MINNESOTA ALLIANCE OF LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Redesign of MNCollections.org



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2) OVERVIEW

MALHM is seeking to hire a qualified vendor to redesign MNCollections.org to meet digital accessibility standards, improve usability, and expand functionality.

The Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums (MALHM) is a statewide nonprofit organization that has served hundreds of local history groups throughout the state since 1991. MALHM offers profession training and networking, mutual assistance in times of disaster, advocacy, and more.

In 2017, MALHM launched an effort to develop a collections management system (CMS) to meet the needs of museums and collecting institutions in Minnesota. The result was CollectiveAccess Minnesota, a highly configurable cataloging tool and web-based application designed specifically for museums, archives, and digital collections, created by developer Whirl-i-Gig (WiG). At present, the system has nearly 70 member organizations across the state who have inventoried more than 1.5 million objects in their private cataloging systems.

Beyond its “back-end” Providence application, CollectiveAccess Minnesota also includes Pawtucket— an optional “front-end” publication and discovery platform. In 2018, MALHM worked with WiG to develop the current MNCollections portal site in use at https://mncollections.org/. The portal pulls data from the nearly 70 individual user sites into a single, searchable collections portal of participating organizations.

3) BACKGROUND

At present, the MNCollections portal is built to 2018 standards— it has outdated functionality in certain areas and does not meet MALHM’s current needs. In late 2025, MALHM additionally received notice from the University of Minnesota’s Veterinary History Museum (one of ~70 users of C/A Minnesota) that the university was requiring adherence to accessibility standards for software used within the university system. Although just one user of many, MALHM is committed to meeting these standards and improving accessibility throughout its entire CollectiveAccess system.

MALHM now seeks to redesign and reimplement the MNCollections portal to ensure its sustainability moving forward, specifically focusing on improvements to site usability, expansion of functionality, and adherence to current WCAG 2.2AA accessibility standards.

4) SCOPE OF WORK

MALHM is asking the selected vendor to work in close collaboration to redesign and reimplement the MNCollections portal, allowing for design mockups and at least three (3) rounds of feedback/revisions from MALHM and its partners.

MALHM is asking for work on the portal to include:

- Refreshed design
- Compliance with WCAG 2.2aa accessibility standards
- Assess and improve overall site navigation and back-button behavior
- Implement site maps and modify bot filtering to improve search engine optimization
- Expand advanced search forms to collection objects and entities
- Update “featured galleries” section with additional content and display modes
- Redesign contributor pages to improve search functionality, usability, and responsiveness
- Redesign search results to improve usability
- Implement tools to track data sync process, ensure timely sync of sites, and force re-sync of selected records

Accessibility

The selected vendor must ensure that MNCollections conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level-AA compliance. MALHM also requests proposals include a plan on auditing the site for compliance.

Additionally, MALHM is specifically seeking to ensure the accessibility compliance of the Minnesota Veterinary History Museum’s collections— currently estimated at ~7,200 object records in Providence and 1,224 object records shared on MNCollections. Ideally, MVHM’s collections would act as a test and example for other CollectiveAccess Minnesota users to follow in the future.

Server Configuration & Software Installation

MALHM currently maintains servers which host the entire CollectiveAccess system, with assistance from Whirl-i-Gig. MALHM requests that the vendor specify server requirements and install all required supporting software. A list of current C/A software requirements is available at https://docs.collectiveaccess.org/.

Training

MALHM requests the vendor provide training for MALHM staff and volunteers on topics including search engine optimization, data synchronization monitoring and issue handling, etc.

5) BUDGET

As a small nonprofit, MALHM will be pursuing a grant to fund this project. No requests have been formally submitted at this point, so the overall project budget remains flexible. The project start date will be delayed until funding is confirmed.

6) SCHEDULE

MALHM anticipates the following schedule for the completion of this contract:

RFP Solicitation Release	November 12, 2026
Proposals Due by	January 13, 2027
Grant Pre-Application Deadline	January 22, 2027
Grant Final Application Deadline	March 5, 2027
Grant Award Notification	June 1, 2027
Project Start Date	June 2027
Project Completion Date	June 1, 2028

7) QUESTIONS AND REQUIRED INFORMATION

Details Requested
As a small nonprofit with one full-time employee and one part-time, MALHM has no internal IT personnel and limited technical experience. MALHM staff are C/A users, trainers to new users, and have made small fixes and adjustments to the system.

MALHM asks for vendor proposals to describe what they might require technically from MALHM and/or Whirl-i-Gig to complete the desired work, in order that MALHM can properly coordinate between all of the involved parties.

Licensing
Developer Whirl-i-Gig has made materials available under the GNU Public License version 3. Whirl-i-Gig retains copyright ownership of all current CollectiveAccess code, but guarantees all C/A extensions shall be made publicly available under the same open-source license. MALHM asks that the vendor grant a non-exclusive, non-terminable unrestricted license to code developed for this project to MALHM.

Deliverables
Prior to the completion of the project, the vendor shall furnish the following deliverables to MALHM:

- Working, redesigned, and reimplemented public-facing site for MNCollections installed on MALHM-provided servers
- End-user application support services, as required
- Copies of any developed application source code, configuration, data migration code, and documentation

8) SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

A review committee will evaluate all responses received by the deadline. The following specific factors will be considered in the evaluation of proposals:

1. The qualifications of the vendor team and its previous experience with comparable projects with nonprofit organizations and historical societies/museums;
2. The capacity to complete the project within the allowed time;
3. The ability to achieve goals while working in a cost-effective manner;
4. A demonstrated skill for working in a collaborative atmosphere;
5. Responses received from references;
6. Appropriateness of general approach outlined;
7. Any other factors considered to be in the best interests of MALHM.

The evaluations will be weighed on the following basis:

Item	Weight
1. Responder's expressed project understanding, approach and methodology; project work plan	50%
2. Responder's background and expertise with nonprofits & historical societies/museums, including ability/experience working on similar projects.	40%
3. Responder's references and reviews.	10%

MALHM will consider all of the above criteria when evaluating the proposals received, including overall value. After selection, the successful vendor will be expected to meet virtually with MALHM staff; submit a detailed scope of services, timeline, and budget; and negotiate contract terms and conditions.

9) MALHM RIGHTS

MALHM reserves the right to:

1. Reject a submission due to defects, irregularities, or provisions inconsistent with this RFP.
2. Alter the project timeline.
3. Cancel the proposal request.
4. Issue a subsequent request for proposals.
5. Remedy technical errors in the proposal process.
6. Appoint an evaluation committee to review proposals.
7. Investigate the qualifications of any firm under consideration and contact responder's references.
8. Request additional evidence of qualifications to perform the work described.
9. Interview responders or the successful vendor prior to contract negotiations.
10. Negotiate with any, all, or none of the proposal request respondents.

This proposal request does not commit MALHM to enter into a contract, nor does it obligate MALHM to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation and/or submission of proposals.

10) PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

A PDF copy of the proposal should be received via email by no later than 11:59pm on **Wednesday, January 13, 2027**. Late proposals will not be considered.

For any submissions, inquiries, or responses, contact:

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