AISI CHALLENGE FUND

APPLICATION PACK
June 2025

AISI
AI SECURITY
INSTITUTE

Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Purpose of this document

This document serves as a comprehensive resource for applicants to the AISI Challenge Fund. It outlines the application process, the terms and conditions that applicants must adhere to, and all relevant information on the AISI Challenge Fund.

An accessible format (plain-text) of this document can be found in the Reference Documents section of our website.

You can access the Challenge Fund application form through **Apply for a Grant**.

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INTRODUCING THE AISI CHALLENGE FUND

Who is involved?

The AISI Challenge Fund ("the Fund") is an initiative delivered by the **AI Security Institute** on behalf of the UK's **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)**.

The **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)** focuses on accelerating innovation, investment and productivity through world-class science and improving people's lives by maximising the potential of science and technology.

DSIT's responsibilities include:
- Positioning the UK at the forefront of global scientific and technological advancement;
- Driving innovations that change lives and sustain economic growth;
- Delivering talent programmes, physical and digital infrastructure and regulation to support our economy, security and public services;
- R&D funding.

The **AI Security Institute (AISI)** is a research organisation within DSIT.

AISI is working to:
- Test advanced AI systems and inform policymakers about their risks;
- Foster collaboration across companies, governments, and the wider research community to mitigate risks and advance publicly beneficial research;
- Strengthen AI development practices and policy globally.

INTRODUCING THE
AISI CHALLENGE FUND

What is the AISI Challenge Fund?

Advances in AI present incredible opportunities for humanity, but also very real security risks. At the AI Security Institute, our work often surfaces gaps and open questions in the technical research aiming to understand and mitigate these risks. Recent months have brought dramatic advances in AI capability, and **it is more urgent than ever to progress research on these topics**.

The **AISI Challenge Fund** aims to advance the science of AI safety & security – addressing open challenges in the field – by providing grants of **up to £200,000** to academics and non-profits aiming to advance research across AISI's priority topics: **safeguards, control, alignment,** and **societal resilience**.

The AISI Challenge Fund aims to:
- Stimulate high-quality research aligned with AISI's strategic focus areas;
- Foster innovation by funding novel, cutting-edge research projects;
- Bridge the gap between AISI, researchers and academia to accelerate the development of safe and secure AI solutions.

The Fund is designed to support a diverse range of projects that contribute to the broader field of safe AI development and/or deployment. While we are particularly interested in AISI's priority research areas, we also welcome proposals that explore other innovative topics relevant to the safe and secure development and/or deployment of AI systems.

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PROGRAMME DETAILS

What are we looking for?

The AISI Challenge Fund encourages researchers affiliated with eligible academic institutions, research bodies and non-profit organisations to submit their solution in response to the following Challenge Statement.

We are seeking applications focused on proposals that address AISI's research priorities: safeguards, control, alignment, and societal resilience as set out in our AISI's Priority Research Areas document.

Proposals should demonstrate clear pathways to impact and offer research that would not otherwise occur without this funding.

What will AISI provide?

The Fund will award grants ranging from **£50,000 to £200,000 per project**.

As the first ever government-backed AI institute, working with AISI also offers a unique opportunity to translate research on safe AI development and/or deployment into real-world impact. By collaborating with us, you will:

- **Work with AISI experts**: Work alongside leading experts in safe and secure development and/or deployment of AI systems;
- **Make a meaningful impact:** Your research could be applied to real world model testing and support technical advice for AI policy and international AI governance;
- **Gain valuable experience:** Contribute to the development and/or deployment of safe, secure and beneficial AI systems;
- **Receive additional support:** On a case-by-case basis we may be able to provide funding to support the research collaboration.

