

Responsible Artificial Intelligence for a Smart Economy (RAISE): Leading Trustworthy Innovation Globally

Key Information

Start and End Date

Start Date

15/12/2025

End Date

30/04/2026

Total Funding Requested

Contracting Term	GST Excl. Amount	GST Amount	GST Incl. Amount
Total	\$250,000.00	\$37,500.00	\$287,500.00

Contact Details

Role	Name	Organisation	Email address	Phone number
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Application Administrator	Hayden Thorne	The Research Trust of Victoria University of Wellington	h*****@vuw.ac.nz	0273058645

Eligibility

Question	Answer(yes/no)
Does your application meet these criteria?	Yes

If you answered no, and would like to add any details:

Public Statement

Responsible Artificial Intelligence for a Smart Economy (RAISE) will position New Zealand at the forefront of shaping trustworthy and safe AI for everyone. This initiative takes an interdisciplinary approach to bring together top academics, industry experts, and Māori innovation networks in developing new AI technologies that are transparent, explainable, and operate in ways people can understand. RAISE is guided by New Zealand's reputation for integrity, upholding human rights, and demonstrating transparency, with a vision to ensure AI is built and used with our highest values in mind.

RAISE's research will develop real-world AI tools that help organisations deliver smart and safe solutions, positioning New Zealand as a global leader in trustworthy innovation. Impact ranges from expert technical research to the development of AI guidelines and regulatory frameworks that provide appropriate safeguards for the productive innovation and adoption of AI. There is global demand for safe and trustworthy AI; RAISE will deliver this research and translate it into commercial outputs. By developing the next generation of AI talent, enhancing public science communication, and building industry and international partnerships, RAISE will ensure that AI grows New Zealand's high-tech economy while protecting our communities.

Contact: Dr Andrew Lensen (andrew.lensen@vuw.ac.nz)

Executive Summary

Responsible Artificial Intelligence for a Smart Economy (RAISE) will position New Zealand as a global leader in responsible AI, building on our trusted reputation for integrity, human rights, and transparency. Our vision delivers world-class research and solutions with enduring benefits for Aotearoa's economy and society, grounded in integrity, equity, and Kiwi values.

RAISE will create value across three pillars:

1. Conducting research to develop trustworthy **technology**, supporting organisations to deploy AI responsibly.
2. Shaping fit-for-purpose AI governance and regulatory **frameworks** aligning with international best practices.
3. Building responsible AI **systems** with industry and the public sector in high-value, high-impact areas.

Appropriate use of AI offers [significant economic and other benefits](#). However, AI innovation and adoption are hampered by a lack of trust. [Multiple recent surveys have shown](#) over half of New Zealanders are very concerned about the negative impacts of AI. Building trust demands more than technical sophistication: it requires a holistic approach, embedding transparency and explainability, underpinned by regulatory and governance structures that unleash responsible innovation.

The global market for responsible and explainable AI is expanding rapidly. [Recent estimates project](#) the explainable AI market alone will exceed US\$20 billion by 2030, reflecting demand in sectors such as healthcare, finance, and government.

Investment into RAISE will create new collaborations, attract top talent, and deliver research and capability that existing initiatives alone cannot. RAISE will position New Zealand as a global influencer in AI policy and practice, through our interdisciplinary approach spanning academia, industry, government, and Māori innovation networks.

Performance Area

Concept Outline

Our Vision

AI could add [\\$76b to New Zealand's GDP by 2038](#), powering our future high-tech economy. However, [research](#) has shown that these productivity gains are [undermined by unreliable outputs, biased decisions, and safety concerns](#). To realise these economic benefits, we need *trustworthy* AI, giving consumers and businesses the confidence to engage.

Our vision is to establish NZ as a global leader in responsible AI (RAI) innovation and deployment, where safety, integrity, and reliability drive our competitive edge. This proposal directly addresses NZ's [low public trust in AI](#), recasting it as a market asset and a cultural strength with export appeal. Responsible, NZ-designed AI will be synonymous with verifiable safety and ethical value, creating a sought-after model for trustworthy technology worldwide. Research shows that **the biggest gains are realised by companies that invest in adopting AI responsibly**, with RAI generating a financial premium.

