



African Advanced Institute for Information
& Communications Technology

Call For Proposals - National HLT Network

December 2007

1. Overview

Human Language Technology (HLT) research has been an area of focus for many researchers over the past few years. South Africa boasts some of the foremost scientists in this field today and in a number of cases we see international recognition for quality and impact of the work. It is well accepted that HLT has an important contribution to make in both the quality of life of our citizens and economic competitiveness by its nature. HLT provides a number of opportunities for local research and development with the ability to globalise these R&D outputs. Despite a number of efforts by Government and the research fraternity, South Africa has not yet been able to truly maximise the benefit of this confluence of opportunities and excellence. One of the key challenges is the perceived fragmentation of R&D activities in this important domain.

In 2006/7, an initial call for proposals was sent to a number of institutions participating in HLT research. The projects were typically small (less than R150k funding) and were conducted only by the institution applying for the funding. Projects were completed satisfactorily, resulting in continued funding for the National HLT Network.

It has been decided that for 2008 and 2009, funding will be allocated in larger blocks, to consortia of institutions collaborating towards shared goals. Funding will be allocated to a maximum amount of R2 million, made available over a 2-year period. It is foreseen that this amount will be divided between three or fewer successful proposals in a competitive process.

Institutions that would like to participate in this call must define a project that will solve a pertinent need of the HLT research community, or an important problem facing South Africa by using HLT technologies. Inter-institutional collaboration will be highly regarded during the evaluation of the proposals and institutions must clearly indicate the different facets to the proposed project and the contributions made by each of the participating parties.

2. Research Areas

As agreed in the national HLT roadmap, proposals will be requested in one of three areas:

- Technology development,
- Resource collection, annotation and distribution, and
- Applications.

Aligning with the HLT roadmap, proposals will be accepted related to various technology domains of HLT, including, but not limited to the following:

- automatic morphological analysis,
- dialogue systems,
- language learning,
- lexicography,
- machine translation,
- natural language processing,
- pronunciation prediction,
- speaker verification,
- speech recognition ,
- speech synthesis,
- spell checkers, and
- telephone-based systems.

3. Selection Criteria

Proposals will need to meet the following criteria to be accepted:

1. The project should be aligned with the national HLT roadmap.
2. The project should provide sufficient value, given the specified cost.
3. The project proposer should have adequate resources and skills in order to undertake the specific research project.
4. The proposer should commit to sharing project progress regularly, utilising the collaborative web site.
5. Technology components and data newly developed as part of the project should be made available widely and freely, under such an Open Source license as approved by the Meraka Institute.
6. Proposals that strengthen inter-institutional collaboration will receive preference.
7. Proposals should address a significant work package, with a total cost of no less than R600,000 per proposal (over the 2-year period).

4. Process

This call for proposals will be sent to individuals currently affiliated with the National HLT Network, but may be distributed to any interested parties. No proposals will be accepted after the call for proposals has closed. Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of external reviewers, including a representative from the Department of Science and Technology.

Successful consortia will be required to enter into a formal contract with the Meraka Institute, prior to project initiation. Where a

consortium is not a single legal entity, the contract will be entered into with the lead organisation only.

Deadlines:

- Call for proposals close: 31 January 2008
- Preliminary results made available: 15 February 2008
- Final agreement and signing of contract: < 31 March 2008
- Project start date: March 2008
- Project end date: March 2010

5. Proposal Guidelines

The proposal should clearly state the scientific background and importance of the issue(s) being addressed. It should then describe in some detail the approach that will be taken, and highlight the likely outcomes that will result from successful completion of the project. The roles of the various collaborators should be stated clearly, including summary budgets for each of the partners. Short CVs of the principal scientists should be appended to the proposals. Proposals are expected to be around 4 pages in length (excluding appendices).

6. Conclusion

Based on your track record in HLT research, we would like to invite you to submit a proposal for a project aligned to the National HLT Roadmap. Further information can be obtained at the National HLT Network website at: <http://www.meraka.org.za/nhn>

Please contact Christiaan van der Walt (cvdwalt@csir.co.za) or Christiaan Kuun (ckuun@csir.co.za) for further information

Kind regards,
Christiaan van der Walt
Meraka Institute
<http://www.meraka.org.za/hlt>