

Hypersensory Intelligence: Olfactory Perception

Call for proposals

Date: 12 August 2026

V1

Glossary

Term	Definition
OOR	Open Olfactory Resource: the data, standards, governance, and organisational infrastructure this call seeks to design and ultimately build.
TA	Technical Area
TA1	Technical Area 1: the OOR-focused technical area funded through this call (described as workstream A in the thesis).
TA1 Stage 1 : The Sprint	3 month sprint to deliver pre-work: OOR blueprint (detailed scientific and operational plan) and pilot dataset to evidence capability (this solicitation) .
TA1 Stage 2 : The OOR Build	4 year programmatic OOR build for core programme
TA2	Technical Area 2: is not being solicited through this call. Future technical area focused on representation learning and modelling, and novel sensor platforms.
TA3	Technical Area 3: is not being solicited through this call. The final phase of the programme, building integrated olfactory perception systems and challenge demonstrations .

Summary

This call is the first for **Hypersensory Intelligence: Olfactory Perception**, and focuses on **TA1: the Open Olfactory Resource (OOR)**.

We are looking for highly ambitious teams to change the path of digital olfaction, to build the shared data resource that will teach machines to smell. The world has rich chemical signals that could address many critical societal challenges, but this dataset does not exist yet. The Open Olfactory Resource (OOR) will be that shared resource built to fill this gap.

Through this call (TA1 Stage 1) we are funding a three-month sprint for up to 6 teams to deliver a detailed plan for the Open Olfactory Resource (OOR) Organisation and a pilot

dataset. At the end of the sprint, a team, or combination of teams, has the potential to build and operate the OOR Organisation over four years (TA1 Stage 2).

Given the ambition and significance of the OOR to the programme, progression to TA1 Stage 2 requires high confidence and cannot be guaranteed. We do not plan to run a separate solicitation for TA1 Stage 2; we expect to award from among the teams funded through this sprint.

Every team funded in the sprint contributes to the OOR. Building digital olfaction takes more than a single team, and we intend this sprint to seed a lasting community, one that endures well beyond any single award.

This solicitation is derived from the programme thesis [Hypersensory Intelligence: Olfactory Perception](#) in turn derived from the ARIA Opportunity Space: [Extending Our Perception](#). **We strongly recommend reading both these documents alongside the Solicitation below.**

	Stage 1: The Sprint	Stage 2: The OOR Build
What	Deliver a detailed plan for the OOR and a pilot dataset	Build and operate the OOR
Grant	Up to £500k	Up to £25m
Teams	Up to six teams	One lead organisation, team or consortium
Duration	3 months	48 months

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SECTION 1: Programme Vision and Structure

This section shares the programme vision, provides details about the OOR, and an overview of the programme structure.

Hypersensory Intelligence: Olfactory Perception is a £65m R&D programme to build the foundations for general-purpose olfactory perception.

Artificial intelligence (AI) models can describe a photograph, compose a symphony and predict the structure of proteins, but they still cannot smell. Olfaction is older than vision, and the volatile chemicals around us carry rich information about the living world that organisms have exploited for billions of years.

The impact of integrating a sense of smell into our models could be enormous: systems that smell a disease flare days before symptoms appear [\[1,2\]](#), or prevent the \$1 trillion in annual food loss caused by spoilage [\[3\]](#). The addressable challenges could extend to plant health, agriculture, environmental monitoring, pest control, industrial applications and more.

The programme aims to build the next generation of general-purpose olfactory perception systems (sensors + AI), that can be informed by representations learnt from large cross-domain, multi-instrument datasets. We make the assumption that there is inherent structure within volatile chemical space that we can exploit with machine learning. To test this we need to build the ImageNet for olfaction.

This first call focuses on TA1: the Open Olfactory Resource (OOR), which will create that data foundation for the programme. Through TA1 Stage 1, the Sprint, we will fund up to six teams to develop a detailed plan and pilot dataset for the OOR.

Our North Star is for olfaction to reach the ubiquity and maturity of computer vision, embedded in frontier AI models and everyday devices as the camera is today.

1.1: What is the Open Olfactory Resource (OOR) and why does it matter?

Decades of work have produced valuable sensors, analytical instruments, algorithms and vertical studies, but no shared, high-quality, cross-domain data resource. Today's olfactory datasets are often small, proprietary, collected under different standards, or too narrow to support general-purpose learning.

The Open Olfactory Resource (OOR) is intended to change this: a trusted common foundation of shared data, standards, governance, access, and infrastructure for researchers, model builders, sensor developers, and domain experts to build on.

This programme asks whether richer, cross-domain volatile chemical data can reveal transferable representations of olfactory space, rather than markers discovered separately for each task. If it does, new applications require adapting a shared foundation rather than starting from scratch.

1.2: What must the OOR Organisation deliver?

The first Technical Area programme (TA1) will create the shared data foundation on which the rest of the programme depends. The **OOR Organisation should deliver against these objectives**;

- **Build a machine-learning-ready volatile chemical dataset**, directly and/or through partners, to collect the data most likely to support future representation learning, modelling, and sensor-development teams.
- **Ensure the dataset is high quality, reproducible, and richly described**, with signals that can be reproduced across labs, standards that are adhered to and developed where needed, and detailed metadata collected alongside each signal.
- **Lead and convene the ecosystem needed to make the resource trusted, adopted, and useful**, working closely with the programme's standards partner, international standards organisations, independent challenge partners, and TA2/TA3 teams so future modelling, sensing, and challenge activities are built on a standardised resource. This role extends beyond the programme: the OOR should be a lasting asset to the community, which makes trust and adoption central to its design.
- **Develop a model for the resource to scale and live beyond ARIA funding**, using partnerships, subcontracting, UK ecosystem strengths, additional funders, tiered access models, platform or standards mechanisms, and community engagement to keep the dataset growing and accessible over time.

We expect these objectives to be met but the approaches might vary.

