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Enhancer RNA Facilitates NELF Release from Immediate Early Genes

Katie Schaukowitch,[1,4] Jae-Yeol Joo,[1,4] Xihui Liu,[1] Jonathan K. Watts,[2,5] Carlos Martinez,[3] and Tae-Kyung Kim[1,*]
[1]Department of Neuroscience
[2]Department of Pharmacology
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 5323 Harry Hines Boulevard, Dallas, TX 75390-9111, USA
[3]Sigma Life Science, 9186 Six Pines Drive, The Woodlands, TX 77380, USA
[4]Co-first author
[5]Present address: Department of Chemistry and Institute for Life Sciences, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK
*Correspondence: taekyung.kim@utsouthwestern.edu
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SUMMARY

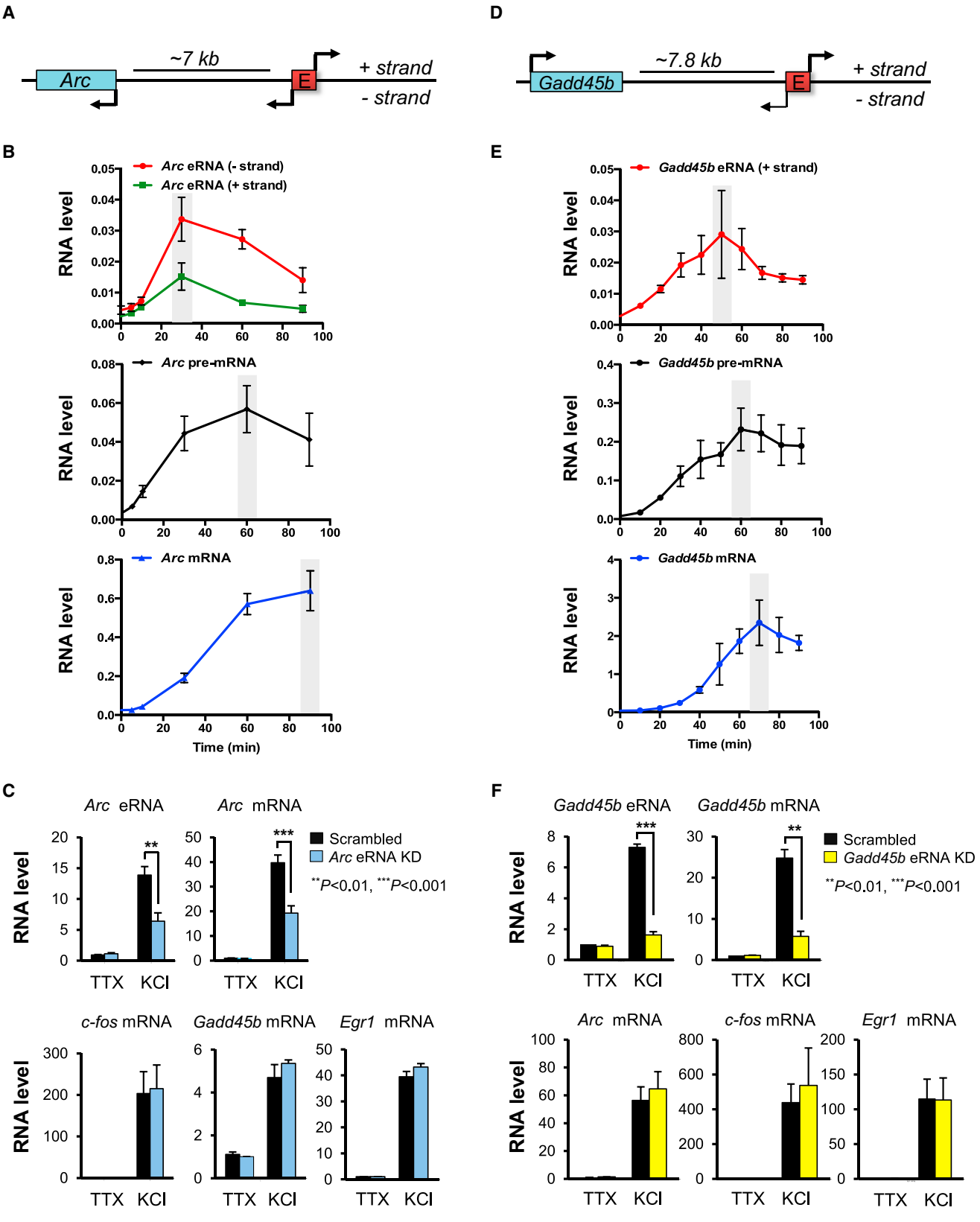
Enhancer RNAs (eRNAs) are a class of long noncoding RNAs (lncRNA) expressed from active enhancers, whose function and action mechanism are yet to be firmly established. Here we show that eRNAs facilitate the transition of paused RNA polymerase II (RNAPII) into productive elongation by acting as a decoy for the negative elongation factor (NELF) complex upon induction of immediate early genes (IEGs) in neurons. eRNAs are synthesized prior to the culmination of target gene transcription and interact with the NELF complex. Knockdown of eRNAs expressed at neuronal enhancers impairs transient release of NELF from the specific target promoters during transcriptional activation, coinciding with a decrease in target mRNA induction. The enhancer-promoter interaction was unaffected by eRNA knockdown. Instead, chromatin looping might enable eRNAs to act locally at a specific promoter. Our findings highlight the spatiotemporally regulated action mechanism of eRNAs during early transcriptional elongation.

INTRODUCTION

Stimulus-induced gene expression in the nucleus is a critical mechanism for cell-wide adaptive responses to environmental cues. In neurons, sensory-experience-evoked synaptic activity triggers various calcium-dependent signaling events, which then induce the expression of a group of genes involved in distinct aspects of neuronal function. We have previously shown that the enhancers of these activity-regulated genes rapidly induce eRNA synthesis when cortical neurons are depolarized by 55 mM KCl (Kim et al., 2010). The majority of eRNAs are transcribed bidirectionally with a strong positive correlation with the expression of nearby protein-coding genes, suggesting a possible ''activating'' function of eRNA as part of a genome-wide activity-dependent epigenetic mechanism (Kim et al., 2010).

eRNAs have also been identified in many nonneuronal cell types and recognized as a reliable marker for active enhancers (Andersson et al., 2014; Creyghton et al., 2010; De Santa et al., 2010; Djebali et al., 2012; Hah et al., 2011; Hsieh et al., 2014; Ilott et al., 2014; Rada-Iglesias et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011). Moreover, eRNAs appear to be functionally important for gene activation as knockdown of eRNAs expressed in different cell types invariably resulted in a reduction of transcription of specific target genes (Hsieh et al., 2014; Ilott et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013; Melo et al., 2013; Mousavi et al., 2013). Despite these exciting findings, precise action mechanisms of eRNAs during the transcriptional induction process have not been well established. A study of eRNAs in human breast cancer cells showed that eRNAs contribute to 17β-oestradiol (E2)-dependent gene activation by stabilizing enhancer-promoter looping through an interaction with cohesin, which forms a complex with Mediator to facilitate chromosomal looping (Kagey et al., 2010; Li et al., 2013). This effect of eRNAs in chromatin looping is reminiscent of the function of activating-ncRNAs (ncRNA-a) that activate gene transcription by facilitating looping through an interaction with Mediator (Lai et al., 2013). In contrast, the eRNA expressed from the distal regulatory region near *Myod1* in C2C12 cells does not regulate chromatin looping when judged by the binding levels of the cohesin subunit, RAD21, and a cohesin-loading factor, NIPBL. Instead, it was shown to promote transcription of the *Myod1* gene by establishing chromatin accessibility through an unknown mechanism (Mousavi et al., 2013). These recent findings suggest that eRNAs might play a regulatory role in various aspects of the transcription process and that further mechanistic study of eRNA function would be imperative for understanding the regulatory capacity of noncoding RNAs in gene expression.

RNAPII pausing is a genome-wide regulatory mechanism in higher eukaryotes, especially enriched at genes in developmentally and environmentally responsive pathways (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Gilchrist et al., 2012). NELF and DRB sensitivity-inducing factor (DSIF) cooperatively induce RNAPII pausing by binding directly to RNAPII and nascent RNA (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Cheng and Price, 2008; Missra and Gilmour, 2010;



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Yamaguchi et al., 1999). One of the NELF subunits, NELF-E, mediates the binding of the NELF complex to nascent RNAs through its RNA recognition motif (RRM), which has been shown to be critical for the transcriptional repression activity of NELF in an in vitro transcription assay (Yamaguchi et al., 2002). Pause release and subsequent elongation are mediated by the positive transcription elongation factor b (P-TEFb), which phosphorylates the RNAPII C-terminal domain (CTD), DSIF, and likely NELF (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Fujinaga et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 1996; Wada et al., 1998a, 1998b; Yamaguchi et al., 1999). Here we not only show that eRNAs are functionally important for proper induction of neuronal immediate early genes (IEGs) in response to an increase in neuronal activity, but we also reveal an action mechanism of eRNAs during the transition of paused RNAPII to productive elongation. Knockdown of eRNAs caused a reduction in the expression of specific target genes, while the chromosomal looping between the promoter and enhancer was unaffected. However, when eRNA levels are reduced, the NELF complex could not be efficiently released from the promoter of the specific target gene during transcriptional induction, and this is accompanied by a reduction in elongating RNAPII and target mRNA. Both ultraviolet RNA immunoprecipitation (UV-RIP) and in vitro RNA pull-down assays demonstrated that eRNAs expressed upon stimulation of neurons are able to directly bind to the RRM of the NELF-E subunit. Replacement of endogenous NELF-E with the RRM-deletion mutant in neurons significantly reduces the levels of NELF complex binding at the IEG promoters as well as mRNA induction, further illustrating that the interaction with RNA molecules (e.g., eRNA and nascent RNAs) is a critical mechanism for NELF to regulate IEG induction in neurons. Taken together, neuronal eRNAs may facilitate the release of NELF by acting as a decoy for nascent transcripts to allow for the efficient transition of paused RNAPII to productive elongation.

RESULTS

eRNAs Are Necessary for Target Gene Induction

In our initial effort to characterize the function of eRNAs, we performed a time course measurement of the eRNAs that are expressed from the enhancer for *Activity-regulated cytoskeletal protein* (*Arc),* an IEG important for brain development and function (Korb and Finkbeiner, 2011) (Figures 1A and 1B and Figure S1A available online). Neuronal activity was first suppressed by tetrodotoxin (TTX), a sodium channel blocker that prevents neuronal action potentials, and then expression levels of *Arc* eRNA, pre-mRNA, and mRNA were monitored for various times following KCl-mediated membrane depolarization. We observed that the bidirectional synthesis of *Arc* eRNA was induced by membrane depolarization but peaked earlier than *Arc* pre-mRNA and mRNA (Figure 1B). The difference in peak times between eRNA and pre-mRNA is not due to a significant difference in decay times between the transcripts as both transcripts show a similar decay rate (approximate half-life $\leq$ 7.5 min) upon addition of a transcription inhibitor, Actinomycin D following 30 min of KCl-mediated depolarization (Figure S1C). This result could suggest that eRNA synthesis is not merely a byproduct of promoter-driven transcription activity, but instead an independently regulated process.

Arc eRNA was also induced by the $GABA_A$ receptor antagonist bicuculline, which more closely resembles the physiological activation of synapses (Figure S2A) (Hardingham et al., 2001). By blocking the major inhibitory input in neurons, bicuculline triggers a synchronous burst of action potentials and induces both *Arc* eRNA and mRNA. Notably, the minus strand of *Arc* eRNA was predominantly induced in response to bicuculline, suggesting that synaptic activity-driven eRNA induction may occur in a strand-specific manner. When the minus strand of *Arc* eRNA was sequenced using an RNA circularization method, we found that while there was a distinct 5′ end of the transcript, the 3′ ends were degenerate without noticeable polyadenylation (Figure S2B), although we cannot rule out the possibility that a minor population of the eRNAs could be polyadenylated. We also found that *Arc* eRNA can be induced by serum stimulation in NIH 3T3 cells, but remain localized in the nucleus after their synthesis whereas *Arc* mRNA is present in both the nucleus and the cytoplasm (Figure S2C). These properties of *Arc* eRNAs are in good agreement with the latest ENCODE consortium analysis of eRNAs in human cell lines showing that eRNAs are prevalent in the nuclear nonpolyadenylated RNA fraction (Djebali et al., 2012).

To test the functionality of eRNAs in activity-induced neuronal gene expression more directly, lentiviral constructs containing small hairpin RNAs (shRNAs) against the minus strand of *Arc* eRNA were designed to knockdown the eRNAs and assess the effect on *Arc* mRNA induction in response to membrane depolarization. Knockdown of *Arc* eRNAs reproducibly led to a decrease in the level of *Arc* mRNA induction when compared to a scrambled control shRNA, suggesting that *Arc* eRNAs are functionally important for neuronal activity-dependent transcriptional induction of the *Arc* gene (Figure 1C). *Arc* eRNA appears to specifically regulate *Arc* gene expression since the expression levels of other

Figure 1. Characterization of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* eRNA

(A) Schematic diagram of the *Arc* genomic locus (see also Figure S1A).

(B) Cortical neurons were depolarized at DIV 6 with 55 mM KCl for various time points, and expression levels of *Arc* eRNAs, pre-mRNA, and mRNA were measured using qRT-PCR and normalized to the level of *Tbp* mRNA (n = 4 biological replicates).

