

Call for Proposals for the Artificial Intelligence Research Platform

2025



**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) Hīkina Whakatutuki – Lifting to make successful

MBIE develops and delivers policy, services, advice and regulation to support economic growth and the prosperity and wellbeing of New Zealanders.

MORE INFORMATION

Information, examples and answers to your questions about the topics covered here can be found on our website: www.mbie.govt.nz.

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Call for Proposals for the Artificial Intelligence Research Platform

We are inviting applications for an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research Platform. We are looking for your boldest, most ambitious AI research ideas. The Government wants to strengthen New Zealand's research capability and commercialisation in AI to build an enduring competitive advantage.

This Call for Proposals contains the same information published on our webpages. The web pages will always contain the correct and most up to date information. Any changes will get communicated by email and published on the web pages. No updates will be available in PDF.

The AI Research Platform should advance internationally leading-edge AI research that makes sense for New Zealand to undertake, creates highly productive, knowledge-intensive firms and opens new market possibilities for New Zealand.

This new investment aims to:

- support AI research that pushes the boundaries and creates novel value propositions that give New Zealand a durable competitive edge and lift economic growth and productivity
- strengthen and build domestic and international AI research and commercial connections to increase the impact and benefit of this investment for New Zealand
- underpin creation of a world-class AI institute that will drive creation of high-tech, knowledge-intensive firms that will grow New Zealand's economy.

This Call for Proposals opens a 2-phase process to identify an ambitious team that can realise this vision. It provides you with information on how to apply, how your application will be assessed, what happens if your application is successful, and how to contact us for assistance with the application process.

The AI research investment will be the second investment of the New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology, following the Government's recent investment in Paihau - Robinson Research Institute's platform on future magnetic and materials technologies. The New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology's core mission is to strengthen New Zealand's advanced technology sector and its contribution to a more productive economy.

How we define AI

We define AI using the OECD definition:

"a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.

This includes, for example, machine learning models, natural language processing, computer vision, generative AI, multimodal AI, reinforcement learning systems, robotics with AI, edge AI, and autonomous systems. It does not include simple rule-based automation, traditional software and basic statistical tools.

The funding available

Applying for funding is a 2-phase process.

Phase 1 concept selection

An open contest to select around 5 applicants, who will receive funding to develop a Platform proposal for further assessment. Applicants may request up to \$250K (excluding GST).

Phase 2 Platform selection

A closed contest to select the Platform. It is intended that one proposal only will be funded, although the New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology may support more than one proposal with the final funding, term, and work programmes subject to negotiation. The New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology may choose to not invest in any proposals. Available funding of up to \$70M (excluding GST) over seven years.

Who can apply

We are looking to fund a driven, ambitious team that can deliver a strategic longer-term research agenda, build an ecosystem that grows New Zealand's AI technology capability, and connect to relevant global research groups and industry. It is essential that the team can successfully bring together science and industry partners and build a high-performing consortia.

To be eligible for funding under this Call for Proposals:

- The applicant is an industry or research organisation, or an entity specifically set up to represent and manage the partnership. The applicant must be a New Zealand-based legal entity.
- Most of the research and related activities are to be undertaken in New Zealand unless it is agreed there are compelling reasons not to.
- The applicant organisation is not a department of the public service.

Ineligible applications will not be assessed.

About the Artificial Intelligence Research Platform: goals and focus

Artificial intelligence (AI) is an advanced technology that holds significant economic potential. It is pervasive across sectors, rapidly developing, and able to make direct and immediate improvements to economic productivity. It is already characterised by multiple applications, and its potential to be combined with other technologies opens a wealth of possibilities for future uses.

The AI Research Platform should advance internationally leading-edge AI research that creates highly productive, knowledge-intensive firms and opens new market possibilities for New Zealand.

