outset. While this programme will not deploy novel interventions in the wild, the research conducted under the framework we propose has the power to transform conservation and ecological engineering approaches, expanding well-established stewardship approaches with complementary tools. It is critical that any tools are created with robust ethical consideration from the outset, to support a transformation that enables a future where both humanity and biodiversity can persist and flourish.

SECTION 2: Programme Objectives

This Programme's aim is to **Enable wild species to rapidly adapt to current and future threats.** The goal is to help the focal species, and the species they interact with, to survive and thrive, and to support the resilience of our natural infrastructure.

The programme aims to:

A. **Demonstrate accelerated adaptation in wild species**
Achieve clear, measurable improvements in key targeted traits (e.g. survival, fecundity, functional performance) in at least two wild species under simulated stress, substantially beyond what unaided natural processes would deliver over the same time.

B. **Develop scalable platforms for accelerated adaptation [not being funded in this call]**
Use robotics, AI, laboratory and computational automation to generalise the tools developed during phase 1 into replicable, scalable platforms. This is to enable cost-effective accelerated adaptation of many more species to many more stressors.

C. **Create the tools to prioritise, predict, and de-risk interventions**
Use modelling, data, and analytics to identify the most impactful targets (species, traits, systems), considering potential cascading benefits, and also risks. This is to support future decisions regarding regulation, investment, and potential deployment.

D. **Lay the foundations for responsible deployment and future markets**
Produce a credible translation strategy for responsible deployment. This includes contributing to the needed governance and information foundations, and addressing key gaps for appropriate measures of value.

To address those four aims, the programme has five Technical Areas (TAs), outlined below. An application must focus on one TA only. However, applicants are welcome to submit multiple separate applications (in separate TAs).

The programme consists of two phases:

+ Phase 1 will focus on the development of protocols, tools, and methodologies to accelerate adaptation.
+ Phase 2 will build on the work initiated in Phase 1, specifically to increase the cost efficiency of accelerated adaptation protocols so they can be more broadly applied.

This solicitation is for Phase 1 of this programme which focuses on TA1, TA3, TA4, and TA5 (see "Programme Structure" section below for further information).

Technical Areas

TA1 — System-focused Teams

System-focused teams are the core of our programme. A study system may be a group of species that are related or associated functionally (e.g., pollinators, soil nutrient cyclers, insect predators), taxonomically (e.g., trees), or ecologically (e.g., grassland, lichen). Study systems must be strategically chosen, with global importance and/or clear UK relevance. A study system may also have cultural value. Creators (i.e., people funded by ARIA) will initially focus on a single species and stressor (TA1.1) in which they anticipate being able to show tractable progress within 18 months; they will subsequently generalise to at least one additional species or stressor (TA1.2). We encourage situations where focal species are highly connected, making cascading functional benefits more likely.

At a programme level, we anticipate funding teams working on complementary systems. We anticipate funding more work on terrestrial and freshwater systems than on marine systems, reflecting differences in tractability and the priorities of other funders. See Annex 1 of the [Accelerated Adaptation Thesis](#) for non-prescriptive examples of in-scope projects. The following are explicitly **out of scope** for this call:

+ Established conservation approaches — vital for ecosystem resilience, but not ARIA's focus.
+ Direct work on invasive or pest species — although new technologies in this area hold promise.
+ De-extinction efforts.
+ Agricultural species (e.g., heat-resistant crop varieties).
+ Public health initiatives (e.g., mosquito eradication for disease control).
+ Species re-introduction programmes (e.g., re-introducing wolves).

TA1.1 - Adaptation

Focus: Demonstrate accelerated adaptation in specific systems.

+ Work on a strategically chosen system.
+ Select a first species and stressor to work on for TA1.1; benchmark the baseline performance of non-adapted species.
+ Use supercharged natural adaptation (e.g. accelerated selection, assisted migration, physiological priming) and/or engineered molecular adaptation (e.g. transient RNA/peptide interventions, symbiont engineering) to accelerate adaptation. All work will occur in contained environments and comply with all relevant UK and international laws and regulations.
+ Consider ethical and social responsibility aspects from day one.

Metrics of success:

+ Improved performance

- ○ Primary metrics: survival, physiological performance (e.g., growth, fecundity), or functional performance (e.g., pollination rate, nutrient cycling) under defined stress scenarios.
- ○ Target: Median performance of adapted species ≥ top 1% of unadapted. Where this metric is unmeasurable, or the target unreasonable, applicants may suggest alternative metrics.
  - + Persistence
    - ○ Evidence that beneficial traits or functions can persist over ecologically meaningful timescales (e.g., ≥3–5 generations for short-lived (e.g., <6 months) species, or over multiple stress events for longer-lived taxa).

TA1.2 - Generalisation

Focus: With minimal refinement, apply the protocol from TA1.1 to a different species or stressor. TA1.1 and TA1.2 will continue during Phase Two for the teams selected for funding under the second solicitation.

Metrics of Success:

- + Ability to apply the protocol developed in TA1.1 to other species or stressors.
- + Trait improvement achieved using metrics analogous to those used in TA1.1.

We expect to fund 6-10 teams within TA1. Expected total budget is £24m for a duration of up to 2 years.

TA2 – Scaling (Phase Two only – not included in this call for proposals)

Although TA2 is not part of this solicitation, it is outlined here for completeness and to provide context on how outputs of Phase 1 will be used in Phase 2.