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PROGRAMME DETAILS

Grant Timeline | Overview

Fund Launch	▪ 5th March 2025
Applications open	▪ 5th March 2025
Stage 1: Eligibility Statement and Expression of Interest (EOI) Submission	▪ Eligibility Statement and Expression of Interest (EOI) forms will be reviewed on a rolling basis. ▪ You will receive outcomes from the Stage 1 assessment *within 2-4 weeks* of EOI submission.
Stage 2: Full Application Form Submission	▪ Shortlisted applicants will work with an AISI Research Sponsor to iterate and complete their full application. ▪ Timeline is typically 2 *weeks*, depending on the nature and scope of proposal and the level of iteration required.
Funding decision	▪ AISI will aim to notify applicants of the outcome *within 4 weeks* of full application submission.
Project kick-off meeting	▪ Projects are expected to commence *within 2 weeks* of signing the Grant Funding Agreement. ▪ Target project duration is typically for *4-6 months*.
Payment	▪ 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 Grant Funding Agreement.

The application window will close when all funding has been allocated. You are encouraged to apply as soon as you are ready. Please note that early submission does not guarantee progression to the next stage as all applications are subject to quality assessment (see Assessment Details).

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PROGRAMME DETAILS

Grant Timeline | Applicant Journey

Below sets out an indicative timeline for a *successful applicant*:

Activity	Indicative Timeline
Fund launch	**5th March 2025**
Visit AISI Website to learn more about the AISI Challenge Fund	
Applications open	**5th March 2025**
Submit Expression of Interest form	Case-by-case basis depending on requirements gathering
Receive notice that EOI has been successful	Within 2-4 weeks of submission
Work with AISI Research Sponsor to iterate research proposal	Case-by-case basis depending on iteration and review needed (2 weeks)
Submit full application for final assessment	Upon completion of requirements
Receive notice that full application has been successful	Within 4 weeks of submission
Sign Grant Funding Agreement (GFA)	Within 2 weeks of receipt
Project kick-off meeting	Within 2 weeks of GFA signing Project duration is typically 4-6 months
Report on research progress and outcomes	Case-by-case basis depending on scope and timeline of research project
Receive payments	Monthly in arrears
Submit final evaluation report for AISI's evaluation	Case-by-case basis depending on scope and timeline of research project

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Eligibility criteria | Applicant

Eligible applicants	▪ **Researchers based at UK and international academic institutions and non-profit organisations**, subject to due diligence requirements.
Eligible scope	▪ The Challenge Fund is broadly constructed to fund a wide range of projects which contribute to the overall field of safe AI development and/or deployment. Please see AISI's Priority Research Areas document for topics we are particularly interested in.

Eligibility criteria | Host organisation

Academic institutions	▪ An institution that is eligible to receive funding from the research funding agency of the country in which it is based (e.g. eligible for Research Council funding in the UK, eligible for NSF/NIH funding in the USA, eligible for ERC funding in the EU, etc.).
Non-profit organisations	▪ An organisation that is a legal entity operated for a collective, public or social benefit and is registered as such in the country in which it is based (e.g. registered with the Charities Commission in the UK, registered as a 501(c)(3) in the USA, etc.).

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Process | Two-Stage Application Overview

You can access the application form through **Apply for a Grant**. To ensure applicants meet the eligibility criteria and align with the objectives of the Fund, we have implemented a **two-stage application process**:

Stage 1: Eligibility Statement and Expression of Interest (EOI)* Submission	▪ All prospective applicants are required to complete an **Eligibility Statement** and **EOI form**. ▪ This allows us to assess preliminary eligibility and determine whether applicants' proposals are suitable to proceed to the next stage of development and assessment.

Stage 2: Shortlisting and Invitation to Submit a Full Application	▪ Following the review of eligibility and EOIs, shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a **full application**.
	▪ As part of this process, they will have the **opportunity to work closely with an assigned AISI Research Sponsor** to refine their proposals and help strengthen their submissions before final assessment.
	▪ The full application will include:
	  • Eligibility Declaration – Confirmation that there have been no changes since Stage 1 (EOI) that would affect their eligibility.
	  • Full Research Proposal – An opportunity for the applicant to further develop and refine initial ideas from the EOI stage.
	  • Budget Spreadsheet – This will include a breakdown of anticipated costs, ensuring clear justification and alignment with the project's scope and objectives.

Submission of an EOI does not guarantee progression to the full application stage.

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Form | Eligibility Statement

The first part of the application form requires all applicants to confirm the below **Eligibility Statement**. Please ensure to review the requirements and confirm that you are eligible before proceeding to the next step of the application.

