

Request for Proposal

Museums' Collections Database Public Portal User Study

Summary

Five Colleges, Inc. (FCI) seeks a research partner as it engages in a study of users of the consortium's Museums' Collections Database Public User Portal. The study is one portion of an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to plan for the future of joint management of the art and cultural heritage collections six repositories and to prepare for a linked data environment across all five college libraries, archives, special collections, and museums. The research will inform future directions for the public-facing art and cultural asset discovery experience.

Context

Overall Project

The Museum Collections Management Commons project is a two-year planning grant funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered by Five Colleges, Inc (FCI). and an interdisciplinary, intercampus steering committee. The project has two main goals. The first is to assess the current status of the museums' consortial collection management platform, functionality, and metadata. The second goal is to plan for interoperability with campus libraries, archives, and related resources to enable student and faculty discovery of interconnected regional cultural assets.

The consortial database (MimsyXG) has been in use since 1995 and is shared by UMass Amherst's University Museum of Contemporary Art, Amherst College's Mead Art Museum, Smith College Museum of Art, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Hampshire College's Gallery, and Historic Deerfield. The database is administered and stewarded by FCI and collections are published to the web via a [public portal](#).

For more than 50 years, FCI's work has included the continual development of an integrated library system, providing unified access to the rich physical and electronic resources distributed across five campuses. Beginning in the 1990s, this commitment was complemented by a parallel project to open up discovery of and access to the museum collections held within the member campuses by creating a consortial database with a public-facing portal. Additionally, FCI coordinates Museums10, a dynamic collaborative of 10 museums in the immediate region that inspire, engage and enrich their communities through shared experiences of art, literature, history, and the natural world. Not only have these initiatives been of wide benefit to academic and broader communities, they have established a strong foundation of collaborative practice encompassing governance structures, funding models, shared systems, and coordinated operations. This culture of cooperation positions FCI to advance to an even

more collaborative and innovative endeavor: to optimize effective cross-collection discovery to unlock the extraordinary cultural heritage and scholarly resources held within the consortium.

As a critical step on this journey, FCI is preparing to upgrade the consortial museum database to a next-generation solution. At its core this project will identify a strategy that will maintain (and improve) the integrity of collection metadata and collection management processes. More broadly, the project will define the requirements for a solution that will allow for the integration of the museum data with other collection discovery systems; that could be extended to incorporate additional managed collections of artifacts; and that is undergirded by a sustainable vision for coordinated oversight, staffing, and support.

The overall project is conceived as having two primary, parallel trajectories. The first is a research process to assess current needs and context to develop a set of functional requirements for a future system and to identify the steps necessary for implementation. The second will focus on organizational development, mapping new cross-collection systems of governance, planning and communication to facilitate increased coordination across museums, libraries and archives. This second phase seeks to break down silos that impede collaboration and to diagnose the imbalanced distribution of expertise and capacity across the colleges and their special collections to build and sustain a more robust cross-collection network of knowledge and discovery.

The proposed project aims to address significant challenges posed by the unique, and still pioneering, shared database model, including: 1) adopting controlled vocabularies, 2) instituting a formal metadata governance system, 3) developing specifications for a new collection management system that incorporates linked data across many managed collections at the five campuses and broader Museums10 group, and 4) providing for the possibility of a federated discovery experience for external and internal stakeholders.

Purpose of User Study

The user study component of the overall project is intended to provide demographic information about web portal users, information about their expectations and perceptions of the current portal in order to plan for future improvements to the collection management system, metadata, metadata transparency, linked data, and the public discovery platform. The study should provide baseline information against which future interim and summative studies can be compared. It is also anticipated that the study results will be published in one or more scholarly journals and/or released independently in support of field-wide learning.

In addition to learning about the current user population, the study should explore the population of non-users to understand their demographics and perceptions regarding use of art and humanities collections to support teaching and learning in a wide variety of academic disciplines.

About Five Colleges, Inc.

Made up of Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the Five College Consortium in the Connecticut River Valley of western Massachusetts is one of the oldest and most extensive higher education consortia in the United States. Its four original campuses began collaborating in the early 20th century, decades before incorporating as a formal consortium and midwifing the creation of Hampshire College in the late 1960s.

Over their 100-plus years of collaboration and 50-plus years as a consortium, the shared spirit of collaboration, community service, and intellectual excellence of the Five College campuses has engendered an organization serving five campuses with 30,000 students, 2,200 faculty members, 7,000 courses, and a combined library collection of some 10 million volumes. In addition to administering a wide array of academic and administrative programs that benefit faculty, students, and staff at member institutions, Five Colleges creates a dynamic intellectual and cultural environment for local communities.

Research questions

The general research questions for this study include, but are not limited to, the following items. It is expected that these will be discussed and refined in concert with the selected firm.

1. What are the demographic characteristics of a) the current collections discovery portal's users? b) non-users?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the portal experience in terms of:
 - a. User interface design?
 - b. Ease of use?
 - c. Accuracy and trustworthiness of returned items?
 - d. Metadata transparency?
3. What are participants' motivations for seeking three-dimensional resources?
4. How did participants find the portal? (referral sources)
5. What are participants' expectations regarding discovery of three-dimensional objects housed on campuses or in individual museums?
6. For non-users:
 - a. Are participants aware of the existence of campus museums? The collection portal?
 - b. What are participants' perceptions about who the collections are for?
 - c. What are participants' perceptions about how collections can be used in teaching and learning across a variety of disciplines?
7. In what ways are the results of this study generalizable to casual public users?

