

Request for Proposal: Regulatory Consultant, Synthetic Plants

7 September 2026

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SECTION 1: THE REQUIREMENT AND CONDITIONS

Introduction

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

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

This RFP seeks proposals for a consultant to run a sprint to map and stress-test the regulatory and policy landscape for synthetic plant genome technologies. The aim is to deliver clarity on the global picture, identify critical-path bottlenecks, and stress-test plausible deployment scenarios so the programme can sequence regulatory engagement alongside technical milestones. These activities must be delivered by **31st March 2027**.

The Requirement (the "Services")

Landscape mapping & engagement

1. Benchmark the regulatory landscape and frameworks across the UK (FSA, DEFRA, Precision Breeding Act, RIO pilots), EU, US, Canada, and Australia, extending to key regions of interest for potatoes and other crops, such as Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (noting that the second phase of [ARIA's Synthetic Plants programme](#) will incorporate additional crops of global importance beyond potato). At the subnational level, e.g. in the US, there are likely to be differences in state legislation and labelling regarding synthetic genomes in crops which would be useful to include. In each case, consider the different regulations applicable to growing vs consuming crops.
2. Understand the IP position and commercialisation potential, in so far as this is relevant to inform ARIA's regulatory approach and strategy for engagement, for the crops developed in its Synthetic Plants programme.
3. Provide a clear, side-by-side comparison highlighting where synthetic plant chromosomes and plastid genomes fit into existing regulatory frameworks and categories, where uncertainties remain, and where new pathways may be necessary.
4. Address the question of detectability of the synthetic units being developed by the Synthetic Plants programme and consider the regulatory implications.

5. Identify novel regulatory approaches, mechanisms and concepts being explored and developed both in the UK and globally, and the stakeholders driving these, that could be relevant to the Synthetic Plants programme.
6. Investigate the applicability of a UK government Advanced Market Commitment for the research in the Synthetic Plants programme; if deemed applicable, outline pathways towards this goal.
7. Map relevant UK regulatory actors (e.g. FSA, DEFRA, RIO) and adjacent agencies (e.g. DBIST, FCDO) as well as international bodies and governments the ARIA programme team should connect with.
8. Advise on when and how to engage, sequencing early bilateral conversations against later multi-agency convenings as projects mature. Consider the relevant individuals and agencies to be included in a regulatory convening, thinking about what groups make sense to bring together and suggest some compelling framings for the convenings.
9. Engage the [Synthetic Plants TA2 teams](#) and weave relevant inputs into the report.

Bottleneck & timeline analysis

10. Identify which parts of the regulatory journey are on the critical path. Tie bottlenecks and regulatory timing back to the Synthetic Plants programme phases.

Programme-level efficiencies

11. Highlight opportunities for cross-portfolio leverage, such as shared regulatory sandboxes or umbrella filings across [Synthetic Plants TA1 projects](#).

Case Studies

12. Building on the landscape mapping and engagement, present parallel case studies for at least two scenarios that could be the outcome of the Synthetic Plants programme, to include: UK food production (for UK consumers) and UK economic benefit (encompassing company creation and licensing revenue).
13. Stress-test a few plausible deployment scenarios based on the Synthetic Plants Creators' projects (e.g. open-source toolkit, SME-developed crop variety, incumbent licensing). For each, map regulatory hurdles, required evidence packages, and indicative lead times.

Deliverables, due 31 March 2027 (latest)

- A full written report covering each of the points within the areas above (Landscape mapping & engagement; Bottleneck & timeline analysis; Programme-level efficiencies; Case studies).
- A 2-page brief, with suggested key messages and talking points, designed to be used to engage UK policy officials and regulators. This brief should outline where the Synthetic Plants programme sits within the current regulatory landscape (UK and international), and

make a compelling case to secure further interest, commitment and investment to developing an enabling regulatory pathway(s) for the Synthetic Plants programme's goals.

Implementation and Deployment Timeline

The initial contract will run until **31 March 2027**.

ARIA shall have the option to extend the contract beyond the initial contract period for up to a further 3 months, in 1 month increments., if required and subject to mutual agreement.

Key Contract Terms

Terms and Conditions

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

- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract for convenience upon one month's prior notice.
- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract where the supplier fails to provide the service contracted, with immediate effect.
- Any Intellectual Property generated in the performance of the contract shall vest in ARIA.
- The supplier shall indemnify ARIA, its employees, officers and agents against the supplier's infringement of third party Intellectual Property Rights.