TA2 focuses on improving the cost effectiveness of adaptation protocols and tools, so they can be applied at broader scales (i.e., large numbers of species and stressors). For this, selected system-focused teams will expand by adding scaling partners, i.e., individuals, teams or organisations with specialist technical skillsets that can enable automation and scaling of the methodology developed in TA1. This likely involves:

- + Robotics for automated rearing in climate-controlled conditions (e.g., incubators, ecotrons, climate-temperature chambers/vivaria/terraria).
- + Sensors and algorithms for automated phenotyping.
- + Lab automation and computational automation for genomic vulnerability mapping or molecular engineering (e.g. cell culture, in-vitro phenotyping, design and synthesis of RNA, vectors, peptides or proteins, performing gene edits, creating transgenic lines).

Metrics of Success:

- + ≥10× improvement in some combination of cost per experimental unit, time from setup to usable data, or number of conditions tested per unit time.

- + Core system-focused team using the scaling mechanism/platform and reporting that it is useful and efficient.
- + Accuracy/reliability/quality on par with low-through put approach used in TA1.

If you are interested in TA2 and wish to sign up for programme updates, including when the open funding call for TA2 goes live in 2028, please sign up here.

TA3 — Modelling

Focus: Prioritise where and how to intervene, and quantify risks.

- + Increase our ability to predict ecosystem vulnerabilities and resilience, and characterise tradeoffs of different types of interventions.
- + Integrate genetic-, population-, and ecosystem-level models.
- + Integrate knowledge and data from System-focused teams' focal species to model which species, traits, and interventions could produce disproportionate ecosystem resilience gains, and quantify risks.

Metrics of Success:

- + **Prioritisation impact**
  - ○ Provide evidence that the new modelling approach can substantially improve prioritisation of systems / traits / interventions.
  - ○ Develop a resilience metric that incorporates trophic interactions, genetic diversity, and environmental change. This should be pragmatically grounded in a manner that can help decision makers and financial markets.
  - ○ Demonstrate capacity to incorporate subjects from TA1 into the model(s) in an ecologically sensible manner.
- + **Predictive performance**
  - ○ Where possible, provide retrospective comparison of model predictions vs observed system outcomes (e.g., trait change, resilience under stress).
- + **Integration level**
  - ○ Models must span at least two levels (e.g., genetics → population, population → ecosystem function) for at least one case.

We expect to fund 1-2 teams within TA3; the teams will need to have a strong track record in ecological, evolutionary, and statistical modelling and/or AI. Teams ideally already work with empirical data, and should at most generate only limited amounts of new data. We anticipate that the TA3 team(s) modelling efforts will benefit from integration of data or knowledge created by System-focused teams or other sources. Expected total budget of £2m for up to 2 years.

TA4 — Data & Analytics

Focus: Make results comparable, trusted and legible to external stakeholders.

- + Provide data-handling training to System-focused teams; lead establishment of shared data, protocol, and code standards. Design and run standardised measurement, validation, and data pipelines across System-focused teams.

+ Develop dashboards and analytics to be used by programme leadership and ultimately external stakeholders in understanding results and helping to inform potential intervention decisions.
+ Independently verify outputs generated by System-focused teams.

Metrics of Success:

+ Shared data schema and reporting standards adopted by ≥70% of funded teams.
+ Independent checks performed on key claims from System-focused teams with a high reporting quality standard.
+ Additional effort to integrate system results into shared architecture should not increase workload of System-focused teams beyond 0.05 FTE.
+ Dashboards and analytics used actively by programme leadership to understand and communicate results.

We expect to fund 1-2 teams within TA4. The teams could be from an academic core facility, a data-science focused academic research team, or a contract research organisation. Chosen teams will have strong expertise in data and statistics, experimental design, software sustainability, and likely genomic analysis. Expected total budget of £0.75m for up to 2 years.

Note: A team selected for one of the other TAs cannot also be selected for TA4.

TA5 — Ethics & Social Responsibility (ESR)

Focus: For TA5, we encourage applicants to propose projects that they believe will support the aim of the programme, recognising there is a diverse set of ethical considerations in the funded areas that could warrant specific ESR focused research and activities. We are interested to see proposals include the following types of activity but remain fully open to other ideas:

+ Co-develop, with creators and/or wider stakeholders, ESR tools, frameworks, and guidance, based on ESR considerations of the programme and projects.
+ Develop and provide programme-level ESR training and project-level support to ensure responsible delivery of goals and/or decision-making.
+ Produce evidence, insight, and practical guidance that can inform future governance models and/or regulatory pathways.
+ Applications focused on running public dialogues are excluded from this call for proposals, as ARIA intends to commission a comprehensive public dialogue separately. Other forms of public and community engagement will be considered.

Metrics of Success:

+ The programme is recognised externally as an example of how responsible research can be done in this field and contributes to advancing constructive dialogue on new ways to support ecosystem resilience. Specifically: outputs including ESR related guidance, insights, and frameworks, are cited or used by other relevant stakeholders (e.g. researchers, companies, regulators, government, NGOs, or international bodies).

+ The programme and relevant Creators report that activities or analysis led by ESR teams added value to their research or decision-making and/or contributed to improved impact strategies.

We expect to fund 1-2 teams within TA5. Expected total budget of £1.2m for up to 2 years.

