Call for Research Funding Proposals: NIST-NSF TRAILS

Overview

The NIST-NSF Institute Trustworthy AI for Law and Society (TRAILS) is pleased to announce a call for research funding proposals. The goal of TRAILS' research is to integrate a greater diversity of AI stakeholders into the AI development and governance life-cycle, creating positive feedback loops between stakeholders.

We seek proposals that:
- Develop new methods that promote AI trustworthiness
- Empower stakeholders to make sense of AI systems
- Analyze and promote inclusive governance strategies
- Train a multidisciplinary next generation of talent
- Center voices that have been marginalized and minoritized in mainstream AI

Proposals should clearly align with or bridge one or more of the following directions:
1. Participatory Design for Trustworthy AI: Create new AI technology and advocate for its deployment and use in a way that aligns with the values and interests of diverse groups of people, particularly those who have been previously marginalized in the development process.
2. Methods and Metrics for Participatory AI: Develop novel methods, metrics and advanced machine learning algorithms that reflect the values and interests of relevant stakeholders, allowing to understand the behavior and best uses of AI-infused systems.
3. Participant Sense-Making of AI Trustworthiness: Effectively evaluate how people make sense of AI systems, and the degree to which their levels of reliability, fairness, transparency, explainability, interpretability, and/or accountability can facilitate appropriate levels of trust.
4. Participatory Governance and Trust: Explore how policymakers at all levels in the U.S. and abroad can foster trust in AI systems, as well as how policymakers can incentivize broader participation, accountability, and inclusiveness in the design and deployment of these systems.

Review Process

The proposals will be reviewed by the TRAILS research council. Each proposal will be reviewed by specialists in the corresponding direction. If needed, external reviewers may be solicited to review a proposal. Some of the factors that the reviewers will consider are:
- Alignment with TRAILS' mission, including promoting participation of underrepresented groups throughout the AI Lifecycle
- Feasibility of proposed method/technique
- Realistic budget proposal and timeline
- Cross-university, cross-school, and/or cross-discipline

Eligibility

- Any full or part-time faculty members affiliated with The University of Maryland, George Washington University, Morgan State University, or Cornell University are eligible to apply for funding.
- Faculty from all disciplines are encouraged to apply.

Award Information

Estimated Number of Awards: About 5-10 projects per year
Funding Limit: The suggested limit for the direct cost (including all fringe benefits) of a single project is $150,000.
Time Limit: The suggested project duration is up to 12 months, with a start date of no earlier than January 1, 2024 and an end date of no later than July 31, 2025. Exceptions to these suggested limits must be well-justified in the proposal.

Please note that requests for research proposals will be announced consecutively for the next four years. So, if you have a proposal that spans more than a year, you can apply for continued funding to support later stages of your project given its scope and success. However, please note that the strong expectation is that these are pilot funds, and requests must include a plan for obtaining external follow-on funds.

How to Apply

Submit all required documents in a single zipped file by email to trails@umiacs.umd.edu. The email subject must be "Proposal for NIST-NSF TRAILS".

Required Documents
- Proposal Description: Should be no more than four single-spaced pages excluding references (Arial, 11-point font, 1-inch margins on all sides). This document should contain the following-
  - Abstract with the research question.
  - Statement of connection with one of the existing four TRAILS directions (listed above).
  - Scope of work, objectives, proposed activities, hypotheses (if applicable) and methodology.
  - Outputs or deliverables.
  - For cross university, cross-school, and/or cross-discipline projects, a clear collaboration and management plan should be provided.
  - Project timeline, linked to proposed activities and outputs/deliverables.
  - List of all project personnel, including faculty, staff, students who will be involved with the project, with bios of no more than 200 words each.
  - Any conflict of interest of any project personnel must be clearly mentioned.
- Budget Description: As a separate spreadsheet.

- Budget Justification: As a separate document. For all personnel, please note percentage (%) of effort on the project and how that effort will be covered (e.g., "one month salary", "in-kind")
- Data Management Plan: As a separate document. No more than one single-spaced page (Arial, 11-point font, 1-inch margins on all sides). It should describe how the proposal will manage all project related data and research results. Samples of data management plans can be found here.

Allowable Budget Items

Below is a list of items that are allowed in the budget. Please follow NSF's Allowability of Costs for more information.

- Suggested salary support for faculty members is up to one summer/academic month salary
- Graduate student stipend
- Hourly student wages
- Tuition fees
- Travel expenses
- Research expenses
- Materials and laboratory supplies (under $5,000)
- Participant costs

Note that we encourage cost sharing with existing projects. Also note that no-cost-extensions are only permitted in extraordinary circumstances.

Important Dates

Proposal Submission Deadline: October 7, 2023
Funding Decision: October 31, 2023

Additional Requirements upon Funding

- Funded projects must submit a post-project report which will be due one month after completion of the project.
- Funded projects will be expected to result in at least one publication submitted to a scholarly outlet such as archival, peer-reviewed conferences and journals.
- Project findings should be shared with the TRAILS community at both internal and external events.
- Funded faculty/students are highly encouraged to utilize the TRAILS space in corresponding campuses and collaborate with other TRAILS members.

Contact

If you have any questions regarding this call for research proposal, please contact Naeemul Hassan (nhassan@umd.edu).