LaunchPad

Funding Announcement – Startup Funding Round

ARENA Launchpad Funding Program

September 2026

Contents

Startup Funding Round

This Startup Funding Round Announcement (**Funding Round Announcement**) sets out the process for ARENA to seek Applications for Grant funding under the Startup Funding Round of the ARENA Launchpad Program (the **Program**).

This Funding Round Announcement should be read in conjunction with the Guidelines for the Program (ARENA Launchpad Program Guidelines). To the extent of any inconsistency between this Funding Round Announcement and the Guidelines, the Guidelines will prevail.

The Startup Funding Round will be delivered as a timebound, ranked process as outlined in items 2.5 to 2.8 in the Guidelines. ARENA will not collaborate with Applicants to support submission of an Application.

Definitions contained in the Guidelines also apply to this Funding Round Announcement, unless otherwise specified.

1 Funding Round Objectives

The Startup Funding Round Objective (**Round Objective**) is to fund Applicants that can contribute to one or more of the following outcomes:

a. Support innovative, early-stage Australian businesses to accelerate the technical and commercial readiness of innovative technologies and products aligned with ARENA's statutory functions and Investment Plan.
b. Address funding gaps faced by early-stage companies and reduce barriers to public or private investment.
c. Increase the volume, diversity and quality of Australia's early-stage startup pipeline aligned with ARENA's Investment Plan and Strategic Priorities.

2 Funding Allocation and Grant Sizing

ARENA has allocated up to $15 million for the Startup Funding Round (**Total Funding Allocation**). ARENA may, at its discretion, allocate an amount of funding that is greater or lesser than the Total Funding Allocation if it considers this to represent value for money. ARENA expects grants to support Activities across a period of approximately 12 months.

Available Grants
Under the Startup Funding Round, Applicants must apply for a $500,000 Baseline Grant and may also request a Top Up Grant of up to $500,000, for total requested funding of between $500,000 and $1

million. Top Up Grants are expected to be requested by Applicants that can demonstrate a valid need for deep tech, high capital expenditure.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Grant Structure for Startup Funding Round</th></tr>
<tr><td>Baseline Grant</td><td>Applicants must apply for a $500,000 Baseline Grant.
There is no matched funding requirement.
Applicants that can provide cash contributions towards the Application Activities may be considered higher merit.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Top Up Grant</td><td>In addition to the Baseline Grant, Applicants may request an additional Top Up Grant of up to $500,000 if valid need is demonstrated. Applicants are not required to request a Top Up Grant and provision of a Top Up Grant will typically be reserved for Applicants in deep tech or capital-intensive industries.
Applicants can nominate for a Top Up Grant upfront as part of the Application process. A separate Application is not required to request a Top Up Grant.
ARENA will apply further scrutiny to Top Up Grant requests to ensure valid need and value for money. In addition to the Application being high merit overall, to be considered for a Top Up Grant the Applicant will be required to demonstrate:
a clear, high impact capital expense or large cost barrier;
that other avenues to resolve this have already been pursued and are not suitable or available; and
why progress will be meaningfully constrained without the Top-Up Grant or meaningfully accelerate with it.
Example acceptable justifications include to access, purchase or lease necessary equipment, to access highly specialised talent or services, or to deliver a capital-intensive prototype.
Example justifications that ARENA will not consider as high merit include those justified solely on the basis of extending runway, funding administrative activity, funding advertising, delaying fundraising or repaying debt.
ARENA, at its discretion, may approve, deny or scale back requests for the Top Up Grant, which may result in offering no funding, the Baseline Grant only, the full Grant amount or another amount deemed appropriate by ARENA.
ARENA will consider the merit of a request for a Top Up Grant as part of the broader merit assessment.</td></tr>
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3 Eligibility Requirements

Preliminary Screening process

ARENA will conduct an initial screening of Applications to ensure that the information provided is complete, coherent and aligned to Program and Round Objectives. This will include consideration of applying entities to ensure, that in ARENA's opinion they are genuine early-stage companies seeking to develop and commercialise innovative technologies or solutions.

