

Consultancy Brief: Collections Management System Review

Context

Museums Sheffield cares for the city's collections of art, human history and natural science. These collections amass over 750,000 individual items including Archaeology, Decorative Art, Social History, Natural Science, Visual Art and World Cultures. The collection of the Guild of St George (originally assembled by Victorian thinker, artist and writer John Ruskin) is also on long term loan to the city and cared for by Museums Sheffield. The industrial collections are cared for by Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust and comprise objects relating to the major manufacturing industries of Sheffield in particular those associated with metalworking. This collection includes items relating to iron and steel manufacture, cutlery making, tool making, silver and hollow-ware manufacture, mechanical and electrical engineering, scientific and technological research, and other manufacturing industries around Sheffield. Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust also cares for the Hawley Tool collection which is on long term loan.

From April 1st 2021 Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust will merge to form a new museums service for the city: Sheffield Museums Trust. This new Trust will care for over 1 million objects and manage Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet, Graves Gallery, Kelham Island Museum, Millennium Gallery, Shepherd Wheel, Weston Park Museum and an off-site collections store.

Ambition

The merger of the two Trusts reunites Sheffield's collections and offers a fantastic opportunity to tell new stories and engage more people with their collections. We aim to place museums at the heart of our city and work collaboratively to bring creative and inspirational museum experiences to all Sheffield's communities.

In order to maximise the potential of Sheffield's collections it is essential that we have an effective Collections Management System (CMS) which meets the needs of our diverse collections and brings together Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust data into one system. The merger of the two organisations offers the opportunity to analyse the current CMS and evaluate whether it is the best option for the long term.

In addition to effective internal collections management it is crucial that we can provide digital access to Sheffield's collection. This will enable us to connect people locally, nationally and internationally with Sheffield's collections to inspire and intrigue.

Current Situation

Both Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust currently use the same collections management system - TMS (The Museums System) which is a Gallery Systems product. Museums

Sheffield have been using TMS since 2001 and now have around 130,000 records on the system. More recently Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust started using TMS and has fewer records on their system.

Museum Sheffield also uses Gallery Systems' software program eMuseum which integrates with TMS to publish collections online. Whilst the interface between TMS and eMuseum is very effective and gives Museums Sheffield control and flexibility, the user experience of the online collections is not as intuitive and user friendly as we would like. Currently Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust does not have any collections online.

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In order to unite Sheffield's collections and become one organisation the two systems will need to merge and in addition the collections will be brought together online, accessible via the new Sheffield Museums Trust website. Before embarking on the merger of the two TMS systems we are keen to ensure that this is the best Collections Management System for the new Trust with specific attention being paid to the sustainability of the system and its value for money.

Over the last nine months the provision of online resources has never been more vital and providing digital access to Sheffield's collections is an important part of our role as a museums service. We are however aware that our current online collections database is not particularly user friendly and would like to explore different options for the interface between our CMS and the online collections function. We would like the online database to be more intuitive and encourage greater user interaction, providing visitors with the opportunity to engage more deeply with Sheffield's collections. Our aspiration is to provide a range of different kinds of online engagement which are appropriate for users with different motivations, from the more informal browser to professional researchers. It's important therefore that we are able to offer meaningful interaction, creating links between collections, facilitating thematic searches and potentially enabling our visitors to curate their own groupings of the online collections.

We would therefore like to recruit a consultant to review our current Collection Management System and make recommendations as to the best fit for the new Trust. We would like this to include consideration as to how this CMS interfaces with the website and suggestions of potential models.

The consultant will work directly to Sian Brown, Head of Collections at Museums Sheffield. If you have any questions about this brief, please contact Sian at sian.brown@museums-sheffield.org.uk.

We are also currently seeking to appoint a Web Developer to research and develop the new Sheffield Museums Trust website and the information provided by the Collections Management System Review will feed into this larger project. The Web Developer will be appointed in February with the new Sheffield Museums website launched in summer 2021. The brief is available to view here: <https://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/about/invitations-to-tender>

As part of this research we would anticipate you liaising with the wider team at both Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust, including both those who work on the Collections

Management System on a regular basis and our Head of Communications who is leading on the creation of the new Sheffield Museums Trust website.

The Consultant will be expected to have:

- Previous experience working with Collections Management Systems
- A proven track record of researching and reviewing Collections Management Systems
- A good understanding of the interface between Collections Management Systems and online collections facilities
- A solid understanding of the technical requirements of data management systems and data migration
- Excellent communication skills

Budget and Timeframe

The total budget for this work is £5,000. The work will be expected to take place between January and March 2021.

How to Apply

Applicants should submit a CV and proposal by noon on Monday 18th January 2021. The proposal, to be no more than 4 sides of A4, should include information on:

- Approach to the brief and outline methodology and timetable
- Details of relevant experience including two references from recent work
- Fee proposal, including a day rate and number of days proposed

Completed proposals should be sent to sian.brown@museums-sheffield.org.uk. Please use this email for any questions or queries.

Virtual interviews will be held during the week commencing 18th January 2021.