Call for proposals:

racial justice in AI ethics

10 August 2020

The Ada Lovelace Institute's JUST AI Network, with the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is seeking to commission projects that identify and address gaps in ethical thinking about data and AI in the UK with respect to racial justice.

At least four grants of £10,000 each will be awarded to researchers, scholars and creative practitioners to execute research or creative projects designed to surface alternative, critical and diverse perspectives on data and AI. The projects will develop anti-racist and decolonial perspectives on data and AI, address structural and systemic inequalities, and shape the field by investigating ethics in new ways and foregrounding overlooked scholars and ethical perspectives.

Successful applicants will gain affiliation with the Ada Lovelace Institute as JUST AI Visiting Fellows for a period of six months from the project start date. During the fellowship they will benefit from structured participation with JUST AI (including participation in weekly lab meetings, peer and expert support, and opportunities for research collaboration) and access to opportunities to contribute to and participate in the work of the Ada Lovelace Institute. Visiting Fellows will be supported in designing and delivering a research or creative project between October 2020 and April 2021.

Background to the call

JUST AI was established by the AHRC and the Ada Lovelace Institute (Ada) to develop a network of scholars working on AI ethics. Part of this task involves mapping and understanding the field of AI ethics, what research and approaches it compasses, and who is affiliated with it.

Existing research suggests that the study and practice of AI and data ethics has platformed certain types of research approaches, practitioners and ethical perspectives to the exclusion of others. Initial JUST AI research demonstrates that the most frequently cited papers in the UK AI ethics field are by White scholars, and that they refer primarily to ethical frameworks developed from the positions of European and North American philosophy.

Current research work in the UK has tended both to prioritise established voices and sustain anti-Blackness within the AI field (Guillory: [Combating Anti-Blackness in the AI Community](#)), and there is evidence that biases accumulate around voices that are most prominent within published work. This is problematic because domains that Ada and JUST AI are particularly interested in, including data justice and critical justice approaches to data and AI, have been influenced by people from a range of backgrounds and standpoints.

Providing space for other perspectives to develop through the commissioning of projects from JUST AI Visiting Fellows creates a chance to intervene in the field in two ways: first, to foreground scholars and

ethical perspectives that have been absent or less fully considered; and second, to shape the field by investigating ethics in new ways.

Objectives and outputs

We will commission at least four projects that can contribute to locating and filling gaps in thinking with respect to racial justice and AI ethics.

The projects commissioned by JUST AI will be oriented as follows:

- Two research projects addressing a topic of substantive interest at the intersection of racial justice and AI ethics. A list of suggested topics can be found at Annex A. Proposals on other closely related topics are welcome. A broad range of research approaches are invited from testimonials to conventional qualitative or quantitative studies.
- One creative project that aims to explore interlocking and contested issues of data, AI, Blackness and racial justice. Production costs for this work will be covered by Ada, subject to pre-approval.
- One project with a specific remit to lead on the development of a co-produced policy brief on data, AI and racial justice in the UK, which would incorporate the contributions of other Visiting Fellows. This project will unite the other research projects and amplify their influence.

Each successful applicant will be expected to participate in JUST AI lab meetings and Ada events, and produce one output (i.e. a research position paper, a policy brief, a creative intervention), as well as contributing regularly to content exploring critical approaches to data and AI, externalised through events or blog posts curated by the Ada Lovelace Institute.

The outputs are expected to represent sustained work over a period of four to six months.

Expected deliverables:

- Initial project sketch presented and discussed between Visiting Fellows, JUST AI and Ada in the first month of the project (expected November 2020)
- At least one blog post on the project's developing ideas (approx. 1,000 words), mid-way through the commission onwards (expected January 2021)
- Participation in a symposium showcasing the commissioned projects (expected April 2021)
- Contribution to the policy brief (for research and creative Visiting Fellows only)
- Final work
    o For research projects, a draft article submittable to a journal OR a research report suitable for design and publication by Ada (approx. 8,000-10,000 words)
    o For creative projects, a creative work suitable for online or physical exhibition or publication.
    o For the policy brief, a public-facing paper incorporating the work of the other Visiting Fellows, in dialogue with JUST AI and Ada, suitable for design and publication by Ada (approx. 10,000 words).

Any necessary design work will be supported by Ada.

Impact

In commissioning these projects, the Ada Lovelace Institute, JUST AI and the AHRC wish to have the following impacts:

- To ensure that the mapping of the AI ethics field undertaken by JUST AI acknowledges and surfaces the work of scholars and experts from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and of ethical frameworks outside of dominant European approaches

- To support and foreground scholars, creatives and ethical perspectives that have been absent or less fully considered from research and policy around data and AI
- To contribute to the development of research and understanding of the interplay between racial justice, data and AI
- To inform the development of new technologies, and of regulation and policy, with a more holistic understanding of how data and AI can exacerbate, entrench or mitigate racial injustice and structural inequalities.