As an example, well established companies such as those with established workforces and operational history, or companies that have raised meaningful capital may be excluded through this screening process. ARENA may seek to clarify uncertainties with Applicants as part of this screening process. Applications that ARENA believes do not meet these minimum standards may be deemed unsuccessful.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants under the Startup Funding Round are required to meet all Eligibility Criteria and must continue to meet the Eligibility Criteria throughout the Activity. Determinations of eligibility are final and at ARENA's discretion.

Eligibility Criteria	Application to Startup Funding Round
Eligible Applicant	The Applicant must: • hold a valid Australian Business Number (**ABN**); • be an Australian incorporated entity, which can also include an Australian subsidiary of an international entity that can demonstrate a presence and commitment to operating and commercialising its technology or solution in Australia; • be a for-profit entity; • warrant that you are the owner or developer of the related technology, product or solution, and have freedom to operate with regard to any IP or assets involved; and • not be a university, publicly funded research organisation or government entity, noting that university spin-outs and research commercialisation companies are eligible.
Eligible Activities	Applications must demonstrate to the satisfaction of ARENA that the activities described in the Application: • will primarily take place in Australia or primarily advance an Australian-based business; • relate to a technology with a minimum TRL of 3 (achieved) at time of Application; and • is aligned with ARENA's statutory functions and Investment Plan.
Ineligible Activities	The following will not be eligible for funding under the Startup Funding Round: • research activities where no clear commercialisation pathway has been identified;

	• blue-sky or idea-stage concepts that have not yet demonstrated a minimum TRL of 3; • activities unrelated to ARENA's remit or Strategic Priorities; • business-as-usual operating activities, such as paying existing overhead costs, that do not directly advance the proposed technology, solution, product or commercial opportunity; • preparation of Application material for ARENA or other funding programs; • activities that have already been completed prior to execution of a Funding Agreement, or recurring costs committed to prior to the Application; and • activities that primarily focus on consulting, advisory services, brokerage, or other activities that do not deliver a novel technology or innovation outcome.

Other Applicable Criteria

In addition to the Eligibility Criteria above, all Applicants must disclose any litigation, arbitration, mediation, conciliation or proceeding or any investigations (Proceedings) that to the best of the Applicant's knowledge, after having made proper enquiry, are taking place, pending or threatened, against them or a Related Body Corporate (as defined in the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth)), where such Proceedings have the potential to affect either the Applicant's capacity to undertake the proposed Activities; or the Applicant's reputation.

Despite anything else in this Funding Round Announcement and the Guidelines and in addition to Eligibility Criteria, ARENA will not enter into a Funding Agreement with an organisation on the list of persons and entities designated as terrorists or subject to sanction. The list and more information on sanctions and the anti-terrorism requirements are available at www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions/consolidated-list.

4 Merit Criteria

All eligible Applications (that pass initial screening) will be assessed for merit including overall value for money and additionality (that is, the likelihood, pace and scale of the Activity proceeding without ARENA funding). ARENA will also consider any potential reputational risks associated with supporting the Application which may result in an otherwise high merit Application not being supported.

Applications must address each of the Merit Criteria shown below. Further guidance on the how Applicants can address Merit Criteria in their Application, including the form and structure of attachments, is provided in Appendix A. Merit Criteria weightings are provided in the table.

ARENA's intent is to fund a diverse portfolio of Applications that contribute towards the objectives outlined in its Investment Plan and are considered meritorious against the criteria below. Applications will be grouped and ranked against other Applications aligned to the same Strategic Priority. Subject to merit, ARENA may choose to fund or not fund Applications in each Strategic Priority grouping.

