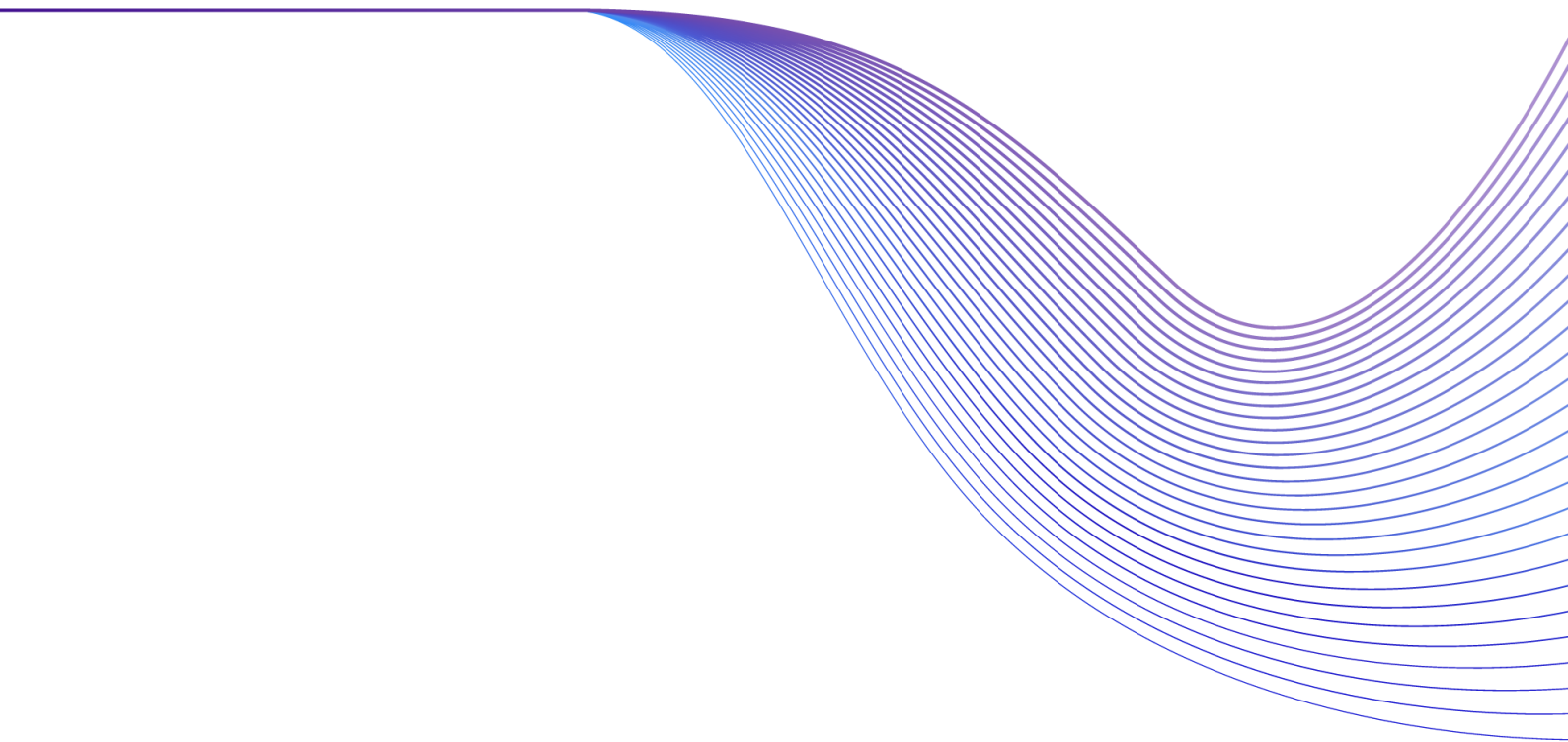


The Alignment Project

Clarification Questions – V1.0



Purpose of this document

This document addresses **clarification questions** to support applicants. Most of the key information regarding the Alignment Project is provided in the Application Pack. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the guidance documents before referring to this document.

