

Toyota AI Ventures Launches Call for Innovation to Fund Robotics Startups Focused on Mobile Manipulation

July 11, 2018

The image shows the Toyota logo, which consists of the word "TOYOTA" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The logo is centered within a light gray rectangular background.

LOS ALTOS, Calif. (July 11, 2018) – Silicon Valley-based venture capital firm [Toyota AI Ventures](#) unveiled a global “call for innovation” today in partnership with the [Toyota Research Institute \(TRI\)](#). Designed to spur entrepreneurial innovation by identifying key technology gaps, the initiative uses a call-and-response approach to offer promising startups the opportunity to secure from \$500,000 to \$2 million in venture capital funding from Toyota AI Ventures, as well as the possibility of partnering on a proof of concept project with TRI.

The first call, developed in conjunction with TRI’s world-class robotics group, focuses on improving mobile manipulation technology for assistive robots that can help people in and around the home. Future calls may address technology challenges in other areas that TRI is working on as part of its research in robotics and automated driving, such as perception, machine learning, or simulation.

“With the call for innovation, we’re looking for talented, tenacious entrepreneurs that are bold enough to solve some of the toughest problems, and bring them to market,” said Jim Adler, managing director of Toyota AI

Ventures. “A startup may be working on technologies for a related product, or an entrepreneur may have been wanting to start a company but she hasn’t done so yet. We hope this call will encourage innovators to take the plunge.”

Since launching an initial \$100 million fund a year ago to invest in early-stage startups focused on artificial intelligence (AI), cloud, data, autonomous mobility, and robotics, Toyota AI Ventures has quickly grown its [portfolio](#). To date, the firm has announced 11 portfolio companies, including [Blackmore](#), [Boxbot](#), [Connected Signals](#), [Intuition Robotics](#), [Joby Aviation](#), [May Mobility](#), [Metawave](#), [Nauto](#), [Realtime Robotics](#), and [SLAMcore](#). Its most recent investment, [announced today](#), is in [Embodied.me](#), a robotics and AI company that is developing companion robots that aim to revolutionize care and wellness by enhancing the quality of human life.

This first call for innovation is open to hardware and software startups around the world that have: (1) raised less than \$3 million in funding; (2) can demonstrate their solution via a working prototype; and (3) have a strong business model to deliver value to customers. Examples of mobile manipulation solutions in hardware include safe, lightweight arms; grippers designed for common daily tasks; and technologies for better tactile sensing. Software solutions could include ways to compensate for lower-precision, lower-fidelity hardware; algorithms to learn from or annotate data; and ways to apply lessons learned from simulation.

“Robotics is starting to have a big impact in industrial automation, but we see a gap when it comes to assistive robotics in and around the home,” explained Max Bajracharya, director of robotics at TRI and head of the Mobile Manipulation Technology team. “There’s a need for innovative technologies and business models that will help us get to the ultimate goal of making robots that are safe, affordable, and useful for everyday people.”

Toyota AI Ventures is accepting applications for this call for innovation now through the end of October, and submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Qualified startups will be evaluated on the basis of their team, technology, business model, and go-to-market strategy, and will be subject to standard diligence before any investment is made.

Innovators are encouraged to learn more and apply on the Toyota AI Ventures [website](#).