

# Systemic AI Safety Grants - Frequently Asked Questions

This document will be regularly updated to reflect those questions most frequently raised with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and Innovate UK, part of UKRI, and the AI Safety Institute (AISI). Potential applicants, and their Host Organisations, are expected to review this document before contacting UKRI or AISI for advice.

Where questions are primarily relevant to either business or academic applicants this has been clearly highlighted. However, information in these answers may have relevance to all applicants.

If you have any questions about the Systemic AI Safety Grants which are not answered in the FAQ, please contact us by emailing at [AISIGrants@dsit.gov.uk](mailto:AISIGrants@dsit.gov.uk).

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# Introduction

## **1. What is systemic AI safety? Is it different to model safety?**

- Systemic AI safety is the attempt to safeguard societies and key infrastructure within them from the present and future risks arising with AI deployment and implementation.
- Systemic safety can be contrasted with model safety, which seeks to make the models themselves safer, for example by evaluating their harmful capabilities and developing technical mitigations that minimise risk. Investing in model safety *and* systemic safety allows us to tackle the challenges posed by AI from different interconnected fronts.
- With the emergence and rapid uptake of powerful frontier AI systems, it is essential that we prepare societal systems and infrastructure for new changes and challenges, as well as intervening on the models themselves.

## **2. Why does AISI need to fund systemic AI safety research?**

- AISI's mission is to provide research to inform UK and international policymaking and provide technical tools for governance and regulation.
- This work goes hand in hand with the AI Safety Institute's work to evaluate models, but instead of focusing on the safety of models themselves, this grant competition is aimed at supporting research that will enable society to better manage the changes AI might bring.
- This grant competition will extend AISI's activities to include systemic safety, by drawing upon the wider expert ecosystem made up of researchers in academia, in industry labs and in civil society. From this, AISI and its partners can better prepare, adapt and safeguard societal systems which will be affected by the adoption of frontier AI.

## **3. How will the grants benefit the UK?**

- The grants will benefit the UK by catalysing more research in AI Safety and position the UK to take a leading role in this transformational technology and how to safeguard against risks, to ensure that AI can benefit society.

- The grants will fund sociotechnical research and projects from UK based organisations and collaborate with international partners to draw as much expertise and talent together from across the world to this global challenge.

#### **4. What are the objectives of this competition?**

- The initial goals are:
  - a. To crowdsource ideas from academics, civil society and entrepreneurs about what challenges AI is likely to pose for societal systems and infrastructure and how to measure and monitor such risks, as well as ideas for how to best intervene to address these challenges and how to prioritise such interventions.
  - b. To build a community of researchers with expertise in this area and establish a field of research focused on addressing these problems. This grant will support the wider AI safety ecosystem by funding groups we have little awareness of or so far underestimated. To support closer ways of working between governments and the research community, ensuring that outputs from this research programme (e.g., new technical tools) can be rapidly taken up by governments and others.

#### **5. What is the desired outcome from the funded research?**

- The grant programme aim is to create *technical methods, tools and knowledge that can support AISI* and its partners to adapt and safeguard societal systems which will be affected by the adoption of frontier AI.
- We are looking for research which can complement AISI's work to date, including our efforts on:
  - a. Testing advanced AI systems and inform policymakers about their risks;
  - b. Fostering collaboration across companies, governments, and the wider research community to mitigate risks and advance publicly beneficial research; and
  - c. Strengthening AI development practices and policy globally.
- We aim for the grant competition to:
  - a. Improve our systemic understanding of AI hazards and potential interventions. We are interested both in cross-sectoral understanding of risks and interventions, and in system-specific understanding.
  - b. Facilitate monitoring and anticipation of AI use and misuse in society, and the contextual vulnerabilities they expose.
  - c. Allow us to better understand how to intervene where needed - with new infrastructure, regulations, and technical innovations - to make our world more resilient to AI-related hazards.