We will continue to update this clarifications document as new queries arise, if you have a question that is not covered here please contact us at aisalignmentproject@dsit.gov.uk. The deadline for submitting clarification questions is 13th August 2025.

Version Control

This document will be **regularly updated** as we receive and address additional questions from applicants. The version control section ensures that any new clarifications are recorded and made available, providing the most up-to-date information throughout the application process.

Version	Published Date	Updates Made
1.0	30 th July 2025	Initial questions included

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Programme Details

1. How many projects are you planning to fund?

The Alignment Project has a total of £15 million funds available for distribution to awarded research proposals. The exact number of projects to be awarded depends on the scope and required funding of each application (£50,000 to £1 million per project). Please note the coalition may consider funding projects that exceed £1 million.

2. Is the four-to-six-month project duration a strict limit?

Projects are recommended to be for 4 to 6 months. A longer project duration may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Application Details

Due Diligence and Eligibility Criteria

3. Who is eligible to apply for the Alignment Project?

Applicants must be affiliated with: academic institutions, research bodies, relevant non-profit organisations, or relevant for-profit entities as defined in the Eligibility Statement (see Application Pack, Eligibility Statement).

4. What qualifies as an academic institution?

An academic institution is an organisation that is eligible to receive funding from its country's primary research funding agency. Examples include:

- UK: Research Council-funded institutions;
- USA: Institutions eligible for NSF/NIH funding;
- EU: Institutions eligible for ERC funding.

5. What qualifies as a non-profit organisation?

A non-profit is a legally registered entity that operates for collective, public, or social benefit. It must be registered as such in its country of operation. Examples include:

- UK: Charities registered with the Charities Commission;
- USA: 501(c)(3) organisations;
- Other jurisdictions: Equivalent legal entities under local laws.

6. Can international organisations apply?

Yes. International applicants can apply but must confirm the Eligibility Statement and pass the Alignment Project's due diligence checks (see Application Pack, Eligibility Statement).

7. Can consortia or joint applications apply?

Yes. Consortia are allowed, but the host organisation to which the lead applicant is affiliated with must be eligible. (see Application Pack).

8. Are university spin-offs eligible to apply?

Yes.

9. Can for-profit companies apply?

Yes. The Alignment Project is made up of a consortium of funders. Certain funders will accept applications from for-profit companies. These applicants may be subject to additional due diligence checks.

10. What is the £315,000 grant funding threshold?

This is relevant to organisations which are classified as enterprises under §7 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Applicants must not have received more than £315,000 in grant funding under the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 within the last three fiscal years if they are considered an enterprise.

11. How do I determine if the £315,000 threshold applies to my organisation?

The MFA (Minimal Financial Assistance) threshold applies only if the affiliated organisation is classified as an enterprise under §7 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

- If your organisation is an academic institution or a non-profit, MFA conditions generally do not apply.
- If your organisation is engaged in economic activity, offering goods or services on a market, MFA may apply.

12. What does “economic activity” mean under subsidy control?

If your organisation sells goods or services in a competitive market, it may be considered an enterprise under UK subsidy control.

- Example: A research body selling AI models commercially may be classified as an enterprise.
- Non-example: A university conducting fundamental research without commercial sales is not an enterprise.

13. What happens if my organisation is over the £315,000 MFA threshold?

- If you are considered an enterprise, you may be ineligible if you have received more than £315,000 in MFA grants in the past three fiscal years.
- If you are not an enterprise, the MFA cap does not apply.

14. What due diligence checks are required?

The Alignment Project team will conduct mandatory due diligence checks on all applicants. This includes Spotlight checks, legal registration verification, and financial viability assessments. Applicants may be subject to further due diligence checks.