1.3: Design Principles for the OOR

This section provides more details on what we believe are important OOR Organisation design principles for successful delivery of the programme.

1.3.1: OOR Organisational Principles

ARIA is open to different legal and organisational forms for the OOR Organisation. The right structure may be an existing organisation, a new organisation, a consortium, a joint venture, a Focused Research Organisation, a CIC, a lead organisation with subcontractors, a national-lab spin-out, or another model.

What matters is not the label attached to the organisation, but whether it can fulfil the role the programme needs and meet programme goals.

The OOR Organisation should have clear leadership and decision-making. It should be able to work with partners and contributors without becoming a loose consortium with no accountable centre. It should be able to add, replace, or recombine capabilities as the programme evolves, while maintaining continuity of mission and delivery.

The OOR Organisation must also avoid becoming a closed or proprietary enclosure of foundational data. Its structure should support broad reuse, appropriate access, standards adoption, long-term sustainability, and usefulness to future TA2 and TA3 teams.

The OOR Organisation must contribute lasting value to the UK ecosystem, both during and beyond the ARIA contract, including a credible route to long-term sustainability and to embedding the resource within UK research and industry.

The OOR Organisation must be financially sustainable beyond ARIA so it can keep maintaining and growing the resource. We are open to a range of sustainability models, provided the principles here are preserved; any future funding must not adjust these principles, and the core resource must not be enclosed or brought into the exclusive ownership of a profit-making entity.

We expect the OOR Organisation to be trusted by the field, accountable for delivery, able to coordinate a fragmented ecosystem, and aligned with the public-good purpose of the programme. We believe an important route to achieving the scale of data needed would be for other groups to adopt standards and contribute community data; this will only be possible if the organisation's intentions are trusted to be of benefit for the entire ecosystem.

1.3.2: Data Philosophy: Fingerprint vs Molecular ID

In our discovery, we found those using analytical chemistry techniques often debated the value of chemical and spectral fingerprints vs VOC identification and quantification. Our

initial position is that we see value to both. Molecule identification may be important for modelling and validation, and where possible should be collated, but the OOR should not assume that useful olfactory data must reduce only to named compounds.

The OOR should retain raw and intermediate data, metadata, quality-control flags, and failed or unexpected runs where these may be interpretable. The OOR should be future proof to new technology that emerges, and as such intentionally designed so that future methods can reinterpret the data as the field develops.

We are interested to hear how applicants approach labels, metadata, and quality-control flags associated with data, considering how molecular ID could be resolved and other ways to capture useful signals.

1.3.3: Dataset Strategy: What samples should the OOR collect?

We have deliberately not pre-committed to which samples to collect first, whether it should be food spoilage, plant health, human health, or others. The right domains are those where high-quality data can be collected at scale, a shared representation is mechanistically plausible, and impact is greatest. We expect them to be chosen with the OOR team and to evolve as the programme learns, rather than fixed at the outset.

We will assess candidate domains against the rubric below, and we expect applications to engage with these factors when setting out their data-acquisition strategy, potentially challenging the criteria or extending upon them. Strong proposals will use criteria like these to prioritise where to collect data rather than assert preferred domains. Not every domain in the optimal portfolio will score well against every criterion.

- **Data volume.** Favour domains where collecting a substantial volume of data is feasible.
- **(Bio)chemistry adjacency.** Favour domains with shared metabolic or biochemical pathways, where transferable representations are more plausible.
- **Societal or Commercial Impact.** Weight domains by their potential impact: a significant societal or unmet need, a commercial opportunity, or outsized benefit to the UK economy.
- **Label quality and controllability.** Training depends on labels whose ground truth represents the sample property. For some sample types labels can be tightly controlled.

- **Speed to access samples.** Highly regulated domains are often high-value but slow to collect in, so a general-purpose portfolio needs balance. Ethics are never traded off for speed.
- **Trajectory data.** Include some domains where you can track the same sample or subject over time, not just single snapshots. For some challenges the change in volatiles might be more informative than the absolute measurements and be of high value to map metabolic pathways.
- **Event rate or label prevalence.** We prioritise event rate over cohort size. In health, predicting early onset of an uncommon disease needs a large cohort to capture a few events; frequent flares of a chronic condition (such as IBD) yield signals from every patient.

Data volume matters, but the right dataset is not necessarily the largest possible dataset. Richness, reproducibility, metadata, transfer potential, label quality, and downstream usefulness are equally important.

1.4: Programme Targets

This section shares indicative targets for TA1 Stage 2, TA2 benchmarks and the final challenge.

1.4.1: Indicative Programme Targets for OOR / TA1

The following metrics show the ambition and direction of travel for the OOR Build. They are designed for TA1 Stage 2, they are **not Sprint targets**. Applicants should use the Sprint to generate evidence and justify credible projections towards the priorities.

Data Volume

As an initial ambition, ARIA is setting a target of **1 million samples** over the programme. A sample is one physical specimen, measured by n instruments at a specific time.

The number signals the programme's ambition. An ambitious target gives machine-learning approaches the best chance of characterising olfactory space. We expect to learn the intrinsic dimensionality of the space, and the number of samples required, as the programme progresses. Data-efficient methods developed in TA2 could lower the number of samples needed. The target should provoke credible strategies for scale, considering cost-per-sample and a data strategy that evolves over the programme.

For context, vision's most widely used benchmark ([ILSVRC](#)) was built on ~1.2 million images, the scale at which learned representations broke through with AlexNet. The programme thesis discusses this further.

Scale is not the only factor. Sample count is balanced against richness, diversity, reproducibility, metadata, and label quality. Scale requirements may also be offset by convening other labs under shared standards. We value a balanced strategy that prioritises machine-learning readiness, where scaling goals do not create unrealistic expectations or incentives; favouring multi-modality and only well-justified use of time-series data.

In TA1 Stage 1, the sprint will have teams project credible year-one targets based on pilot evidence, instrument choice, automation and domain selection, and justify a path toward the programme's ambitious scale.