Programme Structure

The programme is structured in two phases:

+ Phase 1 will consist of work in TAs 1, 3, 4, and 5 over the first two years of the programme and focuses on developing the protocols, tools, and methodologies for adaptation.
+ Phase 2 will continue the work commenced in Phase 1; its main technical challenge will be on finding mechanisms (e.g. through automation) through which Accelerated Adaptation approaches can be more easily and cost-effectively applied.

For Phase 1 (the first two years), all System-focused teams (TA1) will commence with TA1.1, Adaptation. System-focused teams can move onto TA1.2, Generalisation, at a time that makes sense for their team and for their methodology.

Ahead of Phase 2, there will be a second call for proposals in 2028 which includes TA2, TA3, TA4, and TA5. Existing System-focused teams will be encouraged to apply to TA2 under the second solicitation in 2028. As part of this they will need to:

+ Prove they can adapt their species satisfactorily.
+ Outline the technological approach they plan to use for scaling (TA2).
+ Demonstrate a convincing plan towards real-world impact.

We anticipate Phase 2 will bring a smaller, more focused set of teams building on Phase 1, while also welcoming new Creators to join the programme across TAs 2—5. Activities funded under Phase 2 will be distinct from those supported in Phase 1.

	Phase 1 (two years) £29m		SECOND SOLICITATION	Phase 2 (two years) £25m		Total: £54m	
	Year 1	Year 2		Year 3	Year 4	Phase 1	Phase 2
TA1.1 Adapt **TA1.2** Generalise	Project 1 → Project 1			Project 1		£24m	£20m
	Project 2 → Project 2			Project 2			
	Project 3						
	Project 4						
	Project 5 → Project 5			Project 5			
	Project 6						
	Project 7 → Project 7						
	Project 8 → Project 8			Project 8			
TA2 Scaling				Project 1 + Scaling partners			
				Project 2 + Scaling partners			
				Project 5 + Scaling partners			
				Project 8 + Scaling partners			
TA3 Modelling						£2m	£2m
TA4 Data & Analytics						£0.75m	£0.75m
TA5 ESR						£1.2m	£1m
Additional	Independent ethics oversight council					£2.3m	
	Communications, governance, commercialisation, events, etc.						

Table 1) Anticipated programme structure and funding breakdown. For phase 2, a new call for proposals will take place in two years.

SECTION 3: Programme Duration and Project Management

The duration of the programme is four years (two years for Phase 1; two years for Phase 2), though applicants are encouraged to consider plans which may reach success (or failure) on faster timelines.

Project Milestones

Each project's progress will be monitored using clearly defined milestones. Milestones will be defined by the applicant prior to the start of a project, be agreed upon by ARIA, and should be designed to easily convey progress to a third party. In order to do this, milestones should:

+ Be specific, measurable, and signify a meaningful step towards reaching the overall programme goals.
+ Include details on methods used for measurement and evaluation.
+ Be defined on a quarterly cadence for all phases of the programme.
+ Include major "Go / No-Go" decision points.

Success / pivot / closure criteria for each project will be determined by the applicant's ability to meet these, agreed-upon, milestones. We strongly recommend that applicants first aim to tackle the most difficult challenges in their project. Early demonstration that a technical approach will not succeed may still be considered a positive outcome and, in agreement with the ARIA Programme Director, enable an informed pivot.

Further guidance on ARIA milestones can be found here.

Programme & Project Management

Progress reviews will be held quarterly and will include a brief written update from each Creator team, alongside a quarterly meeting with ARIA (held virtually or as a site visit). During each quarterly meeting, Creators and the ARIA Programme Director will review the agreed-upon milestones, and discuss further details of each project. As part of that discussion, teams will be encouraged to think through the following questions as they execute on their plan:

+ What is(are) the target deliverable(s)?
+ What are the top three risks identified at this stage of the project?
+ What are the mitigations required to overcome each risk?
+ What are the expected outcomes/learnings from the activity to date?
+ How long are the critical path activities taking and how much will they cost, both in time and money?
+ What are the dependencies from prior activities/phases of the programme?

Upon completion of each activity, questions we will look to answer are:

+ What new information has been gleaned?
+ What (if any) risks have been overcome? What new risks have emerged?
+ Did we learn what we thought we would learn? If not, why not?
+ Is there anything we can do to learn more or faster?
+ Is there still a path towards the target? Are we heading towards any dead ends?

Ethics and Social Responsibility (ESR) Advisory Committee

This programme will establish an ESR Advisory Committee. This Committee will be made up of international experts in all related fields, with a remit to provide advice and guidance to the Programme Director, to support oversight of matters related to the ethical and social considerations of the programme and funded projects. This may include advising on, and reviewing, the outputs and significant milestones from Creators. The role and remit of this committee will evolve to meet emerging ESR-related considerations of the programme.

Approach to intellectual property

This programme will use ARIA's standard approach to Intellectual Property (IP) as the default position: Creators will own any new IP generated as a result of the project, and will retain full ownership of any background IP they bring to the project. There are a few exceptions to this:
+ TA1 (System-focused) teams will be required to share their data with other Creators as part of the following situations:
  ○ TA4 — The Data and Analysis team(s) will:
    ○ review the submitted data to verify claims made by System-focused teams.
    ○ create a standardised framework for reporting and progress tracking, which all System-focused teams will follow.
  ○ TA3 — The Modelling team(s) will integrate prior knowledge and data generated by System-focused teams to improve modelling efforts.

