Smarter Robot Bodies - Seed Round 1 - General feedback on applications

Following the review of all applications received for Seed Round 1 of Smarter Robot Bodies, the reviewers noted common themes and areas for potential improvement.

Comments for applications that were determined as *out of scope*:

+ A number of applications were identified as out of scope, and therefore did not progress to full review. Proposals may have been determined as out of scope for any of the following reasons:
    ○ They did not show how the idea *either* aligns with *or* challenges the assumptions of the Summary, Beliefs, or Observations in the opportunity space document; or
    ○ The application did not appear to advance robot hardware (e.g. it was purely software, without convincingly explaining the potential to enable new hardware); or
    ○ The application requested funding for a commercial or close-to-commercial stage product.

Comments against criterion one: *Importance and vision of the proposal*

What spiked:

+ A differentiated insight, clearly explained and with a good case made for its importance;
+ A clear statement of what exactly the applicants proposed to do. This usually included a highly specific and fairly detailed workplan, e.g. about specific materials to be tested;
+ Evidence to support how the idea being proposed could have a transformational impact beyond the research focus, and concrete plans to take this forward.

What did not spike:

+ Emphasis on the intended outcomes with little or no detail on how these were to be achieved; no distinctive vision;
+ Restating the opportunity space document, e.g. devoting space to justifying why advances in hardware are needed;
+ Proposals that were similar to many other proposals - this immediately suggested that the ideas were not the kind of novel, outlier ideas we are aiming to support with seeds.

Comments against criterion two: *Our confidence that the individual or team can deliver on the proposal*

What spiked:

+ A named individual responsible for each element of the proposed work;
+ Evidence of an entrepreneurial mindset among team members;
+ Evidence that the proposed work is something the applicants are really passionate about and keen to devote time to.

What did not spike:

+ Workplans that lacked concrete specifics. For instance, a plan might state (and this is just a hypothetical example):
    - Work package 1 (Months 1-6): Design and test new robot in simulation.
    - Work package 2 (Months 6-12): Assemble materials, set up lab space, build robot prototype and troubleshoot.
    - Work package 3 (Months 13-18): Test new robot on demanding real-world tasks, develop control protocols to enhance its capabilities.
        - While this plan outlines the major phases and their timeframe, it's missing the crucial details that make a plan actionable or enable evaluators to assess it.
+ Proposals where a high percentage of the proposed work was to be carried out by individuals unknown at the time of application.

Comments against criterion three: *Relevance to ARIA*

What spiked:

+ Proposals that convincingly proposed a transformational impact or a significant shift in conventional thinking that would be catalysed by the proposed idea;
+ Proposals that demonstrated the difficulty of obtaining funding from other sources, e.g. because the project is very high risk and/or involves funding across countries and organisation types.

What did not spike:

+ Proposals in areas of research where there are existing, alternative funding streams to which the proposal seemed well suited. For more information on ARIA's review and selection process for opportunity seed applications, please see here.
+ Proposals that lacked a clear commitment to advancing the work beyond the research stage, even if successful.