15. What happens if an applicant fails the due diligence check?

The application will not proceed if due diligence checks indicate financial instability, fraud risk, or failure to meet eligibility criteria.

16. I am an international applicant; thus the Charity Commission / Companies House Number is not applicable to me, what should I indicate?

Charity Commission / Companies House number is a unique registration number issued by regulatory authorities in the UK. If this is not applicable to you, you may skip these fields but ensure that you include a legal registration number later on in the EOI form (see Application Pack, Eligibility Statement).

17. Is there any restriction on applicants' nationality?

No, the fund is open to international applicants.

18. Can unsuccessful applicants from the Systemic Safety Phase 1 programme or the AISI Challenge Fund use their previous application for the Challenge Fund?

Yes, unsuccessful applicants from the Systemic Safety Phase 1 and the AISI Challenge Fund are encouraged to seek opportunities within The Alignment Project to pursue their research projects.

19. How many applications can a host organisation submit?

There is no limitation in the number of applications from a single host organisation, so long as these applications are distinct.

20. How do we define "individuals affiliated with eligible organisations"?

Affiliation means the individual has an employment contract with the host organisation over the duration of the funding.

21. I am affiliated with a university, what should I choose as the application type?

This will depend on what the university is registered as. In this case it will either be limited or non-limited company.

22. Are PhD students considered "affiliated to academic institutions" in the context of the Alignment Project? Can they be lead applicants?

Lead applicants require an employment contract with host organisation over the duration of the grant to satisfy eligibility requirement. Hence, PhD students can be collaborators but not lead applicants, unless employed by the host institution.

For applications that are shortlisted where a PhD student is listed as the lead applicant, we will follow up during the Proposal Iteration (Stage 2) to advise that eligibility requires the lead applicant to be an individual who holds an employment contract with the affiliated organisation (e.g. the university). As PhD students are typically not employed by their institution, they are not eligible to act as the lead applicant. Instead, an employed member of their team should be designated as the lead applicant to meet the programme's eligibility criteria.

Expression of Interest

23. What are the stages of the application process?

The application will include a two-step process:

Stage 1: Eligibility Statement and Expression of Interest (EOI)* Submission): This stage allows us to assess preliminary eligibility and determine whether applicants' EOIs are suitable to proceed to the next stage of development and assessment based on pre-defined criteria (see Application Pack, Assessment Criteria).

Stage 2: Shortlisting and Invitation to Submit a Full Application: If successful, shortlisted applicants will be notified and they will have the opportunity to work closely with a Research Sponsor to refine their proposals and help strengthen their submissions before final assessment.

24. What is the purpose of Expression of Interest (EOI)?

The EOI allows the Alignment Project team to evaluate the application against the Research Priorities. It is an essential step in shortlisting applicants.

25. Can I submit multiple EOIs?

Yes. Multiple EOIs are allowed if each proposal is unique and distinct. However, if multiple proposals are successful, there should be a justification of appropriate capacity and resources to run concurrent projects.

26. Will early submission increase my chances of successful application?

Early submission does not guarantee progression to the next stage as all applications will go through quality assessment. However, we will not accept applications after the deadline (10th September 2025), thus, you are encouraged to apply as soon as you are ready.

27. Can I exceed the word-count limit in my EOI?

No, a word-count limit is embedded in the application portal. Thus, you cannot submit your application if this is exceeded.

28. I am an international applicant, what should I include as a legal registration number?

For applicants based outside the UK, please provide the equivalent registration number issued by the relevant regulatory authority in your country. If known, a DUNS number is encouraged to be provided for more streamlined due diligence process.

29. What type of Research Publications should I include? Do I need to embed links to all of them?

Preferably, you should include publications relevant to the area of your research. It is also recommended to include links to online publications for further checking during assessment.

30. Will I be required to provide a detailed budget in the EOI form?

In the Budget Narrative field, you will only be required to provide a short justification of your requested funding. This may include a breakdown of the forecasted expenses directly related to research projects and estimated costs. If shortlisted, you will then be required to provide a detailed budget plan.