+ TA3 teams will own the IP of the models they create. The modelling teams will develop models independently. In some cases, they may integrate small amounts of prior knowledge or data generated by System-focused (TA1) teams to inform or parameterise their models, subject to the agreement of the relevant TA1 Creators.

+ TA4 teams will be required to share their standardised framework with other Creators across all TAs.

In all cases where Creators are required to share data, a signed data/information sharing agreement must be executed within the first quarter of the programme. The agreements must at minimum cover: treatment of confidential information, intellectual property and ownership of results, and dispute resolution. The agreements must allow Creators to use the data for the duration of the programme, for the purposes of their ARIA funded project, subject only to reasonable confidentiality and intellectual property protections.

For Phase 2 applications, Phase 1 Creators may choose to share intellectual property where they consider it beneficial to their application, but are not required to do so. For example, where new Creator teams are formed at the end of Phase 1 from combinations of original teams, the participating Creators may agree to share IP if they determine this represents the best path forward for the project.

Collaboration among Creators and engagement with programme-level events

Each Creator team should include all the necessary expertise and resources required for delivery of their project, without being reliant on the outputs of other individual Creator teams (except for situations where this is specifically highlighted above).

However, to foster a collaborative research environment, we endeavour to enable all Creator teams to feel that they are a part of a greater whole. Therefore, we will host regular community events, specifically an annual two-day Creator event (in the UK). This event will allow teams to exchange updates, scientific learnings, and feedback, as well as attend programme-level sessions to establish standards for data, code, and ethics.

Creators from all technical areas are expected to join this annual event. Please include an estimation of costs related to attendance in your budget proposals.

SECTION 4: Eligibility & Application process

Eligibility

We welcome applications from across the R&D ecosystem, including individuals, universities, research institutions, small, medium and large companies, charities, and public sector research organisations.

Collaboration between Applicants

Many applicants may decide to apply as a consortium consisting of two or more organisations that are proposing a cohesive proposal to work collaboratively. Here, the application should be made by a single lead applicant/organisation, to whom the funding will be awarded if successful. Other

members of the consortium will be subcontracted/granted by the lead applicant. Note that this does not necessarily mean that the whole consortium stands or falls together — at the negotiation stage, we may indicate an intention to fund only certain workstreams or organisations.

Creators who apply as a consortium or otherwise indicate an intention to collaborate with other applicants will be expected to enter into a formal collaboration agreement. A full agreement must be executed between collaborating organisations within the first quarter from project start date. The agreements must at minimum cover roles and responsibilities, treatment of confidential information, intellectual property and ownership of results, and dispute resolution. If helpful, we can refer applicants to established templates that can be helpful as starting points for these agreements.

Finding potential collaborators and teaming

For those seeking specific expertise to support their proposal, we have created a teaming request form to facilitate finding potential team members who have registered their interest in this programme. Using this form you will be able to register, submit your details, and gain access to a list of other individuals seeking to find/share their expertise. All requests are screened via ARIA's internal team prior to access, after which connections will be made by individual users based on aligned expertise.

Webinar

We are also hosting a webinar, on 24th February 2026 at 15:00 GMT, to provide an overview of the programme's objectives, scope, and application process, and to give potential applicants an opportunity to ask questions to the ARIA team. Please register your interest and submit questions in advance for this event here.

Application Process

An application must focus on one TA only. However, applicants are welcome to submit multiple separate applications (in separate TAs). The application process for Technical Areas TA1, TA3, TA4, and TA5 consists of two stages:

Stage 1 — Concept paper

Concept papers are designed to make the solicitation process as efficient as possible for applicants. By soliciting short concept papers (no more than three pages) ARIA reviewers are able to gauge the feasibility and relevance of the proposed project and give an initial indication of whether we think a full proposal would be competitive. Based on this feedback you can then decide whether you want to submit a full proposal. You can find out more about ARIA's review process here.

If you miss the deadline for submission of concept papers you can still submit a full proposal. However, we strongly encourage you to submit a concept paper. Historically, 64% of applicants awarded funding submitted concept papers.

To ensure the process is quick and open, we do not require your organisation's consent prior to submission of a concept paper.

You can find guidance on what to include in a concept paper here.

Following review of concept papers applicants will either be encouraged or discouraged from submitting a full proposal. For more details on the evaluation criteria we'll use, click here.

Stage 2 — Full proposals

This step requires you to submit a detailed proposal including:

+   **Project & technical information** to help us gain a detailed understanding of your proposal.
+   **Information about the team** to help us learn more about who will be doing the research, their expertise, and why you/the team are motivated to solve the problem.
+   **Administrative questions** to help ensure we are responsibly funding R&D. Questions relate to budgets, IP, potential conflicts of interest, etc.

You can find more detailed guidance on what to include in a full proposal here. **You can submit a full proposal even if you did not submit a concept paper.**

For more details on the evaluation criteria we'll use, click here.

Non-UK funding

Our primary focus is on funding those who are based in the UK. However, funding will be awarded to organisations outside the UK if we believe it can boost the net impact of a programme in the UK. In these instances, you must outline your proposed plans or commitments that will contribute to the programme in the UK within the project's duration (note the maximum project duration is two years).

If you are selected for an award subject to negotiations, these proposed plans or commitments will form part of those negotiations and any resultant contract/grant.

More information on the evaluation criteria we will use to assess your answers can be found later in the document here.

We have provided some additional guidance on non-UK funding in our FAQs including available visa options.

