

Invitation to tender for the provision of a national focus for collection level description work in the UK: Further particulars

The Tender

The JISC/DNER, RSLP and British Library have issued an invitation to tender for the provision, for one year, of a national focus for collection level description work in the UK.

Background

Unlike the standards which exist for bibliographic description and recording of collection items, such as AACR2 and MARC, there is no equivalent standard for the description of the collections – print and increasingly digital - which themselves contain the items. Although collection descriptions may take the form of unstructured textual documents, for example a set of Web pages, there are significant advantages in describing collections using structured, open, standardised, machine-readable formats.

Collection description and mapping are key elements of many RSLP projects and are important in the recording and discovery of electronic resources within the context of the DNER (the Distributed National Electronic Resource is an initiative bringing together JISC's information services). Proposals for the setting up of mechanisms to coordinate the distributed national collection of printed research resources identify systematic collection level description and mapping as key strands of the recommended programme activity. The Full Disclosure report also identifies collection description as an important component of any retroconversion strategy, particularly as an aid to navigation between collections in archives and libraries.

The most suitable basis for such a standard in the library domain is likely to be the collection description schema developed by the UK Office for Library and Information Networking (UKOLN) for RSLP, for use in RSLP projects, which is emerging as a de facto standard. Although now being used within a library context, this has been developed to offer a generic, cross-domain approach and is being considered by several projects and initiatives to describe a range of collections, print and electronic.

The collection description work undertaken for RSLP by UKOLN aims to enable projects funded through the programme to describe collections in a consistent and machine-readable way. With additional funding from OCLC, the project has developed a model of collections and their catalogues. The work has been used to form the basis of a collection description metadata schema, implemented using the Resource Description Framework (RDF). A Web-based tool that allows the construction of RDF descriptions by filling in a Web form has also been developed. Associated with this tool there is a detailed set of data entry guidelines and an enumerated list of collection types. The basis for the UKOLN work goes back to the eLib programme, where the primary intention was to describe electronic resources.

Further work is needed, however, to progress from the conceptual framework and pilot implementations. At present, each RSLP project using the schema has had to establish its own interpretation of it and implement it in the way it saw fit. The amount of detail in the description, use of subject descriptors and technical implementations have often differed significantly from project to project.

There is an urgent need for improved coordination at the national level of work on collection level description methods, schemas and tools, with the aim of ensuring consistency and compatibility of approaches between projects, disciplines, institutions and sectors by moving towards the agreement on standard approaches and implementations, where appropriate.

It has been agreed by JISC/DNER, RSLP and the British Library that this urgent need for coordination can best be met by their jointly funding activity over the next year to provide a national focus for collection level description work, moving this forward from a research environment, with pilot implementations, to an operational environment. It is thought likely that this will best be achieved by a dedicated, limited-life, post located within a library or related environment, although alternative approaches may be considered. It is expected that day-to-day oversight would be provided by the host organisation, with the work programme steered by a group with representatives from the joint funders. It is anticipated that this effort will be collocated with relevant related expertise.

Outline description of the collection description focus

Purpose

To provide a national focus for coordination of work on collection level description methods, schemas and tools in the library and information domain, taking into account relevant developments internationally and in the archives and museums domains.

Responsibilities

- Provision of focus and leadership
- Provision of advice
- Developing consensus-making mechanisms
- Ensuring development of implementation tools and guidelines
- Ensuring compatibility with other approaches (eg ISAD G)
- Dissemination of information

Specific activities

Monitoring, evaluation and documentation of approaches to collection level description in library and other domains

Evaluation and recommendation of best practice for library in the following areas in particular:

- a) subject descriptors
- b) other descriptors
- c) granularity of description
- d) collection strength measurement and description
- e) implementation tools

Development and promulgation of guidelines for collection level description

Provision of guidance to projects and organisations involved in collection mapping and the preparation of collection level descriptions

Dissemination through web, workshops, conference papers, publications

Duration: 1 year commencing as soon as possible

Budget: The indicative maximum budget for this activity is £45,000 (inclusive of VAT). Proposals will, of course, be judged according to value for money for the service being offered

Applications: Tenders for the hosting and provision of the focus are invited from institutions or from individuals with the support of their institution. Tenders should be no more than 5 sides of A4, in addition to which the CV(s) of the coordinator candidate(s) should be appended.

Informal Enquiries: Can be addressed to either Ronald Milne, RSLP Director, tel: 0131 651 1494/email: ronald.milne@ed.ac.uk or to Geoff Smith, Director of the British Library Cooperation and Partnership Programme, tel: 0207 412 7584/email: geoff.smith@bl.uk

Closing Date: Five copies of the tender (including CVs) should be sent to Mr Ronald Milne, RSLP Director, Main University Library, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LJ by 5pm on 5 March 2001. Interviews will be held in central London on 14 March.

8 February 2001