# Eligibility

## 6. Who can apply?

- We would like to invite proposals from a broad cross-section of researchers. To be a project lead or co-leads (co-applicants), you must be employed at a:
  - a UK-based organisation currently registered as eligible to apply for funding from UKRI (check [this link](#) for eligibility information),

or:

- any non-academic organisation eligible to receive subsidies from the UK government that will provide an innovation or research environment of international standing (check [this link](#) for eligibility information).
- Project co-partners (international)
  - a. Projects can include international co-leads, but the proposals **must be led by a project lead who is based in the UK and eligible to receive EPSRC funding as a [UK project leader](#)**. An international project co-lead is an individual employed by a research organisation in an overseas country who otherwise fits the normal UKRI definition of a project co-lead on a research project, collaborating with the grant holder in the management and leadership of the project. They are expected to make a major intellectual contribution to the design and conduct of the project.
  - b. Project co-partners (international) will not be permitted to take over as project lead if the UK project lead steps down for any reason. The contribution and added value of the international participants to the research collaboration should be clearly explained and justified in the application.
  - c. Up to 30% of the total cost of the grant can go to international partners. UKRI will pay the award directly to the lead UK organisation under its standard terms and conditions. The UK organisation where the UK project leader is based will then be responsible to subgrant the funds to the international partners.
  - d. If your application includes international co-leads, project partners or collaborators, then please visit [UKRI's trusted research and innovation](#) for more information on effective international collaboration.
  - e. It is the responsibility of the UK research organisation (RO) to undertake any due diligence necessary to ensure the eligibility of the international RO and project co-lead (international), and to make sure appropriate collaboration agreements are in place at the start of the project as required. There will be no requirement

to provide evidence of these due diligence checks at the application stage, but the UK Research Organisation (RO) will be subject to business-as-usual funding assurance by UKRI.

- f. Further information on UKRI project co-lead (international) policy and eligible costs can be found [here](#). The UKRI project co-lead (international) policy **excludes** Innovate UK.

Further information on your eligibility to receive funding from UKRI-EPSC can be found [here](#) and eligibility to receive funding from Innovate UK can be found [here](#).

We support collaborative research projects and team approaches, especially between academic, industry and civil society researchers. If you are working with collaborators based in different organisations to the project lead and co-leads or in industry or civil society, you can formally recognise them in your application as either named **project partners or subcontractors**. Further information on these roles is below:

- a. **Project partners** – A project partner is a third party person who is not employed on the grant, or a third party organisation, who provides specific contributions either in cash or in kind, to the project. Entitlement to the outputs of the project and/or Intellectual Property will be determined between the parties involved, however any access to project outputs and/or IP must be in line with any relevant Subsidy Control regulation. As a rule, Project Partners are expected to provide contributions to the delivery of the project and should not therefore be seeking to claim funds from UKRI. However, where there are specific circumstances where Project Partners do require funding for minor costs such as travel and subsistence, this will usually be paid at 80% FEC unless otherwise stated by us; note that any applicable Subsidy Control regulation and HMRC guidance will also be taken into account which may affect the percentage of these costs that we will fund. Organisations that are applicants on the project, including non-lead applicant organisations, cannot also be a project partner.
- b. **Subcontractor** – A Subcontractor is a third party individual who is not employed as staff on the grant, or a third party organisation, who is subcontracted by the host organisation to deliver a specific piece of work. This will be subject to the procurement rules of the host organisation. Subcontractors can be from anywhere in the UK. All costs that support the delivery of the subcontract are eligible and will be paid at 80% FEC unless otherwise stated; note that any applicable Subsidy Control regulation and HMRC guidance will also be taken into account which may affect the percentage of these costs that we will fund. Entitlement to the outputs

of the project and/or Intellectual Property will be determined between the parties involved, however any access to project outputs and/or IP must be in line with any relevant Subsidy Control regulation.

We welcome applications from people at a broad range of career stages across the public and private sectors.

**7. I am not associated with any organisation. Can I apply?**

- You have to be employed by a host organisation who is eligible for UKRI funding. This could be a university, government, civil society organisation, or business who is eligible to host you (see question 6).
- You are expected to share your application with your host organisation with enough time to allow them to complete their checks and approvals before the closing date.

**8. I am not based in the UK. Can I apply?**

- You can be an international project co-lead, but you need to find a project lead who is **based in the UK and eligible for EPSRC funding (see question 6)**. An international project co-lead is an individual employed by a research organisation in an overseas country who otherwise fits the normal UKRI definition of a project co-lead on a research project, collaborating with the grant holder in the management and leadership of the project. They are expected to make a major intellectual contribution to the design and conduct of the project.
- The UK project lead will need to be willing to attend our grantee workshops and to report to us on the progress of the award.
- Up to 30% of the total cost of the grant can go to international partners. UKRI will pay the award directly to the lead UK organisation under its standard terms and conditions. The UK organisation where the UK project leader is based will then be responsible to subgrant the funds to the international partners.
- Further information on UKRI project co-lead (international) policy can be found in question 6 and [here](#).

