

Programmatic + Operational Support Partner RFP

FAQs from the webinar

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

Category	Question	Answer
Strategy & Objectives	Why are you re-procuring this now?	We have been with the incumbent supplier for almost three years and as a public sector body, ARIA must assess the market and demonstrate value for money. Additionally, ARIA has evolved significantly, making this an ideal time to establish a partner before the third cohort of Program Directors begins in May 2027
	What has worked well in the current model that you want to preserve, and what gaps need addressing?	ARIA wants to preserve the highly embedded culture, cross-functional collaboration, and the high quality of recruited talent. Key gaps to address include improving portfolio-level visibility, creating stronger organizational recommendations, scaling capacity rapidly to bring in talent faster, and establishing processes while maintaining agility.

If you are selecting based on having a deep understanding of ARIA, how will you ensure this does not overly favor the incumbent?

ARIA has processes in place to ensure a level playing field, such as not scoring the application sections related to TUPE liability and costs⁸. Furthermore, ARIA actively welcomes fresh perspectives, diverse expertise, and new ideas on how to improve operations from outside organizations

Partner Requirements & Structure

Are you expecting one primary operational partner or a network of providers?

ARIA requires one primary lead partner to act as a single "front door" for the contract, though they are open to this primary partner managing subcontracts underneath them

Are you looking for innovating/agile organizations even if they are new, or large organizations with an existing bench?

ARIA welcomes applications from both. Small or new organizations offer agility and bespoke tailoring, while large organizations bring proven methods and speed of hiring. Selection will depend on the overall quality of the proposal, demonstrated lived experience, and the ability to consistently provide top-tier talent

Are you willing to create teaming opportunities for potential bidders to partner if needed?

No, ARIA will not facilitate introductions or teaming opportunities¹⁶. Bidders can form subcontracts if they feel it strengthens their application, but they must coordinate this independently

Would ARIA reconsider the TUPE requirements, given it makes bringing in new talent difficult?

No, the TUPE requirements are a legal obligation and cannot be changed¹⁷. ARIA understands this creates complexity, but has built in a 4-month transition period to help smooth the process

	Are you planning on sharing information on the team which the TUPE conditions will apply to?	Yes, after bidders sign an NDA and pass due diligence, they will be given access to anonymized employment terms and costs. The instructions for this process can be found in the RFP.
	Will the individuals under TUPE transfer to ARIA or to the successful winner of the RFP?	The individuals will transfer directly to the successful winner of the RFP, as ARIA intends to keep this function outsourced
Scope of Work & Capabilities	What would be the remit and tasks handled by this partner?	The partner will provide Program Specialist support (assisting with program design, solicitation, workshops, contract negotiations, and creator queries), run the Portfolio Management Office (PMO) for quality and risk management, and offer operational surge support
	How much flexibility and freedom does the delivery partner have?	While Program Directors are the ultimate decision-makers for their programs, partners have flexibility in how they deliver support. Partners are highly encouraged to push back, suggest creative ideas, propose better ways of operating, and help set up appropriate governance
	Could you indicate the size and volume of projects for a typical month?	There is no "typical" month, but ARIA currently has about 16 Program Directors, growing to roughly 2425. Each manages at least one program (typically around £50 million) consisting of 20 to 30 projects. Volume peaks naturally occur during quarterly reporting, workshops, or the launch of new programs.
Internal Operations & Commercials	Does all the team need to be in London three days a week, or is one coordinating person enough?	All Program Specialists and PMO staff must be in the London office three days a week (Tuesday through Thursday). There may be flexibility for specific scientific and technical (S&T) or surge support roles to be fully virtual

Does the ARIA office have the space to accommodate the staff, and will you provide IT equipment?

Yes, ARIA will provide the office space, and ARIA's IT provider will supply the necessary IT equipment and support for the partner's staff

Will ARIA have the final say on hiring? Why do they have the final say if the partner takes on liability?

The partner manages the sourcing and initial interviews, but ARIA retains the final say. This ensures joint accountability and protects ARIA's embedded culture, as the selected individuals will be deeply integrated into ARIA's teams

How does ARIA assess value for money and manage performance?

At the application stage, value for money is evaluated, which makes up 20% of the scoring weight. Once live, performance is managed via regular checkpoints, deep integration, and continuous collaborative conversations to ensure high quality is consistently delivered for the money spent