Study population

The study population for this research includes the following groups:

1. Current students at UMass Amherst, Amherst College, Hampshire College, Smith College, and Mount Holyoke College
2. Recent alumni of the above campuses
3. Historic Deerfield stakeholders including membership, visitors, and alumni of its fellowship program
4. Faculty at all five campuses and Historic Deerfield
5. Outside researchers who make use of any of the collections, or the public portal to discover the museums' holdings
6. Users of other managed collections on the campuses and within Museums10 including library and archive collections
7. Optional groups, groups of potential new users:
 - a. Public school systems
 - b. Other regional campuses, outside of the FCI network
 - c. General public users otherwise unaffiliated with FCI or Museums10.

As the study population are college and university students, among others, it is necessary that Institutional Review Board requirements be met for each campus. See the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements section.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements

In order to ensure ethical research, allow access to the student population at all five campuses, and permit eventual publication of the research findings in support of our responsibility to the museum field at large, this research project will engage in the full IRB procedure for all five campuses. Erin Richardson, PhD, Project Manager for the Mellon Collections Management Commons Project at Five Colleges, Inc. will shepherd the IRB protocol process starting with UMass Amherst and proceeding through the other four college IRBs. Successful proposers must agree to comply with IRB protocols including but not limited to: complete required training through the CITI program, be willing to sign UMass Amherst's Individual Investigator Agreement (See Appendix A) and comply with any additional requirements presented by the IRBs of the other four campuses.

Scope of Work and Deliverables

The selected firm will work directly with the Project Manager at Five Colleges, Inc. to carry out the work of the User Study. A quantitative methodology is preferred because it will allow direct comparisons over time should the organizations choose to undertake interim or summative studies to track progress. The museum field tends to rely on qualitative data, and we'd [would] like to take this opportunity to break that habit. Mixed-methods proposals are welcome but they should have significant quantitative components. The required deliverables are:

1. Development of research plan and questions
2. Survey instrument development and testing
3. Identification of study sample
4. All documentation in support of all five IRB applications
5. Advertising and Subject recruitment
6. Data collection and cleaning
7. Final report including
 - a. Data analysis
 - b. Summary of findings
 - c. Implications and recommendations

Timeline

Release of RFP	August 6
Question Period	August 6 - August 23, 11:59pm EDT
Question responses released	August 25, by 5pm EDT
Submission deadline	September 7, 11:59pm
Proposal Review	September 8 - September 14
Firm Selection	September 18
Project begins	October 2020
Project ends	November 2021

Proposals should include:

Proposer qualifications and identification of team members

Include a firm profile and biographies of each team member anticipated to work on the project.

Methodological approach

Explain in detail how you will approach this research. What methodologies will be employed? What statistical analyses do you anticipate using? How will findings be presented? Will you include a literature review? What other datasets or previous studies will you incorporate into your work? Clearly articulate why you believe the proposed methodology is appropriate to the research in question.

Proposed project schedule

Given the academic calendar of the study population, the current Covid-19 situation, and the time your team requires to prepare the deliverables and gather data, please lay out a clear proposed project schedule. It is generally understood that Fall 2020 will be needed to prepare the research plan, develop the survey instrument, and proceed through the IRBs before the instrument can be released to the study population. All deliverables must be completed and accepted by December 1, 2021.

Previous related studies undertaken by the proposer

Include brief descriptions and/or links to publications referencing research with similar populations, similar questions, or similar scope that your team has undertaken.

References

References should include email and phone contact information for at least three (3) references. These references will preferably be clients involved in the completion of the research described in the above section.

Price

Provide a total price for the project with a breakdown of the cost for each required deliverable.

Instructions for submission

All proposal components should be submitted as one PDF document emailed to bcusin@fivecolleges.edu with the subject line “User Study RFP submission [submitter name]” by August 19, 2020 proposals received after August 19 at 11:59PM EDT will not be considered.

Questions about the proposal can be emailed to bcusin@fivecolleges.edu before August 14 at 11:59pm with the subject line “User Study RFP questions”. Receipt of questions will be acknowledged when received, but all submitted questions will be answered in one response document emailed to all individuals and firms who communicated with us about the RFP on August 17, 2020.

Proposal evaluation criteria

Qualifications of proposer	30%
Methodology and work plan	40%
Cost	30%

APPENDIX A

Individual Investigator Agreement

Name of Institution with the Federalwide Assurance (FWA): University of Massachusetts Amherst

Applicable FWA #: 00003909

Individual Investigator's Name: _____

Protocol Name and Number: _____

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- (1) The above-named Individual Investigator has reviewed: 1) *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (or other internationally recognized equivalent; see section B.1. of the Terms of the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) for International (Non-U.S.) Institutions); 2) the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects at 45 CFR part 46 (or other procedural standards; see section B.3. of the Terms of the FWA for International (Non-U.S.) Institutions); 3) the FWA and applicable Terms of the FWA for the institution referenced above; and 4) the relevant institutional policies and procedures for the protection of human subjects.
 - (2) The Investigator understands and hereby accepts the responsibility to comply with the standards and requirements stipulated in the above documents and to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research conducted under this Agreement.
 - (3) The Investigator will comply with all other applicable federal, international, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies that may provide additional protection for human subjects participating in research conducted under this agreement.
 - (4) The Investigator will abide by all determinations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) designated under the above FWA and will accept the final authority and decisions of the IRB, including but not limited to directives to terminate participation in designated research activities.
 - (5) The Investigator will complete the University of Massachusetts Amherst CITI educational training program required by the Institution and/or the IRB prior to initiating research covered under this Agreement.
 - (6) The Investigator will report promptly to the IRB any proposed changes in the research conducted under this Agreement. The investigator will not initiate changes in the research without prior IRB/IEC review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
 - (7) The Investigator will report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others in research covered under this Agreement.