Quality

The OOR must generate data that is high quality and reproducible, with rich metadata, such that multiple labs in different locations can contribute to the same data resource. Teams will work with the programme's standards partner to assess reproducibility against defined standards (such as ISO 5725) and will be measured against an agreed reproducibility metric. New standards may also evolve through the programme.

Data Diversity

The diversity of the data is important to ensure a general-purpose olfaction system can be built, capable of generalising across domains rather than excelling in one. We have provided a rubric to support the selection of domains ([section 1.3.3](#)). Teams will be assessed qualitatively against these criteria, and we expect the approach to evolve through strategic discussion over the programme.

Signal

Ultimately the OOR's value is whether useful structure can be learned from it, enough to characterise olfactory space and transfer across tasks. In the long run the data's value is demonstrated through downstream (TA2) performance; in TA1 Stage 2 we do not wait for that, and welcome early proxies of signal value. Early indicators could include whether simple models can predict metadata and labels from the data, and whether the data covers olfactory space rather than clustering in a few regions. We welcome proposals for early metrics of signal value.

1.4.2: Programme-Level Benchmarks and Challenges

The programme's progress will be driven by benchmarks that TA2 competes on using TA1 data. These will be modelled on existing AI benchmarks from vision and NLP. From vision, the Visual Task Adaptation Benchmark ([VTAB](#)) measures how well a learned representation transfers to diverse tasks from limited data. From NLP, [FLORES-200](#) tackles low-resource transfer and [GLUE](#) aggregates multi-task performance into a single score. These are useful analogues for what general-purpose olfactory data should enable.

The benchmarks will be tightly linked to the OOR; we intend to promote them beyond the programme, giving the OOR wider visibility and significance.

The programme will end with a Final Challenge that stretches teams to match, and ultimately exceed, the adaptability of biological olfaction. Teams will design new sensor platforms that adapt to previously unseen tasks from little data, drawing on the OOR and learned representations. Across three unseen tasks, solutions will be measured on task performance (sensitivity and specificity) and data efficiency (samples required), benchmarked against a biological standard such as a trained dog. Specifically, teams must meet a minimum performance threshold using as few training samples as possible. Programme success will depend directly on the quality of the OOR.

1.5: Programme Structure

The programme runs for four years and is organised around three Technical Areas. This solicitation is the first stage of Technical Area 1. All three areas are summarised below, and shown in Figure 1, so applicants can see how the resource they build will be used.

Technical Area 1: the Open Olfactory Resource (OOR). The shared data foundation for the whole programme: the data, standards, and governance needed to learn the structure of olfactory space.

Technical Area 2: R&D teams that use the OOR to learn transferable representations of olfactory space and to build novel, general-purpose sensor platforms.

Technical Area 3: the final challenge. A final demonstration testing how rapidly those representations can drive new sensor design across a breadth of tasks, combining the sensing and modelling solutions from TA2.

This is not a call for TA2, these TAs will come later. To register interest, use the form [here](#)

1.5.1: Programme Roadmap

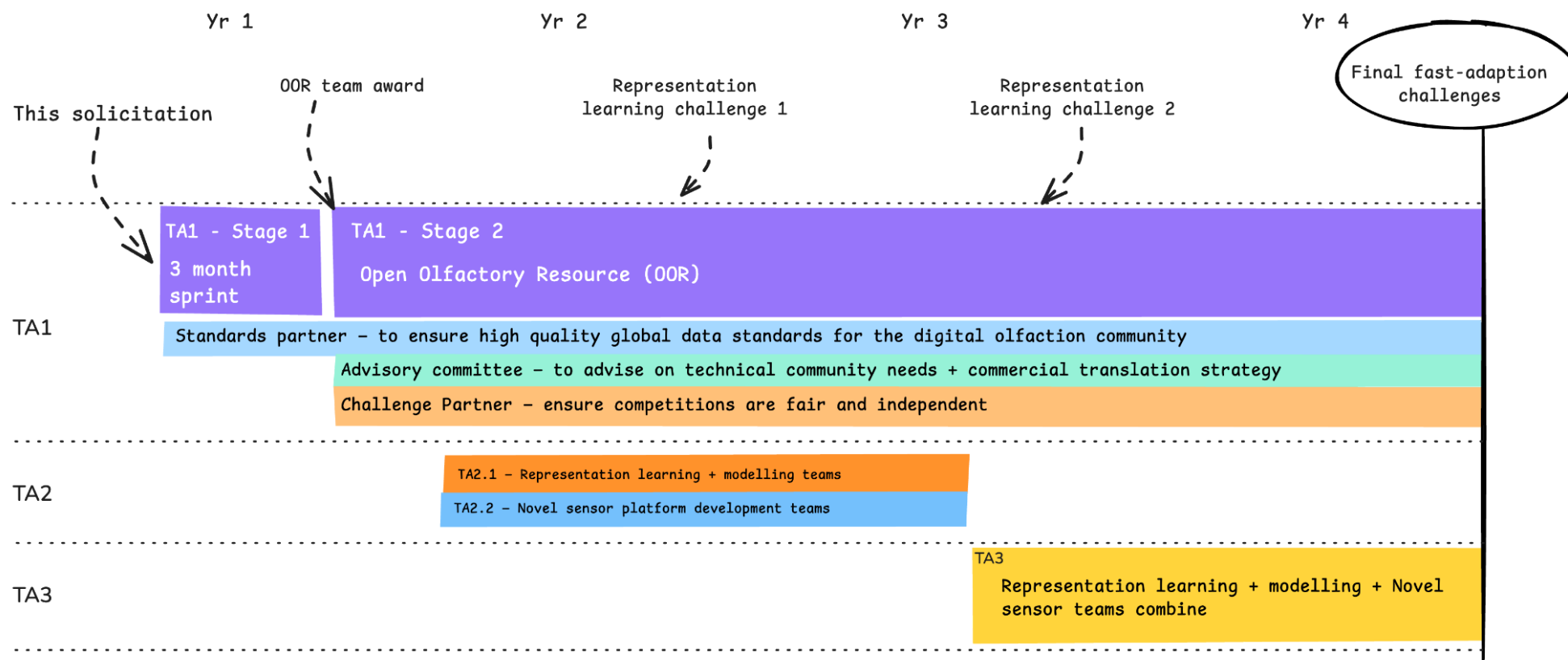


Figure 1: a high level overview of the programme's timeline and structure

1.5.2: TA1 Role in the Programme and Community

Collaborations with other TAs

The technical areas will work closely together: TA1 produces the data, TA2 learns representations and builds sensors from the learnt representations, and TA3 tests how rapidly sensors can be adapted to a new challenge. TA2 sensors could be brought into TA1 as the programme matures. The quality of the OOR is therefore essential to every other TA.

