Advanced Research + Invention Agency ARIA

Request for Proposal

Accelerating Adaptation: how could we help nature?

12 November 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 fund breakthrough R&D in underexplored areas which catalyse new paths to prosperity for the UK and the world. We empower scientists and engineers to pursue research that is too speculative, too hard, or too interdisciplinary to pursue elsewhere. ARIA's programmes are shaped and led by our Programme Directors, scientific and technical leaders with deep expertise and a focused, creative vision for how technology can enable a better future.

ARIA's Accelerated Adaptation Programme is partnering with Sciencewise, a government funded programme specialising in public dialogues on science and technology issues, to run a UK-wide Public Dialogue on Accelerated Adaptation in Nature. This RFP seeks proposals to deliver this UK-wide public dialogue to explore public values and perspectives towards key research topics and questions in ARIA's Accelerated Adaptation Programme (see here).

The dialogue will develop a set of **principles for research and innovation in the targeted adaptation of wild species in the UK**. In this context, the dialogue will:

- Explore what participants consider to be important governance and regulatory principles in this area of research and potential research and deployment of such interventions in wild species.
- Focus on specific techniques and approaches being explored in the research programme to ascertain which type of interventions and potential biodiversity loss should be prioritised and under what conditions.
- Surface public views on which research priorities should take precedence, and on the role science can play in the targeted adaptation of wild species in the UK, in order to prevent biodiversity loss and secure our natural infrastructure.

The findings from this dialogue will help inform the next stage of research in the programme, including potential activities focused on the governance, ethics and regulatory requirements relevant to this area of research and its potential applications in wild species.

The requirement (the "Services")

In October 2026 ARIA launched the Accelerated Adaptation Programme as part of ARIA's Engineering Ecosystem Resilience initiative. Backed by £54m, this programme seeks to explore pathways to accelerate adaptation of wild species in order to limit biodiversity loss and secure the natural infrastructure that underpins our global economy and well-being. The programme is funding 14 projects ("Creators") across five different Technical Areas (TAs): Systems; Scaling (there are

currently no Creators in this TA as Scaling is part of phase 2 of the programme); Modelling; Data and Analytics; and Ethics and Social Responsibility (ESR). The research being conducted includes applying physical or chemical stressors to improve long-term resilience, genetically informed selective breeding using surrogate parents, repatriation of species that have naturalised in foreign climates, and gene editing of non-human species. Full details on what this programme aims to do, including its programme thesis can be accessed from the website here, as well as details on the individual projects here.

The programme is exploring three broad technical approaches to help wild species adapt:

1. Artificial selection: selectively breeding wild species for traits that help them withstand current or anticipated environmental pressures. This happens over generations, so some approaches experimentally and reversibly shorten generation times.
2. Targeted gene modification: changing how a specific gene works, for example by increasing or silencing its activity, or by introducing an entirely new gene.
3. RNA vaccination: applying engineered RNA to a host species to interfere with a pathogen's ability to reproduce, without changing the host organism's genome. This is a temporary treatment and not inherited by offspring.

While the questions for the public dialogue are inspired by this programme of research, there is no expectation that the Creators will necessarily form part of the public dialogue. There is an expectation that this project does not duplicate efforts undertaken by the Creators, especially those funded as part of TA5: Ethics and Social Responsibility. The successful provider will be provided with access to Creators, including those in TA5, to ensure this is the case.

This dialogue will sit within the Sciencewise Innovation Testbed. More information about this can be found here. We are asking bidders to focus on three key areas of innovation within the dialogue:

- More-than-human approaches.
- Participatory futures. These may include a set of future scenarios based on approaches related to conservation due to the climate crisis, e.g. anthropocentric vs. ecocentric.
- How participants may be involved in the long term, to provide ongoing public perspectives and feedback at key milestones during the programme's development. Please provide options for this in your bid, but this element is not expected to be delivered in the lifetime of this project and is subject to further funds.