Merit Criteria	Description of Criteria
A – Market and Technology *Weighting: 30%*	This criterion assesses the significance of the problem, the potential market opportunity and the merit and credibility of the proposed technology or solution. ARENA will consider at a minimum the following: • Significance and relevance of the problem to ARENA's statutory functions and Strategic Priorities as outlined in ARENA's Investment Plan (available at https://arena.gov.au/about/arena-strategic-priorities/), and Australia's energy transition. • Novelty and innovation of the technology or solution. • Level of technical development achieved to date and evidence supporting the claimed TRL. • Size and accessibility of the target market and customer base. • Evidence of customer need, market demand or industry validation. • Strength of the value proposition relative to existing alternatives. • Potential for the solution to scale and deliver meaningful energy, emissions or economic benefits over time. • The credibility of the claims made against currently known and accepted science or similar industry accepted literature.
B – Team Capability and Capacity *Weighting: 30%*	This criterion assesses the capability and capacity of the Applicant and Applicant Partners to deliver the Activities within an impactful timeframe. ARENA will consider at a minimum the following: • Experience, skills and track record of the Applicant's team and where relevant, Applicant Partners. • Applicant team capability and capacity to execute the proposed activities and overcome foreseeable challenges, including the reasonableness of any plans for recruitment of staff or partners. • Access to relevant technical, commercial, industry and operational expertise. • Extent to which the Applicant has secured support from customers, industry partners, investors, research institutions or other stakeholders. • Evidence of progress, traction or achievements demonstrated to date, including current or prior participation in existing industry start-up support or acceleration-style programs. • Overall quality and completeness of the information provided in the Application, including where available, evidence to support claims made (such as letters of support, agreements, recognition of achievements).
C – Activities and Business Plan *Weighting: 20%*	This criterion assesses the extent to which the proposed Activities are likely to advance the technical and commercial maturity of the business. ARENA will consider at a minimum the following: • Whether the Activities are likely to materially advance the technology and/or commercial readiness of the business.

	• Applicant understanding of key technical, commercial and delivery risks and the Applicant's strategy to manage those risks. • Clarity on how the technology will be incorporated or translated into a customer product or service, and any evidence supporting customer demand.
D – Financials *Weighting: 20%*	This criterion assesses whether the Applicant has a credible financial pathway to successfully complete the Activities and continue progressing the business following completion of the ARENA supported Activities. ARENA will consider at a minimum the following: • The credibility of the proposed budget (further detail on Eligible Expenditure is contained in Section 7 of the Guidelines). • Where relevant, justification for the Applicant's request for a Top Up Grant. • The Applicant's current financial runway and ability to deliver the proposed activities. • Existing or previous funding secured by the Applicant. • Evidence of any co-contributions, in-kind support, investor interest or referrals, customer commitments or other forms of external validation of pathways to securing funding. • The extent to which the Activities are expected to improve the Applicant's ability to attract future funding, customers or strategic partners.

5 Application and Assessment Process

An Application must be completed according to the ARENA Launchpad Program Guidelines and as further specified in this Funding Round Announcement. Further details are outlined below on the application and assessment process that is specific to the Startup Funding Round. The Startup Funding Round will use a timebound, ranked process as detailed in the Guidelines.

Application Process	Description of Process Step
Application Submission	• An Application form will be made available on the ARENA website for Applicants to complete. This must be completed by the Application Due Date. • Application materials will include responses to written questions in the Application form, a pitch deck, provision of a short video, Conflict of Interest declaration form and optional attachments of essential supporting evidence (see Appendix A for further detail). • Supporting evidence should not be used to extend written responses to Application form questions. • ARENA reserves the right not to consider any submitted video or supporting evidence if it considers written responses to be low merit.

