

Modelling Audience Interactions: Call for Proposals

Closing date: Friday 16 December 2022

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Summary

The Alan Turing Institute's Defence and Security programme is inviting proposals to investigate the application of AI techniques to suitable data sources to assist in assessing the intent of detected narratives and attributing their origin. This task will assist a human analyst in understanding the narrative landscape, prioritise their analysis and attribute narratives of interest.

Once the intent of a narrative is sufficiently understood, an analyst should then be assisted in assessing the importance of that narrative in the wider narrative landscape, prioritising narratives of interest and correctly attributing them to their points of origin. For example, by helping to find related material that either supports or refutes posited intent and origin, and where possible helps to technically track the dissemination of narratives, elucidating their travel, morphing and change.

We specifically aim to develop an appropriate and repeatable method to apply to specific events spawning narrative, as well as a way of recognising and considering longer-term, strategic narratives.

Available Funding

£150k funding will be available for one project over the initial duration of 8-months. The proposal should be defined such that the initial project can be completed within 8-months. The research will be funded at Full Economic Cost and VAT will apply.

Eligible costs include:

- Salary of personnel working directly on the project – this could include, for example, PIs, postdoctoral research associates, research assistants, data managers, data scientists or software engineers.
- travel and subsistence for project researchers (e.g., attending conferences, travelling to/from the Turing/other collaborators).
- conference or event attendance fees (where conference/event is directly applicable to the research project).
- Cloud computing or other high performance computing costs.
- Other costs which are specifically justified for the project e.g., books, meeting room or catering costs, specific laptops.
- Open access publications.

Terms and conditions

The funding will be made available under The Alan Turing Institute's Defence & Security programme Research Service Agreement terms and conditions. For copy of the terms please contact Alaric Williams by emailing dsprogramme@turing.ac.uk.

You will be required to confirm your university's acceptance of these terms as part of this application process.

Background

The MSSA project is tasked with applying AI for Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (ISR) of the sub-threshold information environment, focussing on military aspects. Here, the

intent and origins of narratives can be covert (where the intended effect and / or sponsor of the activities is unknown), or ambiguous (where the intended effect and / or sponsor is suspected but not proven). An equally important aspect of the information environment is the spread of accidental misinformation, alongside concerns about deliberate disinformation, since both can affect military operations and / or open-source intelligence gathering.

Here we note that within the sub-threshold domain, narratives can serve to deceive, obfuscate, deflect, and disrupt. To help counter the threats of misinformation and disinformation, we are investigating how to identify both the intent and attribution of narratives within the broader narrative landscape, to be able to identify and appropriately deal with narratives of interest.

The Requirement

The aim of the requirement is to create a rapid, appropriate and repeatable end to end process that uses AI to assist an analyst in understanding the sub-threshold narrative landscape, its intent and its origins. This process should be designed to assist an analyst to understand narratives in their contexts, both arising from specific events and longer-term strategic narratives.

We also seek answer to our key research questions about the assistance AI can give an analyst:

- To detect the emergence and propagation of narrative, and understand the intent of that narrative, within both its wider contexts and also specifically within the narrative landscape
- In understanding the process by which narrative in the narrative landscape is morphing and changing, where these changes are more 'grounded in reality', where they are becoming 'less grounded' and where they are departing into an 'ungrounded hyper-reality'
- What the origins of these unfolding and developing narratives are and the part played by adversaries in specific shaping of the intent and origin of narrative, so as to be able to prioritise and formulate appropriate response

The required output is a report addressing the requirement, supported by software artefacts illustrating 'the art of the possible' concerning rapid AI support to the human analyst.

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply you must:

- Be part of a UK university or research institute. Commercial organisations or overseas universities or institutes are not eligible.
- Have permission from your organisation to apply, i.e., ensure your organisation can agree to the Terms and Conditions provided and that you submit an approval of submission letter from your research/finance office stating this. An example of a letter is available on request.

How to apply

Applications must be submitted via the online portal at <https://ati.flexigrant.com/>. If you have not already done so, all applicants must first register on the system and provide basic details to create a profile. If you have any questions regarding the application form or using the online system, please contact the programme inbox dsprogramme@turing.ac.uk.

Please use the budget template provided in the Flexigrant application form. Please note, applicants will also need to upload on Flexigrant an approval of submission letter from your

research/finance office to confirm costs are correct. The Principal Investigator must ensure the same is received for all collaborators / universities on multi party applications.

We must receive your application by **1600 on Friday 16 December 2022**.

What should be in the proposal?

The proposal should:

- Be in OpenDocument, MS Word or PDF
- Describe the scope and technical approach of the proposed work - This should be a narrative description of the principals/solutions the project would aim to achieve and how those solutions may relate to the problem.
- Describe how the approach would lead to the desired results.
- Include a description of how the task is decomposed, thematically i.e. by work package. For each work package, what activities will be undertaken to produce the results.
- Answer questions such as: What is innovative about the proposed research? Why are you uniquely placed to undertake this task? What is the expected scientific impact?
- Identify any key risks and mitigations.
- Reference related work or/and relevant experience.
- Include FEC cost.