Project aim

The overall aim of the public dialogue is to engage a reflective sample of the UK population to produce core principles which should guide research in this area, through deliberating conditions, considerations, red lines and priorities. The overall aim of funding research in this space is to prevent biodiversity loss and secure the natural infrastructure that underpins our global economy and

well-being, with a focus on the research areas and approaches being funded in the Accelerated Adaptation programme.

The findings of this dialogue will be used to understand where further research would be valuable, and surface public values and perspectives towards governance of potential applications for such research and the emerging technologies that may be developed. Findings will inform the design and prioritisation of future research calls in this area, including for the programme, and also be made available in developing governance, regulation and policy relating to research in wild species and its potential for deployment in uncontrolled environments in the future.

This public dialogue will explore the area of research to accelerate adaptation in wild species in the wider context of the environmental pressures facing our natural world - including land being used for industrial agriculture, spread of plants, animals, fungi and pathogens, pollution and climate change - which are affecting the ecosystem functions and biodiversity in nature. The dialogue should provide space for participants to consider whether, when and under what conditions the research approaches being explored in the programme should progress, without assuming that real world testing or deployment will definitely follow, but could be an option.

Project objectives

- **Surface the public's values, and their perceptions of the need, motivations, priorities and justifications** for conducting research in this area. Focus on the techniques and intended interventions that such research may enable, as part of the Accelerated Adaptation programme.
- **Examine the risks, benefits and trade-offs** associated with the programme's research, and the potential deployment of interventions that emerge. Explore these within various contexts and future scenarios – e.g. biodiversity loss, extinction of keystone species, various states of climate crisis, environments, economy/cost, food systems, inequalities etc.
- **Explore participants' expectations around considerations, guardrails, redlines and conditions** that need to be in place to permit or enable such research to continue, as well as the potential deployment of the types of interventions that emerge from it. And, based on this, explore who has the authority and responsibility for ensuring these expectations are met e.g. role for civil society, policymakers, regulators.

Governance and management

- **Oversight Group**: This dialogue will be supported by an Oversight Group that ensures multiple perspectives and the breadth of engagement necessary across a diverse and inclusive range of stakeholders. The supplier will be expected to engage with the Oversight Group – presenting their approach, gaining feedback, engaging around development of materials, and presenting interim and final findings. Please note: the Oversight Group will

follow Sciencewise guidance and will bring constructive challenges to the framing, materials and information given to public participants, and has an advisory role.

- **Project team**: The project team will consist of the successful bidder(s), members from ARIA's Accelerated Adaptation programme team, members from Sciencewise, and the dialogue independent evaluators.
- **Working group(s)**: The project team will decide on the potential need for task-and-finish working groups, in particular in relation to accuracy and impact generation. These groups will be advisory.

Project deliverables

We anticipate requiring the following deliverables from the dialogue contractor:

- Attendance at circa five Oversight Group meetings to present plans and take their views into account. These meetings can be run virtually with at least one session expected to take place in person. Bidders should consider how to make the best use of the in person opportunity. The meetings will likely be as follows:
    - OG 1: Introduction to the dialogue project
    - OG 2: Design and scope
    - OG 3: Stimulus and workshop design deep dive
    - OG 4: Findings
    - OG 5: Impact
- Project management of the dialogue process.
- Leading and managing weekly or fortnightly project team meetings, making a note of key actions and upcoming tasks.
- Design, review and production of the dialogue process and stimulus materials with input and review from the oversight group and project team.
- An independent topic review, including engagement with stakeholders and specialists. This should draw on a broad range of relevant perspectives, for example researchers, regulators, environmental NGOs and the devolved governments. Bidders should outline in their proposals how this will be done. While the dialogue will focus primarily on the UK, bidders should consider in the topic review how relevant UK, regional and international perspectives and examples might inform discussions, particularly where research and potential interventions have wider ecological or ethical implications, and how these might be drawn on in the dialogue through specialist speakers and case studies.
- Recruitment of participants and end-to-end communication and logistics throughout the dialogue process. Consent to include the option of ongoing engagement by ARIA and Sciencewise.
- Delivery of end-to-end dialogue workshops, including expert facilitation.
- Identification, briefing and liaison with specialists involved in dialogue activities.
- Reporting:

