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AI IN JOURNALISM FUTURES 2024

Call for Applications

Deadline: February 23, 2024

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Share your vision for how AI might change news for a chance to get an expense-paid trip to Italy with a $1000 honorarium to explore the future of news in an AI world.

What is the AI in Journalism Futures 2024?

AI in Journalism Futures (AIJF) 2024 is Open Society Foundation's inaugural scenario planning workshop, which invites applicants to imagine how AI capabilities might structurally reshape the global information ecosystem over the next five to 15 years.

AIJF is divided into two parts:

1. Individuals are invited to submit their visions of an AI-mediated information ecosystem, which we call 'mini-scenarios'.

2. Forty individuals will be selected based on their submissions and will deepen their mini-scenarios with structured guidance. Those selected will attend a two-day workshop where they will explore, exchange, and craft full scenarios in a group setting.

Why focus on AI?

Over the last year, the advent of generative AI has demonstrated new capabilities with such obvious and profound potential impact for journalism that AI-driven innovation is now the urgent focus of many newsrooms across the world. But beyond the near-term implications, we believe that AI, and Large Language Models (LLMs) in particular, are likely to bring about significant and lasting structural change to information ecosystems as we know them.

What might an AI-mediated information ecosystem look like five to 15 years from now? What are the key driving forces that get us there? How will media be produced, distributed and consumed in the future? How will this alter markets for news and information? What new power structures might emerge? How might audience behaviour change?

The aim of the AIJF is to kickstart a global public conversation that focuses on the longer-term, structural implications of AI on the information ecosystem with people that bring a diverse set of perspectives and expertise.

Our goal is that the final outcomes of AIJF – four to five fully developed, robust scenarios – can help stakeholders, investors, and others working in the digital information ecosystem better understand what possible futures might be, how to spot any early signals that point to these futures, and thus guide the decisions that need to be taken now which ensures positive impact later.

How does the AIJF Open Call work?

- Individuals are invited to enter the AIJF Open Call by submitting a 300-word mini-scenario using the criteria and link to a submission form below.

- Applications focus on how AI capabilities might structurally reshape the global information ecosystem over the next five to 15 years.

- Forty applicants will be selected and asked to develop and deepen their mini-scenarios, and will also be invited to join a two-day scenario planning workshop to be held in Italy* on April 15 - 16 2024.

- Participants will have their travel expenses fully covered, and will also receive an honorarium of U.S. $1,000 for participation at the workshop.

- Each person selected <u>must</u> commit to attending the workshop and to expanding their mini-scenario into a more detailed and comprehensive document.

- A report of the two-day workshop and its outcomes will be published, and the submitted scenarios and documents will be published in anonymized form.

Who should apply to the Open Call?

We are looking for a diverse set of perspectives from around the globe to participate in AIJF 2024.

There are no specific entry criteria, but we are particularly seeking applications from people who are engaged with the digital information ecosystem, are aware of the new capabilities available from AI and their potential to disrupt media, and who are thinking about or working with the emerging AI-mediated information ecosystem in some way.

How do I enter the Open Call?

Submissions will be open from January 26 to February 23, 2024, and you can apply here: osf.to/AIJournalismFutures

Applications must be from individuals, and only one entry per individual will be considered.

Submissions can be made in any language however we request that English be used if possible. Depending on need, we may be able to offer translation at the workshop.

What are the guidelines for mini-scenario submissions?

To be considered, each submitted mini-scenario *must* be 300 words or less, and contain the following elements:

- The mini-scenario should not merely describe a small incremental extension of the status quo. We are looking for scenarios which assume some fundamental restructuring of the information ecosystem due to the influence of new AI capabilities.

- The mini-scenario should specify a timeframe and contain a specific and explicit 'end state' in that timeframe.

- The mini-scenario should include two to four specific underlying 'driving forces' that lead to that end state, and a logical, reasoned explanation for how these lead to the end state. The 'driving forces' that underly the scenarios should relate to functionality available from AI, either current or potential.

- The information ecosystem to which the mini-scenario applies can include all forms of publicly communicated information, including social media, influencer content, user-generated content, academic publishing, government information, technology-enabled content, etc. It may be helpful to focus only on one particular aspect or characteristic of an AI-mediated information ecosystem, such as information gathering (e.g. sourcing ideas or leads for news stories), processing (e.g. editing) distribution (e.g. social media) or consumption (e.g. personalisation).

