RAI UK Keystone Webinar Questions & Answers

Eligibility

Applicants can only be named on one project - EOI included? Does this apply to both PI and CoI?

Applicants can only be named on one EOI, either as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator. This rule will also apply for full proposals.

It seems like both international partners and partners in industry and the public sector are desired; but the briefing also said that applicants from non-academic or non-UK institutions are not eligible.

What is the role that international academics or organizations can play in the call? Can they provide services and/or receive payment?

How are applicants defined for the purpose of the ‘UK-based’ rule? Can a partner be a tech company incorporated outside of the UK? What if the company is a big conglomerate with a UK branch?

Can an AI research institute abroad be a partner and be funded through this grant?

Can an independent regional think tank lead a consortium?

Can industry partners be investigators if they play an active part in the research project?

Applicants (Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator) from non-academic organisations or from academic organisations outside of the UK are not eligible to apply. The Keystone Projects funding call is open to UK higher education institutions, public sector research establishments, research council institutes, and UKRI-approved independent research organisations and NHS bodies with research capacity.

Other non-academic organisations, or academic organisations based outside of the UK, can be involved as Project Partners but are not eligible to be part of the applicant team. As noted in the call guidance, if you are planning to involve international partners, you will need to complete RAI UK’s Trusted Research section and the checklist for academia by CPNI and NCSC, as well as your own institutional Trusted Research processes if necessary.

Project Partners can in certain circumstances provide subcontracted services, subject to formal procurement processes at your university and Trusted Research due diligence checks. A robust case would also need to be made in the Justification of Resources to support this use of funding.

The purpose of Keystone Projects within the wider RAI UK programme is to grow and strengthen the responsible AI ecosystem, with visibility, impact and advocacy.
achieved at an internationally significant level. This is reflected in our strategic themes and the key features of Keystone Projects, as described in the call guidance. To facilitate this, we strongly encourage applicants to build consortia that draw on diverse perspectives from a range of Project Partners, including policy makers and non-academic stakeholders including industry and civil society groups.

**Scope**

*Should the proposal be a “project”, or must it be a “network plus” type (with smaller themes/disciplines)?*

Keystone projects are significant strategic investments that form core research pillars for RAI UK. They will bring together the best talent to tackle bigger, more open-ended problems, enabled by the substantial resources on offer and the stability afforded by the duration of these projects. While flexibility is expected in the programme of work proposed and allocation of resources – to enable dynamic and agile integrative work with other components of the RAI UK ecosystem – we do not expect applicants to propose Network Plus style activities.

*Can the scope include data and partners from international institutions and/or countries?*

Applicants from academic organisations outside of the UK are not eligible to apply but can be involved as Project Partners. As noted in the call guidance, if you are planning to involve international partners, you will need to complete RAI UK’s [Trusted Research](#) section and the [checklist for academia by CPNI and NCSC](#), as well as your own institutional Trusted Research processes if necessary.

**Project teams & Consortia**

*Is there an expected size (upper/lower bounds, for number of consortium members)?*

What is the size expected for the consortia? Is it expected that multiple universities will collaborate and what would be the ideal number? Can partners from universities outside the UK also be included?

*How many investigators can we have, and how many from a university is permitted?*

Will a proposal with a large number of CoIs be viewed unfavourably?

*Would it be an advantage or requirement to have multiple universities involved in a bid (as was the case for the recent AI Hubs), or is diversity of disciplines, groups, stakeholder voices, etc. what is being anticipated?*

There is no expected size, nor an upper limit to the number of investigators that can be included in the project team, or from any given university. We do however expect successful consortia to involve more than one academic institution and be multi-
disciplinary. For full proposals, applicants should also carefully consider how to best balance investigator time against other requirements for resources within the project.

Can we add additional COIs/Partners for the full proposal?

How much detail on partners is required at EOI stage? The question on the EOI form says ‘outline all partners and their role’ but it may take time between outline and full stage to bring in some new partners to a bid. Is this allowable?

Is it possible to flag potential partners now and add them later in the full proposal?

Yes, additional partners and COIs can be included after the EOI stage, including COIs who were previously named on an unsuccessful EOI. We don't however expect to see any team members removed between EOI and full proposal stage without robust justification. We would also encourage teams to include as many members of the team as possible at EOI stage, as the strength and breadth of the consortium will be factored into decision making during the sift of EOIs.

Is it necessary to identify the PI from the team of investigators at EOI stage?

The strength and breadth of the consortium, including appropriate leadership, will be factored into decision making during the sift of EOIs. We would therefore recommend identifying a PI, or at least Co-leads at this stage to provide a clear picture to the sift panel of the leadership structure. It may be possible to adjust for the invited full proposal but would need to be agreed with RAI UK on a case-by-case basis.

Can we say in our EOI that we would be open to exploring merging with other networked applicants? Will RAI UK rationalise groups invited for full proposals?

Teams can indicate this in their EOI if they wish, but it will not be factored into decision making for the sift. We do not have any specific plans to rationalise bids and encouraging merging but will approach this flexibly on a case-by-case basis.