By focusing on trustworthy AI, the Responsible Artificial Intelligence for a Smart Economy (RAISE) platform will enable innovation and counter the [primary barriers to adoption](#): regulatory uncertainty, and perceived ethics and risk. [Appropriate regulation can promote, rather than inhibit, innovation](#) by providing certainty on boundaries, spurring the development of solutions with confidence. Trust, along with Motivation, Access, and Skills (MAST), is key to realising [The Digital Strategy for Aotearoa](#), necessary for enabling public adoption. A focus on "trust by design" will be a key competitive advantage, enabling our exports to thrive in international markets with complex regulatory environments. This will attract international investment, open new markets, and support the government's strategic focus on being a "smart adopter" of AI.

RAISE will serve as the national "centre of gravity" for AI research, policy, and commercialisation. It will formalise and empower national and international experts to work with industry and government, translating international principles (like those from the [OECD](#) and [UNESCO](#)) into practical, innovation-friendly frameworks. It will foster world-class research to develop practical tools for AI governance, and serve as a trusted advisor and public voice, building the capability required for wide-scale, beneficial AI adoption. RAISE will develop internal commercialisation capability to move successful research into real-world products and services. The team has a diverse range of existing RAI projects that will be combined and rapidly scaled up for fast impact and a rapid return on investment.

The key goal of RAISE's research will be to develop locally-appropriate and world-leading solutions to achieve end-to-end responsibility, encompassing both transparency (of systems) and accountability (of humans and organisations). This work is inherently interdisciplinary, and must be delivered locally for it to be useful in NZ, considering the local economic, industrial, and cultural contexts.

Excellence

RAISE's research will be built on three pillars:

- 1. Trustworthy Technology:** developing technical advancements in transparency, robustness, explainability, security, and safety.
- 2. Trustworthy Frameworks:** establishing thought leadership in accountability, ethics, human rights, governance, and regulation.
- 3. Trustworthy Systems:** building infrastructure and solutions collaboratively with industry and the public sector to demonstrate the efficacy and value of responsible AI systems, through initiatives like the applied doctorates scheme, subsidised consulting for SMEs, and incubating ideas into spin-out companies.

These pillars are designed so that the application-driven research in the Technology and Frameworks pillars (TRL 2-4) can be put into practice through the Systems pillar (TRL 5-7). Illustrative examples of potential projects that build on the team's expertise include:

- Developing novel methods for explainable and verifiable AI to [achieve transparency in medical AI diagnostic tools](#) and decision support systems to enhance patient trust
- Building a [sovereign large language model](#) (LLM) with [Catalyst Cloud](#), [Public AI Network](#), and [Metagov](#), supporting responsible use of GenAI in NZ
- Partnering [Vision Mātauranga in an AI context](#) to develop tools grounded in te ao Māori and create [high-value Indigenous economic opportunities](#)
- Testing privacy-preserving [environmental monitoring](#) to balance transparency with personal and community privacy rights
- Building targeted genAI models for specific legal and commercial applications to [mitigate the likelihood of hallucination](#)
- Embedding complex ethical and legal norms into agentic AI and other automated systems [for delivering public services](#)

This consortium brings together NZ's leading minds across disciplines essential for an RAI ecosystem: computer science, engineering, law, ethics, human rights, Mātauranga Māori, and the social and cognitive sciences. Investment into RAISE will bridge disciplinary boundaries and cohere this world-class capability into a strategic national asset, delivering the "additionality" sought by the Call.

The founding team includes a mixture of senior, mid-career, and early-career academics from six NZ universities, alongside industry partners. It includes extensive experience in science leadership, including Heads of School/Department, and Principal Investigators who have collectively managed \$10m+ in research grants. Several members have private sector experience, including in the commercialisation of deep tech start-ups and in leadership positions.