(C) qRT-PCR analysis of *Arc* eRNA and mRNA expression after knockdown of *Arc* eRNA (− strand) or infection with a scrambled control in cortical neurons. Levels of indicated RNAs were measured after 30 min KCl or TTX treatment in cortical neurons and normalized to the level of *Tbp* mRNA (n = 3 biological replicates).

(D) Schematic diagram of the *Gadd45b* genomic locus (see also Figure S1B).

(E) Cortical neurons were depolarized at DIV 6 with 55 mM KCl for various time points, and expression levels of *Gadd45b* eRNA, pre-mRNA, and mRNA were measured using qRT-PCR and normalized to the level of *Tbp* mRNA (n = 4 biological replicates, *Gadd45b* pre-mRNA: n = 3 biological replicates).

(F) qRT-PCR analysis of *Gadd45b* eRNA and mRNA expression after knockdown of *Gadd45b* eRNA (+ strand) in cortical neurons. Levels of indicated RNAs were measured after 60 min KCl or TTX treatment in cortical neurons and normalized to the level of *Tbp* mRNA (n = 3 biological replicates).

Error bars indicate SEM; p values are from a two-tailed t test.

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neuronal IEGs (e.g., *c-fos*, *Egr-1*, *Gadd45b*) were not affected by the *Arc* eRNA knockdown. To further evaluate the specificity of eRNA action, we examined the knockdown effect of the eRNAs expressed from an enhancer located nearby the *Growth arrest and DNA-damage-inducible, beta* (*Gadd45b*) gene (Figures 1D and S1B). Although expressed from a well-defined enhancer region, the plus strand of *Gadd45b* eRNAs is predominantly transcribed upon membrane depolarization and peaks ~50 min after KCl treatment (Figures 1E and S1B), which is later than the *Arc* eRNA peak time. Knockdown of the *Gadd45b* eRNA plus strand specifically reduces the induction level of *Gadd45b* mRNA, but not other IEGs, upon KCl-mediated membrane depolarization of neurons (Figure 1F). We also observed that the impairment in the activity-dependent induction of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* transcription caused by the knockdown of corresponding eRNAs leads to a decrease in the levels of ARC and GADD45B proteins (Figure S2D). Taken together, these results suggest that eRNAs can act locally at their specific target genes, which is consistent with recent functional analyses of eRNAs in nonneuronal cells (Hsieh et al., 2014; Ilott et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013; Melo et al., 2013; Mousavi et al., 2013) (see also Figure S5).

Enhancer-Promoter Interactions Are Not Dependent on eRNA

Promoters and distal enhancers can be physically juxtaposed with each other through chromosomal looping as part of a gene regulatory mechanism (Smallwood and Ren, 2013). We reasoned that the target specificity of eRNAs could be mediated by enhancer-promoter looping. In order to see if the interaction between the *Arc* promoter and enhancer occurs constitutively or in a stimulus-dependent manner (i.e., membrane depolarization of neurons), we performed Chromosome Conformation Capture (3C) to quantitatively measure the chromosomal interactions in the regions surrounding the *Arc* gene (Figures 2A and S3A). As expected, the eRNA-producing *Arc* enhancer was the most prominent genomic locus that interacts with the *Arc* promoter in an activity-dependent manner. The 3C analysis also found another interaction site (B4) that had not been previously identified, but its interaction with the *Arc* gene locus was constitutive. Some lncRNAs and eRNAs have been shown to promote target gene expression by facilitating chromosomal looping between the enhancer and promoter (Lai et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013). Therefore, we tested if *Arc* eRNA can also mediate the interaction between the *Arc* promoter and enhancer (Figures 2A and S3A). Despite the efficient knockdown of the *Arc* eRNA observed in the same experiment (Figure S3B), we found no significant change in the chromosomal interaction between the *Arc* enhancer and promoter. This was also the case with the *Gadd45b* locus, as we identified a strong activity-dependent interaction between the *Gadd45b* promoter and enhancer that was unaffected by *Gadd45b* eRNA knockdown (Figures 2B, S3C, and S3D).

To corroborate our findings from 3C analysis, we next examined the effect of eRNA knockdown on the binding levels of the Mediator and cohesin complexes at both the *Arc* and *Gadd45b* enhancers as well as promoters (Figures 2C and 2D). The Mediator-cohesin complex co-occupies enhancers and promoters to facilitate enhancer-promoter DNA looping, and recent studies have implicated ncRNA-a and eRNAs in chromosomal looping through interactions with Mediator and the cohesion complex, respectively (Lai et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013). Chromatin immunoprecipitation (ChIP) analysis of a common Mediator complex subunit MED1 and a cohesin subunit RAD21 shows that both the promoters and enhancers of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* genes are inducibly occupied by the Mediator-cohesin complex upon membrane depolarization, but eRNA knockdown has no effect on their occupancy. Together with the 3C analysis, these results collectively argue that at least for neuronal IEG expression, eRNAs are not required for the enhancer-promoter interaction. Our finding is consistent with other reports showing that eRNA transcription is not necessary for enhancer-promoter looping in human breast cancer cells and that eRNA knockdown has no effect on cohesin complex loading in mouse skeletal muscle (Hah et al., 2013; Mousavi et al., 2013).

Knockdown of eRNAs Causes NELF to Remain Bound to Target Gene Promoters

Recent genome-wide studies unambiguously argue that proximal-promoter pausing of RNAPII is a widespread mechanism of transcriptional regulation for controlling expression of stimulus-responsive genes in higher eukaryotes (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Gilchrist et al., 2012). Because of the rapid induction kinetics of eRNAs (Figures 1B and 1E), we investigated whether eRNAs play a role in the early transcription elongation step that involves RNAPII pausing and release. Analyses of RNAPII elongation complexes using a native electrophoretic mobility shift assay have demonstrated that DSIF and NELF complexes are stably associated with paused RNAPII through interactions with both RNAPII and nascent transcripts (Cheng and Price, 2008; Missra and Gilmour, 2010). Therefore, we hypothesized that during target gene activation, eRNAs might destabilize the association of the DSIF-NELF complex with RNAPII by mimicking nascent transcripts and thereby facilitate the RNAPII transition from pausing to productive elongation. Expression of neuronal IEGs was also shown to be subject to this RNAPII pausing mechanism (Saha et al., 2011). Consistently we found that NELF binds specifically to the *Arc* promoter, but not to the *Arc* enhancer when neuronal gene expression is suppressed by TTX (Figure S4A). NELF is then released from the *Arc* promoter upon activation of neuronal gene expression by KCl-mediated membrane depolarization. NELF release appears to occur within a narrow time window and to be gene specific, as NELF occupancy at the promoters of *Arc* and *c-fos* was transiently decreased at 30 min after KCl stimulation whereas NELF complexes bound at *Gadd45b* and *Egr1* promoters were released at 1 hr (Figures 3A and 3B). Transient release of NELF during transcription activation was also observed in a previous study where NELF occupancy at the tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF-α) proximal promoter in macrophages was temporarily decreased at 30 min after lipopolysaccharide (LPS) treatment (Adelman et al., 2009). Interestingly, shRNA-mediated knockdown of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* eRNAs blocked the NELF release from their corresponding promoters even during membrane depolarization (Figures 3A and 3B). A subunit of P-TEFb, CDK9, was also inducibly recruited to the *Arc* promoter at 30 min after membrane depolarization (Figure S4B), but its recruitment was unaffected by eRNA knockdown (Figure 3C). This result strongly

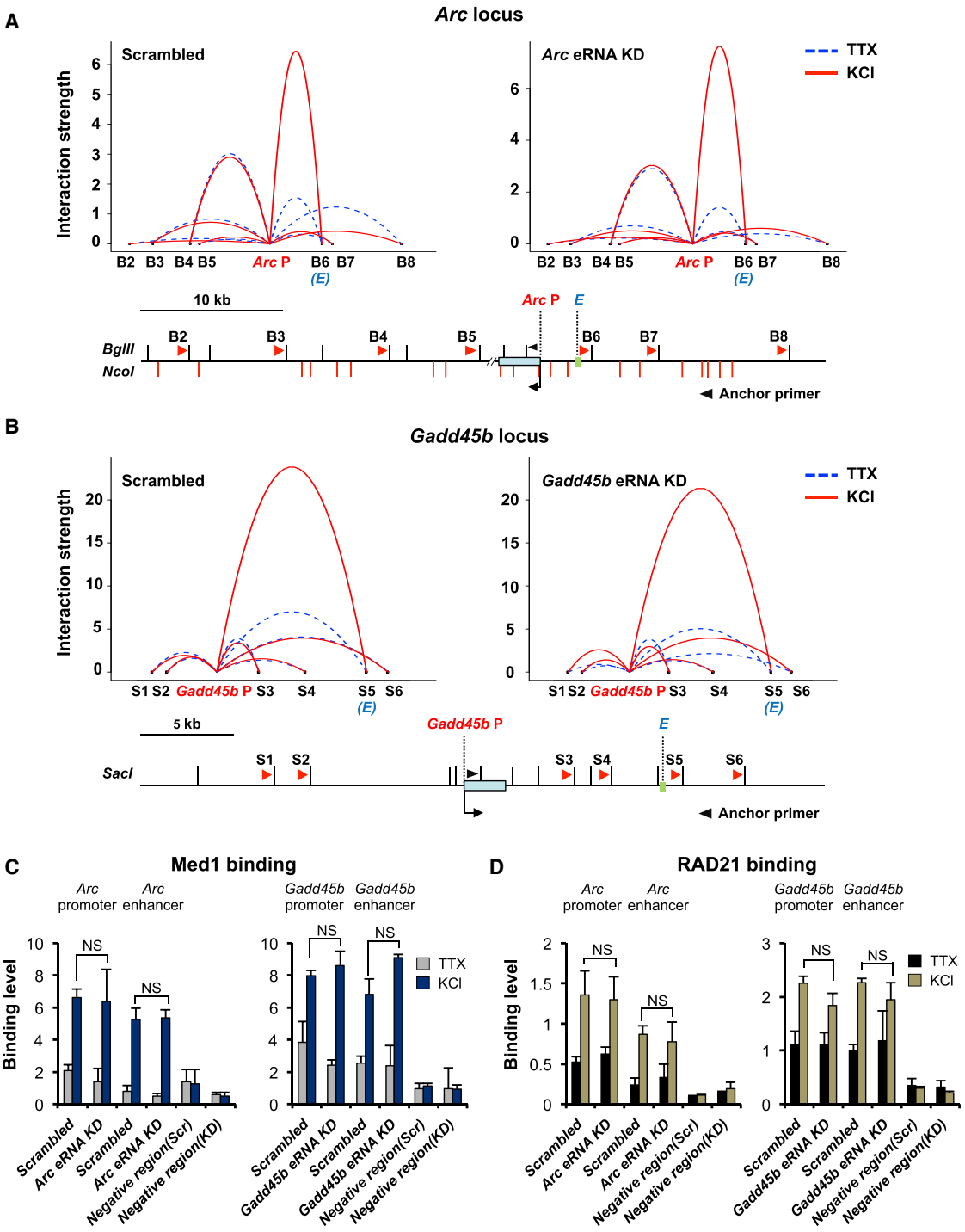

Figure 2. Activity-Induced Interactions between Enhancers and Promoters

(A and B) 3C analysis to examine the effect of eRNA knockdown in enhancer-promoter looping. Chromosomal interactions between the *Arc* or *Gadd45b* promoter and surrounding genomic loci were measured by q-PCR using the primers indicated in the schematic diagram. *Arc* P or *Gadd45b* P indicates the promoter and *E* indicates the enhancer. The black arrowhead near the *Arc* P and *Gadd45b* P indicates the anchor primer. The restriction enzyme sites (vertical lines) and primers used for q-PCR together with the anchor primer (arrowheads) are also shown (n = 3 biological replicates).

(C and D) Binding levels of MED1 and RAD21 at the *Arc* and *Gadd45b* promoters, and corresponding enhancers determined by ChIP-qPCR in neurons infected with a scrambled control or eRNA knockdown lentivirus in quiescent (TTX) and KCl stimulated conditions (n = 2 biological replicates).

Error bars indicate SEM; p values are from a two-tailed t test.

