

Regional Data Research Project brief **- MLA North West**



Introduction

The remit of Museums, Libraries and Archives North West (MLA North West) is to provide innovative services and strategic leadership, advocacy, information and support to the region. The agency aims to maximise the sector's contribution to the North West's distinctive cultural, social, educational and economic life and identity.

Background

To enable MLA North West to achieve its aims, a complete and reliable range of information and data needs to be gathered to demonstrate the sector's strengths and successes and identify gaps in provision and areas where improvements need to be made. There have been examples of ground breaking research and very good practice regarding data collection amongst Museums, Archives and Libraries in the region. Nevertheless the situation is not consistent and requires a strategic approach and MLA North West needs to address this.

The advent of Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment with local authorities has encouraged the use of detailed performance management systems amongst those museums, libraries and archives administered in this way. The requirements of funding bodies and government departments have also resulted in more effective data gathering. Such initiatives as the Museum Hub system and the Public Library Standards, have improved practice further, however there is still a need for a dynamic strategic lead in this area.

It is therefore MLA North West's responsibility to take the lead in data and information gathering in the region. To this effect the organisation wishes to produce a position statement for data collection in the North West. The statement will provide guidance on the creation of a comprehensive bank of data of museums, libraries and archives data. Such data will provide an empirical base for demonstrating the value of the sector, provide evidence for evaluation and advocacy purposes, and inform the region's economic and strategic purposes.

Objectives of the MLA North West Position Statement

1. To identify and evaluate existing quantitative and qualitative data relating to museums, libraries and archives in the North West by:

- * Identifying existing sources (published, non-published and electronic) relating to museums, libraries and archives (regionally, sub-regionally and locally) and emanating from all sectors, nationally, regionally and locally.

- * Assessing these data in terms of timeliness, completeness, robustness, etc over a five year period.

2. To identify the needs for data by:

- * Confirming the status of existing data, and addressing definitional issues.

- * Consultation with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) about the needs of key national stakeholders for data.

- * Consultation with MLA North West's key strategic regional partners (Culture northwest, Government Office North West, northwest Development Agency, Arts Council, English Heritage and others) regarding their current and future data requirements in relation to the sector.
- * Consultation with strategic partners in the region regarding plans to establish a Cultural observatory for research and consultancy reports, to coordinate signposting to active data across the cultural sector and to provide support and guidance for data collection and research.
- * Discussion with MLA North West's staff about the data required to support and monitor the effectiveness of its programmes, including data required to report to its board and significant funding organisations.
- * Consultation with a representative selection of the region's museums, libraries and archives organisations to discover their statistical requirements in the light of statutory obligations and other review processes, including measurement against national standards or initiatives.

3. To provide MLA North West with:

- * Prioritised data collection needs.
- * Solutions that take into account both MLA North West's capacity to collect and collate data and the activities and plans of MLA and other relevant organisations.
- * Suggestions towards a strategy ensuring the collection of relevant data in the future
- * Suggestions for storage, presentation and circulation of data that allow easy access to the required information.

Deliverable

Therefore MLA North West wishes to appoint a consultant/organisation to undertake a piece of work to meet the objectives described above.

The consultant/organisation selected will produce a written report providing analysis, evaluations and recommendations on the following areas:

- Identifying priority quantitative and qualitative data collection needs
- Providing a forward plan for data collection and data housing
- Storage, presentation and circulation of data

Such work must take account of MLA North West's internal capacity and the plans of relevant organisations for regional research and data management, and therefore will allow MLA North West to fashion a position statement for the region.

Costs

MLA North West estimates the cost of the project to be £10,000 - £20,000.

Timescale

Bids should be submitted by Monday 4th October at 12 noon. The selection panel will meet on Thursday, 7th October and the successful bid will be notified shortly after this. The appointed organisation will be expected to attend a commissioning meeting with the project steering group on Monday 18th October and attend regular steering group meetings during the project. The final report should be submitted to MLA North West by 31st January 2005.

Consultant Specification

The successful organisation will be required to demonstrate that it can provide the following skills, experience and knowledge:

- Knowledge and understanding of the museum, library and archives sector.
- Knowledge and understanding of data collection and research in the cultural sector.
- A thorough and up-to-date understanding of qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques as applied to the MLA sector, related sectors and other disciplines.
- Experience of analyzing data and advising on the analysis of data.
- Experience of undertaking similar research.
- Understanding of relevant data protection legislation.
- The bidder will need to describe and justify a detailed methodology. This should build on the points set out in the brief, be feasible within the specified timetable and within the cost limits set out above.

Bids

Bids should include:

- Details of methodology
- Details of costs
- CVs of personnel involved and a description of their suitability to carry out the work.

8 hard copies and an electronic version in RTF or Word for Windows should all be submitted by 12 noon on 4th October to:

Hazel McCormack
Administrative Assistant
MLA North West
Ground Floor, The Malt Building
Wilderspool Park
Greenall's Ave
Warrington, WA4 6HL

Reporting structure

The consultant/organisation will report to Jon Finch, Head of Policy and Development at MLA North West. In addition, the consultant/organisation will be expected to provide regular updates to the project steering group (schedule to be agreed at the first meeting, but will be no more than four meetings).

If you wish to discuss the contents of this brief please contact Jon Finch at MLA North West on 01925 625061 or via email at: jon.finch@nwmlac.org.uk

