NAIRS

NIGERIA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH SCHEME

Nigeria Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme

Empowering the Future through Innovation and Digital Transformation.

OCTOBER 2023

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming many industries and has enormous potential to spur job creation, economic growth, and social development. As Africa's largest economy with over 200 million people, a young population with a median age of 18.4 years (World Bank, 2022), a growing technology talent pool, and an active startup ecosystem (including 6 unicorns as of 2022 - CB Insights, 2022), Nigeria is poised to build on AI to accelerate economic prosperity. Our strong technology fundamentals when combined with strategic investments in AI research will drive innovation, productivity, and future jobs.

However, for us to drive AI applications, job creation, and policy leadership in Africa, robust research and strategic investments in AI will be critical. Research will help us, develop adaptable AI models for key sectors (agriculture, education, healthcare, and finance, amongst others), optimise innovations by linking academic breakthroughs to industry and entrepreneurship, generate insights into AI impacts through pilot studies and field experiments on deployed systems, and inform evidence-based policies around ethical use of AI, data governance, privacy, safety, automation, inclusion, and other emerging AI issues.

To drive this agenda, we are interested in research and innovations on Artificial Intelligence (AI) that spur job creation, and economic growth, improve government services, and have positive societal impacts across Nigeria. Below are examples of research themes:

- Boosting agricultural productivity such as in precision farming, predictive analytics, and robotics to aid smallholder farmers.

- Improving healthcare access and quality in areas of diagnosis tools, personalised treatments, and intelligent hospital systems, amongst others.

- Enhancing education and workforce readiness through adaptive learning platforms, personalised recommendations, and smart career guidance.

- Driving financial inclusion and credit access by the use of automated credit underwriting, AI chatbots for customer assistance, and fraud detection.

- Facilitating transparent and efficient governance using AI for tasks such as in automated document processing, surveillance data analytics, and public resource optimization.

- Optimising energy management and unlocking savings in areas of smart grids, predictive maintenance, and algorithmic efficiency optimizations.

- Supporting sustainable urban development and mobility using intelligent transportation systems, optimised city resources, data-driven urban planning, amongst others.

Nigeria AI Research Scheme

Objective

The main objective of this scheme is to support researchers and start-ups to accelerate their research and development efforts. This initiative aims to foster a vibrant and sustainable AI ecosystem in Nigeria by providing financial support and facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration among individuals and organisations in the AI industry.

Funding

Up to N5,000,000 each for 45 AI researchers and start-ups.

Eligibility Criteria

- Consortium that includes a local startup or technology company, local academic researcher and where possible a foreign researcher.

- Must have a research proposal that aligns with the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation priority areas.

- The applicant must have a detailed proposal outlining the project and its potential impact on the Nigerian economy.

- Must have a demonstrable track record of excellence in research or entrepreneurship.

- Must be able to publish at least one peer-reviewed article within one year of receiving the grant.

Application Process

- The application process will open on October 13, 2023, and all eligible applicants can submit their proposals until the closing date of November 15, 2023.

- Applications must be submitted through the designated online portal hosted by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy.

- The proposals will be evaluated by a panel of experts appointed by the Ministry.

- Shortlisted applicants will be notified via email and then invited for an interview with the panel.

- Final selection and announcement of grant recipients will be made based on the evaluations and recommendations of the panel.

Selection Criteria

Grant applications will be reviewed by a panel of experts in AI. The selection criteria will include:

- The quality and originality of the research proposal.

- The applicant's track record of excellence in research or entrepreneurship.

- The alignment of the research with the Federal Nigerian Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy's AI priority areas in AI.

- The feasibility of the project budget.

Grant Conditions

- The grant must be used for the proposed project only and in compliance with the approved budget. All grant recipients will be required to sign an agreement with the Federal Ministry of Communication, Innovation and Digital Economy, outlining the terms and conditions of the grant.

- Grant recipients must provide periodic progress updates and reports to the Ministry, as well as participate in knowledge-sharing activities that will be organised by the Ministry.

- The grant recipients must acknowledge the support provided by the Ministry in all publications and public presentations related to the project.

- The Ministry reserves the right to withdraw the grant if the project fails to meet the agreed-upon milestones and objectives.

Disbursement of Funds

Successful grant recipients will be notified by December 15, 2023.

Reporting Requirements

Grant recipients will be required to submit a quarterly progress report to the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy. A final report will be required at the end of the project.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this grant scheme are to:

- Publish at least 50% of generated papers in reputable journals.

- Support the development and application of AI research and innovation to priority sectors (Agriculture, Education, Healthcare, Finance, amongst others) in Nigeria.

- Promote the growth of AI start-ups in Nigeria.

- Provide the initial catalyst to increase Nigeria's global competitiveness in AI.

To apply for the grant, visit www.airg.nitda.gov.ng

- **Fill and submit the research grant form.**

- **Upload a CV or resume that highlights your team's experience and qualifications.**

- **Upload 2 letters of recommendation from experts in your field.**

- **Deadline: 15th of November, 2023.**

For further enquiries - research@commtech.gov.ng