31. How do we submit the EOI? Is there a form for it?

The Expression of Interest form is part of the Stage 1 Application form which can be accessed via the DSIT Funding Portal. The required fields and information for the EOI can be reviewed in the Application Pack before submission of application.

Proposal Iteration and Full Application Form

32. How will I be assigned with an AISI Research Sponsor?

The Alignment Project team will assign a Research Sponsor based on the remit of your proposal. If shortlisted, applicants will receive a notification from the Alignment Project team and should expect their assigned Research Sponsor to reach out to them to arrange collaborations.

33. What are applicants required to develop during proposal iteration?

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to complete a full application form that consists of an updated EOI, project plan, and required resources and costs. The Alignment Project team will provide shortlisted applicants with further guidance on this.

34. How long will the proposal iteration take place?

The duration of proposal iteration will depend on the nature and scope of the project, but it typically take 3 weeks. The deadline for submitting the Stage 2 application is 15th October.

35. What type of support can we expect from the Research Sponsors?

At proposal iteration stage, Research Sponsors will work closely with applicants to refine their proposal before submission of the full application. They will provide their expert advice on improving the proposal which may include clarifying research scope and objectives, providing feedback on research methodology, potential risks, and feasibility, aligning the budget with research needs, conducting a final check to ensure the application meets The Alignment Project's standards before the applicant submits the full proposal.

36. How often should I meet with the Research Sponsor?

The frequency and nature of the collaboration will be agreed between the Research Sponsor and the applicants.

37. I have a concern about my assigned Research Sponsor. What should I do?

For any concerns, please reach out to us through our mailbox at aisialignmentproject@dsit.gov.uk

Assessment Details

38. How will my application be reviewed?

At Stage 1, we will conduct preliminary reviews to determine applicant eligibility. Eligible applications will then be forwarded to the Research Sponsors for EOI quality review based on pre-defined selection criteria (see Application Pack, Assessment Criteria). Conflicts of interest will be considered from this stage onwards to ensure fair assessment.

At Stage 2, a formal assessment panel, independent of the Research Sponsors, will review the full applications for final recommendations. Funding decisions will then be determined by the Selection Board Panel.

39. What are the selection criteria? How will my application be assessed against these areas?

Quality of applications will be assessed based on five pre-defined criteria: relevance, feasibility, innovation, actionability, and capacity. Applications must pass all criteria to be successful (see Application Pack, Assessment Criteria section). Certain funders within the Alignment Project may apply additional scoring methodologies to your application.

40. How long does the review process take?

For Stage 1, review outcomes will be provided by 17th September. For Stage 2, assessment results are to be expected within 3-5 weeks of submission. (see Application Pack, Timeline).

41. Will I receive individual feedback?

Unsuccessful applications will not receive individual feedback. If shortlisted, however, applicants will have a chance to receive feedback and work closely with an assigned Research Sponsor to iterate and improve a full application.

42. Can I reapply in future rounds if my application is unsuccessful?

Yes. Applicants can revise their proposal and resubmit in future funding cycles. However, we strongly advise against the submission of duplicate (exact copy of) proposals as these will be rejected during initial checks.

43. Will my Research Sponsor review my full application?

The assigned Research Sponsor will only review the full application before submission. They will not form part of the final assessment panel to avoid advocacy bias and maintain a transparent and fair assessment process.

44. Should I check with my Research Sponsor on the outcome of my application?

The assigned Research Sponsor is not permitted to directly inform applicants of the outcomes. Results of assessments will officially communicated with 3-5 weeks of submission.

45. How will the selection board balance projects with immediate impact vs. those with longer-term transformative effects?

Both types of outcomes will be considered. There is no inclination on one over the other.