Investment goals

The Government wants to lift significantly New Zealand's capabilities in development of world-class AI research that makes sense for New Zealand to undertake and that translates into commercial

applications. Strengthening New Zealand's economic performance is the ultimate target. This investment should contribute to that target by creating new firms that:

- Operate at the technology frontier
- Diversify New Zealand's economy with their novel, knowledge-based activity
- Increase the complexity and sophistication of New Zealand's production
- Contribute to stronger economic growth and productivity.

Capability will be built through an investment in a high-ambition team. By the end of the investment, this team will have built a "centre of gravity" for New Zealand AI research that is building capability, delivering excellent science with flow-through to commercial outcomes, and is internationally recognised and regarded.

The investment goals for the AI research investment are:

Excellence:

Deliver excellence with impact: Invest in excellent, internationally leading-edge AI science and research that amplifies or creates a novel New Zealand strength that translates into knowledge-intensive firms, deeper participation in global value chains, and an enduring competitive advantage.

Deliver additionality: Provide ambitious thinking, new people, new collaborations, new and expanded research, and new impacts that would not have happened without this investment.

Vision:

Create a "centre of gravity" for AI research: Enable, by the end of the investment, creation of an internationally recognised AI institute in New Zealand, that represents a step-change in the scale, cohesion, and strategic capability of AI research in New Zealand.

Enable future-focused research: Support early-stage innovative research and drive a pipeline of new ideas and opportunities that will create start-ups, be relevant to industry and can underpin a stronger technology economy in New Zealand.

Connections:

Leverage and strengthen connectivity: Foster and grow international research and development and commercial partnerships to increase the scale and impact of the investment.

Investing in people:

Build an enduring ecosystem: Grow the scale, depth, capability and impact of New Zealand's multidisciplinary AI research community, attracting top international researchers and developing local talent, and strengthening links between research and industry.

Give effect to the Vision Mātauranga policy: where applicable.

The research focus

The team we are seeking to fund should deliver world-class AI research by creating new knowledge of significance with a compelling impact pathway (indicative TRL 2-3). Over the life of the investment, it will lengthen the pipeline to deliver an increasing profile of research creating value for industry across multiple application areas (indicative TRL 4-6).

Key dates

Activity	Date
Phase 1 applications open	23 October 2025
Assessment Panel members published	By 6 November 2025
Phase 1 applications close	12 noon, 20 November 2025
MBIE checks all applicants against the eligibility criteria	21 November 2025
Assessment Panel meeting	Early December 2025
Funding decisions are made, applicants notified	December 2025
Contracts for successful concepts signed	By 24 December 2025
Phase 2 proposals due	31 March 2026
Phase 2 Assessment Panel Meeting	Mid-April 2026
Platform funding decision made	Late April 2026
Investment funding decisions announced	May 2026
Contract negotiation	May – July 2026
Contract commences	1 July 2026

Dates are subject to change.

Support from NZTech

NZTech is facilitating an online community (Circle) to support building connections between researchers, industry and investors during the investment process and provide access to key information about the AI investment opportunity.

[AI Platform Info Hub](#)

Further updates, including dates for online information sessions, will be facilitated via the AI Platform Info Hub.

You can also contact MBIE at nziatestablishment@mbie.govt.nz for guidance.

Assessment and decision making

An independent assessment panel will review phase 1 and phase 2 applications. MBIE is initiating this investment process and will transfer responsibility, including decision making, to the New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology board once established. Investment decisions will be informed by advice from the independent assessment panel.

The following criteria will be considered:

- Assessment criteria for each phase
- Sufficient merit and strength of alignment with the investment goals and research focus
- Portfolio optimisation to achieve investment goals (if more than one investment is made)
- Fit with New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology intent and future investments.

Investment decisions will seek to best meet the overall intent of the platform. This means:

- changes to concepts or proposals may be negotiated, for example to term, funding, work programme, collaborators, or suggesting mergers
- the highest scoring concepts or proposals (based on assessment criteria alone) may not be selected.