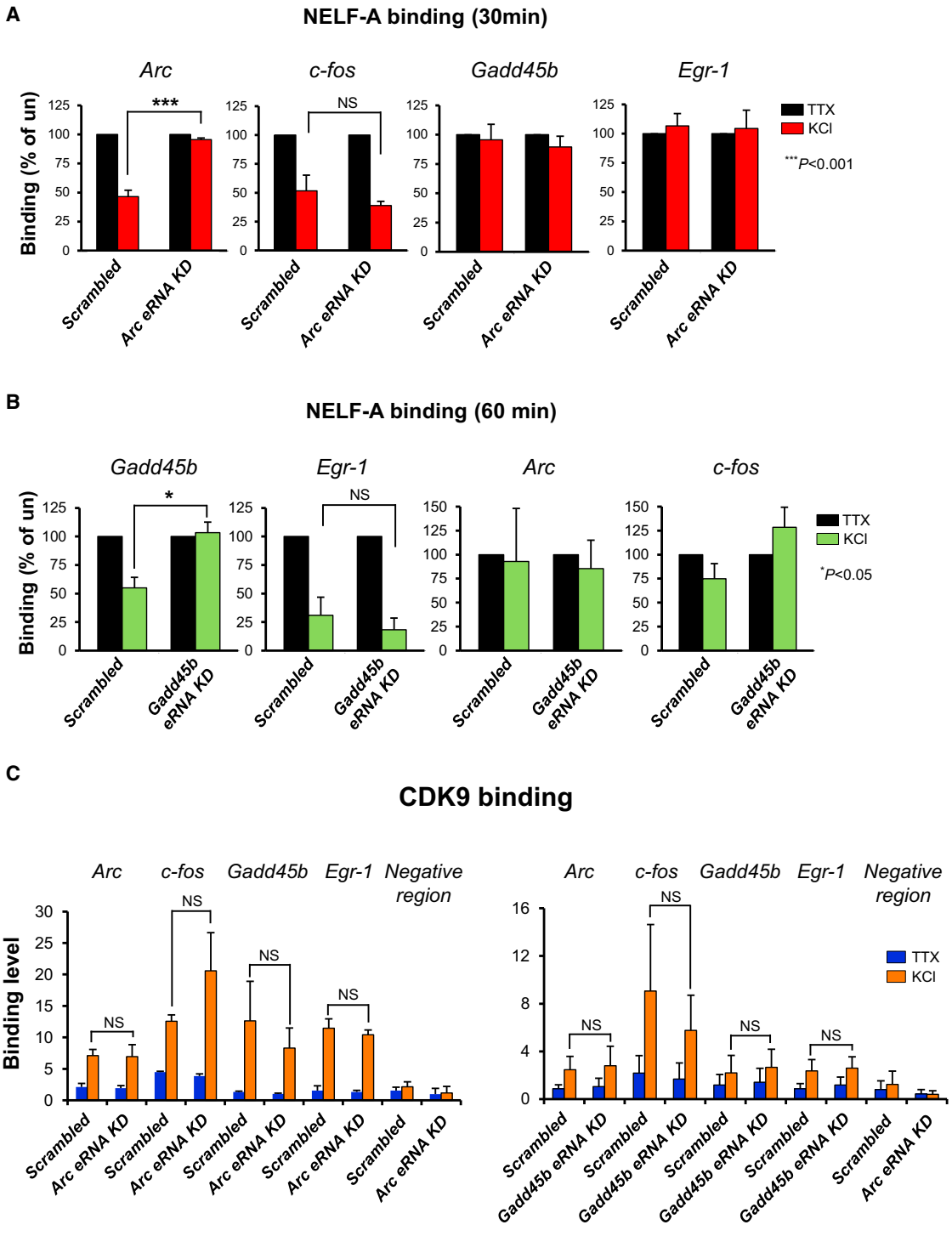

Figure 3. eRNAs Function to Facilitate the Release of the NELF Complex from Paused RNAPII

(A) Effect of *Arc* eRNA knockdown on NELF-A binding at the *Arc*, *c-fos*, *Gadd45b*, and *Egr-1* promoters (n = 2 biological replicates).

(B) Effect of *Gadd45b* eRNA knockdown on NELF-A binding at the *Arc*, *c-fos*, *Gadd45b*, and *Egr-1* promoters (n = 2 biological replicates).

(C) Effect of *Arc* eRNA and *Gadd45b* eRNA knockdown on CDK9 binding at the *Arc*, *c-fos*, *Gadd45b*, and *Egr-1* promoters (n = 2 biological replicates).

Error bars indicate SEM; p values are from a two-tailed t test. NS, not significant.

suggests that eRNAs facilitate transient release of NELF during gene activation.

To further validate our findings, we applied a locked nucleic acid (LNA) antisense-oligonucleotide method to see if we would observe the same result when the level of eRNA is reduced by another independent knockdown method. LNAs can induce degradation of the complementary target RNA by recruiting RNase H without involving the cell's RNAi machinery (Watts and Corey, 2012). Because of the low efficiency of LNA transfection in neurons, we tested the effect of LNA-mediated knockdown of *Arc* eRNA in NIH 3T3 cells, in which both *Arc* eRNA and mRNA are induced by serum stimulation (Figure S5A). As seen by shRNA-mediated knockdown of *Arc* eRNA in neurons, an LNA designed to target *Arc* eRNA was able to reduce both *Arc* eRNA and mRNA levels during serum stimulation, without affecting other IEGs induced by serum (compare Figures 1C and S5A). The *Gadd45b* gene was not induced by serum stimulation in NIH 3T3 cells, thus it was not analyzed in this experiment. Having verified the effect of *Arc* eRNA by two independent knockdown methods, we then asked if the LNA-mediated knockdown of *Arc* eRNA would also block NELF release from the *Arc* promoter during serum stimulation (Figure S5B). In NIH 3T3 cells, NELF was transiently released from the promoters of *Arc*, *c-fos*, and *Egr1* at 30 min after serum stimulation. However, knockdown of *Arc* eRNA by LNA caused the retention of NELF only at the *Arc* promoter during serum stimulation, which is consistent with the results from the shRNA-mediated knockdown experiment (compare Figures 3A and S5B). The consistent results obtained by two independent knockdown methods in two different cell types strongly suggest that the effects of *Arc* eRNA knockdown on NELF release as well as target gene induction are unlikely an artifact or indirect consequence that is associated with a particular knockdown method.

eRNAs Facilitate the Transition of Paused RNAPII to Elongation

The NELF-DSIF complex pauses RNAPII during the early elongation stage of the transcription cycle (after transcribing 20–60 nucleotides of nascent transcript) (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Rasmussen and Lis, 1993; Rougvie and Lis, 1988). If eRNA contributes to the efficient release of NELF from paused RNAPII, thereby facilitating the RNAPII transition to productive elongation, then eRNA knockdown would specifically reduce the level of RNAPII at the elongation stage but not at the initiation and preinitiation stages. The CTD of RNAPII is subject to sequential phosphorylation events during the transcription cycle (Egloff et al., 2012). Only the unphosphorylated form of RNAPII can be assembled into the preinitiation complex at the promoter. During the promoter escape and early elongation stage, the serine 5 (Ser-5) residue of the CTD is phosphorylated by the CDK7 kinase subunit of TFIIH. The serine 2 (Ser-2) residue of the CTD is then gradually phosphorylated by the CDK9 subunit of P-TEFb as RNAPII stably elongates toward the 3′ end of the gene. To test whether eRNAs selectively regulate the RNAPII transition to productive elongation, we examined the effect of *Arc* eRNA knockdown on RNAPII levels along the *Arc* gene by ChIP experiments with antibodies recognizing different forms of RNAPII: unphosphorylated RNAPII (8WG16), RNAPII-Ser5P, and Pan RNAPII. We found that when *Arc* eRNA levels were reduced using shRNAs targeting the *Arc* minus strand, there was no change in the level of unphosphorylated RNAPII at the *Arc* promoter detected by the 8WG16 antibody (Jones et al., 2004) (Figure 4B, top). Since only the unphosphorylated form of RNAPII can enter into the preinitiation complex, this suggests that recruitment of RNAPII to the promoter is unaffected by the eRNA knockdown. However, the level of RNAPII phosphorylated at Ser-5 (Ser-5P) was significantly decreased at the promoter as well as the 3′ end of the *Arc* gene during KCl stimulated conditions (Figure 4B, middle). The Pan RNAPII antibody also detected a significant reduction in total RNAPII levels at the *Arc* promoter region during stimulation, and RNAPII levels along the coding region showed a trend toward a decrease, as well, although weak (Figure 4B, bottom). Since the Pan RNAPII antibody cannot distinguish between the different forms of RNAPII, it detects the sum of the levels of RNAPIIs present in different stages of transcription. As the unphosphorylated form of RNAPII is unchanged, the decrease seen in the Pan RNAPII ChIP is likely due to a decrease in the phosphorylated, elongating RNAPII, as is seen with the Ser5P antibody, although we cannot completely rule out a possibility that recruitment of RNAPII is also affected. These results indicate that upon KCl depolarization, eRNAs play an important role in facilitating the transition of paused RNAPII to elongating RNAPII, as the level of elongating forms of RNAPII is specifically decreased when the *Arc* eRNA level is lowered.

To correlate the RNAPII ChIP results with transcription, we then selectively compared the levels of various regions of nascent *Arc* transcripts induced by KCl treatment with or without shRNA-mediated eRNA knockdown (Figures 4A and 4C) (see Supplemental Experimental Procedures). The transcript level immediately downstream of the transcription start site (detected by primer set A) in the nascent RNA sample was not reduced when compared to the scrambled control, whereas all other regions (detected by primer sets B–E) were lower. In contrast, knockdown of *Arc* eRNA resulted in a uniform decrease in the steady state level of *Arc* mRNA. The retention of similar or even higher levels of nascent transcription specifically near the 5′ end of the *Arc* gene after *Arc* eRNA knockdown is consistent with the RNAPII ChIP results and further supports a role of eRNA in the transition of paused RNAPII to productive elongation.

eRNAs Interact with NELF-E in an RRM-Dependent Manner

The observed effect of eRNA knockdown on NELF release suggests a possibility that the NELF complex and eRNAs might directly interact with each other. The NELF-E subunit contains an RRM that mediates direct interactions with various RNA sequences with little or no apparent sequence or structural constraint, which is suitable for binding to nascent RNAs derived from many genes (Rao et al., 2006; Yamaguchi et al., 2002). The RRM of NELF-E was also shown to be critical for the RNAPII pausing activity of NELF in an in vitro transcription assay (Yamaguchi et al., 2002). We postulate that when eRNAs are rapidly induced in neurons by KCl depolarization, they might compete with the nascent RNA attached to paused RNAPII for binding to NELF, thereby facilitating the release of the NELF complex. To test this idea, we performed UV-RIP with an antibody directed

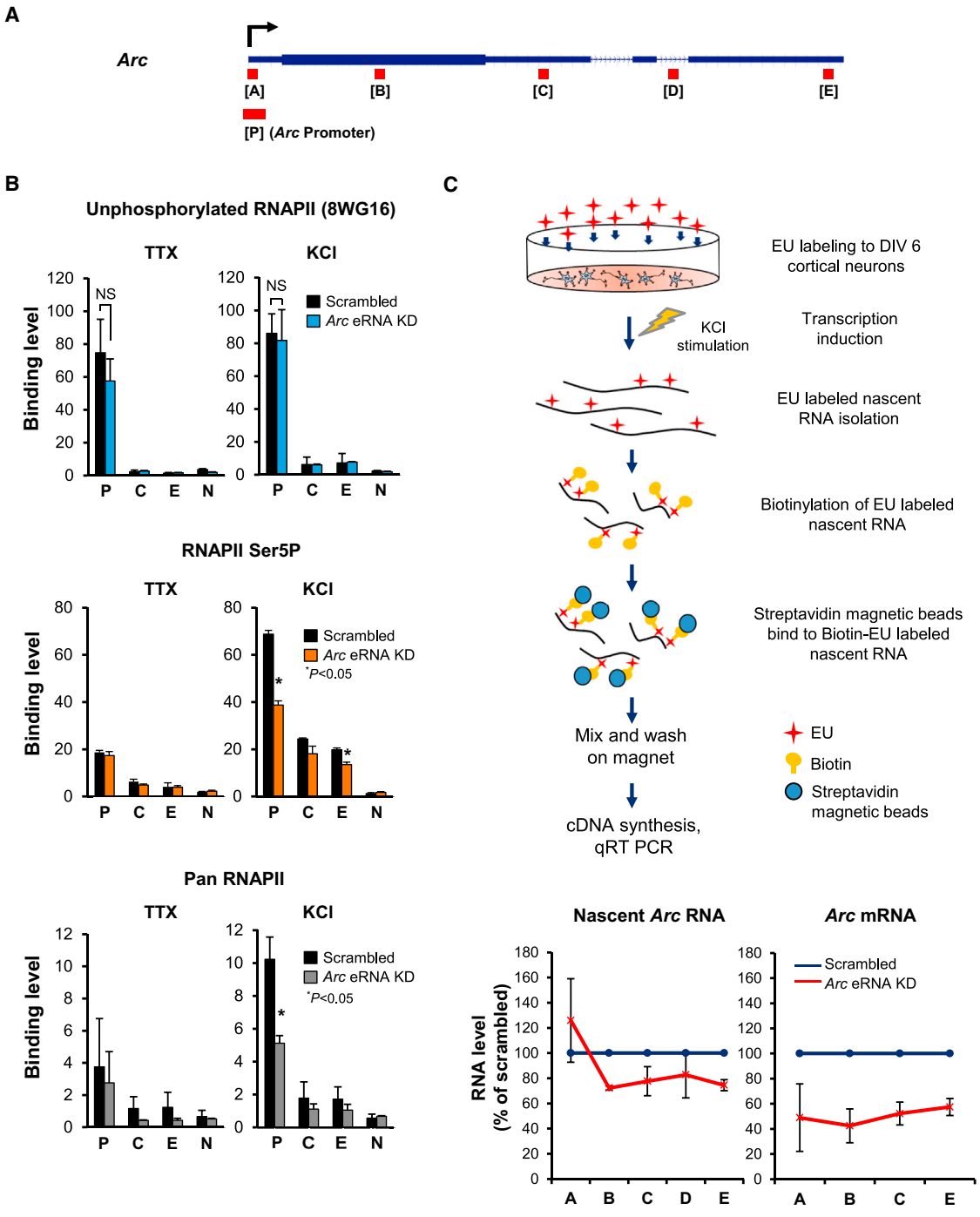

Figure 4. *Arc* eRNAs Promote Efficient Transition of RNAPII into Productive Elongation

(A) Schematic diagram of primer sets used to measure binding levels (B) or RNA levels (C) at various locations along the *Arc* gene.

(B) Effect of *Arc* eRNA knockdown on binding of unphosphorylated RNAPII (8WG16), RNAPII phosphorylated at Ser5 (Ser5P), and total levels of RNAPII (Pan RNAPII) (n = 2 biological replicates). Binding was determined at the following locations along the *Arc* gene: *Arc* promoter (P), middle (C), 3′ end (E), or a negative control region (N).