46. Will requesting a higher budget affect chance of being selected for funding?

The Alignment Project provides funding between £50,000 to £1 million per research project, but we will consider projects that exceed £1 million. During application, applicants will be asked to indicate the required funding for their research project, with an opportunity to justify this in the Stage 1's EOI (Budget Narrative Section), and to further detail out in the Stage 2's Required Costs and Resources. Hence, the amount of requested funding will not affect the chance of approval as long as it is fully justified and detailed out during application stage.

Research Priorities

47. Can multi-disciplinary projects address multiple priorities outlined in the RFT?

Yes. Cross-cutting proposals that address multiple priorities are encouraged.

48. Do applications need to be technical, or are international relations, governance, and policy studies accepted?

Non-technical applications are welcome, as long as they align with the Alignment Project priorities and pass the selection criteria.

49. Can an application focus on multiple alignment problems, like sycophancy and deception?

Yes, as long as the scope remains clear and focused.

50. Do you prefer theoretical or empirical studies?

No preference; both are viable.

51. Is software/hardware security in AI within the scope of the call?

If linked to AI safety and security risks, then yes.

52. Are AI data privacy issues relevant to the call?

If linked to AI safety and security risks, then yes.

Funding Agreement and Project Initiation

53. What happens if the project takes longer than the agreed timeframes?

All activities are required to be completed within the timeframes specified in the Funding Agreement. The recipient should notify The Alignment Project if there is a risk of delays in activities.

54. What happens if the project cannot be completed?

If the project cannot be completed, the recipient must notify The Alignment Project team as soon as possible. A formal review will determine next steps, which may include the funder(s) terminating funding or requesting a partial refund unless valid reasons are provided.

55. Who retains ownership of the intellectual property (IP) after project delivery?

The recipient owns any intellectual property developed using the fund, but the Alignment Project is granted a non-exclusive, irrecoverable and royalty-free, sub-licensable, worldwide license to use the intellectual property.

56. If I change university during the project delivery period, can the funds be transferred to the new university?

The Funding Agreement (GFA) is between the funder(s) and the affiliated university. If the applicant moves to another university during the project delivery period, the GFA will be terminated.

57. Are the Funding Agreement T&C's negotiable?

The Funding Agreement (GFA) is not negotiable.

Performance Monitoring and Reporting

58. How often will the applicant and the Research Sponsor engage during project duration?

The cadence of post-award performance monitoring will be confirmed as part of the proposal iteration stage, based on the level of input and support required from the Research Sponsor.

59. Will the AISI Research Sponsor conduct 'lab visits'?

There are no mandatory lab visits, but the Research Sponsor may arrange in-person or virtual meetings to review progress and discuss findings.

Final Evaluation Report and Submission

60. What do I need to provide to evidence that the project has been completed?

A final report detailing project outcomes, key findings, and deliverables must be submitted, along with any required financial and impact assessments. A final evaluation report template will be provided for consistency.

61. What types of deliverables are acceptable?

Acceptable deliverables include research papers, code, simulations, experiments, services, prototypes, or a combination.

Payment

62. What is the funding range for projects?

Grants range from £50,000 to £1 million per project but we may consider applications that exceed £1 million. Applicants are required to justify their requested budget through a Budget Narrative in the EOI form. If shortlisted, you will then need to complete a budget outlining the required costs and resources for the project.

63. When will the grant be paid out?

Payments will be made monthly in arrears, subject to submission of milestone-based reporting. In exceptional circumstances, depending on need, we may consider one payment in advance of activity. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis and reflected in the Funding Agreement. Recipients are encouraged to engage with their institution's finance team to ensure alignment with these terms.

64. Can I request milestone-based payments for long projects?

Payments will be made monthly in arrears, subject to submission of milestone-based reporting.

65. Can the payment be provided in advance of activity?

Typically, payment is provided monthly in arrears based on milestones. In exceptional circumstances, depending on need, we may consider one payment in advance of activity. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis and reflected in the Funding Agreement. Recipients are encouraged to engage with their institution's finance team to ensure alignment with these terms.