SECTION 5: Timelines

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

Applications open	**13 February 2026**
Concept paper submission deadline	**06 March 2026 (14:00 GMT)**
Concept paper review & notification of encouraged/not encouraged to submit full proposal sent	06 March 2026 - 31 March 2026

At this stage and based on your concept paper, you will either be encouraged to or discouraged from submitting a full proposal. If you receive feedback indicating that you are not encouraged to submit a full proposal you can still choose to submit a full proposal. This preliminary assessment/encouragement provides no guarantee of any full proposal being selected for award of funding.

Full proposal submission deadline	**01 May 2026 (14:00 BST)**
Full proposal review	**02 May 2026 —** **17 June 2026**

As part of our review we may invite applicants to meet with the Programme Director to discuss any critical questions/concerns 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	**18 June 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. If you have been selected for an award (subject to negotiations) we expect a 1-hour initial call to take place between ARIA's PD and your lead researcher within 10 working days of being notified.

We expect contract/grant signature to be no later than 6 weeks from successful/ unsuccessful notifications. During this period the following activity will take place:

+ Due diligence will be carried out.
+ The PD and the applicant will discuss, negotiate and agree upon the project activities, milestones, and budget details.
+ 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 shortlisting or award we will not provide feedback.

Award	**3 August 2026**

Please note, contract/grant 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.

SECTION 6: Evaluation Criteria

Concept Paper and Proposal Evaluation Principles

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. As such, we empower Programme Directors to make robust selection decisions in service of their programme's objectives ensuring they justify their selection recommendations internally for consistency of process and fairness prior to final selection.

We take a criteria-led approach to evaluation, as such all proposals are evaluated against the criteria outlined below. We expect proposals to spike against our criteria and have 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. Final selection will be based on an assessment of the programme portfolio as a whole, its alignment with the overall programme goals and objectives, and the diversity of applicants across the programme. Further information on ARIA's proposal review process can be found [here](#).

Proposal evaluation process and criteria

Proposals will pass through an initial screening and compliance review to ensure proposals conform to the format guidance and they are within the scope of the solicitation. At this stage we will also carry out some checks to verify your identity, review any national security risks, and check for any conflicts of interest. Prior to review of applications, Programme Directors and all other reviewers are required to recuse themselves from decision making related to any party that represents a real or perceived conflict.

Where it is clear that a proposal is not compliant, outside the scope, and/or does not pass a quality assurance review, the proposal will be rejected prior to a full review on the basis they are not compliant or non eligible.

Proposals that pass through the initial screening and compliance review will then proceed to full review by the Programme Director and expert technical reviewers (this may include the use of AI. Further information on ARIAs proposal review process can be found [here](#) and the use of AI in the conditions of the call available [here](#)).

In conducting a full review of the proposal we'll consider the following criteria:

1. **Worth shooting for:**
   a. The proposed project uniquely contributes to the overall portfolio of approaches, systems, and work needed to advance the programme goals and objectives.
   b. It has the potential to be transformative and/or address critical challenges within the programme and/or meaningfully contribute to the programme thesis, metrics, or measures.

2. **Differentiated** — The proposed approach is innovative and differentiated from commercial or emerging technologies being funded or developed elsewhere. This means looking beyond traditional conservation, into novel methods you think are ripe for expansion or under-explored.

3. **Well defined** — The proposed project clearly identifies what R&D will be done to advance the programme thesis, metrics, or measures, and is feasible and supported by data and/or strong scientific rationale. The composition and planned coordination and management of the team is clearly defined and reasonable. Task descriptions and associated technical elements provided are complete and in a logical sequence with all proposed stage-gates and deliverables clearly defined. The costs and timelines proposed are reasonable/realistic.

4. **Responsible** — The proposal identifies major ethical risks and legal or regulatory requirements and includes planned mitigation and/or compliance efforts that are clearly defined and feasible.

Note that ARIA-funded research must comply with all applicable laws and regulations, and [ARIA's policy on research and innovation involving animals](#).

5. **Intrinsic motivation** — The individual or team proposed demonstrates deep problem knowledge, has advanced skills in the proposed area, and shows intrinsic motivation to work on the project, and key individuals are dedicating sufficient time to the project. The proposal brings together disciplines from diverse backgrounds.

6. **Benefit to the UK** — There is a clear case for how the project will benefit the UK. Strong cases for benefit to the UK include proposals that:
   a. Are led by an applicant within the UK who will perform the majority (>50% of project costs spent in the UK) of the project within the UK;
   b. Are led by an applicant outside the UK who seeks to establish operations inside the UK and perform a majority (>50% of project costs spent in the UK) of the project inside the UK and present a credible plan for achieving this within the programme duration.

   For all other applicants we will evaluate the proposal based on its potential to boost the net impact of the programme in the UK. This could include:
   c. A commitment to providing a direct benefit to the UK economy, scientific innovation, invention, or quality of life, commensurate with the value of the award;
   d. The project's inclusion in the programme significantly boosts the probability of success and/or increases the net benefit of specific UK-based programme elements; for example, the project represents a small but essential component of the programme for which there is no reasonable, comparably capable UK alternative.

   When considering the benefit to the UK, the proposal will be considered on a portfolio basis and with regard to the next best alternative proposal from a UK organisation/individual.