(C) Schematic diagram of nascent RNA detection using a nascent RNA capture kit (top). RNA levels at various points along the transcript (primer sets A–E) are quantified using qRT-PCR (bottom) (n = 2 biological replicates).

Error bars indicate SEM; p values are from a two-tailed t test. NS, not significant.

against the NELF-E subunit that contains the RRM in order to see if eRNAs can directly bind to the NELF-E subunit (Yamaguchi et al., 2002) (Figure 5A). We found that the proportions of *Arc*, *Gadd45b*, and *c-fos* eRNAs brought down with NELF-E at 30 min following membrane depolarization were significantly higher than those with the IgG control, whereas there was no such enrichment of target gene mRNAs or the constitutively expressed *Tbp* mRNA. We also performed eRNA pull-down experiments using biotinylated full-length *Arc* eRNA transcribed in vitro and lysates from HEK293T cells that overexpress either a FLAG-tagged wild-type (WT) or RRM-deletion mutant (ΔRRM) of the NELF-E protein. When biotinylated *Arc* eRNAs were pulled down by streptavidin beads under two different salt washing conditions, we reproducibly observed a higher level of WT NELF-E protein coprecipitated than the ΔRRM NELF-E protein (Figure 5B). These data not only provide additional evidence supporting the conclusion that eRNAs are able to interact with NELF-E, but they also demonstrate that the interaction is dependent on the RRM.

The RRM of the NELF-E Subunit Is Critical for IEG Induction in Neurons

Having found an interaction between the eRNA and the NELF-E RRM, we next examined how critical the RRM domain is for NELF function for IEG expression in neurons. To do this, we coinfected neurons with two different lentiviruses that express an shRNA against the 3′ UTR of endogenous NELF-E mRNA, and the shRNA-resistant forms of FLAG-tagged WT or ΔRRM NELF-E protein, which lack both the 5′ and 3′ UTRs. In this replacement experiment, we titrated the amount of NELF-E protein variants to be similar to the level of endogenous NELF-E protein before knockdown, to avoid any complication resulting from excessive expression of exogenous protein in neurons (Figure 5C). We observed in KCl-depolarized neurons that the induction of both *Arc* and *Gadd45b* mRNAs was similar to the scrambled control levels when endogenous NELF-E protein was replaced by the FLAG-tagged version of WT NELF-E, but replacement with the FLAG-ΔRRM NELF-E protein led to a significant decrease in the induction levels of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* mRNAs compared with the scrambled control or WT NELF-E (Figures 5C and 5D).

We also measured the binding levels of NELF complexes assembled with exogenously expressed NELF-E variants at various IEG promoters. NELF complexes formed with either endogenous NELF-E (scrambled condition) or the WT NELF-E variant showed similar levels of occupancy at the promoters of *Arc*, *Gadd45b*, *c-fos*, and *Egr1* when neuronal activity was suppressed by TTX. However, the NELF complex assembled with the FLAG-ΔRRM NELF-E protein showed a much lower level of binding at the IEG promoters, suggesting that the RRM interaction with nascent RNA emerging from initiating RNAPII is important for NELF to stably associate with RNAPII to mediate pausing in quiescent neurons (Figure 5E). A previous study in neurons showed that NELF-dependent RNAPII pausing allows rapid induction of neuronal IEG expression (Saha et al., 2011). Reduction of RNAPII pausing by knockdown of *Nelf-a* or *Nelf-e* prevented rapid *Arc* transcription, resulting in a lower level of *Arc* pre-mRNA induction than a scrambled control upon neuronal activity increase. Our results would further suggest that the interactions with various RNAs via the NELF-E RRM might be a critical mechanism for NELF to regulate IEG induction in neurons. Deletion of the RRM in NELF-E disrupted NELF binding at the promoters of these IEGs (Figure 5E), which we propose causes a reduction of RNAPII pausing, and in turn impairs rapid and synchronous induction of neuronal IEGs such as *Arc* and *Gadd45b* (Figure 5D).

DISCUSSION

RNAPII pause and release is a key rate-limiting step in the transcription of many eukaryotic genes, integrating multiple regulatory signaling pathways, and is thought to support the establishment of permissible chromatin architecture, as well as rapid and/or synchronous gene activation (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Min et al., 2011). In neurons, precise coordination and timing of gene induction in response to changes in neural activity is critical for the consolidation of synaptic plasticity, and NELF has been shown to be an important player in the rapid induction of neuronal IEGs by maintaining poised RNAPII at the promoters when neurons are quiescent (Saha et al., 2011; West and Greenberg, 2011). Our study has revealed a mechanism of eRNA action during this process to facilitate the rapid induction of IEGs. By acting as a decoy for NELF, eRNAs facilitate the transient release of NELF from paused RNAPII, which then enters into a productive elongation stage.

We did not, however, find any noticeable impact of eRNA knockdown on the chromatin looping between the enhancer and the promoter, which has been found to be commonly targeted by both ncRNA-a and some eRNAs (Lai et al., 2013; Li et al., 2013). In fact our previous study suggested that the *Arc* eRNA was unlikely to regulate the interaction between the *Arc* enhancer and promoter (Kim et al., 2010). In neurons in which the coding region, as well as the promoter, for the *Arc* gene has been deleted, *Arc* eRNA was not induced at all by membrane depolarization despite the normal level of RNAPII binding at the enhancer. An implication from this result is that the *Arc* eRNA might be transcribed only after the *Arc* enhancer is juxtaposed to the *Arc* promoter by chromosomal looping. Consistent with this idea, our 3C and ChIP analyses argue that, at least for IEGs in neurons, eRNAs do not contribute to enhancer-promoter looping (Figure 2). The eRNA (termed as ^{CE}*RNA*) expressed from the enhancer for the *Myod1* gene during differentiation of mouse C2C12 muscle cells is another example showing no regulatory activity of eRNA in looping (Mousavi et al., 2013). Instead, the ^{CE}*RNA* increases RNAPII occupancy at the promoter as well as transcription of the *Myod1* gene by regulating the chromatin accessibility, although the exact mechanism is yet to be determined. These results collectively show that eRNAs can positively regulate gene expression by various mechanisms depending on the context.

Upon gene activation, P-TEFb is recruited to the paused RNAPII complex by interacting with various transcription and/or chromatin regulators (Zhou et al., 2012). The CDK9 kinase subunit of P-TEFb then phosphorylates the RNAPII CTD at Ser-2, DSIF, and possibly NELF, which has been shown to be critical for the RNAPII transition into productive elongation

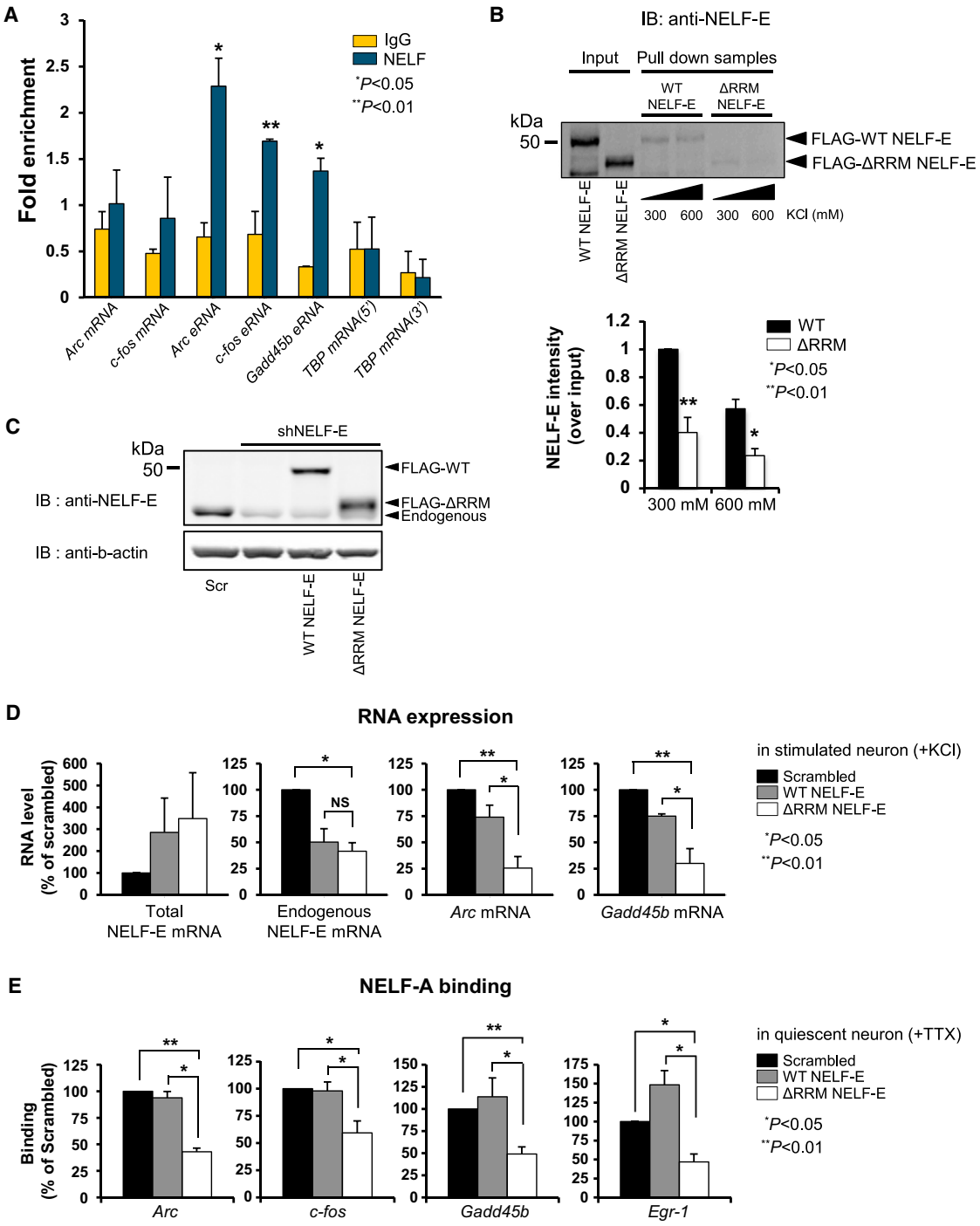

Figure 5. NELF-E Directly Interacts with eRNAs

(A) Ultraviolet-crosslinking RNA immunoprecipitation using KCl depolarized cultured cortical neuron lysates. Fold enrichment indicates the amount of RNA normalized to its respective input (n = 3 biological replicates).

(B) Pull-down of FLAG-tagged wild-type (WT) or an RRM-deletion mutant (ΔRRM) of NELF-E overexpressed in HEK293T cells by in vitro transcribed biotinylated *Arc* eRNA. The top panel shows a representative western blot probed with anti-NELF-E. The bottom panel shows the quantification of the results, normalizing each lane to the corresponding input (n = 3 biological replicates).

(C) Representative western blot showing the knockdown of NELF-E compared with a scrambled control shRNA and overexpression of either WT or ΔRRM NELF-E in cortical cultures. β-actin was used as a loading control.

(legend continued on next page)

(Fujinaga et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 1996; Wada et al., 1998b). P-TEFb-dependent phosphorylation of NELF-E occurs in a region next to the RRM (Fujinaga et al., 2004). A mutant NELF-E protein that mimics its phosphorylated form no longer binds the transactivation response element or represses HIV transcription. However, it is not known whether the P-TEFb-dependent phosphorylation of NELF is necessary and sufficient for the release of NELF from all of its cellular target promoters in vivo. On the basis of our findings, we envision that in an in vivo chromatin context, efficient transition of RNAPII from pausing to productive elongation is mediated by the coordinated actions of multiple factors, in which eRNAs contribute to the topological rearrangement of NELF in conjunction with P-TEFb action. In this scenario, eRNAs would play a modulatory role in gene induction. eRNAs may not be absolutely required for basic transcription, but their role is instead to enhance the transcriptional response by allowing NELF to be released more efficiently, resulting in a larger and precisely timed response.

Biochemical evidence clearly supports the role of NELF in transcription repression in vitro, as NELF addition to the in vitro transcription system selectively inhibits RNAPII elongation (Yamaguchi et al., 1999, 2002). However, RNAPII pausing in an in vivo context does not necessarily mean that transcription is completely silenced, but instead may be a tuning mechanism for tailoring transcriptional outputs of subjected genes depending on the cellular context (Adelman and Lis, 2012; Yamaguchi et al., 2013). The magnitude and impact of RNAPII pausing at each gene varies depending on many factors such as the strength and composition of the core promoter elements and nucleosome positioning. Genome-wide analysis pointed out that an important function of RNAPII pausing in metazoans is to maintain the chromatin architecture surrounding the promoter-proximal regions in an open and accessible state for regulatory factors and efficient RNAPII elongation (Gilchrist et al., 2010, 2008; Leibovitch et al., 2002; Yamaguchi et al., 2013). Although the promoter sequences of highly paused genes intrinsically favor nucleosome assembly, RNAPII pausing effectively antagonizes the assembly of nucleosomes immediately downstream of the TSS, thereby indirectly contributing to transcriptional upregulation. This explains why many NELF target genes are downregulated upon removal of pausing (Gilchrist et al., 2008, 2010; Leibovitch et al., 2002). Neuronal IEGs appear to be subject to this mode of regulation as well, as their expression levels are also decreased by depletion of NELF-A or NELF-E (Saha et al., 2011). We have observed a similar decrease in IEG expression levels by simply deleting the RRM region from NELF-E, which causes a reduced level of NELF binding at the IEG promoters (Figures 5D and 5E). This finding and the effect of eRNA on NELF release described earlier highlight the complex role of NELF in vivo during gene expression. Without the NELF complex to induce pausing at the promoter during unstimulated conditions, the proper chromatin architecture is not maintained and gene expression is impaired. However, if NELF does induce pausing, but is not efficiently released in response to stimulation, as with the case in which eRNAs are knocked down, gene induction is also impaired. Our findings from the replacement experiments collectively emphasize that RNA plays an important regulatory role in both RNAPII pausing and release in neurons.