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

SECTION 2: PROPOSAL RESPONSE STRUCTURE AND SELECTION CRITERIA

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

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

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

- Executive Summary: Summarise how you will deliver the key services you are proposing and how these relate to ARIA's requirements set out in section 1 above. (Max 2 pages)
- Your CV/Case Studies (Max 2 pages)
- Commercial Proposal (Max 1 page)

Criteria A - Background, Profile and Experience (50% weighting)

Essential profile

- Strong track record providing consultancy or advisory services on regulation in emerging or novel scientific applications or technologies.
- Deep expertise in regulatory research and analysis in emerging or novel scientific applications or technologies.
- Expertise in plant biology and/or synthetic biology, from either a regulatory or a scientific standpoint.

Desirable profile

- Strong familiarity with the UK regulatory system.
- Broad understanding of the global regulatory system.
- Experience in global stakeholder mapping.
- Proven experience building synthetic biology case studies.
- Experience working in a regulatory body or setting, preferably on plant biology and/or synthetic biology.
- Viable network across regulatory bodies or governments, in the UK and internationally, that can be drawn upon for insights, introductions to relevant stakeholders and general information.
- Expertise in IP and commercialisation strategies, as relates to bringing R&D to market.

How we would assess the profile of bidders

- Do they have a proven track record consulting and advising on regulation for novel or emerging scientific applications or technologies?
- Do they have demonstrable experience in regulatory research and analysis?
- Can they speak with authority on the UK regulatory system?
- Can they demonstrate a strong understanding of how this work contributes to ARIA's Synthetic Plants programme?
- Do they have access to, or an ability to access, the diverse stakeholders (in the UK and with key international regions) who may need to be consulted as part of this project?
- Can they demonstrate a clear understanding of the project requirements, and where there are areas of ambiguity, credibility in how they would go about seeking clarity?

- Do they demonstrate a partnership-mentality in how they will work with us, being flexible to changes and iterative learning as the project develops?

Criteria B - Your CV (30% Weighting)

CV/Case Studies

- Provide a minimum of two examples/reference customers, ideally one in the private sector and one in the public sector, where you have provided a similar service. With their consent, provide a summary of key successes, issues, mitigating actions and overall learnings for the ARIA contract

ARIA may choose to request references as part of the proposal review process. We will ask for your consent and suitable contact details beforehand.

Criteria C - Commercial Proposal (20% weighting)

- Commercial terms that demonstrate value for the tax-payer, through transparent pricing models with no hidden costs and a proven ability to offer cost-effective solutions without compromising quality. This should include a clear pricing structure, including:
 - Rates per hour (ex VAT)
 - Any additional costs which are likely to be incurred through the life of the contract
 - Any critical assumptions, dependencies and exclusions required by the bidder in order to successfully execute any resultant Contract

Additional requirements

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

Mandatory

- All ARIA data to be stored within the UK or EEA
- Confirmation of adherence with the [Government's Supplier Code of Conduct](#)

Format of Proposal Submission

Format	PDF. Pages should be numbered, and the response should include the bidder's name inserted as a header
Page Guide	Max 5 Pages: 2 Page Summary, 2 Page CV, 1 Page Commercial Proposal
Responses to	ARIA's application portal In case of any technical issues with the portal please contact clarifications@aria.org.uk

If you are disabled or have a long-term health condition, we can offer support to help you engage with ARIA, navigate our RFP process, or carry out the services, you can find more information [here](#).

SECTION 3: TIMELINES, REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Procurement Timeline

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

Event	Date
Deadline for submission of clarification questions	11 September 2026 (14:00 BST)
Deadline for proposal submission	21 September 2026 (14:00 BST)
Notification of selection for Interview	24 September 2026
ARIA Panel Interviews	w/c 28 September 2026
Advisory Committee Interviews	w/c 5 October 2026
Preferred bidder chosen and informed	w/c 5 October 2026
Target Award date	w/c 5 October 2026
Target Contract Start date	19 October 2026

Review Stages

This review is intended to consist of 4 stages:

- Stage 1 - written proposal
- Stage 2.1 - interview with ARIA Panel
- Stage 2.2 (optional) - interview with Advisory Committee
- Stage 3 - preferred bidder chosen and informed.
- Stage 4 - discussions and negotiations with preferred bidder, onboarding planning and contract agreement.

The ARIA selection panel will be chaired by Angie Burnett, Programme Director.

Clarification Questions

Bidders are urged to review the RFP documentation, identify and submit any clarification requests no later than 11 September 2026 14:00 BST, via email to clarifications@aria.org.uk. Clarification requests received after this date will not be reviewed.

Any clarification request or responses containing information that is of relevance to all bidders will be provided to all bidders that confirm their intention to participate. A new version of this RFP document with the answers to clarification requests will also be posted to the [ARIA website](#), following the deadline for submission of clarification requests. If bidders do not wish a query or response to be disclosed to other bidders, they must communicate this and the reason why, with the clarification question.

CONDITIONS OF RFP

Confidentiality, Publicity, Conduct and Conflicts of Interest:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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