

HRI2020 SIGCHI Specialized Conferences Development Fund application

<http://humanrobotinteraction.org/2020/>

Introduction

The ACM/IEEE Human-Robot Interaction conference arrives in Cambridge (UK) for its fifteenth edition between 23 and 26 March 2020. Researchers from across the world present their best work to HRI to exchange ideas about the theory, technology, data, and science furthering the state-of-the-art in human-robot interaction.

HRI has a number of elements which have been substantial in HRI's establishment as the premier conference in the field. One is the meeting in person of the Programme Committee, which doubles as a networking event, an opportunity to pass on good practice, and an opportunity to recruit and train future leaders of the conference. Another is the Pioneers workshop, which selects a few dozen early career researchers to spend a day exchanging ideas and networking. The Pioneers workshop has in previous years been a gathering of academic talent, and many participants go on to become influential members of the industrial and academic community.

Thirdly, as HRI is maturing, both as a conference and as an academic field, we would like to organise an industry event. While during previous editions industry has been presenting themselves through booths and informal contacts, we would like to shape this process by organising an industry event during the conference.

We request

1. **Travel support for Programme Committee (PC) members** to attend the Nov 2019 PC meeting in San Diego, CA. **HRI regulations insist that all PC members commit to attending a physical PC meeting, and self-fund their travel**, a practice which has been integral to our community development and success. Those who have joined PC meetings in previous years are convinced of its value: PC members actively shape the conference, the experience increases rigour and standard across the community, the meeting is networking event and helps recruit and train members for future organising committees. Thus, PC members are highly influential to the community, and junior members (and those just entering the area) get access to premiere training and mentorship on HRI research.

However, we have a diversity problem in the program committee, where it has been difficult to recruit new program-committee members, particularly from far locations (thus expensive to travel): the result is that many members serve year after year, with concentrations in regions, schools, and research groups. One challenge has been to convey the usefulness and importance of the in-person PC meeting to members who have not previously attended, a catch-22 situation: those who have not participated are less likely to spend to join, since they do not have the experience. As such, simply inviting leading researchers from around the world has not worked, with many people politely refusing due to the cost. Further, junior members (and those with limited funding) can likewise find it prohibitive to join.

The first hurdle is convincing academics, who have never attended, to join the PC meeting, which this year is in San Diego. We therefore request **5 x 2000 USD travel grants** to support

diversity. Priority will be given to first-time PC members who add to the diversity of the community and/or who struggle to self fund (e.g. due to not having running research funds). We believe that the **contingency plan** is inherent in our proposal, as we expect that serving once and attending the PC meeting will lead to renewed interest to serve another year, with attendees sharing the importance in their local geographic communities. We also assume that this measure will create a positive feedback loop, making it easier to convince non-local PC members to join.

2. We will organise an **industry event** at this year's HRI conference, in which representatives from industry and academia get to opportunity to **network during a meet and greet session**. As HRI matures there has been an increased interest by businesses to use the conference as a platform to advertise (for which we already serve by allowing industry to sponsor the conference), but also to meet both early career and experienced researchers. HRI has no sub-event in place to cater for this and we would like to invest in advertising and on-site logistics to facilitate the session.

We notice that sponsors are currently reluctant to contribute substantial amounts, as the return on their investment may not be clear. Industry sponsorships to HRI typically constitute only 5-6% of the conference budget (~15k USD), and we see an opportunity to grow this revenue.

We request **5000 USD** for promotional material (banners, signage, mailers) and a booth which we will be set up in the Guildhall room at the conference, near the demonstrations and poster boards. The booth will have a distinct identity and will serve to give businesses the opportunity to interact with delegates and early career researchers looking for positions in industry, or to engage with delegates over IP and possible solutions for industry. The work for this event will be conducted by our organizing committee and student volunteers.

Our **contingency plan** is to advertise the success of this event and use the results to recruit improved corporate sponsorship in future editions. This will aide the conference overall, but given a successful event we anticipate using the increased sponsorship funds to hold this event every year.

3. We request **travel support for participants to the Pioneers workshop and student volunteers**. The Pioneers workshop (similar to a doctoral symposium but open to all levels) has been an integral student-networking of the HRI conference series. It is organised by and for early career researchers, and serves to communicate early research, to receive support from peers, and to build an international network. The workshop draws upon senior researchers to offer advice through talks and panel discussions. The event has consistently received support from the US National Science Foundation, with the condition that the funding is only used to support participants from US institutions. No such funding is available for non-US participants. This has led to an imbalance in participants: in recent years half or over have been from US institutions. We request **5 x 1000 USD travel support grants** to support the participation of non-US early career researchers. Recipients will also be asked to serve as student volunteer during the conference.

As with the PC travel grants, we expect Pioneers to become self-sustaining for non-US participants. While there is currently no expectation of receiving similar funding to that of the NSF, we will explore other funding opportunities, such as the annual stipend we received from

the European Network of Excellence euCognition until 2014, or increased corporate sponsorship.

Description	Item price	Total
Travel support for Programme Committee (PC) members	2000 USD	10,000 USD
Industry event	5,000 USD	5,000 USD
Travel support for participants to the Pioneers workshop and student volunteers	1,000 USD	5,000 USD
		20,000 USD

Procedure

All reimbursements of travel grants will be based on actual expenses (airfare, accommodation), which will need to be evidenced to the conference organisation. Travel grants have a maximum of 2,000 USD for the PC members or 1,000 USD for Pioneers participants/student volunteers.

For the Pioneers participants awarded a travel grant, we will supplement with in-kind support through free registration.

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