

CFP Research Fellowships in Digital Leadership

ICOM IMREC invites members of our community to send in proposals for Research Fellowships in Digital Leadership.

Background:

Digital technology is the subject of much investment and quickly moving practice in museums but this work is not necessarily underpinned by research and evidence-based policy. There is tremendous interest from audiences in digital media and pressure from trustees, stakeholders, funders and the public for museums to 'catch up' with fast moving developments. However, there is criticism that museums rush in to digitising collections with poor information, unsustainable outcomes, and little genuine audience engagement. We want to encourage a wider strategic analysis of digital technology - history, theory, policy, ethics and practice across the museum world as a whole - so that professionals can see the general context for this work and the ways in which *digitilisation* rather than digitisation¹ can be integrated within an overall framework.

Aims

To this end, ICOM IMREC is offering 10 Research Fellowships over 2025-6 to advance practice this important area. The aim of this programme is to produce a cohort of digital leaders who can continue to network and promote digitalisation in the wider museum sector.

For successful applicants, the benefits are :

- The opportunity to work with key world experts
- The chance to implement an innovative project of choice
- One-to one mentoring and professional development from experienced mentors
- Paid travel to Shanghai/Suzhou to present the results of project in 2026

¹ This purposeful and strategic approach is captured in the Digital Culture Charter which calls for organisations' digital work to be values-led, people-centred and responsive to context (ACE UK 2024)

- A certificate of completion
- The option to publish the results of the project through ICOM-IMREC

Who should apply:

The 10 Fellows selected for this programme should be English-speaking CEOs or directors/senior managers of large museums who have a current *digitilisation* project in preparation. Projects should be at a certain scale, be feasible and approved/supported, at an early stage of development and capable of change and evolution. Applicants must be either individual or institutional ICOM members.

Importantly, the projects should advance either or both of the two key ideas that underpin this programme - digital *transformation* and digital *maturity*. Digital transformation is ‘both the process and the result of using digital technology to transform how an organisation operates and delivers value. It helps an organisation to thrive, fulfil its mission and meet the needs of its stakeholders’. Digital maturity is the ‘ability to use, manage, create and understand digital, in a way that is contextual (fit for their unique setting and needs), holistic (involving vision, leadership, process, culture and people) and purposeful (always aligned to the institution’s social mission)’ (Finnis and Kennedy 2022, 3).

The application:

This should include a cv, a project proposal, a letter of support from the institution, a reference, and a cover letter explaining the value of the programme for the applicant, the institution, and the region. Criteria for selection include the applicant’s current role, level of digital experience, past record of digital work, and how the proposed project aligns with the aims of this programme.

The programme:

The programme includes online workshops with world experts, 1:1 mentoring throughout the project with experienced practitioners, culminating in a presentation at Shanghai University/Suzhou Museum. The

series of 6 intensive two-hour workshops will take the Fellows through a structured process from history and theory to practice, including leadership, strategies, engagement, ethics, and models of best practice. Fellows will be matched to mentors from throughout the world who have alignment of experience, needs and interests. The Mentors will support the Fellows to plan, develop and realise the digital project in their museums through 4 x 1:1 sessions. We acknowledge the model for our programme established by ACMI in Melbourne and supported by the Australia Council in 2021.

Timeline:

Applications close March 31, and successful Fellows will be informed and matched to Mentors in May. Six weekly workshops will run in June-July and then four 90mins mentoring sessions from August to February 2026. Final presentations of the projects and related activities will be held onsite at Shanghai University and at the Suzhou Museum in March 2026.