How TA1's data is used

The OOR's primary customers are the TA2 teams, which use the data to create a general purpose olfactory perception system, as per the programme goal, along two tracks (TA2.1 and TA2.2 in Figure 1):

- **TA2.1** representation learning and modelling: using TA1 data to learn compact, transferable descriptions of olfactory space, optionally supported by modelling and simulation.
- **TA2.2** novel sensor platforms: building customisable, fast-to-develop sensors, designed using TA2.1 learned representations, for real-world deployment. Mature sensing capabilities could potentially be adopted by TA1 for further data collection or alignment with core data resources.

Collaborations with partners

Throughout the four years, the OOR works alongside three standing partners (shown in Figure 1):

1. **a standards partner**, to help set high-quality, global data standards for the digital olfaction community;
2. **a challenge partner**, to run the programme's competitions fairly and independently;
3. **an advisory committee**, to advise on technical community needs and commercial translation.

Leadership of the wider community

The Organisation building the OOR is not only a data provider, their leadership must extend beyond the programme's own teams to act as a convening force for the digital olfaction community; setting standards others adopt, and drawing in data and contributors well beyond ARIA's direct funding.

Data provided by ARIA

To give the OOR a head start, ARIA is running a separate request for information (RFI) to identify existing, non-public datasets suitable for olfactory perception. Datasets gathered through the RFI will be made available to the OOR team to integrate into the resource.

1.6: Overview of Award Process

We plan to fund TA1 through two connected stages: TA1 Stage 1: the Sprint (3 month) and TA1 Stage 2: the OOR Build.

Through this solicitation, ARIA will fund up to six teams for TA1 Stage 1: the Sprint. Each team may receive up to £500k for a 3-month sprint to run a data acquisition pilot and develop a full blueprint and execution plan for the OOR. TA1 Stage 2: The OOR Build will be funded by a £25m award to a single, new or existing organisation to deliver TA1 Open Olfactory Resources objectives.

This two stage approach is designed to allow prospective teams to develop thoughtful in depth Stage 2 data acquisition strategies and blueprints to help derisk the larger Stage 2 direct award. Given the magnitude of the full TA1- Open Olfactory Resources award, we will have a high bar for its award and we may choose not to award any teams if we are not able to reach sufficient levels of confidence in any one team.

The background and requirements for Stage 2 can be found within [section 1.1](#) - [section 1.5](#). Stage 1 applicants should familiarise themselves with the structure and goals of Stage 2, since this will inform their application in Stage 1.

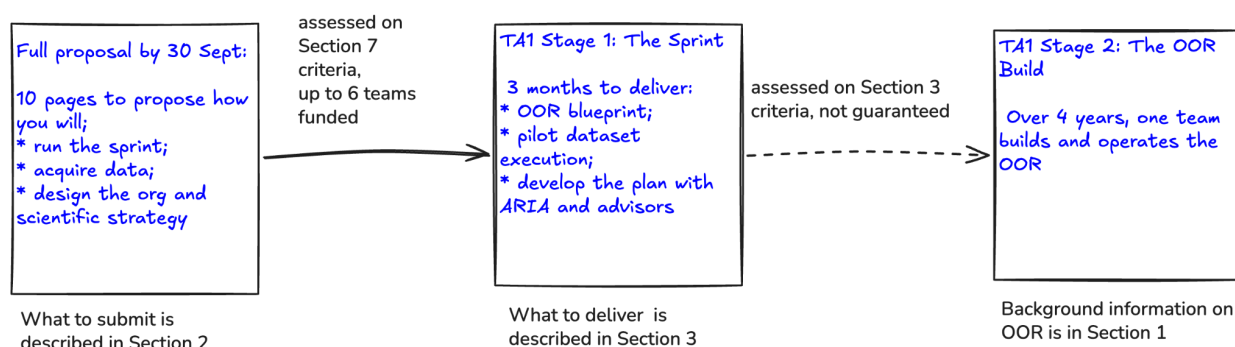


Figure 2: depicting the stages of the award process. The work applicants need to do is in the boxes, assessment is shown over the arrows (alongside in which section you will find

guidance). Note: criteria for full proposal is in section 7, criteria for assessment of TA1 Stage 1 is in section 3.

SECTION 2: What are we looking for and what to submit by 30th September

This section describes what we are looking for, what we are not looking for and what you need in your application to be part of the sprint.

2.1: What we are looking for

We are looking for teams that can credibly design and deliver the OOR as a public-good resource for the field. More details on our view on priorities for this group can be found in [section 1.3.1](#).

We are looking for a highly talented team with an exceptional leader. The OOR Organisation should be trusted by the community as a convener, mission driven, committed to delivering the OOR as an open resource for public good and of benefit to the UK once the programme has closed and a strong vision for the long term sustainability of the dataset and capability. Strong applications are likely to combine technical capability, analytical chemistry, automation, data engineering, metadata and standards expertise, governance, operational leadership, ecosystem coordination, and a credible route to sustainability.