	• ARENA will shortlist Applicants to take through to an Assessment Pitch. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the outcome prior to Assessment Pitches. Any feedback provided at this stage will be at ARENA's discretion.
Assessment Pitch	• Eligible Applicants may be invited to pitch their concept to ARENA and its assessment panel (which will include ARENA staff and some Advisory Panel members). An invitation to pitch is at ARENA's discretion and does not suggest an offer of funding will or will not be made. • Where Applicants are invited to pitch, ARENA will provide further information (in writing) about the scheduled time and date. All pitch slots will be of equal time and structure. • Pitch sessions will be facilitated virtually Pitches are typically expected to be short and may include a brief Q&A session.
Funding Outcome Letter and Agreement to Terms	• ARENA will confirm if, following the Assessment Pitch and subsequently ARENA's internal funding approval, an offer of funding will be made (a **Funding Outcome Letter**). • Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the outcome following the Assessment Pitches. Assessment outcomes and/or feedback will be provided in a form and substance determined by ARENA • ARENA will prepare a Funding Agreement. From the date this is provided, Applicants will have 14 days to accept ARENA's terms and sign the Funding Agreement, unless extended at ARENA's discretion.

6 Funding Agreement

The Funding Agreement provides the legal framework and terms of payment under the Startup Funding Round.

The Funding Agreement template is provided on the ARENA Launchpad Program website. Successful Applicants who wish to sign the Funding Agreement will be required to accept the terms and conditions with no changes. ARENA retains the right to alter the Funding Agreement to better manage funding risks which will be communicated to the Applicant at the time of issue of the Funding Outcome Letter.

7 Knowledge Sharing

An Applicant must agree to participate in the limited knowledge sharing activities, consistent with ARENA's legislated function to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information and knowledge relating to renewable energy technologies, electrification technologies and energy efficiency technologies.

8 Timetable

The below dates represent the current timetable for Startup Funding Round. ARENA retains the right to amend proposed timelines and stages or alter any element of Startup Funding Round at its discretion.

Any changes to the timeline for Startup Funding Round will be published on the ARENA Launchpad website. ARENA reserves the right to not accept an Application submitted after the relevant due dates specified below, including as amended.

Funding Round Stage	Date
Funding Round Launch	Mid-September 2026
Application Due Date	Late October 2026 by 4 PM Sydney/Canberra time
Assessment Panel Pitch invitations	ARENA aims to issue invitations to pitch at the Assessment Panel Pitch stage within 2 weeks of the Application Due Date.
Assessment Panel Pitch Date	Expected in mid-November. The Assessment Panel Pitch Date(s) will be notified to Applicants that are invited to pitch.
Funding Outcome Letter or communication of outcome of the Application	ARENA aims to assess Applications and issue Funding Outcome Letters as soon as practicable after the Assessment Panel Pitch Date. Unsuccessful Applicants will also be notified within this timeframe.

Glossary

Definitions in the Guidelines apply to the Funding Round, with additional definitions provided below.

Term	Definition
$	All references to dollars or $ are in Australian Dollars.
Activities	The stated tasks, deliverables or approaches the Applicant proposed to undertake as detailed in its Application.
Applicant	An entity that submits an Application for funding under this Funding Round.
Applicant Partner	A person, organisation or institution that the Applicant has engaged as part of a joint venture/consortia, contractor or consultant to help deliver the proposed Activities.
Application	A submission made to ARENA for funding support under the Program, submitted in line with the requirements in the Guidelines and this Funding Round Announcement.
Application Due Date	The date when ARENA will cease accepting Applications for the Funding Round.
Baseline Grant	The minimum grant that all Applicants must apply for as detailed in Section 2 Funding Allocation and Grant Sizing.
Conflict of Interest	A situation where a person makes a decision or exercises a power in a way that may be, or may be perceived to be, influenced by either material personal interests (financial or non financial) or material personal associations.
Eligibility Criteria	The criteria set out in Section 3 of this Funding Round Announcement.
Funding Agreement	The agreement between a Recipient and ARENA for funding under the Program and Funding Round. A template is available on the ARENA website.
Funding Outcome Letter	ARENA will issue a non-binding funding offer letter to those Applicants that are successful under the Round.
Funding Round	The process as set out in this Funding Round Announcement.
Funding Round Announcement	This document which has the same meaning as the term Funding Announcement as defined in the ARENA Launchpad Program Guidelines.
Funding Round Objectives	The objectives listed under Section 1 of the Funding Round Announcement.

