

MIT wins Pentagon prize in social networking contest

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DARPA says the balloons will be in readily accessible locations and visible from nearby roads. (Credit: DARPA)

A team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has won a 40,000-dollar prize for using social networking tools to identify the locations of 10 large weather balloons in a contest sponsored by the Pentagon's research agency.

The MIT Red [Balloon](#) Challenge Team needed fewer than nine hours to identify where the eight-foot (2.43-meter) red balloons were tethered across the United States.

The "Network Challenge" contest was sponsored by the Pentagon's

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to mark the 40th anniversary of ARPANet, the pre-cursor to what today is known as the Internet.

ARPANet took its name from the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which was established in 1958 following the launch a year earlier of Sputnik by what was then the Soviet Union.

ARPA was the original name of DARPA, the Pentagon's central research and development organization.

"DARPA salutes the MIT team for successfully completing this complex task less than nine hours after balloon launch," DARPA director Regina Dugan said in a statement after the Boston-based university won Saturday's contest.

DARPA did not say how the MIT won the competition.

According to The Washington Post, the MIT team allotted 4,000 dollars to each balloon.

The first person to spot a balloon would be awarded 2,000 dollars, the Post said, with smaller amounts going to other informants.

According to [DARPA](#), the goal of the Network Challenge was to explore how "broad-scope problems can be tackled using social networking tools."

It said it aimed to look at such issues as mobilization, collaboration, and trust in diverse [social networking](#) constructs.

More information: networkchallenge.darpa.mil/default.aspx

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