We are agnostic to the type of team you are and your legal structure (eg. Focused Research Organisation, Joint Venture, CIC etc). However, we do recognise that this decision is critical to get right. You could be an existing organisation, a consortium of experts looking to form a team to develop in-house capabilities, or a team that can oversee a portfolio of subcontractors to achieve the same outcome.

2.2: What we are not looking for

- **Single-Application Point Solutions:** Teams focused solely on solving one vertical application (e.g., detecting a single disease or monitoring one specific crop) rather than building general-purpose data infrastructure for the entire field.
- **Closed Datasets or Proprietary Enclosures:** Models that permanently lock the foundational cross-domain dataset behind commercial walls. We will reject approaches that recreate the current fragmentation and data incompatibility of the digital olfaction market.

- **Consultancy-only blueprints:** Paper strategies with no credible evidence of execution capability, data access, technical leadership, or ability to build and operate the OOR.
- **Loose consortia with no accountable operating model:** Multi-party teams must show who leads, how decisions are made, how partners are managed, and how delivery risk is controlled.
- **Siloed Sensor Hardware Development:** Groups intending to design a novel "universal gas sensor" without cross-disciplinary collaboration to leverage datasets, AI tools, or modelling. Developing deployable sensor hardware belongs in TA2 and will be part of further solicitations in 2027 ([see programme roadmap](#)).
- **Pure modelling projects:** Representation learning and modelling will be part of future solicitations. This call is focused on the OOR.
- **Purely Biological Olfaction Research:** Experimental neuroscience or neurophysiological work focusing solely on how biological olfactory systems function, without translating this directly into digital datasets or resources.
- **Robotics and Embodiment Navigation:** Research focused on olfactory navigation, drone odour tracking, mobile sensing platforms, or other robotic directions, as these fall outside the scope of foundational sensory perception capabilities required for this programme.

2.3: What to include in your proposal

To see exactly how to set out your application see [Full Proposal Guidelines](#). This section details the headings you should use. To support your answer here, you should review: the programme thesis and [section 1](#) which provides background information about the OOR expectations; [section 3](#), which explicitly shares what deliverable will be expected in the sprint and how you will be assessed on sprint deliverables; and [section 4](#) which shares how ARIA will manage the sprint. We are keen to hear what differentiates you.

Your sprint application (a 10 page pdf) will be a competitive proposal to secure up to £500k in funding for a 3-month sprint. We do not expect you to have the final OOR designed in this application. Instead, we are looking for a highly credible actionable plan for the 3 months, alongside scientific and organisational proposals.

Applicants should structure their proposal around the following four required headings.

1. The 3 month execution plan

We want a broad plan of how you will approach the 3 month sprint.

- a. **Sprint Methodology:** A high level plan or clear set of milestones detailing how you will allocate the budget, up to £500k, over the 3 months to produce the final OOR blueprint.

2. Scientific Strategy and Provisional Organisation Design

We are looking for differentiated technical and operational approaches to a challenging goal. Details of the OOR can be found in section 1, specifically [section 1.2](#) for objectives and [section 1.3](#) for design principles, [section 1.4](#) for TA1 and programme targets, with additional context in section 1 and programme thesis.

- a. **Scientific Strategy:** Explain how you would collect data that is representative, cross-domain ([section 1.3.3](#)), sufficiently large, and well suited to learning general-purpose representations that are of maximal value for TA2 and TA3. Consider how your strategy would meet the indicative OOR targets in [section 1.4.1](#) and contribute to the programme vision, the programme targets, and the final challenge [section 1.4.2](#).

Please cover the following. What is the central bet in your strategy, the choice you would defend that others might not make? How would your strategy adapt as the programme learns? How would you test if the dataset is high quality?

For each of the following, tell us what matters most and where the hard parts are, rather than describing your full method:

- i. **Hardware and Standards:** Describe the measurement modalities you would use and why they fit your target data. These may include multiple modalities such as lab-grade instruments (e.g. GC-MS, PTR-MS and others), gas-array sensors, or less conventional approaches, and may combine several. Set out the standards you will use, your approach to calibration, consistent sample handling and preparation (e.g. headspace, thermal desorption, etc.), metadata, and protocols for reproducibility.
- ii. **Scale of data:** Explain how you would reach a dataset large enough to learn olfactory representations, optimising cost-per-sample. Many routes exist: high-throughput automation; convening academic or commercial labs under shared standards; harvesting data from instruments already deployed at scale; or other options. Tell us how you would break the volume/cost/fidelity trade-off. Give indicative sample counts at three points; end of pilot, end of year 1, and end of year 4, with this data scaling strategy in mind. Sample is

defined in [section 1.4.1](#). Ground these numbers in your scientific strategy, we don't want volume at cost to data quality and utility.

- iii. **Signal, quality and reproducibility:** Tell us how you would know the data has a learnable signal, and how you would keep collection consistent and high quality. High-throughput automation is likely important for more than increasing scale of data, it also supports consistent sample preparation, metadata capture and makes it feasible for multiple labs to contribute to a common dataset. Tell us what role it plays in your approach.
- iv. **Samples and domains:** Which domains would you target, in what order, and why? Use the rubric in [section 1.3.3](#) to justify your portfolio, and tell us how you would expect it to change as the programme learns.

This field is early, so if your approach doesn't fit these categories, include it here.

- b. **Provisional organisation design:** We expect a beta-version of your OOR design and delivery plan (the deliverable defined in [section 3.1](#) as the OOR Blueprint) and a clear strategy for how you will tackle the complex questions required for the final blueprint. Tell us how you will; research and formulate a sustainable legal structure, develop robust ethical and governance frameworks, and integrate with the programme's independent standards organisation. We are agnostic to the legal vehicle as long as our OOR organisational principles are addressed ([section 1.3.1](#)). For governance, consider in particular sensitive or human-derived data, including consent, access, privacy and how data management would be approached. Set out which of these you can already answer and which you would use the sprint to work through.
- c. **Beyond ARIA:** outline your route to sustainability beyond ARIA funding, so the resource keeps growing and stays open once the programme closes.