I confirm that:
- The affiliated organisation named in the application is an academic institution*, research body or relevant non-profit**.
- I have the authority to begin the application process on behalf of the affiliated organisation.
- I will provide DSIT/AISI all information required to undertake mandatory Due Diligence checks and may be remove from the application process if the affiliated organisation does not satisfy the due diligence requirements.
- The affiliated organisation has not received more than £315,000 of grant funding. See Subsidy control and Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) details here: Guidance*** OR the affiliated organisation is not considered to be an Enterprise as defined in §7 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022.
- I give the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) permission to process data in this form in compliance with GDPR.

*Academic institution is defined as an institution that is eligible to receive funding from the research funding agency of the country in which it is based (e.g. eligible for Research Council funding in the UK, eligible for NSF/NIH funding in the USA, eligible for ERC funding in the EU, etc.).

**Non-profit is defined as an organisation that is a legal entity operated for a collective, public or social benefit and is registered as such in the country in which it is based (e.g. registered with the Charities Commission in the UK, registered as a 501(c)(3) in the USA, etc.).

***Only applicable to affiliated organisations that are considered Enterprises as defined in §7 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. If the affiliated organisation is not an enterprise, MFA conditions do not apply.

*If the terms of the Application Statement are met, you may now complete the online Expression of Interest Form. If the terms of the Application Statement are **not** met, the affiliated organisation does not meet the eligibility criteria for the Challenge Fund. Applications will only be considered from affiliated organisations that meet the eligibility criteria.*

APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Form | Due Diligence (Your Organisation)

In this form, the applicants will be asked to provide certain information that will allow us to carry out compliance and due diligence checks. The information we ask for includes:

Type of Application / Organisation	▪ Please ensure that you are applying as either a charity, limited company or non-limited company. **Do not apply as an individual.** If you need to update this, go back to "Your details / Your organisation" section and update the "Type of application / organisation" accordingly.
Host Organisation's Legal Name	▪ State the legal name of the organisation or institution you are affiliated with. It should be the name that is registered with Companies House or Charities Commission, or equivalent regulatory agencies in country where organisation is based.
Host Organisation Type	▪ Choose from a drop-down list the type of organisation you are affiliated with. **You should only choose between limited company, non-limited company, or charity.**
Registered Address	▪ State full registered address of the organisation.
Charity Commission Number (or equivalent)	▪ This is a unique registration number issued by the Charity Commission for England and Wales to organisations legally registered as charities. ▪ For applicants based outside England/Wales, please provide the equivalent registration number issued by the relevant regulatory authority in your country.
Companies House Number (or equivalent)	▪ This is a unique identifier issued by Companies House, the UK's official registrar of companies. It is assigned to all registered companies, including charitable companies and some academic institutions that operate as corporate entities. ▪ For applicants based outside the UK, please provide the equivalent registration number issued by the relevant regulatory authority in your country.

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Form | Due Diligence (Funding) (cont'd)

Amount of Funding Required	▪ State how much your organisation requires as a grant funding ▪ Please enter in whole pounds only ▪ Note that the funding will be £50,000 to £200,000 per project, depending on nature and scope. You will have a chance to justify this budget in the "Budget Narrative" section of the Expression of Interest form.
Where the Funding will be Spent	▪ Select the location where the grant funding will be spent. You can select more than one, if it will be spent in more than one location.

Application Form | Expression of Interest

The Expression of Interest (EOI) form is a preliminary application designed to gather essential information about the applicant and their proposed project. It helps identify proposals that align with AISI's priority research areas before proceeding to the full application stage. The EOI also allows applicants to outline their initial ideas, which may later be refined with input from AISI Research Sponsors. Below outlines the key information required in the EOI form along with some guidelines.

Researcher Lead Contact Name	▪ Provide full name of the lead researcher responsible for the application.
Contact Title/Role	▪ Indicate your role (e.g. Professor, Researcher, PhD Candidate).
Affiliation/ Organisation	▪ State the name of the organisation or institution you are affiliated with.
Affiliated Institution Country Location	▪ Enter the country where the affiliated institution is based.
Relevant Regulatory Authority	▪ Provide the equivalent relevant regulatory authority (e.g. charity or research funding agency) in which your organisation is registered in your country.

