

Birmingham Museums Trust

Resilient Heritage: Laying Foundations

Brief for Market Research

1. Background

Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) is the charity that cares for the city's collection of 1m objects and nine museum sites on behalf of the Birmingham City Council (BCC). The collection is Birmingham's greatest cultural asset and a priceless resource for learning, creativity, health & wellbeing. Pre-Covid, 10m people experienced the city's heritage annually, as visitors, in outreach to schools & groups, through digital engagement or at venues across the world where objects were on loan.

BMT employs 153 full and part time staff and over 340 volunteers caring for and sharing the City's Museum collection with the public. Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) and Thinktank play vital roles in bringing schools, families, and visitors to the city centre. The Museum Collections Centre is our main store and is open to the public every week for behind-the-scenes access. Our six historic properties are popular community facilities with free-to-access green spaces, education, and creative opportunities. We actively reach beyond our sites to engage people across the city in their neighbourhoods.

In 2020, under the new leadership of co-CEOs' Sara Wajid & Zak Mensah, BMT began a multi-year transformation towards a world class, socially purposeful entrepreneurial museum rooted in the distinctive cultural heritage of the region.

Since BMT was established in 2012, its public funding has been reduced, with a 35% drop (excluding inflation) in regular revenue funding from ACE and BCC since 2015. More recently, BMT has seen a deepening of engagement with Birmingham City Council, and a £16m capital investment, funded by BCC and ACE MEND fund, in essential electrical and roof works at BMAG is currently in progress.

BMT received significant Covid Recovery Funding which provided an essential financial lifeline to survive the pandemic, however since then, rising costs and loss of earned income create significant financial challenges for BMT. Combined with the trust's vision of democratising BMT to enable many more people from more diverse backgrounds to enjoy their heritage, we are at a critical point of risk and opportunity.

A radical rethink of all aspects of the organisation is required to become financially sustainable and inspire a sense of hope and belonging, championing inclusion, creativity and social justice. BMT has begun to engage its trustees, workforce, stakeholders, community partners and the public. However, the trust now needs to make a more fundamental change in how it operates and functions, deepening our vision and translating it into an organisation capable of responding to the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century Birmingham.

2. BMT Vision

By unlocking Birmingham's cultural heritage with its citizens, visitors and industries, we want to create hope, social trust and belonging. We stand in solidarity on key issues that are meaningful, shaping the future of this diverse, creative and ambitious global city.

3. Laying the Foundations for the Transformation of Birmingham Museums Trust

Museums have been vowing to overhaul themselves in line with progressive social agendas for a generation, and mainly failing to deliver. Sara and Zak are the first job-sharing Black and Asian co-leaders of a major museum in the UK, are the only global majority leaders on the NMDC and they follow in the footsteps of the former BMT Director, Rita McLean who was the first Black museum director in the UK. Sara is the first British Asian museum director in the UK and together they are committed to re-shaping the museum using intersectional, feminist anti-racist principles of leadership.

Their job-sharing leadership is not merely 'inclusive working practices' it is about confidently embodying and projecting a form of creative cultural collaboration and convivial multiculturalism (to quote Paul Gilroy's) which is distinctively Brummie.

This new project, starting in autumn 2023, is the first phase of a fundamental transformation of BMT to a resilient and financially sustainable organisation with the structure, culture, skilled workforce, and audience insights to deliver its ambitious vision. This first phase will lay the foundations - building insights, research and development that will shape the organisational transformation and help realise the vision of BMT for an open, participatory entrepreneurial and sustainable museums trust that plays a key role in the cultural and economic growth of Birmingham and the wider West Midlands region.

The Laying the Foundations phase includes:

- Organisation review and new business strategy development and working towards organisation transformation.
- Development of Theory of Change & Logic Model.
- Evaluation, including organisational culture and capacities baseline, creating an evaluation framework and a post project review.
- Existing and New Audience research.
- Development of Citizens' Jury to inform and shape BMT.
- Communication strategy and plan.
- Fundraising and income diversification strategy and plan.

4. The Opportunity

In recent years, cultural organisations have focused more on engaging with and attracting non-traditional visitors to their sites through creating more welcoming spaces, more relevant exhibitions and events, better representation of previously neglected cultures and histories, outreach programmes, co-

curation and engagement. However, despite best efforts, visitor profiles still fail to represent the diversity of their local communities and remain largely disproportionate to the make-up of the society within which they exist.

This is true of Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT), which welcomes up to 1 million visitors to its nine sites each year and up to 2m to its digital platforms but whose visitors do not reflect the diversity of Birmingham and the West Midlands.

At Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT), we want to confront this head-on. We want to explore how we can genuinely transform what we do to address this ongoing lack of representation by creating meaningful ways for communities to visit, engage and participate with Birmingham Museums Trust. We recognise that Birmingham and the West Midlands are super-diverse but suffer significant socio-economic inequality. We want to honour this city by becoming the first museum organisation in the UK to fully represent the communities we seek to work with.

5. The Vision

Our vision is for Birmingham Museums Trust's nine physical sites and digital platforms to be open, participatory spaces for the diverse communities of the city and region. Over the next five years, we will be undertaking this transformation, developing a Theory of Change to articulate and measure our vision and impact, as well as creating a Citizens' Jury for residents to actively shape our work, a Cultural Citizenship Research Centre and a transformation of the nine sites, including a physical transformation of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, that will reflect the Trusts' open and participatory approach through content, programming and other activity.