3. Data Acquisition Pilot

The data acquisition pilot will give us conviction and evidence you can execute your plan. All outputs of this pilot will be incorporated into the OOR at the end of the sprint.

- a. **Rapid Data Collection:** During the 3 month sprint, we expect teams to collect an olfaction relevant VOC dataset that is machine learning ready. Outline your plan for this pilot: What domain will you sample and why? How will you rapidly acquire data? How will you adhere to and advance standards? How will you ensure metadata is high quality? How will you test for whether the dataset produces a high value signal, will you develop algorithmic tools? Detail what you expect the outputs to be of this sprint; size, quality etc.

- b. **Rationale for your strategy:** Using the criteria outlined in [section 1.3.3](#) justify why you have chosen this domain for your 3 month pilot. How will this experimental phase inform the work of the OOR, how will this drive subsequent decisions? How will you ensure maximum value for the first representation learning teams joining the programme? How would you scale it up?
- c. **Addressing assessment criteria:** If the proposal is successful, your sprint will be assessed against criteria in [section 3.2](#). Read those before you write, and show how your plan will meet them.

4. Team composition, ecosystem, and subcontracting

We want exceptional technical leadership to co-ordinate a fragmented field, alongside world-class talent to execute.

- a. **Core team:** Who is driving this? Who is on the team? What share of their time is dedicated to the project? Give short bios demonstrating your ability to execute the scientific strategy (analytical chemistry, olfaction, ML/data science, data curation etc). Hiring is permitted to onboard in time for the sprint. If you rely on third parties or subcontractors, who are they, what will they deliver, and how will you coordinate them? Are there gaps in your competency to close? What motivates you to do this?
- b. **Partnerships and Networks:** Generating a cross-domain dataset will require scale. Identify the partners, labs, or subcontractors you will work with or onboard during the sprint. Highlight where you leverage the UK ecosystem.
- c. **Existing data or instruments:** Do you have equipment or data that could form the basis of the OOR? Could this data contribute to the open-access OOR, and has this been collected to the same standard as your current proposal? Ensure legacy instruments and data assets do not restrict your ability to create a differentiated proposal..

2.4: Application Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria of the proposal TA1 Stage 1 (described in [section 2](#)) can be found in [section 7](#). The next section discusses what you will be expected to deliver if this proposal is successful.

SECTION 3: What deliverables are expected in TA1 Stage 1 and how are they assessed

This section outlines what funded teams will be expected to deliver at the end of the 3 months, and how those deliverables will be assessed during TA1 Stage 1.

3.1 What deliverables are expected from the TA1 Stage 1: The Sprint

Throughout the sprint, teams are expected to participate actively in the ARIA activities described in Section 4.

By the end of the Sprint, funded teams should deliver an OOR blueprint and a pilot dataset.

OOR Blueprint

The OOR blueprint combines the organisational design and delivery plan for the OOR. It should explain how the team would build, operate, govern, scale, and sustain the open resource.

- **Comprehensive operational plans** to establish the OOR organisation, which will produce and steward the world leading open, cross-domain dataset of volatile chemical signals, hardware platforms, and standards.
- **Scientific strategy** for which domains to target, how you would measure them, and how the dataset reaches the scale and quality to learn transferable representations.
- **Scalable data acquisition** for high-resolution, reproducible olfactory datasets across the domain(s) selected via the rubric. Outline the use of lab-grade analytical equipment (e.g. GC-MS, PTR-MS), gas-array sensors or other options.
- **Robust governance and ethical frameworks** for managing highly sensitive data (such as human breath or skin volatiles) and ensuring the dataset is appropriately managed and accessible — for example independent ethics oversight, professional data-governance, and federated storage to protect privacy without hindering research.
- **Community and standards integration** — acting as a coordination hub rather than just a data provider, including deep collaboration with an independent, ARIA-contracted metrology or standards institute to develop rigorous data-collection standards and benchmarks.
- **Sustainable organisational structure** with clear public-good alignment and a path to financial sustainability beyond ARIA (see [section 1.3.1](#) for organisational principles).

Pilot Dataset

Teams should start collecting a relevant olfactory dataset (domain chosen via the rubric), in-house or via subcontractors — generating useful data for the programme while evidencing your ability to execute the scientific strategy.

3.2 How the TA1 Stage 1 (the sprint) will be assessed

Note: these criteria apply at the end of the sprint, to assess funded teams for the Stage 2 award. They are not the criteria used to assess your proposal — those are in Section 7.

At the end of the sprint, funded teams will be assessed to determine who is awarded the OOR contract, based on the sample datasets generated during the sprint and the quality of their final blueprint.

Quality of the OOR Blueprint

- **Criterion 1:** The final technical and operating model proposal (The Blueprint) will be scored by independent experts on two dimensions:
 - Operating model and organisational design: strength against the principles in [section 1.3.1](#), and ability to deliver the programme goal.
 - Scientific strategy: soundness, ambition, and ability to deliver the programme goal. It should reflect learnings from the pilot.

The Pilot Dataset

- **Criterion 2:** Use the sprint to justify credible projections for how much useful data you could generate in year 1 and across the 4-year build. We weigh both the projected number and its plausibility; throughput, cost per sample, reproducibility, automation, sample access, bottlenecks, and quality-control plans inform this. A lower number can still score well where you make a strong case for reaching a sufficiently large or rich dataset by other routes.
- **Criterion 3:** Evidence that your data collection is reproducible across days, instruments, and labs, assessed against a defined reproducibility standard developed with the programme's standards partner.
- **Criterion 4:** Metadata and data quality. Evidence that data is richly described, standards-aware, and collected with sufficient metadata to support future reinterpretation, reproducibility, and downstream learning.
- **Criterion 5:** Assessment of whether there is a learnable signal within your initial pilot dataset. This might be achieved through dimensionality reduction tools or simple machine learning tools, alongside labels and metadata.