If you are employed by one of the Institute's 13 university partners, please contact your University Liaison Manager ([a list of University liaison managers is available on the Turing website](#)) to make them aware of your application. They can provide support, answer questions and involve you as part of the Turing community at your university from now on.

If you are employed at a university that received a Turing Network Development Award, please contact your Award lead ([a list of Turing Network Development Award Leads](#) - scroll to the bottom of the page) – to make them aware of your application.

Deliverables

We expect the project to achieve the following deliverables

Ref.	Deliverable	Due by Start Date = T0	Format	Description
D0a	Project Kick off Meeting	T0+1M	Meeting	Meeting to initiate the project
D0b	Technical update meetings	Monthly	Meeting	technical update meetings
D1a D1b	Quarterly reports	T0+3M, T0+6M	Technical Reports	An update on technical progress that deliver the outputs identified above (including academic literature and

				system design choices as appropriate).
<i>D2</i>	Final report	T0+8M	Technical report	Final technical report describing the methodology and technologies used, along with a discussion of recommendations for next steps.
<i>D3</i>	Modelling Audience Interactions proof-of-concept tool	T0+8M	Software	Source code for initial proof-of-concept tool, along with documentation, and instructions for install and use
<i>D4</i>	End-of-phase presentation and demonstration	T0+8M	Presentation + demonstration	Technical presentation summarising progress up to T+8M, plus demonstration of the initial proof-of-concept tool.
<i>D0c</i>	Project Closure Meeting	T0+8M	Meeting	Meeting to close the project or agree follow on steps

Assessment and review

Following eligibility checks, proposals will be reviewed by an assessment panel who will rank the proposals based on score.

The assessment panel will consider the following criteria:

- **Quality:** This will consider the method and concepts for the proposed research. This will assess if the methods are suitable for delivering the desired outputs and pushing forward fundamental understanding in the field.
- **Viability:** This will assess how feasible it is to practically carry out the proposed research, and if it can be delivered in the time frame. This will account for the difficulty of the tasks, logistical factors surrounding delivery, and the track record of the proposed research team.
- **Significance:** This will consider the relevance to the call and the themes that are represented.
- **Justification of resources:** This will consider whether the proposal is appropriately resourced and suitable expenditure has been included in the budget.

Each of the criteria will be scored and while all criteria will have equal weighting in evaluation, there will be a minimum requirement on significance to be considered for approval.

Key Dates

Deadlines are as follows

Activity	Date
Proposals to be Submitted*	Friday 16 December 2022
Announcement of Results	Friday 06 January 2023
Research Project Starts by**	Wednesday 18 January 2023
Research Completed and deliverables submitted	Friday 29 September 2023
6 month extension completed and deliverables submitted	Friday 06 January 2024

*Proposals must be submitted via Flexigrant by 16:00 Friday 16 December 2022.

**Any project agreements not signed by Wednesday 18 January 2023 may result in funding offer being withdrawn and going to an application on the reserve list

Post-award information

Government furnished assets

A baseline view on narrative shall be shared, in a workshop with researchers at or near the beginning of agreed work; noting that we expect the definition to evolve with researcher input.

In addition close, alignment and sharing of outputs from work undertaken in MSSA's related task 'Narrative Detection & Tracking' is expected.

Project meetings

Successful applicants will be expected to attend a kick-off meeting and a project close meeting, with a Technical Partner from the D&S programme Partner/s. These may take place online, at the Turing, at Dstl, or at the project lead's university.

Screening of researchers

This research is not at a classified level so formal security clearance (see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/security-vetting-and-clearance>) is not required. Successful applicants will however be required to complete a 'Personal Particulars - Research Workers & Dstl Sponsored PhD Students form' for all staff working on their project. A sample form can be requested by emailing dsprogramme@turing.ac.uk or found [here](#) (this is an example and the actual form may differ).

Ethics approval

We require that the project will complete an application to and approval from any relevant research ethics committees.

Publications

Please note, approval from the D&S programme is sometimes required prior to publication; in such cases, approval will not be unreasonably withheld.

The funders are committed to full and open publication of the research outputs in line with academic practices.

We encourage researchers to submit their findings to a high-quality peer-reviewed journal or conference, on an open-access basis (funding for open-access fees will be available on a case-by-case basis).

We expect a 'green' open access version of any papers to be published (if allowed by journal/conference - please check <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/index.php>) either as a pre-print on (e.g.) the ArXiv (<https://arxiv.org/>) or in an institutional repository.

We also encourage datasets and research code to be openly shared too where possible - for example on the Turing's Github repository. All publications, reports and code should reference the support of the Turing Defence & Security programme.

Reporting and dissemination

Extracts from reports may be collated into update papers for the D&S Programme Board, Strategic Partners Board, Turing Innovations Ltd Board, and the Turing's Trustee Board.

Awardees may also be required to present their work to members of the D&S programme, the D&S Programme Board and/or other invited audience during the award period.

Reporting allows further identification and signposting of potential additional opportunities for the benefit of the awardees and the Turing; for example, opportunities from across the Turing's network such as new collaborations, external/public engagement, media/press, other funding availability, speaking slots at or invitations to events/conferences/seminars.

Queries

Please contact Alaric Williams, The Alan Turing Institute, Programme Manager dsprogramme@turing.ac.uk.