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Form | Expression of Interest Form (cont'd)

Legal Registration Number	▪ Provide the registration number for the affiliated organisation / institution in the country in which it is based.
Email Address	▪ Enter a valid and active email address.
Orcid ID / Google Scholar / Linkedin Profile Link	▪ To tell us about your career history, provide a link to your Orcid ID, Google Scholar, and/or Linkedin profile.
Additional Collaborators	▪ List any key collaborators, including their names, roles, and their affiliations.
Relevant Research Outputs	▪ List your and your collaborators' top 5 previous research outputs of relevance to the proposed area of research, e.g. publications, patents, preprints, products. Include links to these publications (if applicable).
Research Title	▪ Provide a concise and descriptive title of your research in 1-2 sentences.
Research Statement	▪ Outline your proposed research project including your approach, what makes this different from existing work in the literature, and how it relates to AISI's priority research areas. The statement should not exceed 500 words.
Priority Research Area	▪ Choose which priority research area your proposal is mostly focused on. If not on the list, select "Other" and indicate in the next question.
Other Priority Research Area (Optional)	▪ If you answered "Other" in the previous question, state your priority research area.
Deliverables and Timeline	▪ Outline the expected deliverables including timeline (typically 4-6 months). This statement should not exceed 500 words.
Budget Narrative	▪ Outline the budget and justification for the proposed research. This statement should not exceed 500 words. If shortlisted, you will be required to submit a more comprehensive budget using an excel template and based on this cost guidance.
Additional Information	▪ Share any additional information relevant to your application.

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APPLICATION DETAILS

Application Process | Full Application Submission

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full application using a separate Apply for a Grant link and to collaborate with an assigned AISI Research Sponsor. The full application consists of **three required documents**:

1. Eligibility Declaration

- Confirm that there have been no changes since your EOI that would affect your eligibility. If there are changes, you must declare them and provide updated details in your Stage 2 submission email.
- You must complete a form and return to AISI Challenge Fund team.
- This step ensures that any changes in circumstances are acknowledged and agreed on.

2. Full Research Proposal

- The Full Research Proposal is an opportunity for you to further develop and refine initial ideas from the EOI stage.
- A full research proposal template will be provided in your Stage 2 invitation.
- This must be submitted in PDF format and should not exceed five pages.

3. Budget Spreadsheet

- This should include a breakdown of anticipated costs, ensuring clear justification and alignment with the project's scope and objectives.
- A Budget Spreadsheet must be completed in conjunction with adherence to the cost guidance.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Support available

We have endeavoured to make the entry process as simple as possible, but you may still have questions. There are a number of ways that our team can support you.

Reasonable adjustments	▪ We are committed to making the entry process as accessible, efficient and practical as possible. If any reasonable adjustments are required in your circumstance, please contact aisichallengefund@dsit.gov.uk.

Join our Applicant Webinar (Part 2)	▪ We're hosting a follow-up Applicant Webinar to give you the chance to engage directly with our Research teams. This session will focus on what types of research we're looking to fund, what areas our teams are most interested in, and where they see opportunities for collaboration. It's also a great opportunity to ask questions in real time.
	  ▪ Date: Thursday 12th June 4.00pm - 5.00pm (GMT)
	  ▪ Register here: Applicant Webinar Part 2
	▪ If the webinar date has passed, a recording will be shared on our website.

Clarification Questions (CQs)	▪ A list of frequently asked questions and answers will be made available through the CQs document and kept regularly updated.

Accessibility	▪ An accessible format (plain-text) of our guide documents can be found in this link with these file names:
	  ▪ AISI Challenge Fund - Application Pack - Accessible
	  ▪ AISI Priority Research Areas - Accessible

Email us	▪ If you still have queries, contact the team on aisichallengefund@dsit.gov.uk.