The ability of RNA to act as a decoy was previously demonstrated by several studies (Hung et al., 2011; Kino et al., 2010; Rinn and Chang, 2012; Sun et al., 2013). The *Growth arrest-specific 5* (*Gas5*) noncoding RNA contains a sequence that resembles the glucocorticoid response element (GRE) and blocks the glucocorticoid-mediated induction of several genes in growth-arrested cells by competing with GREs for binding to the glucocorticoid receptor (GR). Another lncRNA, *PANDA*, is induced during the DNA damage response by p53 and inhibits the expression of apoptotic genes by sequestering the transcription factor NF-YA away from chromatin. Another decoy action of RNA can be found during X chromosome inactivation (XCI). The transcription of *Xist* ncRNA that initiates XCI is controlled by a dynamic balance between CTCF and *Jpx* RNA. At pre-XCI cells, CTCF is bound to the promoter of the *Xist* gene to suppress *Xist* expression, but upon induction of XCI, *Jpx* RNA is induced and titrates CTCF away from the promoter of the *Xist* gene to induce *Xist* transcription. Together with our findings, these examples illustrate that the decoy mechanism is probably a common strategy for ncRNAs to regulate gene expression.

Our study also highlights the importance of the spatiotemporally controlled expression and the stability of regulatory RNAs in the gene expression network (Figure 6). Both the tight control of eRNA synthesis requiring prior communication with the target promoter and the transient nature of eRNA (Figure S1C) (De Santa et al., 2010) are well suited to ensure the locus-specific action of eRNAs during gene induction. The NELF-E subunit was shown to bind various RNA sequences with little or no apparent sequence or structural constraint, which is suitable for binding to nascent RNAs derived from many genes (Rao et al., 2006; Yamaguchi et al., 2002). In this regard, the spatiotemporally controlled local abundance of eRNAs might be a critical factor for allowing them to effectively compete with nascent RNA for NELF binding at the target promoter.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Additional methods can be found in the Supplemental Experimental Procedures

Chromatin Immunoprecipitation

Cultured cortical neurons were treated overnight with 1 μM TTX. The next day, they were incubated with 55mM KCl for 30 min and then fixed with 1% formaldehyde for 10 min. ChIP was performed as described (Flavell et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2010). Detailed procedures and antibody information can be found in the Supplemental Experimental Procedures.

(D) Effect of replacement of endogenous NELF-E with FLAG-WT or FLAG-ΔRRM NELF-E on RNA levels during KCl depolarized conditions for total *Nelf-e* mRNA, endogenous *Nelf-e* mRNA, *Arc* mRNA, and *Gadd45b* mRNA (n = 3 biological replicates).

(E) Effect of replacement of endogenous NELF-E with FLAG-WT or FLAG-ΔRRM NELF-E on NELF-A binding during unstimulated conditions (n = 3 biological replicates, except *Arc*, which has n = 2 biological replicates).

Error bars indicate SEM; p values are from a two-tailed t test.

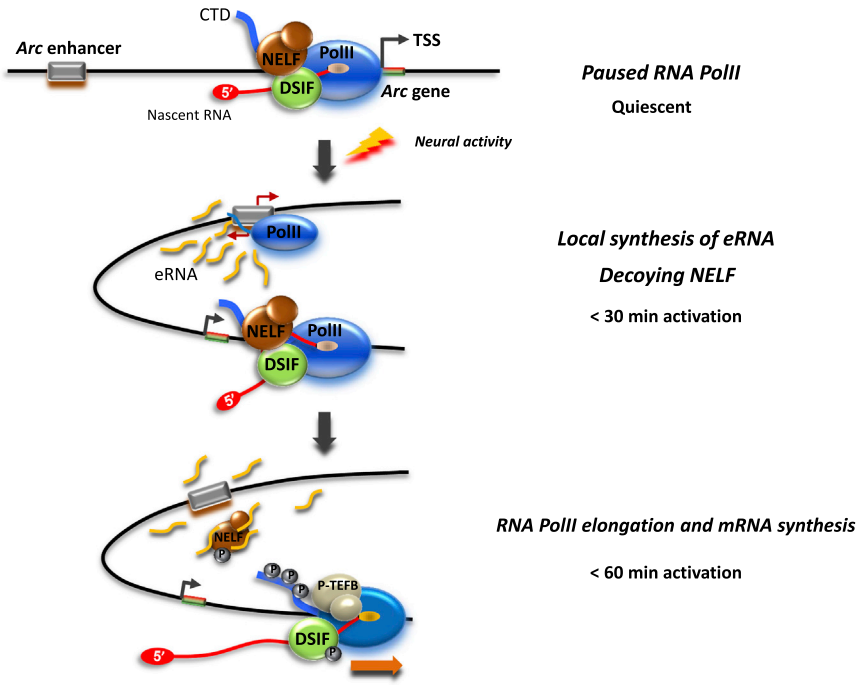

Figure 6. A Model for *Arc* eRNA Action during Early Transcription Elongation

In response to neuronal activity, the enhancer of *Arc* is brought into close proximity with the promoter. The rapid local rise of *Arc* eRNA facilitates the dissociation of the NELF complex from paused RNAPII by competing with the nascent *Arc* mRNA emerging from paused RNAPII for NELF-E binding. P-TEFb is also recruited and phosphorylates RNAPII, DSIF, and NELF. The *Arc* eRNA is degraded before diffusing out, and thus its effect is confined to the *Arc* gene. RNAPII is able to enter into productive elongation, and *Arc* mRNA induction occurs.

Analysis of EU-Labeled Nascent Transcripts

The EU-labeled transcription experiment was performed with the Click-it Nascent RNA Capture kit (Invitrogen) protocol. Briefly, cultured cortical neurons were pulsed with 0.5 mM EU for 1 hr at 37°C, and then total RNA was isolated. EU-labeled RNA was biotinylated with azide-modified biotin. Biotin-EU-labeled nascent RNA was captured on streptavidin T1 magnetic beads (Invitrogen), and then cDNA was synthesized using the High-Capacity Reverse Transcription Kit and analyzed by quantitative RT-PCR (qRT-PCR). Primers employed are listed in the Supplemental Experimental Procedures.

Ultraviolet-Crosslinking RNA Immunoprecipitation

Cultured cortical neurons (1 × 10^8 million) were harvested and UV crosslinked at 400 nm (400 mJ/cm^2) in 10 ml ice-cold PBS with protease inhibitors. Neurons were incubated with the ice-cold low-salt lysis buffer (50 mM HEPES KOH [pH 7.5], 10 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA [pH 8.0], 10% glycerol, 0.2% NP-40, and 1% Triton X-100) containing protease inhibitor and RNase inhibitor (Promega) for 10 min at 4°C, using a rotating wheel. Nuclei were resuspended in the ice-cold high-salt buffer (1 mM EDTA [pH 8.0], 0.5 mM EGTA [pH 8.0], 10 mM Tris [pH 8.0], 600 mM NaCl, 1% Triton X-100, and 0.1% DOC) containing protease inhibitor and RNase inhibitor for 1 hr at 4°C using a rotating wheel. After centrifugation, supernatants were diluted with the immunoprecipitation buffer (1 mM EDTA [pH 8.0], 0.5 mM EGTA [pH 8.0], 10 mM Tris [pH 8.0], 1% Triton X-100, and 0.1% DOC) containing protease inhibitor and RNase inhibitor and incubated overnight with anti-NELF-E (H-140; Santa Cruz Biotechnology) or anti-normal rabbit IgG (Santa Cruz), and then the lysate was incubated with Protein A/G agarose beads for 2 hr at 4°C. Subsequently, the agarose beads were washed with ChIP washing buffers. Bound proteins were eluted by the ChIP elution buffer containing RNase inhibitor for 10 min at 65°C. Samples were treated with Proteinase K and DNase I (Roche) for postimmunoprecipitation, and then the RNA was extracted by phenol-chloroform and ethanol precipitation. The extracted RNA samples were reverse transcribed into cDNA and used as a qPCR template.

Biotinylated RNA Pull-Down

The minus *Arc* eRNA sequence was amplified from a bacterial artificial chromosome/clone containing the *Arc* gene and cloned into the pBluescript SK(−) vector. The *Arc* minus strand was transcribed from the T7 promoter using a commercial in vitro transcription kit (MegaScript; Ambion), supplementing the dUTP with 25% bio-16-UTP to produce biotinylated transcripts. The pull-down was performed as described previously (Tsai et al., 2010), with the following modifications. Ten micrograms of biotinylated *Arc* eRNA was heated to 85°C for 2 min, placed on ice for 2 min and supplemented with an RNA structure buffer (10 mM Tris [pH 7], 0.1 M KCl, and 10 mM $MgCl_2$), and incubated at room temperature for 20 min. HEK293T cells were transfected with constructs containing FLAG-tagged wild-type or ΔRRM NELF-E and harvested using the lysis buffer (150 mM NaCl, 1% TX-100, 2 mM EDTA, and 50 mM Tris [pH 7.5]). Five hundred micrograms of lysate was diluted with the pull-down buffer (100 mM KCl, 20 mM HEPES [pH 7.5], 1.5 mM $MgCl_2$, 0.2 mM EDTA, and 0.5 mM DTT) for a final concentration of 0.1% TX-100. The biotinylated RNA was incubated with the lysate for 1 hr at room temperature with rotation. One hundred microliters of M-280 Streptavidin Dynabeads (Invitrogen) was added to the lysate-RNA mixture and further incubated for 1 hr at room temperature. Beads were washed with the wash buffer (20 mM HEPES [pH 7.5], 1.5 mM $MgCl_2$, 0.5 mM DTT, 0.2 mM EDTA, and 0.1% TX-100) containing either 300 mM or 600 mM KCl. Protein was eluted using the SDS buffer (120 mM Tric-HCl [pH 6.8], 20% glycerol, and 4% SDS) at 100°C for 10 min. Lysate was run alongside 1/40 input on a 10% SDS-PAGE gel, transferred using the Trans-blot Turbo (Biorad), and probed with anti-NELF-E (Abcam; 1:1000).

All experiments carried out in this study that involved the use of animals were reviewed and approved by the IACUC committee at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Supplemental Information includes Supplemental Experimental Procedures and five figures and can be found with this article online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.molcel.2014.08.023.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

T.-K.K., K.S., and J.-Y.J. designed the project, and K.S. and J.-Y.J. performed most of the experiments. K.S. contributed to the design and preparation of the *Arc* eRNA knockdown reagents, expression kinetics analyses of IEGs, and transcript mapping and functional characterization of *Arc* eRNAs in gene expression, as well as NELF in vitro pull-down and replacement assays. K.S. and J.-Y.J. jointly performed UV-RIP experiments. J.-Y.J. performed the characterization of NELF, CDK9, MED1, RAD21, and RNAPII binding, 3C analysis, and nascent transcript analysis. X.L. contributed to the designing and preparation of lentiviral vectors encoding shRNAs against *Gadd45b*. J.K.W. contributed to the design and preparation of the LNAs, and C.M. produced the LNAs. K.S. and T.-K.K. wrote the manuscript with input from J.-Y.J. All authors discussed the results and commented on the manuscript.