66. What types of costs are eligible?

Eligible direct costs typically include:

- **Personnel costs** - The payroll costs of all staff, full or part-time, who directly work on the project, and whose time can be supported by a full audit trail.
- **Materials and minor equipment costs** - The costs of consumables, materials, and minor equipment directly used for project delivery.
- **Licensing and access costs** - The costs related to acquiring licenses for software, datasets, or computing resources needed for the project.
- **Travel and subsistence costs** - The costs for travel, accommodation, and meals necessary for project activities.

Eligible indirect overhead elements must be restricted to those that will **directly impact and support the project** but cannot be identified as a direct cost. This may include office rent and utilities, administrative support (HR, Finance, Legal), and shared IT infrastructure (email, servers).

You may refer to above guidance when calculating the high-level estimate of your required funding as part of Stage 1 application (EOI form – Budget Narrative).

We have published a more detailed Cost Guidance which will be more relevant to shortlisted applicants as part of the proposal iteration (Stage 2). In this stage, applicants may update their estimated budget and detail out each element of cost through the budget.

67. What costs are NOT eligible for funding?

As a general rule, any costs that cannot be categorised as eligible cost (see previous Q&A) must be considered ineligible for the purpose of funding.

The examples of ineligible costs include but not limited to:

- Using funds to fund lobbying (via an external firm or in-house staff)
- Capital expenditure for long term use; given the nature of projects that are expected to be for 4 to 6 months only
- Training and development; as per the nature and scope of projects, teams are expected to have existing capabilities and skills to undertake project activities
- Any other costs of activities not related to the aims of the project or not sufficiently justified.

As per previous Q&A, you may refer to above guidance when calculating the high-level estimate of your required funding as part of Stage 1 application (EOI form – Budget Narrative).

We have published a more detailed Cost Guidance which will be more relevant to shortlisted applicants as part of the proposal iteration (Stage 2). In this stage, applicants may update their estimated budget and detail out each element of cost through the budget.

68. Is co-funding allowed?

Yes. Applicants may secure co-funding from other sources, but it must be declared.

69. What happens if the project requires additional funding?

Additional funding may be available however, this is not guaranteed. Requests must be submitted with a clear rationale, budget details, and an impact assessment for consideration.

70. Will the funding cover all estimated project costs?

The funding will cover 100% of eligible costs. Please see Q#s 5 and 6 to understand what we consider eligible and ineligible costs.

71. Can funds be used for salary costs, such as hiring a researcher on a fixed-term basis?

Yes, salary costs are eligible costs.

72. Which organisation is ultimately funding the Alignment Project?

The grant programme is funded by a coalition of funding partners. It is led by AISI UK which is funded by Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

73. Do collaborators need to be affiliated with the host organisation and how will the payment to the collaborators be managed / distributed?

Collaborators don't necessarily need to be affiliated with the host organisations. They may also be individual consultants.

It's important to note, however, that the Funding Agreement (GFA) will be between the funder(s) and the host organisation only. In addition, funds will be directly paid to the host organisation, who will then manage further distribution to and/or contractual agreements with their collaborators. Host organisations should ultimately bear the risks and responsibilities around their chosen collaborators.

74. For Stage 1 – EOI Form – Budget Narrative, how accurate should we estimate our required funding? Do we get an opportunity to update it in Stage 2?

The Budget Narrative should provide us with a rough estimate of your required funding and a justification as to why your organisation will need financial assistance from the Alignment Project to undertake the research activities. Hence, we do not expect the required funding at this stage to be accurate, rather a high-level estimate only based on high-level guidance provided in Q5 & 6.

In Stage 2, shortlisted applicants will be given an opportunity to refine and update their cost estimate and detail out each element of their costs through a Cost Guidance and a Budget section in the DSIT Funding Portal.