Call for Applications: Research Ethicist in Technology Ethics

Topos Institute is searching for a Research Ethicist to help craft and develop a deeply rooted culture of ethical, prosocial scientific and technological research, both internally and in the broader ecosystem. Topos is a new nonprofit scientific institute with a mission to shape technology for public benefit by advancing sciences of connection and integration. Our team of 12 uses cutting-edge mathematics to develop computational tools that enhance communication, cooperation, and collective intelligence (example), with careful attention to their ethical, prosocial deployment. We have raised over $7M and are doubling in size annually. We now seek a motivated, independent team member to help shape the ethical culture of our ambitious research institute directly in its most formative stages.

Position Summary

- The Research Ethicist will be the pioneer who builds and develops new cultural practices in research and development (R&D) at Topos, to further deepen engagement with the ethical and societal impacts of our fundamental, technological research. We believe that more ethical and responsible technology R&D requires innovation in R&D practices and processes, including in basic R&D that may initially seem at arms length from application. The new Research Ethicist will engage with the team to lead these transformative efforts at Topos, with the ultimate goal of leading new R&D sector best practice.
- The Research Ethicist will collaborate closely with fellow Topos scientists, including on reviews of ethical implications of existing and potential research projects; development of research and governance processes and practices; building a culture of ethical and societal reflection in our research and team; and application of their essential expertise across the organization. While the primary focus is on internal expertise and practices at Topos, publication through academic and/or popular channels is also a key aspect of the role.
- The salary range for this position is $70,000 to $90,000, with generous benefits. It is a two year full-time position, with possibility of extension, and located at our offices in Berkeley, California.

Topos believes in the value that diverse perspectives and life experiences bring to our community, and we especially welcome applications from those with personal or professional backgrounds underrepresented in our present team. We are dedicated to shaping the future of technology to ensure a more equitable and just world, and believe that technology to support a healthy society can only be built by an inclusive organization.

Position Responsibilities

- Collaborate with Topos staff scientists to illuminate ethical and societal implications of existing and proposed research projects, including broader issues of fairness, autonomy, responsibility, and care.
- Collaborate with Topos' broader stakeholders, including the board of directors and principal donors, to align our ethical culture.
- Help explore and provide guidance regarding new, prosocial applications of our mathematical and software tools, including design, implementation, and partnership choices that facilitate those applications.
- Participate in the development of Topos organizational policy on topics including research management; diversity, equity and inclusion; gift and grant acceptance; and outside engagements, with a view to advancing new industry standards.
- Bring expertise in technology ethics to our team through seminars, facilitated discussions, and staff training, including helping Topos staff think concretely about abstract projects and the people that are impacted.
- Facilitate links between the Topos community and wider technology ethics community.
- Pursue novel scholarship on ethical practice in fundamental mathematical, scientific, and technological research.

Qualifications

- A PhD in a field related to technology and ethics (or equivalent), and at least one year of experience in a scientific research context.
- Exceptional communication, facilitation, and interpersonal skills, ideally combined with experience in establishing the culture of early-stage organizations. Diverse cultural experiences are a plus; understanding of marginalization is essential.
- Ambitious work ethic and commitment to bringing about social change via the mission of the Topos Institute.

This position description is not all-inclusive. Other duties and responsibilities may be assigned by the CEO or Director of Research.

About Topos

Topos is a mission driven organization that works to shape technology for public benefit by advancing sciences of connection and integration. Our strategic plan is at the center of all our work together: https://topos.site/strategic-plan.

Joining Topos means joining an exceptional team deeply committed to using their talents for the betterment of society, and a future of technology that belongs to the public. After two years incubating the idea at MIT, we opened our Berkeley office in 2021, and are growing fast, with an office in Oxford (UK) planned for the coming year. We're looking for team members who are as excited as we are at pioneering a new organizational structure for prosocial and ethical development of technology, from basic research to tool development to societal impacts.

Topos is committed to ensuring that its team members thrive in their work and home lives. Topos offers competitive salary and benefits including medical, dental, and life insurance, 401k, paid sick leave, 18 days paid vacation annually, 13+ paid company holidays, and options for flexible working hours. We seek to provide working conditions comparable with top-tier academic research institutions such as MIT, Stanford, and UC Berkeley.

Location in Berkeley is required and we anticipate most work days will involve time in our Downtown Berkeley office; nonetheless our culture is one of trust and autonomy, and some work from home is common.

Topos is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran. More than this, we are committed to building a team where diverse voices will feel respected and heard.

Further information about Topos Institute can be found on our website (https://topos.institute), including information about our current team. See also our blog, YouTube, and research homepage.

Apply

If you have questions about this position, please contact our CEO Brendan Fong at brendan@topos.institute. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. All offers of employment are contingent upon completion of a background check. Unfortunately, Topos is not able to sponsor visas for applicants without US work status.

To apply, please send an application comprising a cover letter and CV/resume to juliet@topos.institute.

Please feel free to convey any information about preferred names and pronouns. Upon request, we are also able to provide reasonable disability-related accommodations during the application and interview process.

Join us in realizing our vision of a world where the systems that surround us benefit us all.