Visiting Fellowship affiliation

1. Successful applicants will be invited to affiliate with the Ada Lovelace Institute as JUST AI Visiting Fellows for a period of six months commencing at the initiation of the projects.
2. Awardees will constitute the inaugural cohort of Visiting Fellows at the Ada Lovelace Institute.
3. As a young organisation working to translate research into policy change and foster an informed public dialogue about the impact of data and AI on society, the Ada Lovelace Institute has a remit to convene and foster pluralistic and challenging conversations, and to diversify the range of voices in the room for the development and governance of data and AI. In establishing a Visiting Fellow scheme, we hope to create opportunities for early-career researchers, professionals and creatives to:
    - contribute to the evolving vision and scope of the organisation, and shape our approach and outputs
    - use the Ada Lovelace Institute's platform as a mechanism for developing and externalising new thinking on AI ethics, particularly from critical and justice perspectives
    - have access to the Ada Lovelace Institute's staff, resources and networks
    - form and build a community of experts specialised in the intersection of technology and society.
4. In becoming Ada Lovelace Institute JUST AI Visiting Fellows, awardees will be invited to:
    - participate in regular meetings with other Fellows and with the Ada Lovelace Institute team, and join an online communications platform to facilitate regular exchanges
    - participate in JUST AI lab meetings
    - benefit from academic or professional mentorship and support from members of the Ada Lovelace Institute, including Dr Alison Powell, Director of JUST AI
    - participate in events hosted by the Ada Lovelace Institute and feed into ongoing research initiatives where relevant and possible.

Eligibility and assessment criteria

There is no restriction on current nationality or geographic location of applicants. Project descriptions should indicate how they address or connect with current UK experiences.

There are no minimum academic requirements for applicants, and no requirement for institutional affiliation.

For the policy brief project and creative project, consideration of eligibility will be based on an applicants' demonstrable record of relevant experience and expertise.

For the research projects, consideration of eligibility will be based on the standards articulated in *[Dismantling Systemic Racism at the Oxford Internet Institute: A template for institutional change spanning the intellectual life of the department](#),* namely:

1. Research Agenda: The extent to which the scholar substantively engages with questions of social justice in their scholarship and as part of their research agenda.

2. Public & Community-Based Scholarship: The extent to which the scholar has actively been a public scholar, seeking to expand the social and educational impact of their research beyond the academy (e.g. writing in publicly accessible and readable forums, community organising, producing creative or community-based outputs such as exhibitions, films, or community organising work). This includes the extent to which the scholar performs community-based or community-focused research which feeds back into supporting the well-being of underrepresented communities *and/or* addresses forms of social injustice.

3. Service & Social Justice Scholarship: The extent to which the scholar engages in scholarly activities, either as part of or outside of their formal research projects, that contribute to increasing social justice. This includes mentorship and service work inside and outside of the academy.

4. Teaching & Mentorship: The extent to which the scholar demonstrates a clear commitment to addressing questions of racial and social justice in their teaching, teaching materials, and mentorship model.

5. Perspective and Experience: The uniqueness of the candidate's world perspective and experiences relative to the current composition of the Network on the basis of the intersections of the candidate's racial, ethnic, gender, disability and personal identities.

Process for commissioning

Applicants are asked to apply for a research grant by **submitting a letter of interest and CV by email to** hello@adalovelaceinstitute.org **by 17.00 BST on 30 August 2020.** The letter of interest should indicate the proposal project orientation (i.e. research project, policy brief development, creative project), and should include a short (500 words or less) elaboration of the proposed project. Applicants are asked to evidence their relevant experience and expertise, as outlined above.

Applications will be reviewed in the first instance by the Ada Lovelace Institute and JUST AI Network for minimum eligibility requirements. Applications will then be reviewed by a Commissioning Board comprised of representatives of the JUST AI Network, Ada Lovelace Institute and AHRC, one scholar and one practitioner from a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise.

Interviews will be conducted by a subset of the Commissioning Board. The interview process will include an opportunity to outline and present the proposed intervention and discuss the type of mentorship and support that would be most appropriate for the project.

Projects are expected to start as soon as possible from 1 October 2020.

ANNEX A – Potential research project topics

- Discussion of ethical frameworks in Black and indigenous ethical traditions, and/or case studies of applications of alternative ethical frameworks
- Participatory models of ML designed to address social inequities, building on the work of Rediet Abebe and Desmond Patton
- Investigations of the ethics of justice work
- Gaps in data collection and systemic injustices related to the uses of AI
- Use of data and AI in the service of anti-racism or justice (e.g. monitoring human rights violations, human trafficking detection, etc.)
- Redress / recourse / redesign: can you achieve redress to injustice through the redesign of AI systems?
- The emerging history of technological colonialism and data transfer, cultural capital and the continuation or reappropriation of colonising forms
- Understanding technoprivilege and how that compares to other forms of privilege
- Decentralising data / care and self-organising (e.g. mutual aid networks or collective community building)
- Challenges to current understandings and framings of ethics – e.g. that practice of ethics is not meaningful without conversations with other fields (such as computer science) that allow for the results of those conversations to take form
- Lack of diversity and inclusion in key institutions of data/AI ethics research
- Specific applications of AI that have significant racial justice issues