Note: Where a team relies on subcontractors for equipment, we want to see strong evidence providing confidence in this execution.

Collaboration and Ecosystem Building

- **Criterion 6:** Demonstrated strength of collaboration, assessed by your ability to successfully identify UK partners, work with standards bodies, incorporate diverse perspectives, and collaborate with the ARIA team.

3.3 Programme-Level Metrics

If a team progresses to TA1 Stage 2: The OOR Build, they will be asked to hit metrics and milestones agreed with ARIA.

Initially they will be assessed on their ability to generate high-quality data, against metrics covering data volume, data quality (reproducibility), data diversity, and signal value; these are discussed in [section 1.4](#), project management details are in [section 4.2](#).

SECTION 4: Project Management Expectations

This section will describe what the teams can expect if they become part of this ARIA programme, firstly during the TA1 Stage 1: 3 month sprint, and then high-level expectations during the TA1 Stage 2 (if the team progresses).

This section details the project management plan for TA1 Stage 1, initial 3 month sprint for up to 6 teams. To provide teams with visibility of project management, however, as a successful team may go on to build the OOR over the 4 year programme, we have outlined the project management expectations for both phases below.

4.1 What is expected of you during the 3 month sprint (TA1 Stage 1)?

Up to 6 successful teams will receive initial funding of up to £500k for a 3-month sprint. Given the short timeframe and high stakes, this phase will involve tight collaboration and regular touchpoints with the ARIA programme team.

- **Project Milestones:** While your specific sprint methodology will be defined in your proposal (see [section 2.3](#)), all teams will be expected to adhere to the following overarching milestones:
 - **Pre-sprint kick-off** - A kick-off meeting for all successful applicants prior to the sprint.
 - **Month 1:** Onboarding, and rapid initiation of the Data Acquisition Pilot.
 - **Month 2:** Interim progress review. Teams will share early pilot data and the first version of their OOR Blueprint.

- **Month 3:** Final submission of the OOR Blueprint and proof of concept dataset, culminating in a final presentation/review with ARIA and independent experts.
- **Coaching, Workshops, and Access to Experts:** Teams will be expected to work with the ARIA team, advisors and experts identified to help refine proposals. Teams are encouraged to use budget to hire external support where necessary. We plan to organise workshops throughout the sprint to convene teams and external experts in one forum. We expect the workshops to include standards, organisation structure, automation advice, and to debate scientific approaches. ***All teams will have equal access to the programme team time during the sprint period.***
- **Programme Management:** Teams should expect bi-weekly check-ins with the ARIA team to unblock hurdles, discuss data acquisition progress, and refine their blueprint strategies.

4.2 Project Management in TA1 Stage 2

A team that progresses from the sprint into TA1 Stage 2 will not work in isolation. They will be expected to collaborate deeply with ARIA, the TA2 and TA3 teams, an independent challenge partner, an independent standards partner, and the advisory committee, which covers technical needs and translation opportunities ([section 1.5.2](#)) to manage the programmatic goals.

The OOR will act as the primary coordination hub for the digital olfaction community. During the 4-year programme, the OOR will be expected to host and manage community events, standard-setting workshops, and data-sharing consortiums to ensure the resulting datasets and standards scale beyond ARIA's funding.

The performance of the TA will be measured against agreed metrics, an indicative set of which is outlined in [section 1.4](#). Due to the high ambition of the programme, we expect the team to be comfortable with continually learning as we progress.

4.3 Approach to Intellectual Property

Stage 1 Sprint

If you receive funding for the sprint but are not selected to progress to the OOR build phase, we would expect any relevant data, metadata and data collection protocols to be made available to ARIA and/or the successful OOR builder where this is necessary to support continuation of the programme.

The pilot dataset and its accompanying metadata are intended as an open contribution to the OOR from the outset, reflecting the resource's open design philosophy.

Stage 2 OOR build

We are not prescribing a single IP model. Instead, applicants are asked to propose how to handle IP, data access, licensing, and sustainability in line with the OOR and the programme's overarching mission. The IP approach must be consistent with the OOR's status as a resource for public good and UK benefit, and must address downstream creator success.

When considering this, we would like to draw attention to the principles we have developed for the organisation being a trusted resource in [section 1.3.1](#). Amongst these, we believe it will be important to shepherd the field to reduce fragmentation and siloed data collection.

SECTION 5: Eligibility and 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.

Finding potential collaborators and teaming

For those seeking specific expertise to support their proposal for the 3 month sprint, we have created a teaming request form to facilitate finding potential team members who have registered their interest in this programme. By following the link to the sign up form [here](#) 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.

ARIA will also host an in-person event on **7th September 2026** for applicants who are interested in teaming to be able to meet each other in-person. To register your interest for this event, please follow the link to the sign up form [here](#). You will then be able to submit your details and receive further information. Please note, this event is **limited to 50** in person attendees with virtual participation available, in person spaces will be allocated on a first come first serve basis and alignment to TA1. Depending on demand, we may need to restrict teams to a fixed number of participants per team to attend in person.

Webinar

We are also hosting a webinar, on **25th August 2026**, 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](#). Applicants are welcome to register for both the webinar and the teaming event.

Application Process

The application process for Technical Area 1 Stage 1 - OOR 3 month sprint consists of a single stage:

Full Proposals

This step requires you to submit a detailed proposal using the sections set out in [section 2.3](#).

- **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 COIs etc

You can find more detailed guidance on what to include in a full proposal [here](#).

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 awarded as a result of this solicitation will be 3 months).

The OOR build phase is expected to create a UK-centred capability. If your organisation is not currently UK-based, you should explain how you would contribute to UK capability, whether through UK partners, UK infrastructure, UK data stewardship, UK hiring, UK standards leadership, or establishing activity in the UK.

If you are successfully selected for an award subject to negotiation, those negotiations and any resultant contract/grant will need to cover in detail how the organisation will capture value for, and add value to, the UK ecosystem, both during the ARIA grant and beyond.