Trustworthy Technology: Dr Andrew Lensen (proposal lead), Prof Michael Winikoff, Prof Stephen Cranefield, Prof Brendan McCane, Prof Grant Dick, A/Prof Hui Ma, Dr Emily O'Riordan, Dr Veronica Liesaputra, Dr Caitlin Owen

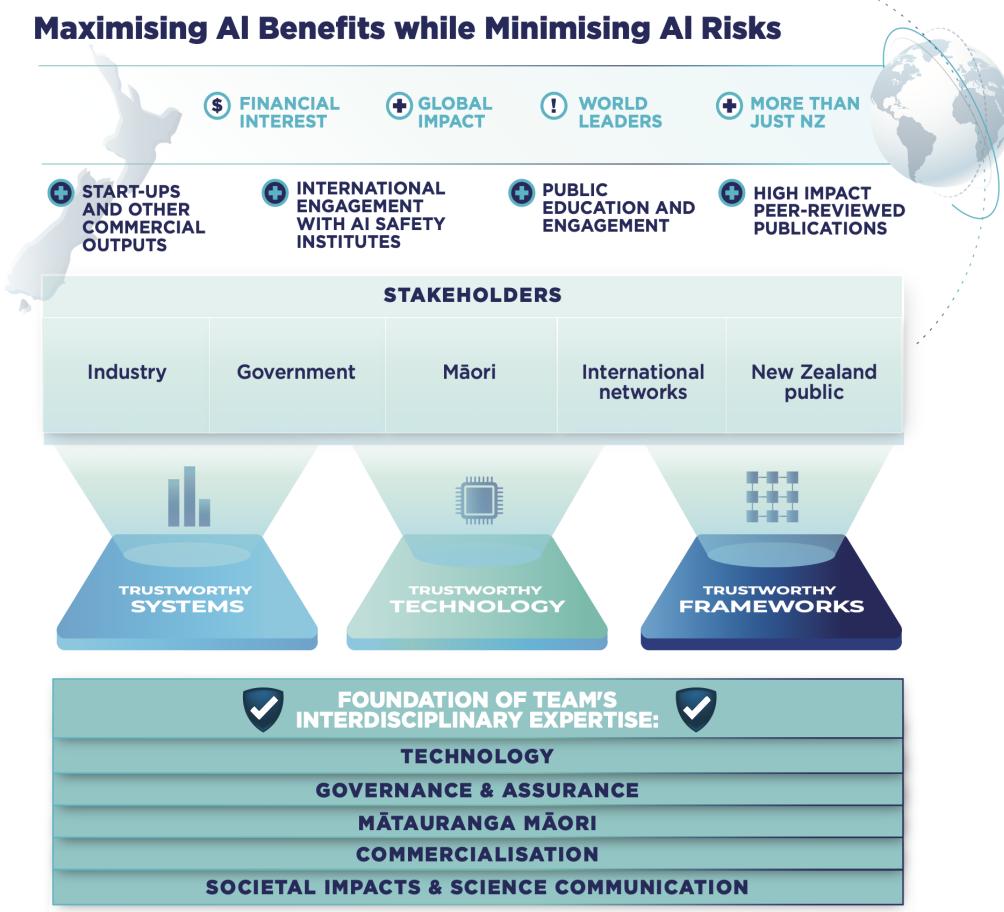
Trustworthy Frameworks: Prof Alexandra Andhov, Prof Nick Agar, Prof Ali Knott, A/Prof Stephen Hill, Dr Cassandra Mudgway, Dr Michael Daubs, Dr Olivia J Erdelyi, Dr Ethan Plaut, Dr Andrew Richmond

Trustworthy Systems and Industry Expertise: Dr Andrew Chen, Chris McGavin, Paul Seiler ([Catalyst Cloud](#)), Deane Sloan ([Equinox IT](#)), Dave Moskovitz, Prof David Eyers, Dr Heitor Gomes

Indigenous Māori AI Experts: Prof Hemi Whaanga, Dr Kirita-Rose Escott, Dr Jesse Pirini (Executive Chair of [Te Matarau a Māui](#)); Dr Kevin Shedlock, and the wider [Hiringa te Mahara](#) team

RAISE will track outcomes in scientific excellence (e.g. publications and citations), commercialisation (e.g. start-ups created, capital raised), and societal impact (e.g. public engagements, changes in public perceptions).

