Request for Proposals for an ARA Secretariat Strategic Learning and Tracking Partner

16 May 2023

Duration

This is a 24-month consultancy assignment, although the timeframe can be lightly adapted based on programme's timeframe and logic, and opportunities.

Title

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Background to activities

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a global collaborative effort with over 180 members that seeks to catalyse increased investment and capacity for action-oriented research that supports effective adaptation to climate change – primarily in developing countries – at the scale and urgency demanded by the science. The ARA focuses on ensuring that increased ambition can be delivered through evidence-based action and recognising that practical action is required to minimise and avert loss and damage. We need a step-change on adaptation, collaborating with governments, business, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to prepare for climate risks, mobilise further action, and increase adaptation financing.

The ARA operates within three strategic functions (Advocacy, Research Planning and Cooperation, and Resource Mobilisation and Delivery) and four core values, which are operationalised through activities which enable its Theory of Change (ToC). Cutting across these functions are a range of ARA activities aimed at tracking and learning.

The ARA envisages learning at three levels (learning levels):

i. Tracking and learning at the level of the ARA programme - ensuring that ARA activities, ranging from micro-grants to Co-creation Spaces embed robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) components that not only allows for assessment of progress against the ARA ToC, but generation of lessons for the ARA and the wider adaptation community.

ii. Supporting ARA members in tracking, sharing and peer-to-peer learning. For example, the operationalisation of Adaptation Research for Impact Principles by ARA members provides unique opportunities for the sharing of experiences and identification of good practices.

iii. Learning as a strategic area for action-oriented research - embedding learning in the implementation of interventions and projects is essential for ensuring their effectiveness and sustainability and can support more rapid scaling and replication.

Over time, the ARA would like to develop and implement a learning agenda at these levels, and we hope that the Partner will play a key role in this process. In the near-term, we expect the Partner to take over existing activities that are primarily at the first two levels as indicated below:

1) **Tracking, Learning and Sharing:** This component looks at what ARA members are doing, learning and contributing to. These activities are known as [Tracking, Learning and Sharing (TLS)](#) and have two sub-components.
    a. *Tracking*: Collective outcome harvesting with members of the Alliance by voluntarily documenting and sharing on the progress that they are making against the outcomes of the ARA and the Adaptation Research for Impact Principles.
    b. *Learning and Sharing*: ARA members engage in peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange on learnings, successes and failures, questions, tensions and dilemmas central to their work and mission. The first set of these activities were carried out in 2022-2023 by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and have been documented. For more information on the shared learning process on understanding risk, [see here](#). More information is included in the TLS workstream [available here](#).

2) **Monitoring and strategic learning (MEL) on the ARA programme strategy implementation**: these activities are part of the core functions of the ARA Secretariat and include curating the ARA theory of change, testing its core assumptions and hypothesis, and tracking progress against its targets, as well as the logframe.

For the longer-term, the Partner will initiate an ARA strategy for contributing to the broader adaptation learning agenda that will consist of:
3) Harnessing learning from ARA activities and affiliated programmes to **develop and drive a broader learning agenda** within the adaptation community. This strategic process will include identifying possible roles that the ARA could play in advancing that agenda.

Purpose and objectives:

The ARA is looking for a strategic learning partner to help refine the design of and deliver on its strategic learning and tracking priorities, as mentioned above. This function forms an integral part of the ARA's distributed Secretariat, working very closely with the Programme Coordinator and reporting to the Head of Secretariat. The assignment requires high-level strategic thinking and planning as well as

coordination and administrative work. Therefore, the role could be delivered by a team or an individual, though a team is preferred given the scope of work.

The objectives of this assignment are:
a) The ARA and its members actively learn from their respective experiences of designing, funding, conducting and using action-oriented research for adaptation and resilience.
b) The ARA and its members actively share learning with other stakeholders in the adaptation ecosystem, including the operationalisation of the Adaptation Research for Impact Principles in their work.
c) The ARA helps advance the learning agenda to ensure that adaptation actions and interventions are evidence-based and effective and policy makers and practitioners actively uptake and apply learning to improve the performance of their adaptation and resilience building initiatives.
d) ARA Secretariat tracks and reports the progress of the Alliance against its Theory of Change and uses tracking data to adjust and improve the approach of the Alliance and its members for conducting and using action-oriented research for adaptation and resilience.
e) ARA Secretariat can report progress to donors, the Steering Board, and Plenary Body using agreed monitoring and evaluation frameworks (logframe, theory of change, periodical monitoring templates, etc).

Activities

The Activities needed to meet these objectives will include-

TLS
- Plan and implement an approach for undertaking the process of tracking ARA members' progress in achieving ARA outcomes and the Principles.
- Engage ARA members and incentivise their voluntary engagement in TLS activities through group meetings and one on one conversations.
- Review existing methodologies, approaches and frameworks for TLS activities that have been employed in the past.
- Suggest improvements and amendments in these to effectively enable the next round of such activities.
- Adopt interactive and relational approaches to determine the ways in which ARA member organisations are operationalising the outcomes and the Principles. This can include online and offline meetings and workshops.