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 6: 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	12 August 2026
Full proposal submission deadline	30 September 2026 (14:00 BST)
Full proposal review	30 September 2026 - 28 October 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 30 October 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 ARIAs 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 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.

SECTION 7: Evaluation Criteria

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](#). *Please note there is no concept paper stage for this call, instead there will be an extended full proposal application window.*

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, these proposals 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.

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 needed to advance the programme goals and objectives.
- b. It has the potential to be transformative and/or address critical challenges within and/or meaningfully contribute to the programme thesis, metrics or measures. Please refer to [section 2.3](#).
- c. For this specific sprint, the proposal should show a compelling vision for how the OOR could become a field-shaping public-good resource for digital olfaction.

2. **Differentiated** – The proposed approach is innovative and differentiated from existing data collection efforts with respect to cross-domain applicability, scale, automation, intentional broad scientific strategy, leveraging emerging technologies where possible within delivery timelines.

3. **Well defined** – The proposed project clearly identifies what R&D will be done to advance the programme thesis, metrics or measures, 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. A well-defined proposal will feature a highly credible; 3 month execution plan; scientific strategy; and provisional organisation design and realistic data acquisition pilot, as outlined in [section 2.3](#).

4. **Responsible** – The proposal identifies major ethical, legal or regulatory risks and that planned mitigation efforts are clearly defined, feasible and aligned to the programme's north star. Applicants should pay particular attention to sensitive data,

including human-derived data, data access, consent, privacy, and long-term governance.

5. **Intrinsic motivation** – The individual or team proposed demonstrates deep problem knowledge, have 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, including relevant analytical chemistry, automation, AI/ML, data engineering, data infrastructure, standards, governance, and ecosystem leadership.
6. **Benefit to the UK** – There is a clear case for how the project will benefit the UK. Strong cases for TA 1 Stage 1 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 sprint duration.

Strong cases for TA 1 Stage 2 must increase to >80% of project costs spent in the UK.

For non-UK applicants, we will evaluate the proposal based on its potential to boost the net impact of the programme in the UK. This could include:

- a. 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;
- b. 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

After the proposal review process, applicants will be notified whether or not they have been successfully selected for an award. Successful teams will be guaranteed an award of up to £500k to carry out the 3 month sprint. However, this does not guarantee that successful applicants will progress beyond this stage and be eligible for the full award for TA1. For those applicants not selected for award we will not provide feedback. We may contact teams after the full proposal period where we believe there would be a benefit from teaming or collaboration.

SECTION 8: 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. Clarification that cannot be answered by the AI chat function should be submitted no later than 21st September 2026.

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](#) and create your account before the application deadline.

Communication with potential applicants

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.

Programme Directors are encouraged to maintain an open dialogue with potential applicants after release of this solicitation and before applications are received. Any outcomes from Programme Director discussions with potential applicants that are relevant to all parties will be shared via the same method as clarification questions.

The published solicitation, any formal amendments and published clarification Q&As remain authoritative.

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](#).

[APPLY HERE](#)

SECTION 9: References

1. van Poelgeest J, Shahbazi Khamas S, Hallawa A, D'Alessandro C, Ferreira R, Maitland-van der Zee AH, et al. Exhaled volatile organic compounds associated with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease exacerbations-a systematic review and validation. *J Breath Res*. 2025;19. doi:[10.1088/1752-7163/adba06](https://doi.org/10.1088/1752-7163/adba06)
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Full Proposal Guidelines

How to Format your proposal

- Page count: 10 pages, (including diagrams, excluding references)
- 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

Section 1: Proposal Structure

Applicants are required to provide a proposal no longer than 10 pages in length that is structured using the exact headings set out in [section 2.3](#).

1. The 3 month execution plan
2. Scientific Strategy and Provisional Organisation Design
3. Data Acquisition Pilot
4. Team composition, Ecosystem, and subcontracting

Section 2: 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.

Application	Guidance
How much funding do you need?	Please provide a cost breakdown by completing the spreadsheet here . In your

	<i>proposal you may submit your budget using yearly, quarterly, or monthly phasing.</i> <i>Prior to completing this template you should review ARIA's Eligible cost guidance here.</i> <i>If your proposal is successful, prior to contract signature when the scope of work has been agreed, you will be required to provide an updated cost breakdown.</i>
Are you proposing to contribute funding?	<i>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, is the funding already secured and any other relevant details.</i> <i>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.</i>
Does your proposal depend on background IP (pre existing)?	<i>If Yes, give us an Indication of: What background IP is required, Whether you currently have rights to that IP.</i>
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?	<i>If yes, tell us more about the funding you already have or are applying for.</i>

Any other factors or restrictions that might impact your freedom to operate and deliver the project?	<i>Please provide a detailed description of any perceived conflicts of interest with the programme director, import/export or security restrictions that you are aware of</i>
How do you envision the OOR organisation becoming sustainable at the end of the four year programme?	<i>Please complete and upload a hypothesis for your project becoming sustainable as an open resource based upon the guidelines here (please bear in mind these guidelines are designed for a commercial entity, please adapt appropriately)</i>
Are you proposing to perform the majority of the proposed project outside of the UK?	<i>The Open Olfactory Resource (OOR) must be based in the UK. However, we may fund applicants during the three-month Stage 1 period who are not yet UK-based, provided they outline a credible high-level plan for establishing and conducting the project in the UK.</i> <i>At the application stage, this plan may remain high level. Further refinement, including a more detailed timeline, key milestones, and relevant commitments, can be undertaken during Stage 1. The plan should demonstrate a clear intention to deliver the project in the UK within the overall project duration, noting that the maximum project duration for Stage 1 is 3 months and the total, funded, duration for the delivery of the OOR is 4 years.</i>
Has a suitably authorised member of your Organisation approved the submission of this proposal?	<i>In the application portal, please select the option that best describes your situation and provide details where required.</i>

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](#).

Additional questions about you/your organisation that can be found in the application portal.