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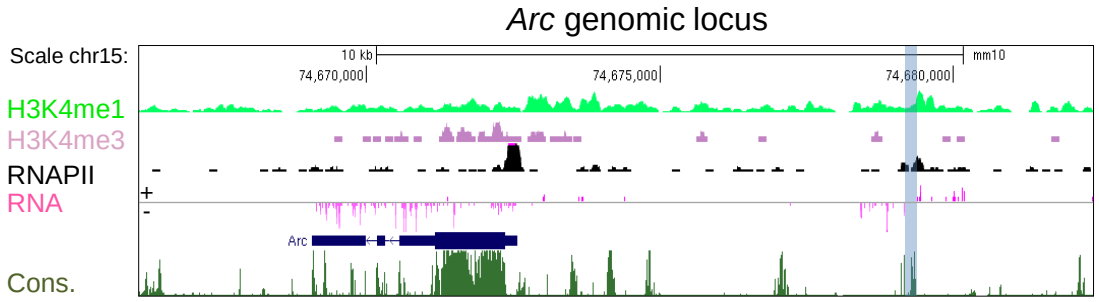
Supplemental Information

Enhancer RNA Facilitates NELF Release from Immediate Early Genes

Katie Schaukowitch, Jae-Yeol Joo, Xihui Liu, Jonathan K. Watts, Carlos Martinez, and Tae-Kyung Kim

Supplemental Figures :

A



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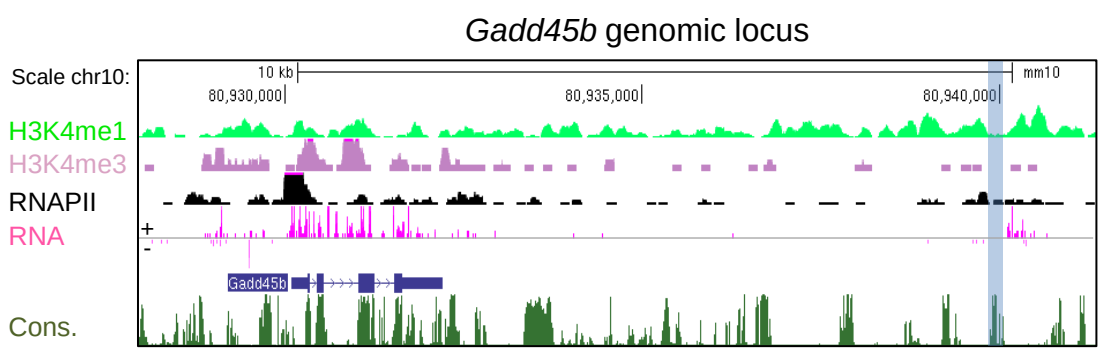

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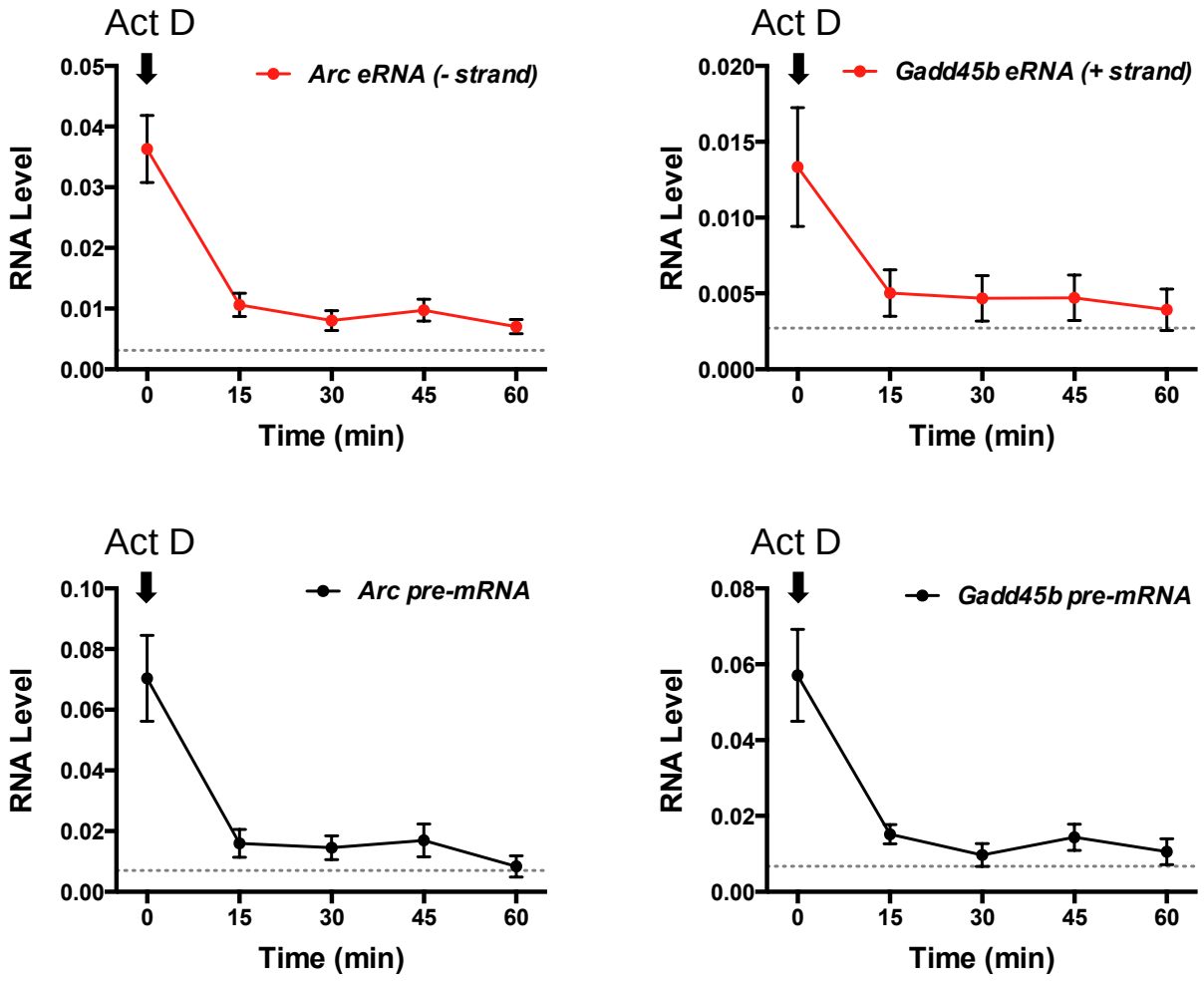
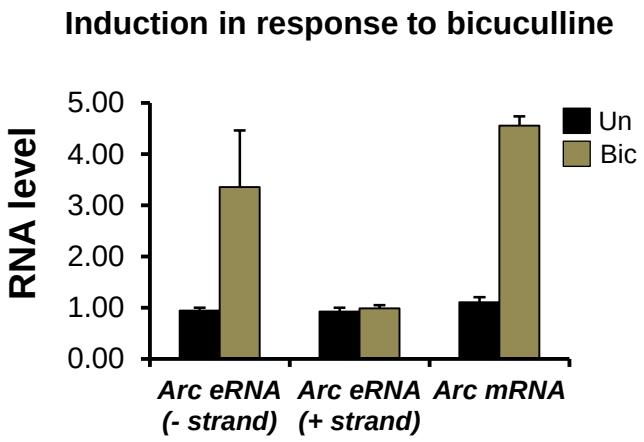
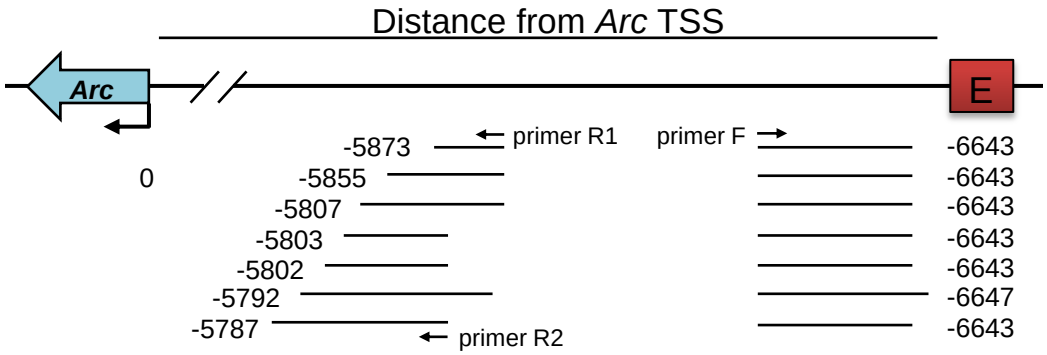


Figure S1. Time course analysis of Arc and Gadd45b eRNAs, pre-mRNAs, and mRNAs, related to Figure 1. **(A)** A UCSC genome browser view of the *Arc* genomic locus with RNA-seq data from Kim *et al.*, 2010 (*1*) aligned with binding profiles of H3K4 mono-methylation, H3K4 tri-methylation, RNAPII, as well as the evolutionary conservation. **(B)** A UCSC genome browser view of the *Gadd45b* genomic locus. Blue bars represent the location of the enhancer regions. **(C)** Cortical neurons were depolarized with 55 mM KCl at DIV 6. After 30 min of stimulation, Actinomycin D was added (black arrow). Expression levels of *Arc* and *Gadd45b* eRNA and pre-mRNA were measured at the indicated time points using qRT-PCR and normalized to *Tbp* mRNA. The grey dotted line represents the average baseline, during TTX conditions, for each RNA (n = 3 biological replicates). Error bars represent s.e.m.

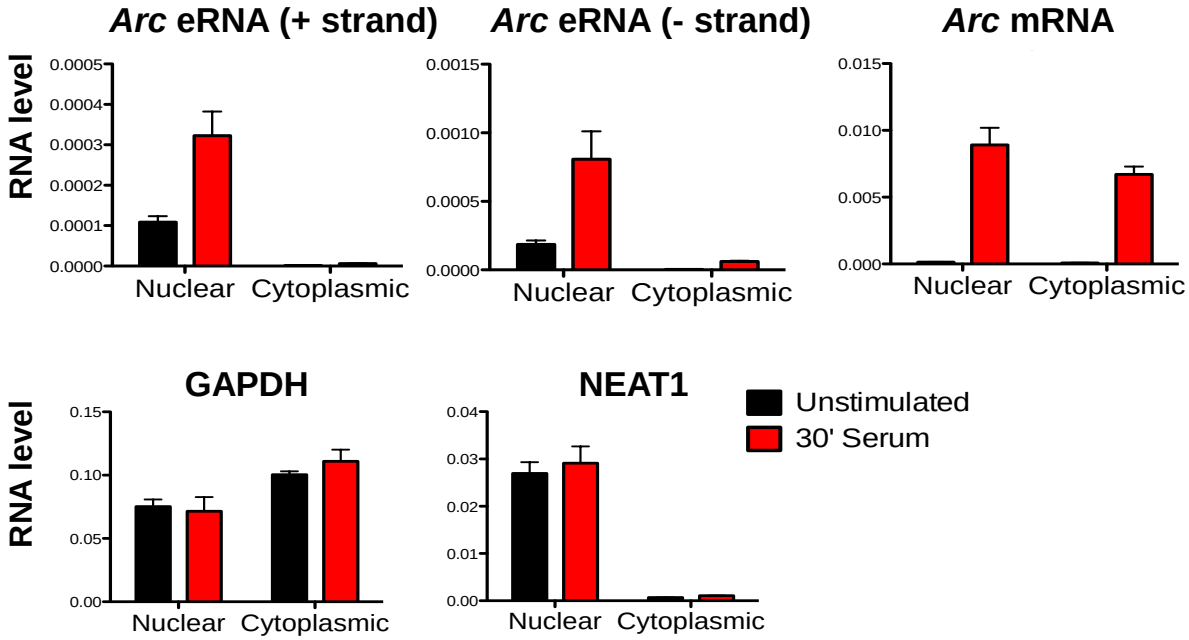
A


Induction in response to bicuculline
RNA level
5.00
4.00
3.00
2.00
1.00
0.00
Un
Bic
Arc eRNA (- strand)
Arc eRNA (+ strand)
Arc mRNA

B


Distance from Arc TSS
Arc
E
primer R1
primer F
primer R2
0
-5873
-5855
-5807
-5803
-5802
-5792
-5787
-6643
-6643
-6643
-6643
-6643
-6647
-6643

C


Arc eRNA (+ strand)
Arc eRNA (- strand)
Arc mRNA
RNA level
Nuclear
Cytoplasmic
GAPDH
NEAT1
Unstimulated
30' Serum

D

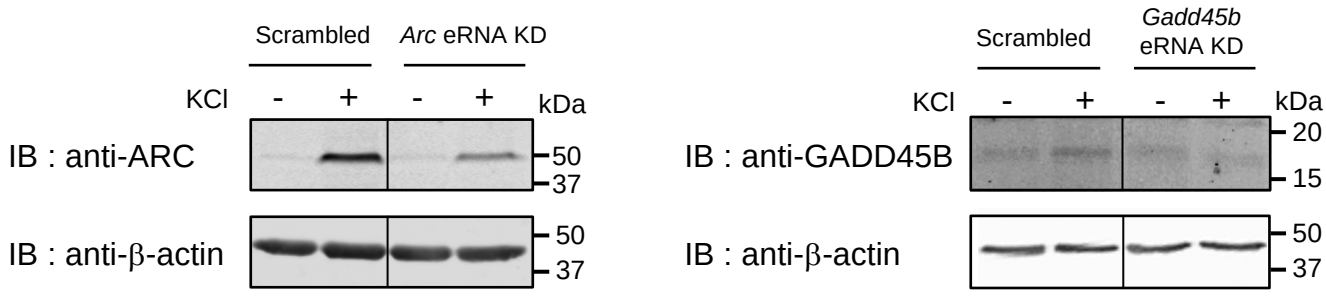

Scrambled
Arc eRNA KD
KCl
kDa
IB : anti-ARC
IB : anti-β-actin
50
37
Scrambled
Gadd45b eRNA KD
IB : anti-GADD45B
20
15

Figure S2. Characterization of eRNAs, related to Figure 1. **(A)** Cortical neurons at DIV 12-14 were treated with 50 μM bicuculline for 30 min, and expression levels of *Arc* eRNAs (plus and minus strand) and mRNA were measured using qRT-PCR and normalized to the level of *Tbp* mRNA (n = 2 biological replicates). **(B)** Mapping the 5' and 3' ends of the minus strand of the *Arc* eRNA transcript by RNA circularization. Black arrows represent the primers used during nested PCR. Values given are relative to the *Arc* TSS. **(C)** NIH3T3 cells were stimulated with 20% serum for 30 min. RNA from nuclear and cytoplasmic fractions was extracted and quantified with qRT-PCR. Both strands of *Arc* eRNAs and *Arc* mRNA were examined for their relative abundance in the nuclear and cytoplasmic fractions. *NEAT1* lncRNA was used as a positive control for nuclear-localized RNA. **(D)** Cortical neurons infected with lentivirus encoding either a scrambled control shRNA or shRNA against *Arc* eRNA (- strand) or *Gadd45b* eRNA (+ strand) were lysed and the levels of ARC and GADD45B proteins were analyzed by western blotting. Beta (β)-actin protein was also blotted as a loading control. Extra lanes were removed from the GADD45B western blot image for clarity, and the lines indicate the position of the deletion. Error bars represent s.e.m.