How many different disciplines can we have on the project team?

There is no limit to the number of disciplines represented within the project team.

In terms of the multidisciplinary team, what would you consider as non-technical roles? Behavioural scientists, ethicists?

How do you define “technical” and “non-technical” researchers?

Are you looking for Project Leads to be from technical disciplines e.g. Computer Science or is it more who is the best person to lead the bid?

While we would stress there is no ideal mix prescribed for these multidisciplinary teams, they will ideally include ‘technical’ team members, e.g., from Computer Science or Engineering, and colleagues from ‘non-technical’ disciplines, including the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In simplistic terms, we would like to see
teams comprising members who ordinarily would apply to different Research Councils for funding, e.g., AHRC and EPSRC. The Project Lead can be from either technical or non-technical disciplines.

Diversity is of course important. Can it be manifested across the entire team, i.e., can the PDRAs, partners etc. balance out the Co-Is if it’s difficult to balance them alone?

We are looking for evidence that equity, diversity and inclusivity has been considered in the composition of the research team as well as for the proposed research. We encourage teams to consider these factors across the wider team, including researchers and project partners.

It says somewhere that consortia should reflect whole UK. Does that mean that there need to be CIs from Eng, Sc and NI?

While we encourage applicants to assemble teams that reflect and represent the strengths in responsible AI found across the entirety of the UK, there is no requirement to include Co-Investigators from each of the four nations. RAI UK itself has been constructed to include representation from the four nations, and we will leverage this to support Keystone Projects in reaching and engaging with broader audiences.

**RAI UK Investigator involvement**

Does a project need a RAI UK PI/Co-I as advisors or investigator. The call doc says it is possible. Is that implicitly saying those who have that are at an advantage? Could you share more guidance on this?

Is it possible to seek help on identifying suitable RAI UK investigator not already committed at this stage?

Would RAI UK investigator as an advisor bias the evaluation process as the RAI UK board are the evaluators? What steps do we need to take?

Do you need a member of RAI UK leadership already nominated at EOI stage?

Should an advisory board member from RAI be approached before the EOI is submitted?

It sounded from the talk as if we should contact someone on the leadership board of R-AI to be an advisor on the project. It would seem sensible to do this after knowing the outcome of the EOI, but it sounds like you want us to do that now. Am I correct? I am assuming that these people can be advisors on multiple proposals otherwise the number of applications will be limited by the number of board members of RAI.

Projects do not require Co-Investigators from the RAI UK team.
We will rigorously monitor and act on conflicts of interest at each stage of the assessment process to ensure the involvement of RAI UK team members as Co-Investigators does not influence the evaluation process.

All projects will need to put in place an independent advisory board that provides advice and recommendations to the Keystone team. To aid integration of Keystone Projects with the wider RAI UK programme, we require each advisory board to include at least one member of the RAI UK Leadership Team. Please note, this is not required for EOIs and will not form part of the assessment of EOIs. It is not therefore necessary to reach out to Leadership Team members to act in an advisory capacity until the full proposal stage.

There will be no limit to the number of proposals RAI Leadership Team members can engage with in an advisory board capacity.

*Where can we find a list of RAI UK investigators?*  
[www.rai.ac.uk/teams](http://www.rai.ac.uk/teams)

*Are working group members counted as RAI Investigators in relation to the rule that they can be included as CO-Is but cannot be costed in the proposal?*

No, only members of RAI UK Leadership and Delivery Teams are subject to this rule.

**Advisory Board**

*What exactly does "independence" mean for the advisory board? Independent of the PI/ CIs, industry, government?*

We ask that the membership of the advisory board is at least 50% independent of the Keystone Project team and identifies an independent chair.

*Can RAI UK team members be named as members of the advisory board of only one proposal at EOI stage? Or does this restriction only apply if they are partners on the proposal?*

*Does the independent advisory board and the member of RAI management team need to be organised and agreed for the EOI, or can we focus just on the ideas and core team just for that?*

*Did I understand correctly that the expectation for EOI is to provide details of the independent advisory board including naming who from the RAI UK leadership team should be part of that team? Or shall this be left to full proposal?*

There will be no limit to the number of proposals RAI Leadership Team members can engage with in an advisory board capacity. Applicants do not need to detail the membership of their advisory board – including the identity of the RAI UK Leadership Team member – at EOI stage.

*Can we have non-UK members of the Independent Advisory Board?*
Applicants (Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator) from non-academic organisations or from academic organisations outside of the UK are not eligible to apply. However, non-UK based organisations can join as Project Partners (subject to Trusted Research checks), and this could include contributing to the advisory board.

**Partners**

*Are there any requirements on partner contributions?*

*How many partners makes a good EOI?*

While we expect to see substantial cash and/or in-kind contributions from project partners and participating organisations, there is no minimum requirement. Partnerships will be assessed on their relevance and alignment to the programme.

*Does the EOI need to have a comprehensive list of partners, or can this grow until the 5th of January?*

Additional partners can be included after the EOI stage.