Grant	An amount awarded to the Applicant in return for the completion of Activities. A Grant is not to be confused with a gift or a loan. In the case of the Program, the Grant is the amount identified in the Funding Agreement. Grants are subject to normal taxation treatment as income and no special taxation agreements will apply to Grants under the Program.
Guidelines	ARENA Launchpad Program Guidelines.
Investment Plan	A document that ARENA releases annually, which outlines ARENA's investment approach and current strategic investment priorities. The latest Investment Plan can be found here.
Merit Criteria	The assessment criteria set out in Section 4 of this Funding Round Announcement.
Program	The ARENA Launchpad Program.
Program Objective	The objectives listed under Section 1 of the Guidelines.
Strategic Priorities	ARENA's current strategic priorities as outlined in the ARENA Investment Plan.
Top Up Grant	An optional additional grant that Applicants may request as detailed in Section 2 Funding Allocation and Grant Sizing.
Total Funding Allocation	The amount of ARENA funding that is allocated to the Funding Round, as specified within this Funding Round Announcement.
TRL	Technology Readiness Level. A guide is available at link for further information.

Appendix A – Additional Information Requirements

Applicants must provide the following as part of their Application:

a. Completed Application form, which contains a brief set of questions covering:
   i. Applicant details;
   ii. Proposed Grant request; and
   iii. Alignment to Merit Criteria.
b. A pitch deck (maximum 10 slides), including but not limited to:
   i. The Applicant founders, team and summary of experience;
   ii. Key Applicant Partners and their involvement/contribution;
   iii. Summary of the tech/solution and IP ownership;
   iv. Addressable market size and target customers;
   v. Validation and traction to date from industry, customers and/or investors;
   vi. Indicative Application Activities and location, including a clear description of the key objectives / metrics that could be used to assess Application Activities performance and how the Applicant is seeking to build on previous work and knowledge;
   vii. Indicative timetable outlining the key Application Activities and deliverables;
   viii. Indicative budget consistent with the budget table contained in the Funding Agreement template, including sources and uses of funds, assumptions around key cost items and any cash and/or in-kind contributions;
   ix. High level commercialisation roadmap beyond the scope of ARENA-funded Activities. This may cover fundraising approach, go-to-market strategy, business model(s) and unit economics at scale; and
   x. Key risks and mitigants.
c. A short video (maximum of 2 minutes) presenting the Application covering:
   i. What problem the Applicant is solving;
   ii. Why the Applicant's solution / technology is differentiated;
   iii. Why the Applicant's team is positioned to succeed; and
   iv. What they would achieve with ARENA funding.
d. Completed Conflict of Interest declaration form (see template here).

Note: accepted video file types include .mov, mp4, mpeg, mpg, wmv only. File limit is 500MB.

Optional Supporting Attachments

Applicants are not required to provide attachments (in addition to the above requirements) but may provide additional information to support their Applications where necessary. Applicants are strongly urged to minimise the length and quantum of attachments and should only upload material where it is considered essential to ARENA's assessment of the Application. If further attachments or pages are required, this can be highlighted in the Application form and ARENA at its discretion may request additional attachments. Materials considered superfluous by ARENA may impact broader merit assessment of the Grant request.

The following are examples of attachments that can be considered by ARENA:

a. Brief technical primer that describes any relevant technical aspects of business (e.g. process flow diagrams, techno-economics, evidence for achieved TRL level, etc.) that are not able to be addressed via the Application form.

b. Evidence/letters of support of the Applicant from customers, investors, Applicant Partners etc., including their commitment to provide the specified cash and In-Kind Contributions.

c. Where relevant, information to confirm the Applicant (and any Applicant Partners) has (have) the financial capacity to fund any cash co-contributions for the duration of the Activities.

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