

Broadening Participation at the Scratch@MIT Conference

Submitted by:

Mitchel Resnick

MIT Media Laboratory

mres@media.mit.edu

Needs and Objectives

In 2003, our research group at the MIT Media Lab was awarded a four-year grant from the National Science Foundation (ITR-0325828) to develop a new programming environment, called Scratch, that enables young people to create their own interactive stories, games, animations, and simulations – and share their creations with one another online. The Scratch website (<http://scratch.mit.edu>), launched in May 2007, has become a vibrant online community, with nearly 500,000 registered members sharing, discussing, and remixing one another's projects. Each day, members of the Scratch community (mostly ages 8 to 16) upload roughly 1500 new Scratch projects to the website – on average, a new project every minute. As they program and share Scratch projects, young people learn to think creatively, reason systematically, and work collaboratively. Scratch was featured as the cover story in the November 2009 issue of *Communications of the ACM* (see <http://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/Scratch-CACM-final.pdf>).

This summer, we are hosting a conference, called Scratch@MIT, for educators, researchers, developers, and others who support the use of Scratch, so that they can share best practices with one another (see <http://scratch.mit.edu/conference>). At the conference, scheduled for August 11-14 at the MIT Media Lab, participants will:

- share stories of how Scratch is being used in homes, schools, and community centers
- participate in hands-on workshops, to learn new Scratch techniques and strategies
- discuss research examining how and what kids learn with Scratch
- explore future directions for Scratch with members of the MIT Scratch Team

Since Scratch software is available free of charge, it has attracted a broad and diverse community of users. We want to make sure that participation at the Scratch@MIT conference is similarly broad and diverse. We realize that registration fees and travel costs could make it difficult for some people (particularly school teachers) to participate in the conference. In this proposal, we are seeking funding so that we can waive registration fees for some people coming to the conference, and thus broaden participation at the conference.

Conference Organization

We previously hosted one similar Scratch conference, in July 2008 at MIT. The conference attracted great interest: registration reached full capacity of 300 people a full month before the conference. Feedback from conference participants was extremely positive. The conference agenda and program are available at <http://events.scratch.mit.edu/conference/2008>

Since the last conference, we created a community website, called ScratchEd, for educators interested in Scratch (<http://scratched.media.mit.edu>). More than 1500 educators have created accounts on the ScratchEd website, and we see them as the core audience for the Scratch@MIT conference. We are increasing the maximum number of participants for this summer's conference to 350 people, and we again expect to reach full capacity.

The organizing committee for 2010 conference is the same as for the 2008 conference: Mitchel Resnick, Karen Brennan, and Stephanie Gayle (all of the MIT Media Lab).

Broadening Participation

The costs of the Scratch@MIT conference will be covered primarily through registration fees. We have set registration fees at \$275 for people who register before May 15, and \$375 for people who register after May 15.

To broaden participation at the conference, we would like to waive registration fees for 50 of the participants (particularly classroom teachers). The conference website provides information on how to apply for free registration. Applicants are asked to submit responses to two questions:

- Why do you want to come to the Scratch@MIT conference?
- How do you intend to make use of your conference experiences?

Based on the responses to these questions, we will select 50 people to receive free registration.

Budget

We are requesting that NSF provide funds to waive registration fees for 50 conference participants. At an average registration cost of \$325/person, our total request is for \$16,250 (50 x \$325).