Phase 1 assessment criteria and application process

Eligible concepts which are considered to have sufficient merit and strong alignment with the investment goals and research focus, will be assessed and scored using the criteria below. Depending on the number of concepts submitted, the assessment panel may request assistance from MBIE to support their advice.

A scoring scale from 1 (low quality) to 7 (high quality) will be used.

Phase 1 assessment criteria

Excellence (Weighting 35%)

Applicants should:

- demonstrate emerging or existing world-class science and research capability in AI
- demonstrate the skills and knowledge the team possesses, particularly leadership expertise and experience
- provide ambitious thinking on novel approaches for future AI research and areas to address.

Vision (Weighting 35%)

Applicants should:

- set out a vision for how their science and research capability in AI can be applied to provide New Zealand with an enduring competitive advantage and can generate high-tech, knowledge-intensive firms that grow and diversify New Zealand's future economy
- describe why this vision makes sense as a New Zealand research investment, i.e. "why would this be done in New Zealand?"

- describe their early thinking on managing and driving the science and research to deliver outcomes
- set out a vision for creating an AI institute that can be a focal point for domestic and international engagement on AI and a centre of gravity for building capability and strengthening research-industry engagement.

Connections (Weighting 20%)

Applicants should:

- elaborate their existing AI research and industry connections and collaborations (both New Zealand and internationally), and how these will be developed and expanded, to help realise the vision.

Investing in people (Weighting 10%)

Applicants should:

- demonstrate a track record of developing advanced AI research capability.

Note: For research entities, this might be demonstrated by training of post-graduate researchers. For industry entities, this might be demonstrated by structured staff training, support for graduate placements, etc.

Phase 1: platform concept application process

To submit your application, you will need access to [Pītau](#) – MBIE’s Investment Management System. To access Pītau you will first need a [RealMe](#) account.

Once you have a RealMe account, contact your research office to get access to Pītau. If you don’t have a research office, please download the [Pītau Request for Access form](#). Once complete, submit to imssupport@mbie.govt.nz. This will also be your point of contact for technical assistance with your application.

If you are interested in applying for this opportunity, we suggest you complete these steps as soon as possible and ensure you request access to Pītau at least two weeks before you want to submit your application.

When developing your application, we encourage you to consult the following reference documents:

- [Call for proposals for the Artificial Intelligence Research Platform web pages](#)
- [Concept template for the Artificial Intelligence Research Platform](#)
- [Vision Mātauranga policy](#)
- [Pītau Investment Management System Portal](#)

The Phase 1 concept template provides guidance on how to prepare your concept and the information you are required to provide. We recommend you use the template provided to draft the required information. When you’re ready to submit, copy and paste your responses into the appropriate Pītau fields.

We also encourage you to consider the eligibility criteria, the investment goals, assessment criteria, and the terms and conditions relating to this Call for Proposals.

Conflicts of interest

If you are submitting your application, check the list of Assessment Panel members when published for any potential conflicts of interest. If you identify an actual, potential, or perceived direct or indirect conflict of interest, you must identify this within your application in Pītau.

Conflicts of interest may occur on two different levels:

A direct conflict of interest, where an Assessor is:

- directly involved with a proposal (as a participant, manager, mentor, or partner) or has a close personal relationship with the applicant, for example, family members
- a collaborator or in some other way involved with an applicant's proposal.

An indirect conflict of interest, where an Assessor:

- is employed by an organisation involved in a proposal but is not part of the applicant's proposal
- has a personal and/or professional relationship with one of the applicants, for example, an acquaintance
- is assessing a proposal under discussion that may compete with their business interests.

A close personal relationship is generally considered in relatively narrow terms, for example, that of a direct relationship (spouse/partner, sibling, dependent).

Assessment panel members

A list of Assessment Panel members will be published here by 6 November 2025.

Phase 2 assessment criteria and application process

The Assessment Panel will interview Phase 2 applicants as part of their proposal assessment. Assessors will consider the proposal's strengths and weaknesses, using the scoring rubric below for each criterion.