**Details for the Expression of Interest form**

*For the EOI stage, for the non-academic partners, do we have to also include their staff details? Alternatively, does it mean the investigators are only from academic partners, not from non-academic partners?*

*What counts as an "applicant"? Is this just the Co-Is and PI, or anyone who would be a recipient of the funding? Should we be including the names of non-academic and non-UK partners in our expression of interest?*

Please use the ‘Investigators’ section on the Expression of Interest form to provide details for the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators, noting the guidance on institutional eligibility in the call guidance.

Applicants from non-academic organisations or from academic organisations outside of the UK are not eligible to apply as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator for this funding opportunity. The ‘Partners’ section on the form can be used to provide details for non-academic organisations acting as Project Partners. Points of contact do not need to be identified within these organisations at the EOI stage.

*Can a project cross over on the themes? How do we select multiple themes in the EOI form?*

Please use the ‘Strategic theme’ section on the form to identify the primary theme associated with your proposal. If you wish to note additional themes that are relevant, please indicate this in the final section for additional information to consider.
Where should we list RAI UK leadership advisors in the EOI? Researcher list or Partners or in abstract?

While it isn’t necessary to identify Leadership Team members joining the advisory board at the EOI stage (and it will not influence assessment of EOI), applicants can if they wish include this information. We suggest including it in the final section for additional information to consider.

How much detail do we need to have about WPs in the EOI?

How much information regarding management and monitoring and RRI plans is expected in the EOI (given the limited number of words)?

The Expression of Interest form includes a brief abstract of 750 words, which should articulate the vision for your keystone project and give a high-level overview of your objectives, research approach, and be clear how your proposed programme of work fits with our vision for the keystone projects, set out in the call guidance under “What we are looking for”. We recommend applicants focus on addressing these points.

Finance & use of available resources

How much financial detail is expected in the EOI?

No financial details are required for the EOI.

Can the 20% for work alongside and with other RAI "properties" be specified in any way as to activities, personnel, or should it just be left as a 20% carve out?

You ask for 20% of the funding to be used for RAI activity. Clearly the project is all about building an ecosystem. Should the 20% be left in a pot as money for RAI activity or should the ecosystem building activities that we are intending to run just add up to at least 20%?

We ask that Keystone Projects allocate at least 20% of the budget to support integrative research with RAI UK and other Keystone projects. Whilst this might include ecosystem building activities you plan to run in collaboration with RAI UK, teams should also factor in resource to allow dynamic, collaborative research (including PDRA resource) as the responsible AI landscape evolves.

Does project management have to be built in separately in the budget or can it be shared cost free with a host institutional centre?

There is no set expectation for how consortia should resource this aspect of their programmes. We strongly encourage applicants to secure dedicated project management and other administrative support for their programmes, either resourced directly from the project or as a firm commitment from the host institution, in which case we would expect to see this clearly detailed in the host organisation Letter of Support at full proposal stage.
Can we engage or subcontract parts of the project to other researchers?

Can partners’ time be costed?

Can external partners (e.g., NGOs and charity) be funded e.g., as paid consultants for their time?

Are consultancy fees eligible in the budget?

In certain circumstances, work can be undertaken as a subcontracted service, subject to formal procurement processes at your university and Trusted Research due diligence checks. A robust case would also need to be made in the Justification of Resources to support this use of funding.

Are costs for studentships eligible?

No, we cannot fund any costs associated with PhD studentships.

Assessment

What is the expertise of the sifting panel, and will they follow EPSRC/UKRI outline panel format?

The sifting panel will represent a range of disciplines with broad expertise across the responsible AI landscape. The funding call has been developed in conjunction with UKRI, who will continue to have oversight of the process as we progress through the stages, including representation during the sifting phase.

What percentage of proposals to go to full proposals?

How many EOI s are you expecting to select and invite for full proposal, given the expected number of funded projects?

At this stage, we are unable to provide a percentage figure. This call is unique and there is therefore no data to indicate how many EOI s we can expect to receive. We expect to progress around 15 proposals to full proposal stage, but this figure will depend on both the quality and breadth of EOI s we receive.

How are the EOI s and full proposals evaluated? Will we get feedback? Is it the same sifting panel?

A Sifting Panel will consider EOI s to identify bids that are likely to meet the expectations set out in the section “What we are looking for”. Successful proposals at the sifting stage will be invited to submit full proposals. Specific feedback will not be provided for EOI s.

Invited full proposals deemed to meet the Assessment criteria will be sent out for peer review by experts across the RAI community. The reviews and the proposals
will then be considered by a panel of experts to select the final successful proposals. This review panel will not be the same as the sift panel; while it will still include members of the core RAI UK team, it will also bring in experts outside of the RAI UK consortium, as well as continued involvement from UKRI representatives.

RAI UK will follow UKRI’s principles of peer review to ensure fairness and transparency within the decision-making process. Funding decisions will be made based on the rank ordered lists as well as the nature of the projects. To ensure a balanced portfolio of activities, we will aim to fund at least one project against each of the themes.