**9. What costs are eligible for the award?**

- At the application stage, we only require an approximate budget (up to the budget limit, £200K). We would like you to tell us what you think you need to make your idea work. If your application advances to the expert assessment panel, then UKRI-EPSRC

will request a more detailed budget breakdown. You will be notified in mid-December 2024 if your application is advancing to the expert assessment panel. If so, you will be asked to provide the detailed budget by 9th January 2025.

- Eligible costs also differ depending on the type of organisation you are and if you are an international co-lead (co-applicant). Guidance on eligible costs for both academic and non-academic organisations can be found below:
  - a. Costs guidance for non-academic organisations – [linked here](#)
  - b. Cost guidance for academic organisations – [linked here](#)
  - c. Eligible costs for international project co-leads can be found within our policy guidance [linked here](#).

### **10.Can I submit more than one application?**

- Each project lead can only submit one application but can be named as a co-lead (co-applicant) on one other application. The combined time committed to both projects by an individual **may not** exceed 100% FTE. There is no limit on number of applications from host organisations.

## **Application process**

### **11.Who is helping AISI deliver the competition?**

- AISI will deliver this programme in partnership with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and Innovate UK, part of UKRI. EPSRC and Innovate UK will administer the peer review and grant award process on behalf of AISI. However, final decisions on which projects will be funded sits with AISI.

### **12.What is UKRI and AISI's competition process?**

- Due to the breadth of this research area, and eligibility criteria of this programme, we are anticipating a high level of applications, and are planning to run a two-stage review process consisting of a peer review and sift followed by an expert assessment panel. For the sift stage, we may use partial randomisation in the process of shortlisting which applications advance to the expert assessment panel. Please review the applicant and reviewer guidance documents for more information.
- Each application during the peer review and sift stage will be assessed by individuals outside of UKRI and AISI. All reviewers are expected to uphold [principles of peer review assessment and decision making](#).



- You will be notified of the outcome of the sift stage by mid-December 2024.
- If your application advances to the expert assessment panel, then you must provide to EPSRC by 9th January 2024 the following additional information:
  - a. a detailed budget of the resources and costs for your proposed work.
  - b. information on your project partners and their contribution.
  - c. additional information as required to perform due diligence.
- EPSRC, Innovate UK and AISI will be available to answer your questions and provide advice where possible.
- The expert assessment panel will review all shortlisted applications against all the assessment criteria. Final selection will be made by AISI based on the expert assessment panel's recommendations and in line with the programme's objectives. Depending on the level of demand for this opportunity, the delivery partners reserve the right to modify the assessment process as needed.

### **13. What is the scope of the Systemic AI Safety Grants?**

- The scope of the call for the Systemic AI Safety Grants is deliberately broad and encompasses the diverse ways that AI might create new and significant risks that might impact the economy, critical national infrastructure, and specific sectors including education, media, legal, and health. Research within scope for Phase 1 award will:
  - Study and characterise ways in which societal systems are vulnerable to the challenges posed by Frontier AI over the near term (2–5-year horizon).
  - Surface new data or insights that are needed to understand how to best address these challenges.
  - Propose and test interventions that may help build resilience in societal systems.

Successful proposals will be innovative, relevant, feasible, and actionable.

### **14. Can you say any more about Phase 2 of the award?**

- The Systemic AI Safety grant programme will have two phases. The initial phase will invite bids for exploratory or proof-of-concept grants to develop a project to tackle a core problem in Systemic AI Safety or provide understanding and tools that will help us identify and prioritise interventions that increase systemic safety. We will announce future funding for projects in due course but expect to draw on the outputs of phase 1 to help guide our funding decisions in the second phase.

## Post award

### 15. How will AISI monitor and evaluate the projects?

- AISI and EPSRC's programme officers will be in regular contact with awardees to increase the impact of their work and to provide AISI with an overview of the grant programme and its outputs. The application form and applicant guidance provide further details on what will be expected from successful applicants. The primary success criteria for Phase 1 of the programme include identifying promising directions for larger grants in Phase 2 and the formation of a shared understanding of Systemic AI Safety across the cohort and beyond.

### 16. Are there plans to bring the cohort together?

- Yes, grantees will be required to participate in regular meetings to present their work in progress, and to engage with the programme officer(s). We expect these will provide opportunities to develop shared understanding, expand the field of Systemic AI Safety, and to increase opportunities for impact.