6. The Research

This is not your usual audience research project. This significant, meaningful, transformative work will form the foundation for a whole new approach at Birmingham Museums Trust. We want to understand how we must evolve our offer to boost participation and relevance for all of Birmingham's residents, regardless of socioeconomic status or current interest in cultural activities. This work must build on existing non-user research and the identification of barriers to access. We know what these barriers are. But they steadfastly remain in place, and we want to change what we do significantly to ensure that, in Birmingham, these barriers come down.

We want the legacy of this research to not only be a new model of working for BMT but also become a new model for the sector that fundamentally examines how museums and cultural sites need to evolve to address the ongoing disparity in access and engagement fully. It will also provide the basis for future action research to enable BMT to become a learning organisation, continuously deepening our understanding of our city and its residents by creating a Cultural Citizenship Research Centre to be managed by BMT.

In short, a more significant, bolder shift is needed from a transactional model with traditional visitor profiles to one which embeds opportunities in the real lives of all residents for participation for local communities across the Trust, fundamentally reviewing who we are serving and why.

7. Who Are You?

You may be a market research organisation with excellent knowledge of the museums, arts and culture sector.

You may have no experience working in this sector but have expertise with community or place-based development.

You might be an expert on Birmingham and the West Midlands region, with a deep understanding of what makes its citizens tick. Or be into place-making and ensuring that cities and institutions speak to and represent their communities. Or you might be great at understanding people and their motivations.

Ultimately, we do not mind who you are (although if you are not based in the city, we hope that you would see the benefit of spending ample time here to get under the skin of its residents).

We want you to understand our passion for change, appreciate the exploratory nature of this work, and be robust and brave with your assertions.

8. Scope and Deliverables

- Desktop research:
 - Comparator research, focussing on existing organisations (not just across the museum and cultural sector) who have worked to become more representative, with a particular focus on the results/lessons learned / how this diversified audiences. This can include examples from outside the UK.
 - Existing reports and strategies on the people of Birmingham and the region – demographics, profiles, motivations etc.
 - Place-based study on the different areas of the city and their key characteristics.
- A comprehensive review of existing visitor research from Birmingham Museums Trust, including exit surveys, relevant evaluations, and audience studies.
- A baseline survey to understand current perceptions of Birmingham and BMT's role in the city, which will enable us to track our future large-scale impact on civic morale.
- Set of statistically significant responses that are as representative of the city as possible.
- Baseline data for future representative participation metrics and the perception of BMT's venues and programmes as a trusted source of civic pride and belonging where everyone is welcome.
- Develop values-led user personas underpinned by demographic and psychographic data. These should then be developed and tested on those audiences through the following:

- The identification and exploration of partnerships, via, e.g. conversations and workshops, with organisations across the city that represent these audience segments and who may be good collaborators for a re-envisioned BMT or have shared purpose and values with BMT
- The delivery of a series of large-scale interventions in locations across the city, focusing on participation with the audience segments.
- Quantitative and qualitative research, including Illuminate Audience research and Impacts and Insights Activity Evaluation processes and existing BMT audiences (newsletter database/online audiences/events attendance).
- Integration of the Theory of Change and Citizens Jury findings and outcomes into emerging recommendations.
- Set of insights and recommendations that inform audience development, content and business strategy for BMT.
- Collaborate closely with our team to ensure trustees, staff, volunteers, and others gain a much deeper understanding of the enablers and barriers to visiting and are informed and engaged with the work, including how it applies to their role and function within BMT.
- Final research insights and recommendations to inform audience development and activity across BMT alongside recommendations from a Citizens' Jury and Theory of Change, including interpretation, content, public programming, marketing and communications, retail and partnerships.
- Other recommendations for BMT to realise its vision where relevant.

9. Outcomes

Based on the deliverables listed, we expect that BMT:

- Has a deep understanding of its communities, both existing visitors and non-users.
- Understands what steps it can take to enable meaningful participation and representation in its work.
- Recognises barriers to participation and has strategies in place to address them.
- Has a defined set of audience personas to help target their work.
- Feels able to evolve into a fully participatory and representative organisation.
- Is an exemplar in the sector for undertaking genuinely transformative audience development.

10. Existing information

We have the existing information that we will share with the successful tenderer:

- Identity, Confidence, Connection: Rethinking Audience Engagement for Arts & Culture in the West Midlands, Indigo-Ltd 2021
- QA Research: BMAG Pop Up Display Evaluation, 2022
- BMAG 2022 Programme Evaluation, BMT 2022
- Audience and Market Research undertaken for the Birmingham: City of Ideas project (a reimagining of a new science museum undertaken in 2021 - 2022) Market Research:

Birmingham City of Ideas Feasibility, Indigo 2022 Audience Consultation: Birmingham City of Ideas Feasibility, R Barker & A Bonnell

- Review of BMT's Audience Sentiment Analysis by David Edwards, Scattered Clouds 2022
- Bluegrass surveys for BMT visitors and non-visitors pre-2020
- Audience Agency (now replaced by Illuminate) visitor data
- BMT site Survey Monkey exit surveys 2021+
- Aston Hall Visitor Research, CH Heritage Evaluations 2019

11. Timescales

We anticipate the work to be completed between March 2024 and September 2024.

However, we want the research to be meaningful. If there is a beneficial reason why the research period should be extended to ultimately deliver higher-quality outputs, then we would be open to discussion.

The overall programme for the Laying the Foundations project runs through until March 2025.

12. Budget

£30,000 excluding VAT but including travel and expenses. There is a separate "events" budget for holding any wider events required to support the research.