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Opportunity Title: Intelligence Community - Virtual Applied Research Consortium Program
Opportunity Reference Code: VARC-2026

Organization Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)

Reference Code VARC-2026

How to Apply Click on *Apply* below to start your application.

Additional information about the Virtual Applied Research Consortium (VARC) Program is available on the ORISE ODNI program website located at: https://orise.orau.gov/icpostdoc/index.html.

Virtual Information Fair: Join us on **March 3, from 1 to 3 p.m. ET**, for a virtual event highlighting the IC Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program and the Virtual Applied Research Consortium Pilot Program! During the event, attendees will have the chance to chat 1-on-1 with program representatives. **Register Here**

Questions about this opportunity? Please email ICPostdoc@orau.org.

Application Deadline 3/31/2026 6:00:00 PM Eastern Time Zone

Description

VIRTUAL APPLIED RESEARCH CONSORTIUM PROGRAM: TRANSFORMING SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY INTO NATIONAL SECURITY ADVANTAGE

Where Intelligence Innovation Meets Mission Impact – Apply Your Experience to America's Most Critical Challenges

ACCELERATE YOUR RESEARCH IMPACT IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

The Intelligence Community's Virtual Applied Research Consortium (VARC) Pilot Program offers elite scientists an unprecedented opportunity to transform cutting-edge research into operational capabilities that directly strengthen America's security posture. Unlike traditional research environments, our virtual applied research laboratories focus on practical applications in critical technology domains that will determine future global advantage.

Do you have what it takes to join a select cohort of brilliant minds researching national security's most pressing challenges?

Why Join the IC Virtual Applied Research Consortium Program?

- **Supercharge Your Career Path**: Leverage this prestigious program as a direct pipeline to high-impact intelligence careers. Past IC researchers have secured coveted positions across the intelligence community, defense sector, and national laboratories.
- **Elite Professional Network**: Develop career-defining connections with decision-makers and technical leaders across the 18 IC agencies who can champion your future career advancement.
- **Distinguished Credential**: Add a rare and respected qualification to your professional profile that signals to future employers your ability to excel in high-stakes environments.
- **Direct Mission Impact:** Convert your theoretical expertise into solutions that address critical intelligence gaps and protect America's interests.

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- **Professional Recognition**: Gain visibility with senior intelligence leaders while advancing your field.

2026 Focus Area: Artificial Intelligence

Our inaugural virtual laboratory will focus on artificial intelligence applications critical to intelligence and national security. Selected researchers will address high-priority challenges under the guidance of experienced IC mentors.

Research Topic:

This IC Postdoc research addresses critical challenges in validating AI systems that integrate multiple heterogeneous data sources (multi-INT) for analytical decision-making at scale. Specifically, it targets: (1) lack of rapid experimental methodologies for assessing AI performance on complex analytical reasoning tasks, (2) absence of assurance standards and testing protocols for AI systems processing sensitive, multi-source data, (3) opacity in delivered AI models that undermines trust in high-stakes assessments, (4) insufficient granularity in reward constructs limiting reinforcement learning applications beyond coding and mathematics, (5) inadequate validation methodologies for determining when AI exceeds current human-machine capabilities in data orchestration and fusion, and (6) ineffective human-AI collaboration limiting oversight in AI-driven analytical workflows.

To address these challenges, the project proposes a multidisciplinary approach integrating expertise from researchers in machine learning, cybersecurity, knowledge representation, human-computer interaction and related fields. This will result in an integrated validation framework addressing collaboration and fusion challenges while providing iterative findings supporting operational decisions. The research will establish validation standards for adaptable, explainable, and trustworthy AI systems, ensuring appropriate human oversight and facilitating effective human-machine teamwork.

Example Approaches:

- Develop innovative experimental design methodologies that support rapid probing, testing, and assessment of delivered AI systems for analytical reasoning tasks requiring multi-source evidence integration. Research will identify performance gaps between general-purpose models and domain-specialized requirements, establishing operational standards for heterogeneous data fusion.
- Research verifiable reward models supporting reinforcement learning at granularity enabling paradigm shifts in performance for complex analytical domains beyond coding and mathematics applications, with focus on intelligence community use cases.
- Conduct experiments testing explainability of delivered AI models, whether closed or open weights, focusing on methods improving transparency of reasoning and justifications for assessments that enhance trust in AI outputs used in high-stakes decision-making.
- Create dynamic knowledge representation systems and adaptive knowledge graphs tracking and monitoring entity relationships in real-time, evolving in response to shifting input distributions and multi-modal inputs.
- Establish human-AI teaming protocols optimizing collaborative decision-making by strategically allocating cognitive tasks based on complementary strengths of human judgment and AI processing capabilities.

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- Implement validation frameworks across technical performance metrics, psychological impact assessments, and simulation-based stress testing ensuring reliable AI operation under varied conditions.

What You'll Experience

As a Virtual Applied Research Consortium Program participant, you'll join a virtual consortium of up to 10 elite postdoctoral researchers focused on converting theoretical knowledge into practical solutions. This isn't abstract academic research – your experience will be guided by real-world intelligence requirements and operational needs.

You'll participate in:

- Quarterly research reviews with direct IC feedback
- Collaborative problem-solving across the intelligence enterprise
- Development of prototypes and proof-of-concepts
- Briefings and demonstrations for intelligence community leadership
- Creation of transition pathways for promising technologies

Elite Standards, Exceptional Opportunities

We're seeking candidates with outstanding academic credentials, exceptional character, and high motivation who want to make a difference in areas vital to national security.

The Program Offers:

- A yearly stipend ranging from $87,000 to $91,000
- Collaborative virtual research environment
- Direct mentorship from IC subject matter experts
- Opportunity to gain experience researching problems at the forefront of national security

Qualifications

Postdoc Eligibility

- U.S. citizens only
- Ph.D. in a relevant field must be completed before beginning the appointment and within five years of the appointment start date
- Proposal must be associated with an accredited U.S. university, college, or U.S. government laboratory
- Eligible candidates may only receive one award from the ORISE Research Participation Programs at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Research Advisor Eligibility

- Must be an employee of an accredited U.S. university, college or U.S. government laboratory
- Are not required to be U.S. citizens

Stipend $87,000.00 – $91,000.00 Yearly

Point of Contact Ashley

Eligibility

- **Citizenship:** U.S. Citizen Only

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Requirements

- **Degree:** Doctoral Degree.
- **Discipline(s):**
  - **Chemistry and Materials Sciences** (12 👁)
  - **Communications and Graphics Design** (3 👁)
  - **Computer, Information, and Data Sciences** (17 👁)
  - **Earth and Geosciences** (21 👁)
  - **Engineering** (29 👁)
  - **Environmental and Marine Sciences** (14 👁)
  - **Life Health and Medical Sciences** (45 👁)
  - **Mathematics and Statistics** (11 👁)
  - **Other Non-Science & Engineering** (2 👁)
  - **Physics** (16 👁)
  - **Science & Engineering-related** (1 👁)
  - **Social and Behavioral Sciences** (30 👁)