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ASSESSMENT DETAILS

Selection Process | Overview

The selection process consists of **two key steps**, mirroring the two stages of the application, designed to assess eligibility and alignment with AISI's research priorities, and the overall strength of each application.

1. Initial Screening and Shortlisting	▪ Applications will undergo an **initial screening** to ensure they meet the basic eligibility requirements and pass due diligence checks. ▪ Eligible applications will then go through an EOI **quality review** based on pre-defined selection criteria. ▪ Following this initial assessment, applicants will be notified of the outcome.
2. Final Assessment	▪ Shortlisted applicants will then **collaborate with their assigned AISI Research Sponsors** to refine and develop their full application. ▪ Once the full application has been submitted, they will undergo a **final assessment** to be undertaken by a panel, independent of assigned Research Sponsors, against pre-defined selection criteria. ▪ Based on this review, final funding decisions will be made. ▪ Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the outcome following the completion of the final assessment.

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ASSESSMENT DETAILS

Selection Process | Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on the following **five key criteria**. Applicants should ensure their EOIs and full applications clearly address each area to strengthen their submission.

1: Is the proposal _relevant_?

- The proposed research must align with the objectives of the AISI Challenge Fund.
- We particularly welcome proposals that align to our priority research areas.
- We also welcome broader research ideas that explore other critical aspects of safe and secure AI development and/or deployment.
- The problem statement should be well-defined, demonstrating a clear understanding of the challenges it seeks to address.
- The proposal should outline how the research contributes to advancing safe development and/or deployment of frontier AI systems, filling gaps in existing knowledge, or providing actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

2: Is the proposal _feasible_?

- The research plan should have clearly defined objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes.
- The proposal should demonstrate a realistic approach to achieving its goals within the proposed timeline and budget.
- The research should be technically and logistically feasible, with consideration of potential risks and mitigation strategies.

3: Is the proposal _innovative_?

- The project should introduce novel approaches, methodologies, or perspectives that advance research on safe AI development and/or deployment.
- The proposal should demonstrate originality and go beyond incremental improvements to existing work.
- Where applicable, interdisciplinary or cross-sector collaboration that enhances research impact is encouraged.

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ASSESSMENT DETAILS

Selection Process | Assessment Criteria (cont'd)

4: Is the proposal *actionable*?

- The research should have clear, tangible outputs that can contribute to real-world applications, policy recommendations, or furthering the development and/or deployment of safe and secure AI systems.
- The proposal should outline pathways for impact, including how findings will be disseminated, shared with key stakeholders, and/or applied in practice.
- Consideration should be given to how the research aligns with industry or regulatory needs in order to safely develop and/or deploy AI systems.

5: Are the team and its requested resources *likely to deliver*?

- The research team should demonstrate the necessary expertise, experience, and track record to successfully execute the project.
- The proposal should clearly outline roles and responsibilities, including any key collaborators.
- The budget should be reasonable and well-justified, ensuring requested resources align with the scope of the project and are essential for its success.

Applicants are encouraged to carefully consider these criteria when preparing their submissions to maximise their chances of success.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

What happens next?

Once application is submitted, it will undergo assessment as outlined in this document. If successful, the following are the expected next steps. Further guidance will be provided to fund recipient upon signing of agreement.

1. Grant Funding Agreement and Project kick-off meeting

- If your full application is successful, you will be issued a formal Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) outlining the terms and conditions of the funding.
- You must review, sign, and return the agreement *within 2 weeks* upon receipt.
- The project is expected to kick-off *within 2 weeks* of agreement signed.

2. Performance Monitoring and Reporting

- 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 AISI Research Sponsor.
- We will provide reporting templates to ensure consistency and clarity.
- Monitoring may also include check-in meetings or reviews with the AISI team and Research Sponsors.

3. Payment

- 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 Grant Funding Agreement.

4. Final Evaluation Report Submission

- Upon project completion, you must submit a final evaluation report summarising the research findings, deliverables, and overall impact.
- The final report will be reviewed by AISI to assess whether all agreed outcomes have been met.

Contact us

For further questions or clarifications, you may refer to our Clarification Questions (CQ) document or message us at aisichallengefund@dsit.gov.uk.

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