  - An end-of-project report summarising the outputs of the deliberations, and participants' perspectives and conclusions, including an executive summary. We expect there to be two drafts and comment rounds on the report as well as the final version. Commenting on the report will be managed by the project team, with input from the Oversight Group expected in one round. Bidders should outline their approach to analysing the data from the dialogue and reporting on the project.
  - A methodology report outlining the key methodological features of the dialogue process, in particular innovative features no longer than 5 pages.
  - Reports should consist of both a formal written element and slides that can be used in presentations. The end-of-project report should include visuals (infographics, images etc) that can be used in social media outputs.
  - Public-friendly summary of findings, suitable for use with non-specialist audiences. This should be of publishable standard and include a mix of written and visual reporting.
  - Policy-friendly summary of the findings, suitable for use externally. This includes a 2-page summary document of the dialogue findings written for regulators, research funders, and other policy stakeholders.
  - Videos and other suitable creative outputs of the dialogue for different audiences including policy makers, the public, research stakeholders. This will be agreed with ARIA and Sciencewise. ARIA and Sciencewise branding to be incorporated.
  - A topic review in a publishable format.
  - The dialogue supplier will be expected to be responsible for coordination, communications and logistical preparation for meetings related to the project, reporting and sign-off of outputs.
- Project oversight:
  - The contractor will be expected to engage with the Oversight Group – presenting their approach, gaining feedback and responding, engaging around materials development, and presenting interim or final findings.
  - It is also expected that the contractor will coordinate and manage stakeholder engagement/workshops run throughout the project.
  - Cooperate with the independent evaluation supplier throughout the dialogue process and up until the evaluation reports, which can be up to six months after the publication of the dialogue findings.

Methodology and approach

We invite prospective contractors to provide a clear and evidenced proposal as to how they would design and run this public dialogue to fulfil the objectives and requirements specified. As a minimum, your response should include but not be limited to:

- Your suggested approach to participant selection, recruitment and incentivisation, including a suggested sample.
- Your suggested approach and rationale for delivering the public dialogue, including number of participants, contact time, delivery mode (e.g. face-to-face, or mix of online and face-to-face), geographical locations, and any online interactive space. We would expect a minimum number of 50 participants and 12 contact hours. We would be open to suggestions of hybrid formats for the delivery mode. The dialogue should be UK-wide; bidders should set out how they will reflect perspectives from all four nations and the rationale for their proposed geographical spread.
- We encourage creative approaches, and would be keen to see some options that feature more-than-human approaches (given the topic), as well as participatory futures. Clearly highlight any novel and creative approaches you will incorporate.
- ARIA is encouraging bidders to consider how participants may be involved in the long term, for example through a panel to provide ongoing public perspectives and feedback on key programmatic milestones. Bidders should outline a set of options for long term involvement.
- Your suggested approach to developing creative and accessible dialogue materials, including how you would balance ensuring enough material is covered for participants to understand the complexity of the topic and engage with it. We are keen to see approaches that provide sufficient time for participants to, both as a group, and asynchronously on their own individual time, to receive, discuss, reflect, and deliberate on information provided, and share and learn from each other's views.
- Your suggested structure and content of sessions.
- Your suggested approach to analysing the content of the public dialogue and final report. All outputs should be written in accessible, plain English.
- How your approach will incorporate the Sciencewise Quality Framework and Guiding Principles.
- Information demonstrating how lessons learnt from relevant projects, will be implemented within this project.
- Evidence of previous experience and approaches to ensure compliance with highest ethical standards in conducting similar public dialogues or social research.
- How you will give consideration to a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, e.g. geographic environments such as rural/coastal/urban, levels of educational attainment, digital literacy, and participant wellbeing. This includes how you will support participants with additional needs and balance engagement with pastoral support.

Evaluation

An independent evaluation will be commissioned for this project. With the dialogue supplier's collaboration, an independent supplier will be responsible for the evaluation of the project. The delivery contractor will be expected to engage with this evaluator.

