Support from Microsoft helps researchers merge digital, physical worlds

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Funding, software, data and collaboration awarded for promising research into the cutting edge of map-based information systems.

Microsoft Research announced Thursday the recipients of $1.1 million in funding for academic researchers working on geographic information-visualization techniques and location-based Web searching. The 21 winners were chosen from more than 140 university applicants worldwide in response to Microsoft Research's parallel SensorMap and Virtual Earth(TM) requests for proposals (RFPs).

The innovative and diverse projects to be supported by the gifts from Microsoft Corp. include the ability to combine data from tiny sensors, the Internet and a variety of other sources with map information and geographic imagery such as that provided by Microsoft(R) Virtual Earth. The university research teams aim to study and map the physical world in real time, to push the technological boundaries of local search, and to understand the potential societal impact of these kinds of geographic technologies. New solutions ultimately resulting from the research are expected to yield rich and diverse benefits, such as helping tourists find affordable restaurants with the shortest lines, or helping scientists understand changes in the ecology of biological systems under the threat of climate change.

"The ability to search for and analyze information within the context of location is a field with great potential," said Sailesh Chutani, director of External Research & Programs, the arm of Microsoft Research that works closely with academic institutions. "These researchers are using a powerful new approach to solve fundamental problems, and our programs are designed to help them in a number of ways -- funding to bring in additional resources, software and data to use in experiments, access to top researchers at Microsoft, and collaboration with the broader, global research community."

In addition to the unrestricted monetary awards, winners of the SensorMap RFP will receive access to Microsoft's SensorMap geographic sensor-data publishing platform, enabling them to integrate and publish searchable data through a map interface. The Virtual Earth RFP winners will receive some of Microsoft's Web-based geographic imagery, which in combination with the Interactive Virtual Earth software development kit will enable researchers to explore potential applications of location-based Web searches.

"We believe scientific research can be highly enriched through access to geographic presentation assets," said Gur Kimchi, software architect for Microsoft's Virtual Earth business unit. "Data gathering is an expensive operation today. These RFPs allow us to share and utilize the rich data we've collected for the benefit of the scientific community, with the potential ultimately to enhance scientists' understanding of ecology, meteorology, epidemiology and virtually any field of inquiry that can benefit from displaying and analyzing data geographically."

External Research & Programs' Investment in the Future of Academic Research

Today's funding is part of the External Research & Programs group's broader collaboration model, one that underscores Microsoft's ongoing commitment to investing deeply in innovative research. External Research & Programs engages and collaborates with top researchers from the worldwide academic community to explore emerging areas of research and technology. The group works closely within Microsoft Research to identify current trends and challenges in technology, and issues broad calls to the academic community in the form of RFPs.

The best proposals are provided with seed funds, relevant software, data and access to Microsoft Research. Many of the projects supported by these grants go on to receive funding from public organizations such as the National Science Foundation, or deepen their relationship with Microsoft through other forms of collaboration.

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