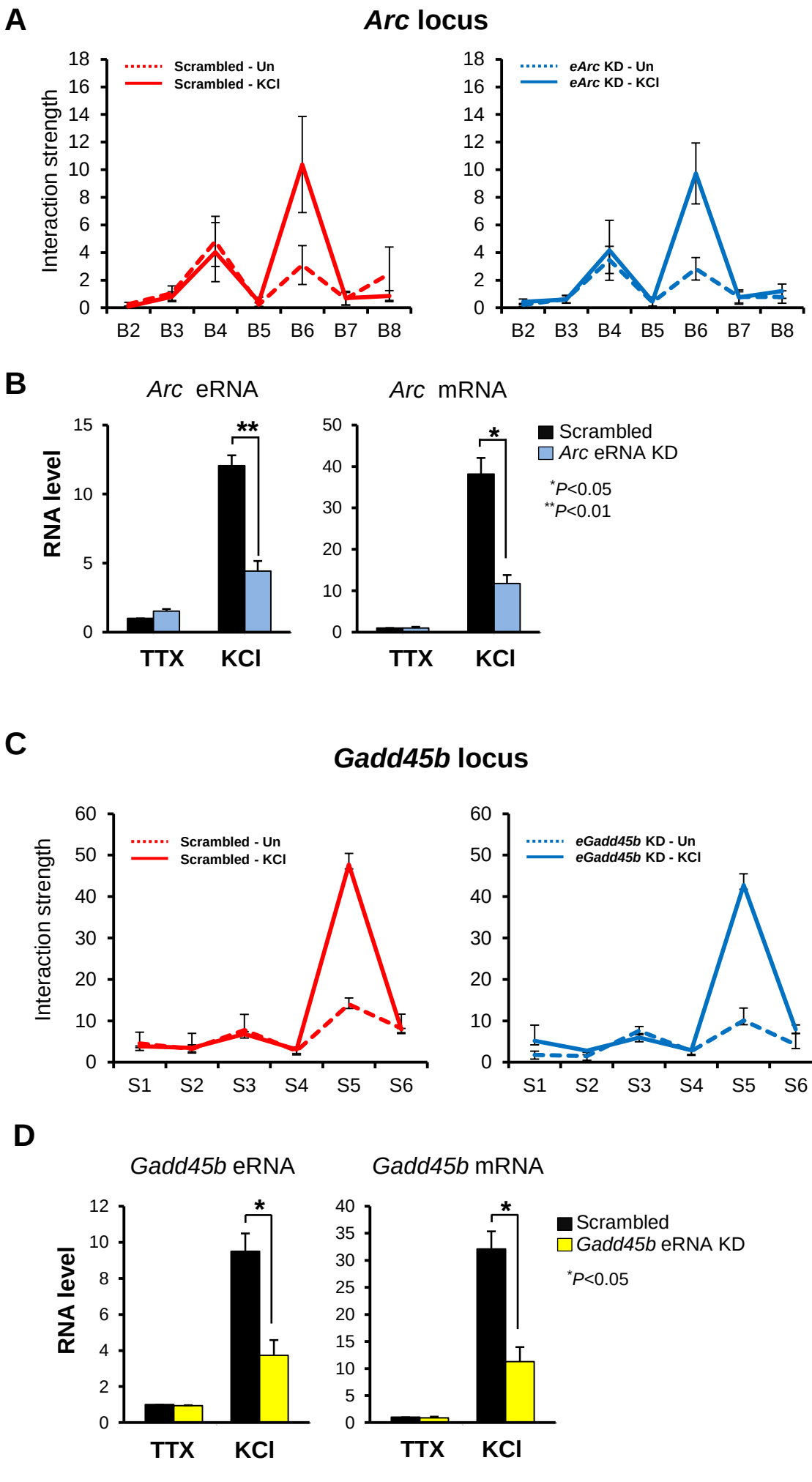

A
Arc locus
Interaction strength
Scrambled - Un
Scrambled - KCl
eArc KD - Un
eArc KD - KCl
B2 B3 B4 B5 B6 B7 B8
B
Arc eRNA
Arc mRNA
RNA level
Scrambled
Arc eRNA KD
*P<0.05
**P<0.01
TTX
KCl
C
Gadd45b locus
Scrambled - Un
Scrambled - KCl
eGadd45b KD - Un
eGadd45b KD - KCl
S1 S2 S3 S4 S5 S6
D
Gadd45b eRNA
Gadd45b mRNA
Scrambled
Gadd45b eRNA KD
*P<0.05

Figure S3. The effect of eRNA knockdown on chromosomal interactions, related to Figure 2. **(A,C)** The same 3C data shown in Figures 2A and 2B are presented here in a line graph representation with error bars (n = 3 biological replicates). Please note that in this graph, each value represents the interaction strength between the indicated site and the corresponding promoter. **(B,D)** Effects of eRNA knockdown measured from the same neurons prepared for the 3C assay (n = 2 biological replicates). Error bar indicates s.e.m.; P-value from two-tailed t-test.

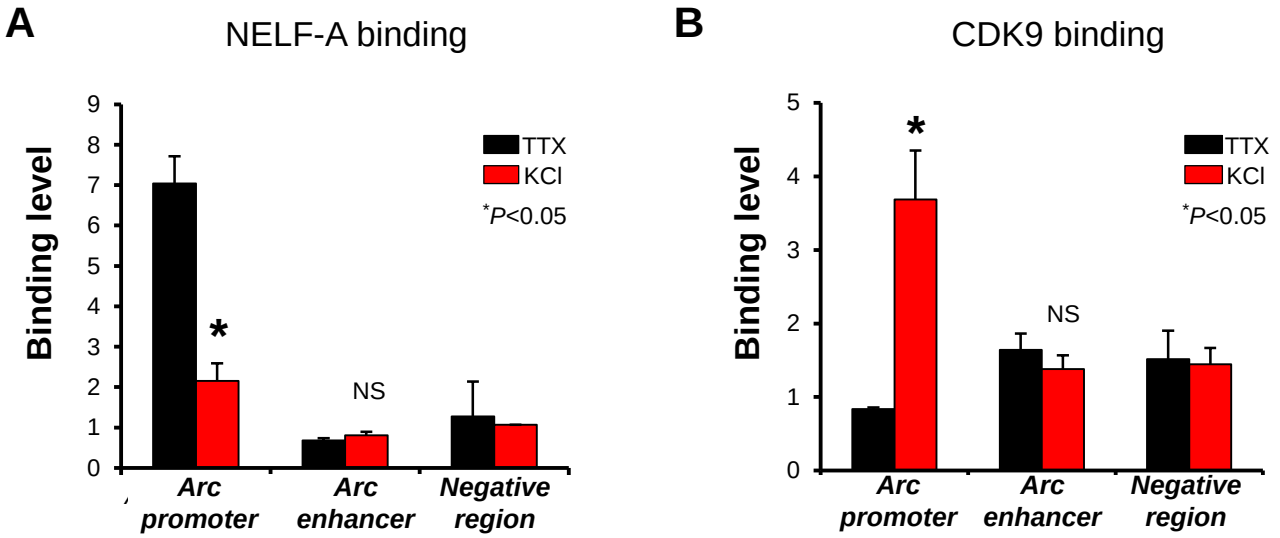
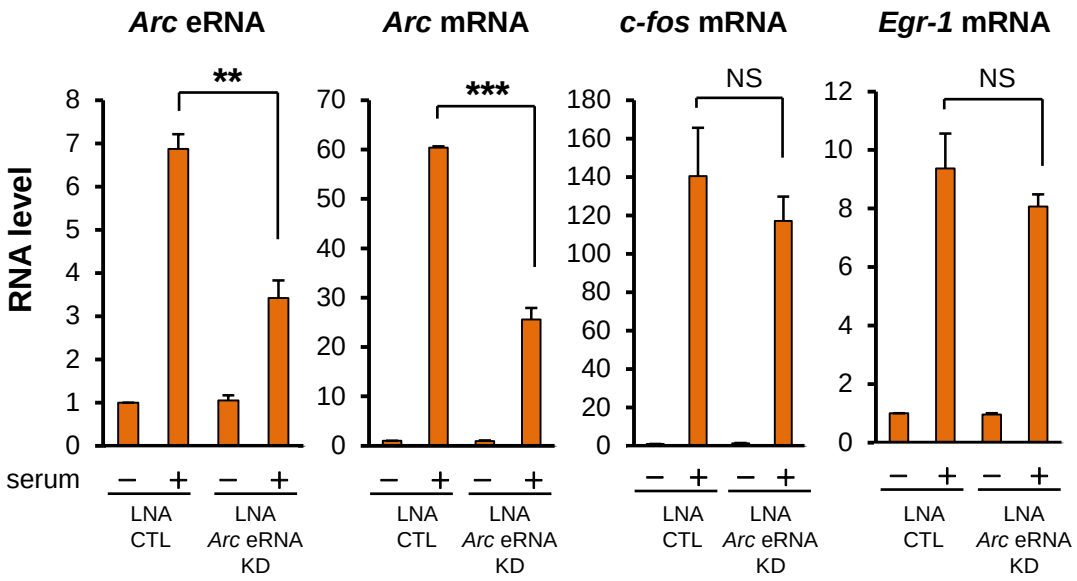


Figure S4. Reciprocal binding pattern of NELF and CDK9 at the Arc promoter and enhancer, related Figure 3. **(A)** NELF-A binding profile at the *Arc* promoter and enhancer in quiescent and 30 min KCl stimulation conditions (n = 3 biological replicates). **(B)** CDK9 binding profile at the *Arc* promoter and enhancer in quiescent and 30 min KCl stimulation conditions (n = 3 biological replicates). Error bars indicate s.e.m. *P*-value from two-tailed *t*-test. NS, not significant.

A


Arc eRNA
Arc mRNA
c-fos mRNA
Egr-1 mRNA
RNA level
**
***
NS
NS
serum
− + − +
LNA CTL
LNA Arc eRNA KD

B

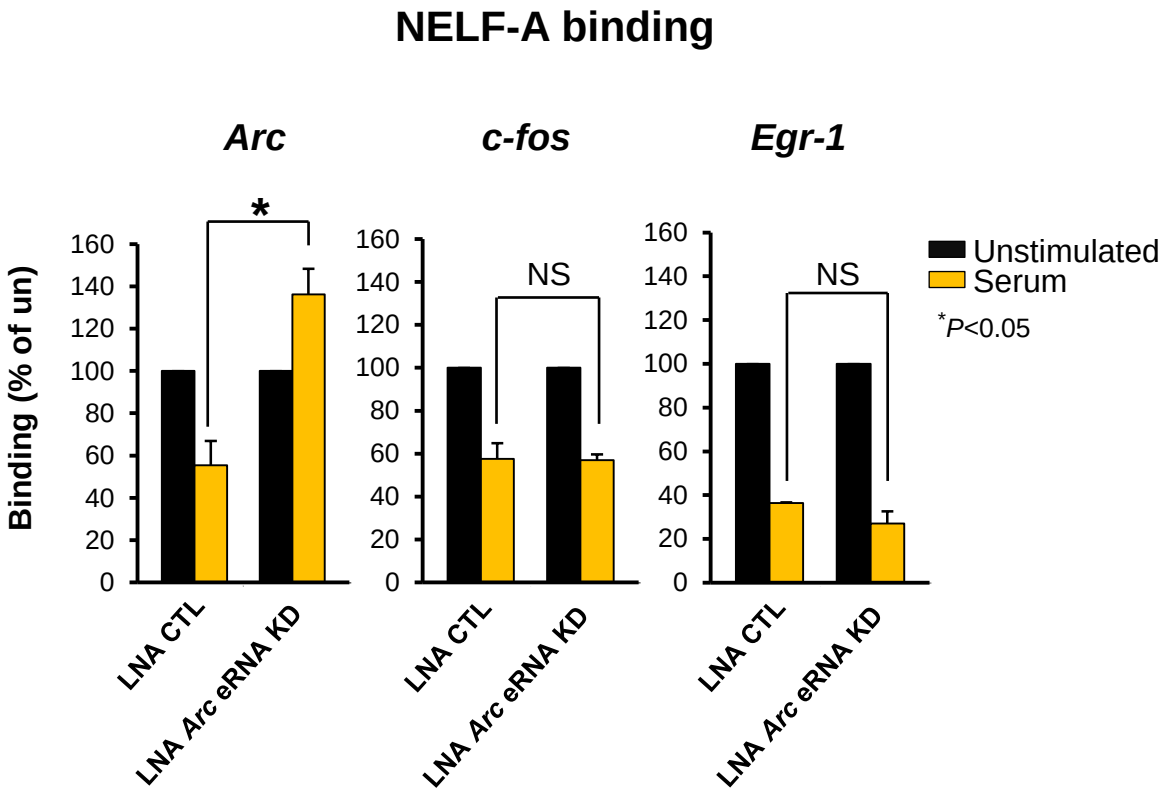

NELF-A binding
Arc
c-fos
Egr-1
Binding (% of un)
*
NS
NS
Unstimulated
Serum
*P<0.05
LNA CTL
LNA Arc eRNA KD

Figure S5. Reduction of eRNA expression inhibits the release of the NELF complex in NIH3T3 cells, related to Figure 3. **(A)** Knockdown of *Arc* eRNA using LNA decreased the induction levels of *Arc* eRNA and mRNA, but not *c-fos* and *Egr-1* mRNA expression levels. *Gadd45b* mRNA was not induced in the 3T3 cells. Levels of indicated RNAs were measured for LNA control and *Arc* eRNA knockdown (- strand) conditions after 30 min serum or unstimulated in NIH3T3 cells and normalized to the level of TBP mRNA (n = 3 biological replicates). **(B)** Effect of *Arc* eRNA knockdown on NELF-A binding at the *Arc*, *c-fos* and *Egr-1* promoters (n = 2 biological replicates). Error bars indicate s.e.m. *P*-value from two-tailed *t*-test. NS, not significant.