SECTION 2: KEY CONTRACT INFORMATION

Budget

The available budget for the project is £165,000 (plus VAT). This should be used to inform the size and pace of the dialogue. The budget should include all costs related to the project, including travel, subsistence, and overhead costs.

Provider profile

We are open to the provider being a research agency, consultancy, consortium or any other type of organisation that has the following experience:

- Deep experience designing and delivering national public dialogues in complex areas.
- Strong ability to draw useful insights from primarily qualitative data analysis, and to deliver concise, compelling and clear narratives and findings that have a practical focus.
- Flexible approaches to working on topics that are novel, emerging and generally unfamiliar to the general public.
- Experience working on scientific, contentious or highly technical topics would be desirable.
- Experience working with publicly funded bodies would be desirable.

Implementation and deployment timeline

The initial contract will run for 12 months. The supplier must be able to start work immediately after the Target Award date, 1 February 2027 (subject to change). ARIA shall have the option to extend the contract beyond the initial contract period for up to a further 24 months, in 12 month increments.

Terms and conditions

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

- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract for convenience upon ninety days' prior notice.
- ARIA shall have the right to terminate the contract or part of the contract where the supplier fails to provide the service contracted, upon thirty days' prior notice.
- 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 3: 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 choose 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. You may choose to include certain information in the annexes e.g. case studies, project timelines, risk registers. Please note that page restrictions apply (see below).

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

Executive summary

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

Criteria A - Background, profile and experience (20%)

- Demonstrate experience of having delivered similar requirements for fast-paced and rapidly scaling organisations, including existing and recent client and project information.
- Provide a brief overview of your organisation's values and mission statement.
- Provide evidence of delivery of comparable projects, learnings, and how previous work will inform this dialogue.

Case studies

- Provide a minimum of two examples/reference customers. With their consent, provide a summary of information that demonstrates experience delivering on the size and scope of similar deliberative public dialogues, particularly on similar topics and/or to similar timeframes; and how your knowledge and learnings from these projects will inform your approach to this dialogue.
- ARIA may choose to verify case studies with the reference customers as part of the proposal review process. We will ask for your consent and suitable contact details beforehand.

Criteria B - Your approach to service delivery (30%)

- Clearly articulate your understanding of the policy, delivery and evidence requirements for this project and how you would meet them.
- Set out your proposed plan for delivery, dialogue design, approach and methods you will use to deliver this contract , any tools or novel methodologies to be used
- Outline the outputs you will produce to meet the objectives and requirements set out in Section 1, including how it will meet the Sciencewise Quality Framework and Guiding Principles.
- Outline your recruitment approach and rationale, and details of how retention will be maintained.

- Set out how you will approach the scoping and design stage of the project, how you will deliver the dialogue workshops including the content, stimulus and facilitation.
- Set out your approach to analysis and reporting.

Criteria C - Demonstration of resource (30%)

- Demonstrate your expertise and resources for delivering the services, including:
    - Your ability to provide operational and executional resources without requiring internal ARIA resources (beyond what is agreed), with supporting examples.
    - Your project management plan, a timeline for project delivery (including key milestones and interdependencies), and how you will manage any consortium or subcontracting arrangements to ensure collaboration across the project team.
    - Details of how you intend to quality assure work undertaken as part of this contract and outputs so that deliverables are provided efficiently, to a high standard and on time, including in relation to change management, issues escalation and quality control.
    - A risk register identifying the key risks associated with this contract, including any technical, personnel, stakeholder, timetable and commercial risks. For each risk, set out the likelihood, impact and mitigation actions, including details of risk mitigation in the event that outputs do not meet the specification.

- Provide your proposed project team (including roles, capabilities and experience), including an organogram showing its structure, and confirmation of whether you are bidding as a single supplier (with or without subcontractors) or as part of a consortium.
    - Where a consortium is proposed, the lead supplier will remain the contracting party and be fully liable for performance of the contract.
    - Provide a breakdown showing the allocation of time across different components of the project by organisation (for bids by consortia) and key individual members of the proposed team. Please indicate overall days on the project.