RAISE will be governed by a Board comprising a mix of academic, Māori, and industry members, providing accountability and oversight. We also plan to establish a Research Board with international and Vision Mātauranga expertise to provide strategic direction for RAISE, and a Community Advisory Board to inform the research work through engagement with relevant community groups. RAISE's operational team will include Māori co-leadership.



Connections

Our team has a strong track record of collaboration in both domestic and international AI research and industry networks, particularly in the areas of AI trust and safety. We will leverage our positions in high-level international forums, including the OECD, the EU's AI office, and the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), as well as relationships with prominent global researchers such as [Prof Yoshua Bengio](#) (University of Montréal), [Prof Shannon Vallor \(BRAID\)](#), [Prof Stuart Russell](#) (UC Berkeley), and [Prof Virginia Dignum](#) (Umeå AI Policy Lab). This will create a pipeline of global talent through visiting fellowships and funded positions, establishing RAISE as an enduring and world-class multidisciplinary RAI research community.

Formal partnerships with the [global network of AI Safety Institutes](#) will further expand our international reach. NZ's scale and social cohesion make it the ideal place to study the real-world societal impacts of AI deployment. RAISE's value proposition will be to serve as a world-leading centre for sociotechnical evaluation, directly addressing the investment goal to "foster and grow international research and development", and creating a high-value role for NZ in the global ecosystem.

Vision Mātauranga is woven into RAISE in partnership with the [Hiringa Te Mahara](#) Māori research team, whose expert collaboration spans global indigenous communities, and [Te Mataurau a Māui](#), a network of Māori businesses keen to test and trial AI. These networks will help RAISE connect with iwi/hapū authorities, tribal NGOs, and Māori academics across Aotearoa. For Māori, responsible AI is critically important to the sustainable development of the Māori economy, with wide-ranging benefits for the whole of NZ.

RAISE will build on existing relationships domestically with key industry bodies (e.g. [AI Forum](#)), research communities, and the innovation and investment ecosystem to ensure research is commercially relevant and rapidly implemented. RAISE will play a vital role in catalysing industry as a centralised hub for organisations to easily access NZ's leading interdisciplinary AI experts.

Investing in People

RAISE will help **cultivate the next generation of AI talent**, ensuring they are both technically brilliant and socially and ethically literate. They will be equipped with foundational, multidisciplinary skills that will be highly sought after as markets and technology continue to evolve, directly supporting the government's goal of building a "future-ready workforce". There will be a focus on training master's and doctoral students, including through the [applied doctorates scheme](#), to develop industry-ready expertise in RAI. Many members of this proposal are experienced supervisors of interdisciplinary thesis students.

RAISE will also develop new interdisciplinary postgraduate coursework curricula. It will seek early engagement with strategic partners, such as REANNZ, PROs, and industry partners, to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of the emerging AI workforce and secures preemptive buy-in. This will create a pipeline of graduates with the unique, multidisciplinary skills required for the RAI economy. RAISE will also actively **inform and educate the New Zealand public** about the safe use of AI, thereby addressing [the knowledge and skills barriers that impede AI uptake](#), while building public trust that enables businesses to deploy RAI confidently.

Some parts of this proposal were edited using Gemini and Perplexity GenAI tools.

Additional Information

Conflicts of Interest

Do you have one or more conflict of interests to declare?

Question	Answer(yes/no)
Do you have one or more conflict of interests to declare?	No

Please state who you are conflicted with, the type of conflict and a description of the conflict.