- Excellent: Compelling, comprehensive, clear evidence; international calibre; highly credible; excellent potential.
- Good: Comprehensive; good potential; credible.
- Insufficient: Limited potential and credibility

Phase 2 assessment criteria

Vision

Panel members will consider the proposal's:

- strategic vision and leadership, additionality, and potential to build a hard-to-copy niche that makes sense for New Zealand
- ability to support a pipeline of AI research from TRL 2-3 to TRL 4-6 and potential to maintain a balanced research portfolio across horizons
- potential to forge a successful path to an AI institute
- plan for the institute's robust governance, programme management, and risk management.

Excellence

Panel members will consider the proposal's:

- potential to deliver internationally leading-edge AI research
- potential to develop novel scientific and technological advances that will be enabled by the proposed research
- calibre of research capability, including scientific leadership
- commitment to excellent scientific practices related to method robustness, risk management, reproducibility, and responsible AI practices.

Impact

Panel members will consider the proposal's:

- scale and credibility of potential benefits
- intended pathways and potential to develop commercial outcomes and achieve growth in innovation-led frontier firms in New Zealand
- potential to deliver beneficial spillovers to other areas of research and (if relevant) other industry areas
- potential to build New Zealand's reputation for excellence in AI research and forge new markets.

Connections

Panel members will consider the proposal's:

- current and potential breadth and depth of collaborations and networks, both domestic and international, that will enhance capability and commercialisation outcomes
- planned mechanisms for joint work and potential to develop enduring and strategic collaborations, including with co-funding
- potential to bring complementary resources to the programme and build a high-functioning team
- plan to ensure that collaborative arrangements are supported by clear IP and commercialisation frameworks that enable strong, productive relationships of benefit to New Zealand.

Investing in people

Panel members will consider the proposal's:

- potential and plans to grow New Zealand's AI research capability and create a pipeline of talent, including through attraction and retention of talent, and training of postgraduates and early career researchers
- potential to develop research leadership capabilities
- planned steps to give effect to Vision Mātauranga, where applicable.

Phase 2: platform proposal application process

We will provide the phase 2 proposal template to successful applicants of phase 1.

Applicants are expected to have developed a substantive proposal that elaborates further on how the Platform will meet the investment goals and addresses the criteria.

Decision notification and contracting

MBIE will conduct an eligibility check on all applicants. If applicants are deemed not eligible, we will notify you and let you know the reasons why.

1. After the Phase 1 concept selection process has been completed, all applicants will receive written notification of their decision. Successful applicants will be published on our web pages and announced by a press release.
2. Successful Phase 1 concept applicants will enter a Funding Contract with MBIE, to support the development of your concept into a Phase 2 proposal. This contract must be signed and returned to us within one week. This funding may be used to support:
 - a leadership team to coordinate the development of an integrated research programme.
 - activities necessary to develop an integrated research programme. This may include developing the proposal, undertaking fore sighting or market analysis, tasks associated with drafting the proposal including building connections, stakeholder facilitation, and workshops.
3. Contract holders will be required to submit an end of contract report confirming expenditure and submission of Phase 2 proposal.

All applicants proceeding to Phase 2 will receive feedback on their applications. Feedback will be based on information gathered from Assessment Panel members.

For the successful Phase 2 applicant, funding may be used to support:

- Research leadership and management.
- Mechanisms for connecting research, end-users and communities for impact.
- Research programmes that deliver against the platform intent, investment goals, and research focus.
- A portfolio of excellent, high-impact research.
- Costs directly related to the research programme, and for connecting with industry, end-users for impact.

The New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology will provide confirmation of what funding maybe used to support prior to Phase 2 contracting.

Contact

Application queries: nziatestablishment@mbie.govt.nz

Pitau queries: Email imssupport@mbie.govt.nz or phone 0800 693 778 Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm.