

## **Call for Expressions of Interest for Participation in an AHRC Workshop on UK-US Collaboration for Digital Scholarship in Cultural Institutions**

### **Introduction**

The AHRC is pleased to announce a call for participants to attend a workshop on “UK-US Collaboration for Digital Scholarship in Cultural Institutions”. Organised in partnership with EPSRC (the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) of the UK and the NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities); NSF (National Science Foundation); Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress in the US the event will convene 60-70 leading experts from both countries to explore the role of digital scholarship in defining the future of cultural institutions.

The workshop will take place from 18-19 September, in Washington DC, and launch a new 5-year programme focused on UK-US collaboration for digital scholarship in cultural institutions for which the AHRC has received funding from the UKRI Fund for International Collaboration. It will play a key role in shaping the thematic priorities to be taken forward through the programme and embedded within future funding calls, and in building the transatlantic partnerships that will respond to the opportunities and challenges underpinning the programme.

### **Context**

Museums and cognate institutions such as galleries, libraries and archives are vital cultural assets and central to the academic, social, and economic wellbeing of the UK and US. As a result of the technological shift driven by digitisation, mobile access, social media, machine learning and immersive technologies, however, they face growing pressure from evolving audience and user expectations.

Given the variability in the form, standard and contexts of the material they hold, museums and related institutions face a particular challenge in responding to the complexities of the modern digital age and have had fewer opportunities than other organisations to explore how they most effectively make their collections available in digital form for large-scale computational research.

The programme being launched by this workshop aims to respond to this challenge by establishing new transatlantic research partnerships that deliver a transformational impact on digital scholarship in museums and cultural institutions in the UK and US. These collaborations will transform the ways in which culture and heritage can be experienced by global audiences; open new research frontiers and questions; and advance collections-based research methods for the 21st century. Fundamentally, the programme will reimagine the future for the world’s leading museums and cultural institutions, empowering them to adapt to the digital age in a manner that secures their enduring value as centres for excellent research and wider cultural, economic and social value.

Specifically, it aims to:

- Build capacity through the innovative application of digital methods and research in museums and cultural institutions;
- Drive new, cross-disciplinary approaches and accelerate thinking about the potential for digital scholarship;
- Facilitate new projects in areas of mutual interest;
- Pioneer new approaches to audience engagement and experience; and
- Support dialogue and outreach about the value and impact of digitisation and digital collections.

The transatlantic focus of the programme reflects the fact that the UK and US are home to some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions. They are also world-leading in digital scholarship, with established centres of excellence. This programme is unprecedented in aiming to bring together the outstanding quality of these combined cultural assets and academic standards to deliver the next generation of digital scholarship. It builds upon a successful history of collaboration between the AHRC and US partners including related programmes such as 'Digging into Data', which brought data science approaches to bear on large digital libraries of cultural heritage material.

### **Workshop Aims**

The workshop will be a critical early-phase activity and provide an important platform for the delivery of the programme over subsequent years. Specifically, it aims to:

- Convene leading experts from academia, museums and other cultural institutions in the UK and US in order to build a world-leading, transatlantic community around the vision, aims and objectives of the programme;
- Identify and discuss the key contemporary challenges and opportunities facing museums and cultural institutions and the role of digital scholarship in helping to reimagine their future;
- Officially launch the programme;
- Identify thematic priorities to be taken forward by the partners and embedded within future funding calls;
- Build new partnerships, foster cross-disciplinary dialogue, explore best practice and create new, innovative ways of working that builds capacity in both countries;
- Explore the practical challenges of working internationally and building cross-sector partnerships in the field.

### **Workshop format and themes**

The workshop will focus on creating a discursive, open dialogue environment that is conducive to the generation of new ideas and helps to refine priorities and objectives. Whilst the exact format and agenda will be refined with US partners in due course, it is anticipated that this will include networking sessions; plenary discussions on the key opportunities and challenges; best practice case studies; group discussions focused on specific topics; and prioritisation exercises that help to map future priorities to be taken forward through the programme.

It is anticipated that discussions will focus on themes including, but not limited to:

- **Machine learning and AI:** including the analysis and exploration of image-based collections and use of augmented reality, including ethical issues and technical challenges;
- **Crowdsourcing and models of co-creation:** including the use of digital tools and methods to create new approaches to community engagement, enhance public access and outreach and engage marginalised and disenfranchised communities;
- **Developing enhanced information on museum/cultural institution visitors:** for example, through the application of advanced data science and the combination of multiple data sets and including ethical issues such as visitor tracking;
- **The automatic creation and interrogation of all document types and unlocking of new data:** for example, including the role of optical character recognition, text extraction and parsing; linking data from digitised records to create richer research data and allow research with collections-as-data at scale through methods such as geo-location and network analysis; the annotation of resources; social networking analysis; and the interrogation of all media types including complex fields such as sound;
- **Understanding the impact of digitised and digital collections:** including how these resources are being used by researchers and how researchers' engagement with museum collections might change as a result, including gap and trend analysis to help look to the future of museum-collections-based research;
- **The use of digital tools and methods in addressing contemporary challenges:** such as linked data for provenance research, and research into topics including commercialisation and trafficking;
- **Leadership and skills development in digital scholarship:** building a critical mass of transatlantic research excellence and intellectual leaders in collections-based scholarship and forging infrastructures to develop the next generation of digital humanities scholars;
- **Defining the future of museums and cultural institutions:** using research and scholarship in digital practices to drive audience engagement and respond to evolving user expectations, inform strategies and partnerships, and contribute to the overall sustainability in the sector.

The workshop will reflect the inherently multi-disciplinary nature of digital scholarship and researchers with appropriate expertise from across the breadth of the arts and humanities are encouraged to apply. We also welcome applications from other disciplines – notably the physical sciences – where a capacity to engage with and enrich the overarching aims of the programme can be demonstrated.

## Outputs

It is important to note that this workshop is not intended to be a stand-alone event, rather it is an opportunity to network, form partnerships, share expertise and begin discussions that will foster future collaborative activity in the field of digital scholarship for cultural institutions. As above, the workshop will play a key role in informing the thematic priorities to be taken forward by the programme and in future collaborative research activity supported by the partners.

The AHRC intends to commission a report summarising the key findings of the workshop and recommending next steps. It is anticipated that this will be a key working document for the partners and serve to shape future activity and joint funding calls. We also intend to build a virtual community in order to advance discussions and partnerships generated through the workshop.

It is expected that the workshop will be the first of a number of such events convening key stakeholders over the five years of the programme.

### **Call for Expressions of Interest**

Expressions of interest to participate in the workshop are invited from UK-based researchers and cultural institution stakeholders who meet the AHRC [standard eligibility requirements](#). Applicants should have a particular research interest in the topics outlined above and be able to demonstrate both the insights and approaches they would seek to bring to the workshop and what they would seek to gain from it.

Expressions of interest are welcome from researchers at all stages of their careers, including early career researchers. The AHRC expects to support the attendance of around 30-35 UK-based delegates, with the US partners identifying a similar number of US academics and cultural institution experts.

To apply to attend, please complete the following Smart Survey questionnaire:

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/UKUSDigitalScholarshipEOI/>

The AHRC will process the information you send for the purposes of workshop attendance only, and the information will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

**Deadline for Submission of Eoi:** 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019, 4pm (GMT)

Expressions of interest will be assessed by the AHRC, against the following criteria:

- Fit to call: the strength of the case made to attend the workshop and ability to support the realisation of its aims;
- Track record: a demonstrable history of research excellence, or equivalent professional experience, appropriate to career setting and stage;
- Development: the potential of the workshop to add value to the research and professional experience of the applicant, including the benefits of engaging with a wider network of individuals and organisations from the UK and US, and the potential for those parties to benefit from the experience and perspectives of the applicant;
- Long-term plans: the ability of the applicant to perceive and articulate the longer-term potential benefits of the workshop, including to their own research, their discipline/field, and in terms of wider activity.

We aim to inform applicants of Eoi outcomes by 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

## **Costs Covered**

In line with the standard [AHRC Travel and Subsistence policy](#), the AHRC will pay for all transport (standard class), accommodation, visa charges and subsistence costs incurred during the event. Detailed information about logistics and procedures will follow upon acceptance of an offer to attend. Please note that all costs will need to be claimed back through the AHRC expenses process.

**Please note that you are eligible to apply only if you have a valid passport and do not foresee any problems with obtaining a visa, or with being in the States for the duration of this event.**

## **Contact**

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