Submitted scenarios would ideally, but not necessarily, exhibit the following characteristics:

- They should be imaginative! We are trying to broaden perspectives of what might be possible in an AI-mediated information environment, both positive, negative and in-between.

- They should be reasonably grounded. We are looking for concepts that are realistically possible within a 0 – 15-year horizon, rooted in 'driving forces' of AI functionality that may already exist or that might be on the horizon. *For example, how might functionality such as generative search or conversational AI or personalisation drive changes in information delivery?*

- They should point out related aspects of the scenario, such as potential unintended consequences, interaction between the 'driving forces' and the potential effect on audiences, including their wants and needs and their available attention. *For example, how might a combination of generative search, conversational AI and personalisation change audience behaviour and information consumption, given there are still limits to human attention?*

What are some examples of mini-scenarios?

Two examples of 300-word mini-scenarios that includes these requirements and suggestions are below. These examples are centred around news and journalism, but mini-scenarios can focus on any part of the information ecosystem.

Example 1

- *Mini-scenario title: News beliefs*
- *Timeframe: 0-5 years*

AI enables almost anyone to produce content at the same quality as news from major publishers, including well-written text, impactful videos and even engaging conversational audio. At the same time efforts to automatically detect AI generated content fail, so that it becomes much harder for social platforms and news consumers to tell which content comes from journalists and which content does not. As a result, most news-like content consumed in society is generated by individuals, advocacy and commercial organisations and other non-journalist providers, without the professional processes and values of journalism.

This causes wildly inaccurate or severely misleading news-like content to become a much larger part of everyone's news consumption diet and also to become more impactful because of the improvement in quality enabled by AI. Eventually this results in news stories becoming more and more of a belief rather than factually grounded understanding. As news consumers and citizens lose their sense of certainty about what is happening in the world, they divide into different 'tribes' that follow different beliefs of what is happening in the world. The tribes are led by charismatic individuals that instil confidence and conviction in their followers that they know what is 'really' going on in the world.

Professional news providers and their brands are still relevant in this AI world, but now they have been reduced to a small number of large, global brands, and they serve just a relatively small population of well-educated, technocratic people. Furthermore, they are considered as just another tribe with their own 'news beliefs', and other tribes even think of them as boring or naïve. Politics and the functioning of governments becomes much less logical and reasoned as this scenario develops, but efforts to identify AI-generated content via regulation or by AI providers are attacked as censorship by other news tribes.

Example 2

- *Mini-scenario title: 'Always in the know''.*
- *Time horizon: 10-15 years*

News publishers begin using large language models, automated transcription, and other AI tools to expand the areas of news that they can cover and the depth with which they can cover those beats. Eventually publishers have access to most information written, spoken, recorded, or released publicly by any public figure, organisation or government, and have the ability (using AI tools) to sift through all that information to find stories, check facts, make comparisons, point out contradictions, etc. Publishers also begin using AI to publish all these stories, updates, observations, etc in many different ways that are customised or personalised to individuals, including as videos and via 'personal journalist' conversational bots. News consumers therefore have access to all of the news that is relevant to them, regardless of its source, in engaging formats that they enjoy, and verified and contextualised by oversight from journalists.

This new and easy access to all relevant news makes societies far more transparent. The facts and uncertainties of every story are laid bare, and most error, obfuscation and contradiction are made obvious. Everyone has an opportunity to quickly and easily trace any news story to its source material, and can question the material, explore alternative interpretations and interactively engage in factual, respectful conversation about the story. Discussions, whether about national stories or for local or niche stories, are moderated by AI agents to encourage respectful, informed debate and inappropriate remarks are edited according to transparent, well-explained guidelines.

An effect of this new information environment is that news becomes more clearly separated from entertainment, even though news is still provided in entertaining ways. People gradually become more informed and confident that they know what is going on in their society, and new issues like privacy, AI use and income distribution are discussed rationally and sensibly.

How are individuals selected?

Selection will be made by the AIJF team and trusted partners. Selection will use a standardised scoring system to rank mini-scenarios, which are then cross-checked among team members.

Due to the anticipated volume of applications, we regret that we will be unable to provide feedback, and participants will only be contacted if they are successful.

What is the Timeline?

These are indicative dates which may be subject to change.

- **January 26:** Call opens
- **February 23:** Call closes
- **March 15:** Notification for 40 individuals selected
- **April 5:** Deadline to develop mini-scenarios further
- **April 15–16:** Workshop with 40 participants
- **May 31:** Publication of the final report, group scenarios and (anonymised) mini-scenarios