Criteria D - Commercial proposal (20%)

- 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
- Cyber Essentials

Desirable

- Cyber Essentials Plus

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	6 pages (sides) for the core proposal i.e. not including annexes. (A maximum of 15 pages for full submission including annexes).
Responses to	ARIA's application portal In case of any technical issues with the portal please contact clarifications@aria.org.uk

SECTION 4: 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	30 November 2026 (13:00 GMT)
Deadline for proposal submission	16 December 2026 (23:59 GMT)
Notification of selection for presentation	13 January 2027
In-person presentation by bidders to ARIA selection panel, ARIA London office	20 or 21 January 2027

Preferred bidder chosen and informed	W/c 25 January 2027
Target Award date	1 February 2027

Review stages

This review is intended to consist of 4 stages:

- Stage 1 - Written proposal
- Stage 2 - Presentation by shortlisted respondents to ARIA selection panel. A maximum of 5 responses will be shortlisted to present to ARIA at this stage. Shortlisted bidders will be expected to attend ARIA's HQ in London, to present in person, on 20 or 21 January 2027.
- Stage 3 - Preferred bidder chosen and informed.
- Stage 4 - Discussions and negotiations with preferred bidder, onboarding planning and contract agreement.

The ARIA selection panel will be chaired by the ARIA's Head of Public Policy and ESR (ethics and social responsibility) and will include both ARIA and Sciencewise staff.

Clarification questions

Bidders are urged to review the RFP documentation, identify and submit any clarification requests no later than 13:00 (GMT) on 30 November 2026, via email to clarifications@aria.org.uk. Clarification requests received after this date will not be answered.

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

CONDITIONS OF RFP

Confidentiality, publicity, conduct and conflicts of interest

The contents of this RFP are confidential and must not be copied, reproduced, distributed or passed to any other person at any time except for the purpose of enabling the bidder to submit a proposal. ARIA may use the information included in a bidder's response for any reasonable purpose connected with this RFP. In particular, once a bidder has been excluded, ARIA reserves the right to use any ideas contained in that bidder's proposal in any ongoing discussions with other bidders but undertakes not to reveal the identity of the provider of these ideas. No publicity regarding the subject-matter of this RFP or the award of any Contract will be permitted unless and until ARIA has given express written consent to the relevant communication.

ARIA reserves the right to: a) waive or change the requirements of this RFP from time to time without prior (or any) notice being given by ARIA, in the event ARIA makes material changes to this RFP, ARIA may choose to extend the deadline for submission. b) reject any bidder that does not submit a compliant Proposal in accordance with the instructions in this RFP. c) disqualify any bidder that is guilty of serious misrepresentation in relation to its Proposal, d) withdraw this RFP at any time, or to re-invite Bidders on the same or any alternative basis; e) choose not to award any Contract as a result of the current procurement process; and f) make whatever changes it sees fit to the Timetable, structure or content of the procurement process, depending on approvals processes or for any other reason. ARIA will not be liable for any bidder's costs, expenditure, work or effort incurred by them in carrying out enquiries in relation to, proceeding with, or participating in, this RFP, sourcing process or procurement, including if the procurement process is terminated or amended by ARIA.

Any attempt by bidders or their advisors to influence the contract award process in any way may result in the Bidder being disqualified. Specifically, bidders shall not directly or indirectly, at any time: a) enter into any agreement or arrangement with any other person as to the form or content of any other Proposal, or offer to pay any sum of money or valuable consideration to any person to effect changes to the form or content of any other Proposal; b) enter into any agreement or arrangement with any other person that has the effect of prohibiting or excluding that person from submitting a Proposal; c) canvass ARIA or any employees or agents of ARIA in relation to this sourcing process; or d) attempt to obtain information from any of the employees or agents of ARIA or their advisors concerning another bidder or proposal. Bidders are responsible for ensuring that no conflicts of interest exist between the bidder and its advisors, and ARIA and its advisors. Any Bidder who fails to comply with this requirement may be disqualified from the procurement at the discretion of ARIA. Bidders recognise and accept that it will be at ARIA's sole discretion as to which, if any, proposal is accepted.