Announcing SIGIR Futures

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Abstract

As we approach 50 years of SIGIR conferences in 2027, it is an opportune moment not only to celebrate the impact of Information Retrieval (IR) research, but also to invest in shaping the next generation of ideas, systems, and communities that will define the field's future.

SIGIR Futures is a new ACM SIGIR program designed to help shape the trajectory of IR research and practice by supporting high-ambition, future-oriented events and grassroots projects proposed and run by community members. SIG support for Futures activities may include financial assistance, mentorship from research leaders, connections within and beyond our community, and publicity for an activity. Potential activities include workshops, challenges and competitions, visionary whitepapers, and other community-driven efforts.

Futures will begin with a fixed-deadline Call for Proposals (CFP). Selected activities will take place in 2027, aligning with the 50th anniversary of the SIGIR conference and helping shape the next 50 years of IR. In this inaugural year for Futures, we will prioritize fewer, higher-impact activities. After SIGIR 2027, we will shift to a standing CFP, enabling Futures to continuously surface and support emerging directions in IR.

Requests for Futures support for activities in 2027 should be submitted via our online form[1] by the deadline below.

- Deadline for submissions: September 1, 2026 (Anywhere on Earth Time Zone)
- Notification of decisions: September 30, 2026
- First round of Futures activities: 2027

For this first CFP, Futures activities can happen anywhere in the world at any time during 2027. We welcome proposals for Futures activities at the SIGIR 2027 conference, and other conferences to be held in 2027, including envisioning workshops, challenges and competitions around new and emerging areas, and forward-looking panels.

1 Motivation

ACM SIGIR is uniquely positioned to help the research community envision and define the future of IR. This forward-looking perspective is important for many reasons including:

[1] https://forms.gle/YxXoThjiLSbwHrcj9

- To "sell" IR outside of the SIGIR community as an innovative and exciting discipline that is proactively investing in its future;
- To help rally the IR community around some of the most compelling and impactful research problems (e.g., through events such as Search Futures [Clarke et al., 2025][2]);
- To strengthen connections with researchers in adjacent disciplines pushing the boundaries in related areas (e.g., Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Artificial Intelligence (AI)). For example, by supporting envisioning events with a cross-disciplinary focus, involving organizers and participants from multiple communities, leading to shared research agendas, co-authored publications, cross-institution grant proposals, and so on;
- To inspire and to energize the IR community, especially the next generation of IR researchers (e.g., encourage initiatives such as HIPstIR [Dietz et al., 2021] and ECRs4IR [Trippas et al., 2023], focused on early career researchers (ECRs)), to keep the community thriving and bring fresh ideas that challenge established assumptions, and;
- To bring new members into the community and keep SIGIR growing, via cross-community collaborations and showcasing our energy and the range of exciting IR-related research opportunities.

2 SIGIR Futures Program

SIGIR Futures is a new program within ACM SIGIR designed to catalyze ambitious efforts that envision and shape the future of IR research and practice. Relevant activities include those that identify and evangelize compelling IR-related research problems, tackle high-risk/high-reward challenges in IR, and dive deep on specific, future-leaning topics of interest to the IR community (including topics that may only interest a subset of the community—although not so narrow as to be sub-scale, e.g., of interest to a single person or single research group).

While the activities Futures will support (either partly or in full) will often be events such as envisioning workshops (e.g., SWIRL itself [Trippas et al., 2025] or SWIRL-like events of different scales) and competitions (e.g., the LiveRAG Challenge,[3] TREC tracks[4]), Futures could also help bring together related initiatives in the IR community and beyond to amplify their impact, or support those working on promising research directions (e.g., emerging from the Perspectives track at the SIGIR conference) to take next steps in building new communities of interest around emerging ideas or themes. Other tracks at the SIGIR conference, or IR venues in general, may also provide a valuable source of future directions and collaboration opportunities that could help inspire Futures proposals.

Examples of Futures support include (but are by no means limited to):

- Contributing funding to high-ambition events, such as envisioning workshops or challenges, that chart new directions for IR;
- Support in raising awareness of an emerging, high-importance topic with broad relevance to the community;

[2] https://searchfutures.github.io/
[3] https://liverag.tii.ae/
[4] https://trec.nist.gov/

- Assistance in building connections across the IR community around a breakthrough idea poised to shape the field;
- Funding or access to collaboration technologies or experiences (digital or physical) that enable engagement among researchers working on a flagship research effort;
- Funding for limited travel to bring researchers from different institutions together to brainstorm on a forward-looking, high-impact challenge, and/or;
- Connections to IR leaders for guidance and advice on refining a promising new direction for the field.

3 Selecting Futures Proposals

Proposals for Futures support should be submitted via our online form[5] by the submission deadline posted above.

Please note that the SIG has limited funds available for financial assistance. Funding requests should be $10k USD or less per proposal, though exceptions may be made for activities of significant community impact. Note that funding is administered under ACM rules and we will likely be unable to support all proposals we receive. Financial support may also be partial and is contingent on feasibility. Beyond financial support, proposers are strongly encouraged to think creatively about other reasonable ways that the SIG could help advance their forward-looking activities and to clearly articulate those requests and their benefits in their proposal.

Proposals will be evaluated based on criteria including:

- Alignment with the Futures program aims (to catalyze forward-looking activities that help define the future of IR);
- The level of ambition;
- The expected impact on the field of IR, the IR community, and/or emerging areas where IR can play a leading role (and how measurable that impact is);
- The need for SIG funding in light of other funding options (if any);
- The feasibility of the activity described in the proposal;
- SIG budget considerations; and
- The opportunity cost for the SIG in supporting this proposal versus putting those resources to other uses.

Requests will be reviewed and selected by the Futures chair with SIGIR Executive Committee oversight. We will revise the selection process (e.g., adding a small review panel) as necessary.

Proposals that build connections to other disciplines or communities (e.g., co-organizers of activities from recommender systems, HCI, and/or AI) are encouraged, as they help strengthen ties beyond SIGIR. Proposals led by ECRs are also encouraged to support and inspire the next generation of IR talent. Diversity across other dimensions, such as geography, background, sector (e.g., academia, industry, and government), and cross-domain research, is similarly important and will be taken into account.

[5] https://forms.gle/YxXoThjiLSbwHrcj9

Authors of selected proposals are required to provide a brief statement on the impact of the activity and how Futures support helped. We will include these in a SIGIR Forum article and/or share highlights at the SIGIR conference business meeting.

4 Comments, Questions, or Suggestions?

For questions or feedback, please contact the SIGIR Futures Chair, Ryen W. White at futures_SIGIR@acm.org. Please also reach out if you have suggestions for specific Futures activities as we develop this program for the community.

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