- Survey the ARA membership to determine the most appropriate learning themes that will form the basis of peer-to-peer learning amongst ARA members.
- Capture learning and insights from the tracking and learning activities in reports and knowledge products (that may be co-created with ARA members).
- Attend weekly ARA strategy/secretariat meetings and contribute insights from TLS activities to these to improve the functioning and impact of the Alliance.

MEL
- Revise programme documentation to finalise the ARA logframe, including outcome and output indicators.
- Design the monitoring processes and tools for adaptive programme management including providing guidance on MEL associated with specific activities.
- Design and facilitate sense-making and learning moments as part of the ARA Secretariat to be embedded in the planning and reporting programme cycle.
- Assist the Secretariat in other monitoring, evaluation and learning tasks that may emerge during the assignment.

Learning agenda
- Work with the ARA membership, Steering Board and other key stakeholders to scope the role of learning in accelerating adaptation actions, and the opportunities for learning to lead to stronger research – action linkages.
- Develop an agenda in this regard for the ARA, including identification of different roles for the ARA.

Deliverables and outputs

TLS
- Design and facilitate phase two of the TLS strategy, including activities and implementation plan for tracking ARA members' progress in achieving ARA outcomes and the Principles (using online and analogue tools).
- Design a self-reporting process for outcome tracking and progress toward the ARA Theory of Change.
- Plan an approach for delivering peer-to-peer learning activities with ARA members.

- Design and facilitate peer-to-peer learning activities with ARA members, including but not limited to a set of interactive workshops to enable this learning to take place effectively.
- Develop minimum of two report/knowledge product (details to be determined with ARA Secretariat) to capture the overview and key insights from initiatives to track the progress that members are making in achieving ARA outcomes and Principles, in one calendar year.
- Produce minimum two knowledge products (details to be determined with ARA secretariat) to capture the overview and key insights from each learning theme part of the peer-to-peer learning component, in one calendar year.
- Attendance of weekly ARA strategy/secretariat meetings and contribute insights from TLS activities to these to improve the functioning and impact of the Alliance.

MEL
- Finalised ARA logframe, including outcome and output indicators.
- A MEL framework for:
    - the monitoring processes and tools for adaptive programme management of the ARA.
    - sense-making and learning moments embedded in the ARA planning and reporting programme cycle.
    - Capturing donor reporting requirements periodically (quarterly and annually).
- A delivery plan for the abovementioned MEL framework.

Learning agenda
- Design and facilitate a scoping activity that includes engagement with key stakeholders to identify opportunities for engaging research communities for strengthening learning.
- Produce a white paper outlining a learning agenda that the ARA could support and facilitate in different ways.

Management and accountability

This role sits within the ARA Secretariat as part of the distributed Secretariat model of the Alliance. Short, weekly meetings will be held with the ARA Secretariat team to update on progress and challenges. Communication will also take place regularly via email and MS Teams.

Budget, Personnel and Payment Schedule

The total budget from the ARA for personnel, including overhead costs, and activity budget, is **75,000 GBP** per year which will be paid on a quarterly basis. Payment will be paid on agreed milestones (tbc - process based) and not for total days. This function is expected to be hosted by the Partner for two-years, with the possibility of extension.

Skills and experience required

- Extensive demonstrable experience in the design and implementation of strategic learning systems, particularly in complex multi-stakeholder collaborations.
- Familiarity with complexity aware monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) methods.
- Strong analytical and synthesis skills to identify the strategic elements and priority learning points.
- Excellent learning process design and facilitation.
- Experience working in international settings and programmes, ideally in climate change or international development.
- Understanding of action-oriented research, or Adaptation Research for Impact.
- Experience working with senior management as a thought partner, being able to constructively offer alternative perspectives.
- Curiosity and flexibility in working styles and environments.
- Languages skills: Fluency in English is required with a working proficiency in Spanish and French.

Application and eligibility requirements

The Supplier(s) should submit a proposal capturing:

- Motivational letter for the assignment and partnering with the ARA.
- An indicative budget including an overview of financial resource use (i.e., personnel and activities).
- Team profile and CVs of key personnel that will be involved.
- Track record of delivering activities similar to described in the preceding sections.
- Links to relevant outputs for other similar projects.
- Any expected risks and challenges.
- Indicative timelines assuming start date of 1st June 2023 and end date of 31 March 2025, with the possibility of extending.
- Any other information that they feel supports their suitability for this work.

Short-listed organisations will be invited to interview and to prepare a detailed presentation on their proposal in advance of the interview.

Learning partners based in the Global South will be strongly favoured.

Proposals should be submitted in one PDF file. The proposal to be limited to 5 sides of A4 (i.e., 10 pages), any additional content provided beyond this will not be considered.

Please submit your proposal to secretariat@adaptationresearchalliance.org. Applications will remain open until a candidate has been selected.