Proposal Feedback

At the concept paper stage, applicants will be notified whether or not they are encouraged to submit a full proposal. If you are encouraged to submit a full proposal, we will provide detailed feedback to help inform your full proposal. For those applicants not encouraged to submit full proposals we will not provide feedback.

At the full proposal stage, applicants will be notified whether or not they have been successfully selected for an award. For those applicants not selected for an award we will not provide feedback.

SECTION 7: How to apply

Before submitting an application we strongly encourage you to read this call in full, as well as the [general ARIA funding FAQs](#).

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. Any questions or responses containing information relevant to all applicants will be provided to everyone that has started a submission within the application portal. We'll also periodically publish questions and answers on our website, to keep up to date click [here](#).

Please read the portal instructions below and create your account before the application deadline. If you are disabled or have a long-term health condition, we can offer support to help you engage with ARIA, navigate our funding application process, or carry out your project, you can find more information here.

Application Portal instructions

APPLY HERE

SECTION 8: References

1. IUCN. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2025-2. 2025 [cited 31 Oct 2025]. Available: https://www.iucnredlist.org
2. Radchuk V, Reed T, Teplitsky C, van de Pol M, Charmantier A, Hassall C, et al. Adaptive responses of animals to climate change are most likely insufficient. Nat Commun. 2019;10: 3109.
3. Planetary Boundaries Science (PBScience). Planetary Health Check 2025. Potsdam Institute forClimate Impact Research (PIK); 2025. Available: https://publications.pik-potsdam.de/rest/items/item_32589/component/file_33044/content
4. Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. In: IPBES secretariat [Internet]. 17 May 2019 [cited 5 Aug 2025]. Available: https://www.ipbes.net/node/35274
5. Oliver, T., Isaac, N., August, T. et al. Declining resilience of ecosystem functions under biodiversity loss. Nat Commun 6, 10122 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms10122
6. Evison W, Low LP, O'Brien D. Business relies heavily on nature to supply much-needed goods and services. Recognizing those dependencies is the first step toward managing the risks and opportunities they create. Available: https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/strategy-and-business/content/sbpwc-2023-04-19-Managing-naturerisks-v2.pdf#page=3.08
7. Global Risks Report 2025. In: World Economic Forum [Internet]. [cited 3 Oct 2025]. Available: https:// www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2025/digest/
8. Mitchell RJ, Bellamy PE, Ellis CJ, Hewison RL, Hodgetts NG, Iason GR, et al. Collapsing foundations: The ecology of the British oak, implications of its decline and mitigation options. Biol Conserv. 2019;233: 316327.

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Concept Papers Guidelines

How to format your proposal

+ Page count: a maximum of 3 pages, including diagrams but excluding references
+ Format: single line spacing, standard character spacing
+ Font: Arial. Colour: black. Size: 11-point font or larger
+ Margins: At least 0.5" margins all around
+ File type: PDF only

Section 1: Technical concept

Applicants are required to provide a concept paper no longer than 3 pages in length that outlines:

+ Which Technical Area you seek to pursue (TA 1, 3, 4 or 5).
+ A brief summary of your scientific or technical aim, the proposed idea / solution, and how it supports the objectives of the technical area and the programme as a whole.
+ A description of the approach or methodology that will be employed to address the research objectives. Including:
  ○ Any data or scientific rationale to support your proposed concept — supporting data, journal articles, blogs, code, or other materials may be referenced or linked to in the submission if they directly support your paper, but do not necessarily have to be your own work.
  ○ Identification of the technical challenges or obstacles that must be overcome to achieve the research goals. This includes potential risks and mitigation strategies.
  ○ TA1 applicants should also explain why the proposed idea has not previously been realised.
+ An overview of the proposed activity of work, any key metrics and milestones, and any dependencies and assumptions.
+ An overview of the proposed project team including information about the expertise of the research team, relevant experience, skills, and capabilities.

Section 2: Timeline, Budget and Additional questions

In completing your application you must also provide answers to the following questions. Answers to these questions are not included in the 3 page cap. You should complete these questions in the application portal so there is no need to format these in a specific way.

Budget: How much funding do you need?

Please complete the table below providing an estimate in GBP (inclusive of VAT where applicable and all other costs) of what you consider a reasonable funding amount for your project. It's ok if you're not sure — give your best estimate.

Cost Type	Budget (£ Inc VAT)
Labour	
Materials	
Subcontract	

Cost Type	Budget (£ Inc VAT)
Labour	
Equipment & Facilities	
Travel	
Other	
Subtotal	
Indirect Costs	
Total	

Timeline and additional questions:

Question	Guidance
Are you proposing to contribute funding?	*Where you or your organisation are proposing to contribute funding to the project, please let us know. If yes, tell us how much funding you/your organisation plan to contribute.* *ARIA will fund 100% of project costs and contribution of funding is not essential. However, we welcome proposals that contribute funding in cases when such funding will strengthen the potential success. In these cases, this funding contribution will be considered as part of the overall strength of the project proposal.*
How many months will you need to work on your proposed project?	*There is no minimum length for a proposed project. The maximum length is 24 months.*
Do you consent to ARIA introducing you to other programme applicants to facilitate potential collaborations?	*The primary goal is to facilitate potential collaborations that can strengthen the applicants' proposed projects. Please note that we will not share any information about your proposal. All personal data provided to ARIA will be processed in accordance with UK data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act (2018) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Further information on how we use personal data and how you can exercise your right as a data subject can be found in the ARIA Privacy Policy.*
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.*

Are there any conflicts of interest?	*Please provide a short description of any potential conflicts of interest.*
What are the ethical and social responsibility considerations for your proposal? How do you propose to engage with these?	*Please provide an overview of the ethical/social responsibility issues you have considered and your proposed plan for meaningfully engaging with these throughout the project.*
Are there any other factors or restrictions that might impact your freedom to operate and deliver the project?	*Please provide a short description of any import/export restrictions, security, legal and regulatory restrictions that you are aware of.*
Do you intend to use animals as part of your proposed project?	*If yes, what type of animal do you foresee using and roughly how many?* *Why do you think there is a need to use animals as part of your proposal?*
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).* *However, we can award funding to applicants whose projects will primarily take place outside of the UK, if we believe it can boost the net impact of a programme. In these instances, you must outline any proposed plans or commitments in the UK that will contribute to the programme within the project's duration (note the maximum project duration is 2 years).* *Please provide a brief summary of your proposed plans or commitments.*
Additional questions about you/your organisation that can be found in the application portal.	

Full Proposal Guidelines (subject to minor amendments)

How to format your proposal

+ Page count: a maximum of 10 pages, including diagrams but excluding references
+ Format: single line spacing, standard character spacing (neither expanded nor condensed)
+ Font: Arial. Colour: black. Size: 11-point font or larger
+ Margins: At least 0.5″ margins all around
+ File type: PDF only

Applicants are required to provide a proposal no longer than 10 pages in length that outlines:

Section 1: Programme & Technical

The aim of this section is to gain in-depth, technical information about the project being proposed. This should include:
+ Which Technical Area you seek to pursue (TA 1, 3, 4 or 5).
+ An abstract of no more than 250 words summarising the proposed technical approaches and how each will enable achievement of one or more TA goals. It should also rationalise why the applicant(s) is well poised or suited to address these challenges.
+ A detailed explanation of the proposed idea/solution and how it supports the technical objectives of the chosen pathway.
    ○ This should be supported by visual aids, data, and/or strong scientific rationale for why what you are proposing would work.
    ○ Please include any required technical information, as specified in section 2 of the Call for Proposals document.
+ A comprehensive list of the known technical risks/unknowns standing in the way of achieving the stated goals.
+ How the proposed approach is differentiated, e.g. from commercial or emerging technologies being funded or developed elsewhere.
+ A description of the proposed activity of work, key metrics, and milestones, and any dependencies and assumptions.
+ Estimated timelines — applicants should provide a Project Plan for the life cycle of the project, showing what you plan to achieve for each period of the project.
    ○ Applicants should provide a Gantt chart to show the proposed project schedule.
+ Identification of any significant legal or regulatory dependencies (such as required licences, permissions, approvals, or registrations), along with any associated timelines or constraints.
+ A detailed description of the ethical/social responsibility issues you have considered and your proposed plan for meaningfully engaging with these throughout the project — this should include any specific resource(s) dedicated to this. The issues 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.

Section 2: The Team

This section includes information about the proposed individuals or teams who will conduct the research and management structures. This must include:

+ Details of the project team — 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 any lead or key researchers to be spending at least 50%, ideally 80%, of their time on the project).

+ You could include short bios about each team member (we discourage you from submitting CVs).

+ If you intend to collaborate with or rely on any third parties, such as sub-contractors/grantees, who they are and which elements of the project they will support/deliver.

+ How you intend to coordinate and manage the teams including any collaborations with third parties.

+ Any potential gaps in your core competency which would be required in order to achieve the overall goals.

+ We also want to know what motivates you or the team to want to do this project and why you are the right person/team to work on this project.

In addition to the above, the following table should be completed and attached as an annex to your proposal:

Individual	Role / expertise	Already in place? If not, how long after project kickoff are they likely to start?	FTE	Total time on project (months, rounded)
Sophia Fleissig	Synthetic biologist, project lead (TA1.2)	Currently assigned to a different project but could transfer to this project with 6 weeks notice	80%	28
Unknown	Expert in plant tissue culture and transformation (TA1.3)	To be recruited, aiming to start within 3 months	100%	33
Magnus Formaggio	Plant geneticist advising on synthetic unit design (TA1.1)	Yes	40% during months 1-12, 20% during months 13-36	10
Etc	Etc	Etc	Etc	Etc

Labour table to be completed for all individuals working on the proposed project (*filled here with hypothetical examples*).

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Section 3: Administrative Response

This section includes information about the budget, intellectual property that you intend to rely on, any perceived conflicts of interest, and for non-UK applicants, how the proposed project may benefit the UK.

In completing your application you must also provide answers to the following questions. Answers to these questions are not included in the 10 page cap. You should complete these questions in the application portal so there is no need to format these in a specific way.

Question	Guidance
How much funding do you need?	*Please provide a cost breakdown by completing the spreadsheet here. In your proposal you may submit your budget using yearly, quarterly, or monthly phasing.* *Prior to completing this template you should review ARIA's eligible cost guidance here.* *If your proposal is successful, prior to contract signature when the scope of work has been agreed, you will be required to provide a monthly cost breakdown.*
Are you proposing to contribute funding?	*If you or your organisation are proposing to contribute funding to the project please let us know how much funding you plan to contribute, who is contributing the funding, whether the funding is already secured, and any other relevant details.* *ARIA will fund 100% of project costs and contribution of funding is not essential; however, we welcome proposals that contribute funding in cases when such funding will strengthen the potential success. In these cases, this funding contribution will be considered as part of the overall strength of the project proposal.*
Does your proposal depend on background IP (pre existing)?	*If Yes, give us an Indication of what background IP is required, and whether you currently have rights to that IP.*
Have you already secured funding for a similar project or are you currently in the process of seeking support from other funding sources for the same project?	*If yes, tell us more about the funding you already have or are applying for.*
Any other factors or restrictions that might impact your freedom to operate and deliver the project?	*Please provide a detailed description of any perceived conflicts of interest with the Programme Director, and any import/export or security restrictions that you are aware of*

How do you envision commercialisation of the proposed project?	*Please complete and upload a commercial hypothesis for your project using the guidelines [here](#).*
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).* *However, we can award funding to applicants whose projects will primarily take place outside of the UK, if we believe it can boost the net impact of a programme.* *In these instances, you must outline any proposed plans or commitments in the UK that will contribute to the programme within the project's duration (note the maximum project duration is 2 years).* *Please provide a detailed description of any proposed plans (including a timeline) or commitments.*
Has a suitably authorised member of your Organisation approved the submission of this proposal?	*In the application portal, please select the option that best describes your situation and provide details where required.*
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](#). If you are unsure which terms apply to you, you can find more guidance [here](#).*
Do you intend to use animals as part of your proposed project (even if you don't intend for us to cover the costs of such research)?	*If yes, applicants will be required to answer the additional questions in the portal (also included in Annex 1 to this document).*
Additional questions about you/your organisation that can be found in the application portal.	

Annex 1 - Additional questions for projects that include animals

Note: You can find more information on ARIA's policy on funding animal testing here: [ARIA's Policy on Research and Innovation Involving Animals](#).
Applicants should design their proposals in line with the above, the NC3Rs [guidance](#) and NC3Rs '[Experimental Design Assistant](#)' for experimental design support.

1: Need - Describe (i) the need to use animals as part of your proposal, (ii) the use and current limitations of replacement technologies or non-animal methods in the research area, and (iii) how the proposed animal use is proportionate in light of your research objectives and the potential breakthrough that might be achieved.

2: Location - Specify the location of the proposed animal use (including details of the establishment where that information is available).
(Please note that the appropriate [additional NC3Rs questionnaire](#) must be provided alongside your application if (a) the location is outside of the UK and (b) the animals involved are one or more of the following: rodents; rabbits; sheep; goats; pigs; cattle; Xenopus laevis and Xenopus tropicalis; or zebrafish.)

3: Species - Indicate the choice of species to be used, the rationale for this choice, and the decision making process used.
(Please ensure that you address why the animal species and models being used can address the scientific objectives of your proposal and the relevance to human biology.)

4: Animal characteristics - Indicate the characteristics of the animal(s) to be used, for example, strain or substrain, sexes, age or developmental stage, weight range, genetic modification status, pathogen status, and the rationale for this choice and the decision-making process used.
(Both sexes should be used throughout the research pipeline unless appropriately justified. If the use of only one sex is proposed, please provide a scientific justification for this.)

5: Experimental procedures - Outline the planned experimental procedures, including the frequency, duration and timing of all procedures. Include details of the maximum prospective severity rating (and, for activity undertaken in the UK, with reference to the [Home Office severity ratings](#)). For moderate or severe procedures, detail the percentage of animals expected to reach this classification. Provide details of the refinements in place to reduce the pain, suffering and harms to the animals and give information on the expected clinical signs and humane endpoints that will be put in place.

6: Experimental design - Outline the total number of animals required and how this number was reached. Provide details of the (i) control and experimental groups, (ii) the experimental unit, (iii) sample size per group, including a justification for the chosen sample size, and (iv) the methods implemented to reduce confounders during the conduct of the studies (e.g randomisation and blinding strategies). If randomisation or blinding is not used, provide rationale for this. For research generating inferential statistics, provide details of any power calculations used to determine the sample size.

7: Licences and ethical approval - Where the proposed research is to take place:
A.   In the UK, please provide details of the Home Office licences in place in respect of the proposed research, researchers, and venue. If the necessary licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 are not yet in place, please outline your plans to ensure that such licences are acquired and estimated timelines; OR
B.   Outside of the UK, please provide details of any relevant licences in place in respect of the proposed research, researchers, and venue to the extent applicable. If licences or other approvals are

not yet in place but will be required, please outline your plans to ensure that such licences are acquired and estimated timelines.

(Please note that it is the responsibility of all applicants to ensure that the appropriate licences and approvals are obtained where this is required. This includes the approval by a local ethical review process (and, where UK based applicants are undertaking research outside of the UK, additional approval from any relevant UK institutional Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board). Licences (or amendments to existing licences) do not have to be obtained before your application is submitted to us, but if your application is successful you must have the necessary licences in place before any animal experimentation begins.)

8: Outcomes and analysis - Outline primary outcomes to be assessed and describe the planned statistical analyses.

(Provide details of all the outcome measures taken during the conduct of each study and indicate the primary outcome measure, that is the outcome measure that is used to determine the sample sizes. Provide a description of the statistical analysis methods that will be used, explaining how they relate to the experimental design used and the experimental unit (that is, there is a difference between N samples from one animal, as distinct from one sample from each of N animals, or combining samples from multiple animals), and showing that they are appropriate for the types of data that will be collected. Applicants should consider whether and how to access statistical support.)