Supplemental Experimental Procedures

Cell culture, stimulation, transfections, and retroviral infections. Primary mouse cortical neurons were dissected at embryonic day 16.5 (E16.5), and cultured in Neurobasal (NB) media supplemented with B-27 and Glutamax. For KCl mediated membrane depolarization, at days in vitro (DIV) 5 neurons were made quiescent by incubating with 1 μM TTX (Tocris) overnight, and then treated with 55 mM KCl to stimulate gene expression. For the bicuculline experiment, neurons at DIV 12-14 were treated with 50 μM bicuculline for 30 min. To generate lentiviruses, HEK293T cells were transfected using Fugene-HD (Promega) with a lentiviral construct containing the shRNA, along with the helper plasmids Δ8.9 and VsVg, and allowed to incubate for 48-72 h. For experiments with KCl mediated membrane depolarization, cells were infected with the lentiviral supernatant at DIV 3 and harvested at DIV 6-7.

qRT-PCR. Total RNA was prepared from DIV6 cortical neurons using Trizol reagent (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer protocols. Subsequently, RNA samples were reverse transcribed into cDNA using a High-Capacity reverse transcription kit (Applied Biosystems). Primers employed are listed below. PCR amplification conditions have been described (Kim et al., 2010). Statistical significance was evaluated by an unpaired two-tailed Student's *t*-test.

LNA transfection of NIH3T3 cells. NIH 3T3 cells were transfected using Lipofectamine RNAiMAX (Invitrogen). 50nM of scrambled or *Arc* eRNA KD LNA were mixed with transfection reagent and incubated for 20 min at room temperature and then added into the cells. Cells were incubated with the transfection mixture overnight at 37℃, then the media was replaced with DMEM (Dulbecco's Modification of Eagle's Medium) with 10% fetal bovine

serum (FBS) for 24 hours. The cells were then serum starved (in DMEM containing 0.5% FBS) for 24 h, after which the cells were stimulated (in DMEM containing 20% FBS) for 30 min, followed by immediate harvest with Trizol reagent (Invitrogen). The *Arc* minus strand targeting sequence is 5'–TGTGCAACCATATATG–3', with LNA nucleotides underlined.

Chromatin Immunoprecipitation (ChIP).

Details of the ChIP procedure are as follows. Neuronal cell lysate was incubated overnight with anti-NELF-A (A-20; SantaCruz), anti-Cdk9 (ab6544; abcam), anti-Ser5P Pol II (ab5131; abcam), anti-8WG16 Pol II (COVANCE), anti-Pol II (N-20; SantaCruz), anti-RAD21 (ab992; abcam) or anti-Med1 (A300-793A; Bethyl labs) and then the lysate was incubated with Protein A/G agarose beads (Santa Cruz) for 2 h at 4℃. Subsequently, the agarose beads were washed with Low (150 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl, 2 mM EDTA, 1% TritonX-100 and 0.1% SDS) and High (500 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl, 2 mM EDTA, 1% TritonX-100 and 0.1% SDS) salt solutions, then washed using LiCl solution (250 mM LiCl, 10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA, 1% deoxycholic acid and 1% NP-40). Bound proteins were eluted by ChIP elution buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA and 1% SDS) for 10 min at 65℃. Samples were treated with RNase A (Qiagen) and Proteinase K (NEB) for post-immunoprecipitation and then the DNA was purified using a commercial DNA purification kit (Qiagen).

RNA Circularization. Cultured cortical neurons were treated overnight with 1 μM TTX before being stimulated for 30 min with 55 mM KCl. Circularization was performed as previously described in (Kim et al., 2010). Briefly, RNA was extracted using Trizol (Invitrogen) as above, and treated with DNase I (Invitrogen) for 30 min in 1X DNase I buffer. DNase I was inactivated

using 100 ul 25 mM EDTA and incubating at 75℃ for 10 min. RNA was extracted using Phenol/Chloroform and precipitated with ethanol. 10 ug of RNA was decapped using 25 U Tobacco Acid Pyrophosphatase (TAP, Epicentre Biotechnologies) for 1 h at 37℃, followed by Phenol/Chloroform extraction and ethanol precipitation. RNA was then circularized with T4 RNA ligase in the following reaction: 8 ug RNA, 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.6), 10 mM $MgCl_2$, 1 mM ATP, 5% PEG-8000, 20 U T4 RNA Ligase, with a final volume of 2 ml. The reaction was incubated at 37℃ for 18 h, followed by 10 min at 65℃. Phenol/Chloroform extraction and ethanol precipitation were again performed. 1 ug of circularized RNA was reverse transcribed using the High-Capacity reverse transcription kit (Applied Biosystems). The cDNA was used in nested PCR, using Phusion High Fidelity polymerase in the HF buffer (NEB) according to the manufacturer's instructions, with the primers listed below. PCR products were cloned using the TOPO TA cloning kit for sequencing (Invitrogen).

Chromosome Conformation Capture (3C). 3C analysis was performed as described (Tolhuis et al., 2002). Briefly, cultured neurons were harvested and cross-linked with 1% formaldehyde. Cross-linked cells were lysed with ice-cold lysis buffer (10 mM Tris, pH 8.0, 10 mM NaCl, 0.2% NP-40) containing protease inhibitor (Roche) for 15 min at 4℃ using rotating wheel. Nuclei were resuspended in the 1X NEB buffer 3 containing 0.1% SDS and incubated for 10 min at 65℃. TritonX-100 was added to 1% and samples were then digested with BglII and NcoI or SacI restriction enzymes overnight at 37℃. SDS was added to 1.6% in order to inactivate the restriction enzyme for 25 min at 65℃. Triton X-100 was added to final concentration 1% and then samples were incubated at 37℃ for 1 hr, mixing occasionally. DNA was ligated using T4 ligase for 4 hr at 16℃ and 30 min at room temperature. Subsequently, 200 ug of protease K was

added in order to remove the protein and then incubated overnight at 65℃ to reverse cross-link. The next day, samples were incubated with RNase (1 ug/ml) for 1 hr at 37℃, and the DNA was purified by phenol chloroform extraction and ethanol precipitation. The purified DNA was used as a qPCR template. Primers employed are listed below. A bacterial artificial chromosome (BAC) clone containing the *Arc* or *Gadd45b* genes were used as a control template. The BAC plasmid was digested with BglII, NcoI or SacI restriction enzymes overnight at 37℃ and then ligated by T4 DNA ligase for 4 hr at 16℃. Subsequently, ligated DNA was purified by phenol/chloroform extraction and ethanol precipitation.

Western blot analysis. Protein extracts from cultured cortical neurons (DIV 6-7) were prepared with sample buffer (60 mM Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 2% sodium dodecyl sulfate, 10% glycerol), and before loading mixed with loading buffer (5% 2-mercaptoethanol, 0.1% bromophenol blue) and boiled for denaturation. Proteins were separated by SDS-PAGE and analyzed by Western blot with anti-Arc (Synaptic Systems, 1:1000), anti-Gadd45b (H-70; SantaCruz, 1:500), anti-β-actin (Sigma-Aldrich, 1:5000), or anti-NELF-E (Abcam, 1:1000). Images were acquired by Odyssey (LI-COR) and quantified using ImageJ.

***Nelf-e* Constructs.** The open reading frame of mouse NELF-E (Origene) was cloned into p3XFLAG-CMV. The RNA recognition motif (RRM), consisting of amino acids 254 to 328, was deleted in the ΔRRM mutant. For replacement experiments, FLAG-tagged wildtype or ΔRRM NELF-E was also cloned into the pLLX vector containing a short hairpin RNA against NELF-E, as described previously (Zhou, et al. 2006), inserting FLAG-NELF-E after the Ubiquitin promoter followed by an IRES and GFP to monitor expression. To obtain maximum knockdown while maintaining levels of overexpression similar to endogenous, cells were infected with both

shNELF-E alone as well as the overexpression constructs. The shNELF-E targeting sequence is 5'-CTGGATTCCTTGTGCCTCATA-3'.

Primers for 3C

BglII *Arc* pro-rev anchor primer	AGTCAGTTGAGGCTCAGCAA
BglII *Arc*-B2 primer	CTTTTTGCCCTGCATTAGAGT
BglII *Arc*-B3 primer	GGCTCAGGAATTTGTCTCTC
BglII *Arc*-B4 primer	GAGGTCTTGTATCCTGGCTG
BglII *Arc*-B5 primer	CACACCAAATCTGCAGAGATT
BglII *Arc*-B6 primer	GGCTGGAGACTGGTGACATT
BglII *Arc*-B7 primer	CAGGTCCTGTCTATGCTCTT
BglII *Arc*-B8 primer	GCATAAAGGCAGGCAACACA
SacI *Gadd45b* pro-anchor primer	CGTGCAGTACTGCGGCTG
SacI *Gadd45b*-S1 primer	CAGCAGGGCAAGGAGATAC
SacI *Gadd45b*-S2 primer	GGCTACATGAGATTCAGTCTC
SacI *Gadd45b*-S3 primer	CAGGTGTATGTTCACGCAGA
SacI *Gadd45b*-S4 primer	CTACACACCGCACCTACTG
SacI *Gadd45b*-S5 primer	CAGGCACCCAGTGCTGAAG
SacI *Gadd45b*-S6 primer	GAGCAGGGTTCAGAAAAGGG

Primers for qRT-PCR

Arc promoter forward	GAGGAGCTTAGCGAGTGTGG
Arc promoter reverse	AGCATAAATAGCCGCTGGTG
Arc enhancer forward	GGCTGGAGACTGGTGACATT
Arc enhancer reverse	CCATCTGCTTTCTCCTGGAA
c-fos promoter forward	GCCCAGTGACGTAGGAAGTC
c-fos promoter reverse	GTCGCGGTTGGAGTAGTAGG
Gadd45b promoter forward	CAATCTCAGCGCGGGATACT
Gadd45b promoter reverse	CGCTGCGAGCGGTTTATATG
Gadd45b enhancer forward	CTGAGTTCTCTCCCCAGCAC
Gadd45b enhancer reverse	CTCACAGCAATCCTGCTTCA
Egr-1 promoter forward	CTCTTGGATGGGAGGGCTTC
Egr-1 promoter reverse	TCAAGGGTCTGGAACAGCAC

Negative region forward	ACCTGAAACTGTGGGGACAC
Negative region reverse	ATGCCCTTTTGTCAACTTGG
Arc enhancer (Minus) forward	GAGATGATTTGGTGGCTGGT
Arc enhancer (Minus) reverse	GAGATGATTTGGTGGCTGGT
Arc coding forward	GTGAAGACAAGCCAGCATGA
Arc coding reverse	CCAAGAGGACCAAGGGTACA
c-fos coding forward	ATCCTTGGAGCCAGTCAAGA
c-fos coding reverse	ATGATGCCGGAAACAAGAAG
Gadd45b enhancer forward	CTGAGTTCTCTCCCCAGCAC
Gadd45b enhancer reverse	CTCACAGCAATCCTGCTTCA
Gadd45b coding forward	GTTCTGCTGCGACAATGACA
Gadd45b coding reverse	TTGGCTTTTCCAGGAATCTG
Egr-1 coding forward	AACACTTTGTGGCCTGAACC
Egr-1 coding reverse	AGGCAGAGGAAGACGATGAA
TBP forward	TGACTCCTGGAATTCCCATC
TBP reverse	TTGCTGCTGCTGTCTTTGTT
TBP-5’ forward	GGTTTCTGCGGTCGCGTC
TBP-5’ reverse	GCAAACTCCGGGGACCCG
TBP-3’ forward	GTTCTCCTTATTTTTGTTTCTGG
TBP-3’ reverse	GTTCTAACACAGAAAATGCCAC
GAPDH forward	AGGTCGGTGTGAACGGATTTG
GAPDH reverse	TGTAGACCATGTAGTTGAGGTCA
NEAT1 forward	TTGGGACAGTGGACGTGTGG
*NEAT1*reverse	TCAAGTGCCAGCAGACAGCA
Nelf-e coding forward	TCAAACGTTCTCGGACCCTG
Nelf-e reverse	CTCTGGAACGGCTGGAAAGT
Nelf-e 3’ UTR forward	AGCTGGATTCCTTGTGCCTC
Nelf-e 3’ UTR reverse	GAGGCTGACGGAGGTGAAAA

Primers for analysis of EU-labeled nascent transcripts

[A] forward	CAGGCTCGTCGCCGCTGAA
[A] reverse	GCAGAGCTCAAGCGAGTTCTC
[B] forward	CTGCTTGAACTCCCACCACTT
[B] reverse	CCTGAGCCACCTGGAAGAGT
[C] forward	CTTTAGCATCTGCCCTAGGAT
[C] reverse	TCATTCTGCTCCAGTGTCCAG
[D] forward	GTGAGAGAACTGCTCACCAC
[D] reverse	CTATCCTGACCAAGCCTCAG
[E] forward	AGATGGTATGGGCAGACAGC
[E] reverse	GGACTAGGGAGACCCTGGAG

Primers for RNA circularization

MinusCirc1 forward	GATTTGGTGGCTGGTGTTCT
MinusCirc1reverse	AAAGCTAAAGGGGGCTACGA
MinusCirc2 forward	GGCAGAGTTACGAACCAGGA
MinusCirc2 reverse	CCAGACCTGTGCAGATACCA