### 17. How will I be able to access phase 2 funding

- More information will be released at a later date.

## UKRI-EPSRC and AISI responsibilities

### 18. What about Intellectual Property Rights?

- All Intellectual Property Rights generated from grants funded by the AISI Grant Programme will belong to the grant recipient that generate them, provided (unless otherwise agreed in writing with UKRI) that they are compelled to make every reasonable effort to ensure that the knowledge and other intellectual assets obtained in the course of their projects **are disseminated to the public and software (if any) is released on an open source licence.**

### 19. What will you do with applicant's data?

- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and EPSRC and Innovate UK, as part of UKRI, will need to collect some personal information to manage your funding application. We will handle personal data in line with UK data protection

legislation and manage it securely. For more information, including how to exercise your rights, read [UKRI's privacy notice](#) and DSIT's [personal information charter](#).

- EPSRC and Innovate UK complies with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016/679 (EU) GDPR. We process and handle personal information according to these regulations. The personal information that you provide in the application will only be used for the processing of your application. The information will be viewed by EPSRC and Innovate UK staff and those who are part of the decision-making process. Your information will not be used/shared for any other purpose without your specific consent. EPSRC and Innovate UK reserves the right to publish and share anonymized aggregated information with stakeholders.
- You may also contact UK Research and Innovation Information Rights Team if you have any additional queries around how your personal data is used, how we maintain the security of your information and your rights to access that information we hold about you.

## **20. What is your data retention policy?**

- We reserve the right to retain personal data collected in the procurement exercise to evaluate the procurement exercise and obtain feedback from tenderers. We reserve the right to contact all those organisations who submitted a response to this competition, should we choose to, at the point of re-tendering this requirement in the future, if this is required.
- All tenders will be retained for a period of 6 years from the date of contract expiry unless the contract is entered into as a deed in which case it will be kept for a period of 12 years from the date of contract expiry.

## **21. What are the grant terms and conditions?**

- Grants will be awarded under the [standard UKRI grant terms and conditions](#) and [terms and conditions of an Innovate UK grant award](#).
- **Grant Additional Conditions (GAC)**
  - **GAC 1: grant extensions**

No slippage or grant extensions (beyond exceptional circumstances in line with the Equality Act 2010) will be allowed. We will not be responsible for any cost overrun incurred during the course of this grant. You will be required to make up any shortfall from alternative sources.
  - **GAC 2: governance**

We will nominate a member of our staff (the project officer) who will be your primary point of contact from UKRI and AISI. The project officer(s) will ensure that the project is being run in accordance with the terms and conditions and in line with financial due diligence. As funding administrators, all UKRI staff have agreed to maintain the confidentiality required by all parties involved in EPSRC-funded research.

- **GAC 3: monitoring and reporting**

Notwithstanding the requirements set out in standard grant conditions RGC 7.4.3, you are responsible for providing to the project officer quarterly progress updates against financial and non-financial performance metrics. A detailed list of performance metrics and instructions for reporting will be agreed with You upon commencement of the grant. You will also be expected to participate in regular check-in meetings with AISI and UKRI-EPSRC, participate in workshops organised by AISI, and produce an annual report at the end of the grant. We reserve the right to suspend the grant and withhold further payments if the performance metrics requested are not provided by the stated deadlines or are determined to be of an unacceptable standard by our project officer(s).

Additional financial or non-financial information may occasionally be requested outside of the standard annual and quarterly reporting cycle. You agree to undertake all reasonable endeavours to comply with these requests in a timely manner.

- **GAC 4: expenditure**

At the start of the grant the financial spend profile will be agreed by us. In addition to any reporting requirements set out in GAC 3, you must immediately notify our project officer(s) in writing of any accumulation, slippage or variation in expenditure greater than 5% of the annual profiled funding.

We reserve the right to re-profile the grant if required. Any deviation from the agreed allocation of funding and profiled costs must be negotiated and approved through written consent by us. The approval of profile changes should not be assumed and will be dependent on spend across all associated grants. At the end of the grant period a breakdown of the expenditure should be submitted along with the final expenditure statement.

- **GAC 5: embedding trusted research**

The project is expected to embed [trusted research and innovation](#) throughout the activities. We reserve the right to suspend the grant and withhold further

payments if trusted research is not embedded throughout the project or is deemed to be of an unacceptable standard by us.