Colonial Collections Consortium

Guide
Digital Depot Visit

Colonial Collections Consortium
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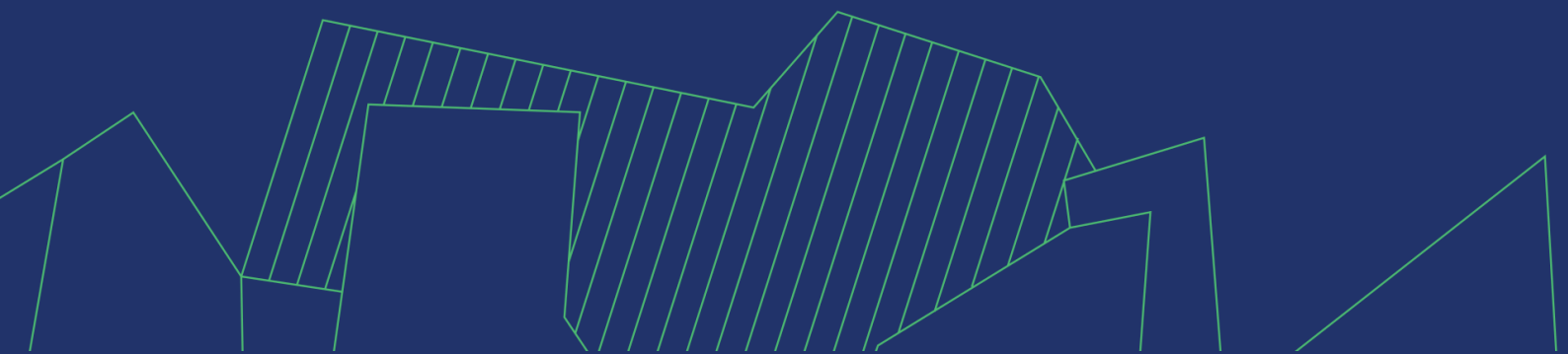


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Introduction

The Colonial Collections Consortium is a partnership between five organisations in the Netherlands: Museum Bronbeek, NIOD, Cultural Heritage Agency, Rijksmuseum and Wereldmuseum. The consortium supports institutions administering collections in provenance research by sharing knowledge, answering questions and providing stakeholders with a network. In addition, the consortium is working to create greater transparency regarding the objects collected by the Netherlands in the colonised territories during the colonial period. Providing access to the collections in the Netherlands is of great importance to the countries of origin. We often find that there can be significant barriers when it comes to studying the object itself, as opposed to accessing the collection data digitally. These barriers may be financial in nature or relate to obtaining a visa.

To make it easier for people to visit a collection in the depot, the Wereldmuseum has been trialling digital depot visits via Microsoft Teams or Zoom meetings. The Rijksmuseum also participated in conducting user tests.

In this guide, you will learn how your organisation can organise a digital depot visit. We discuss what you **need**, the **preparations** involved and how the **process** works. You will also find practical tips and an appendix listing the equipment you can use to optimise digital depot visits.

When can a digital visit to the depot be used?

A digital visit to a depot is no substitute for the experience of visiting a depot or collection in person. However, it is a good and sustainable alternative (as it does not require travel), allowing specialists on both sides to discuss an object and its visible details.

What is a digital depot visit?

A digital depot visit is an online meeting in which a member of the museum staff acts as host or chair (and expert), in which one or more visitors from outside the organisation take part, and in which someone can show one or more objects. You could use a microscope, which makes it possible to examine surfaces or specific details. It is easy to invite a larger group of people to take part in the digital meeting. Keep in mind, however, that internet bandwidth may be more limited than you are used to. The meeting will benefit if all participants can share their video feed.

What do you need?

- **Video conferencing platform**
  For organising an online meeting, for example using Microsoft Teams or Zoom.
- **Laptop**
  Use a laptop to organise a Microsoft Teams or Zoom meeting and connect the necessary equipment.
- **Camera**
  A digital camera on a tripod so that you can take close-ups of the objects. Choose a tripod that can stand on its own but can also be easily held in your hand.
- **Wireless connection**
  To be able to move around freely with the camera, you can use an HDMI transmitter and receiver to stream live footage wirelessly from the camera to your Microsoft Teams or Zoom meeting.
- **Power bank**
  To power the HDMI transmitter, use an external wireless battery, such as a power bank.
- **Audio**
  Use wireless microphones to improve sound quality and communication. The wireless option is particularly important when studying larger objects.
- **External monitor**
  Staff on site must be able to hear the digital visitor clearly and follow any instructions. Although a laptop's screen and sound can be used for this purpose, the sound quality is not always ideal, and the screen is often small. Using an external monitor can help with this.
- **Laptop connection**
  To connect all your equipment to your laptop, you'll need a sufficient number of inputs and outputs. Using an external video and audio production console, such as the RØdeCaster Video, makes it easier to connect various devices and switch between cameras.
  An alternative is to connect the equipment directly to your laptop. In that case, you will probably need additional inputs and outputs which you can achieve using splitters or hubs. You will also need a video capture card to receive the live feed from the camera on your laptop.

  In this guide, we will focus on the use of a console.

Extra:

- **Digital microscope**
  For research focusing on materials and technology, a digital microscope can be a

valuable tool. A Dino-Lite can be connected as an additional camera. When using the accompanying software, you can also choose to share your screen in Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

- **Stand for a digital microscope**
  When using a Dino-Lite, you'll need a suitable stand.

Preparation

Unlike a physical visit to the depot, a digital visit involves a physical distance between the staff on site and the digital visitor. A virtual session can be more demanding for all participants, as looking at and listening to a screen for long periods requires more energy. With proper preparation, a concise yet valuable digital depot visit can be organised. If more time is needed, consider spreading the number of objects or research questions across several sessions.

1. Prior Communication

Make sure everyone knows in advance what the visitor can expect, and vice versa: what the researcher expects from the session.

Record the following details internally and communicate them to the visitor:

- the maximum number of objects;
- the maximum duration of the visit;
- the available cameras and other audiovisual equipment.

Tip: Limit the number of objects and the duration of your visit. The Wereldmuseum allows a maximum of five objects per 60-minute session.

Ask the visitor about:

- the reason for and purpose of the visit or the research question;
- which objects should be viewed and in what order;
- which parts or details of the objects should be clearly visible during the visit.

Please also coordinate the following practical matters:

- the language spoken during the visit;
- whether the visit will be recorded and, if so, whether all participants consent to this.

2. Write a brief script

Once both parties know what to expect from the digital depot visit, it is advisable to draw up a brief script and work out the technical and practical arrangements. Share this script with colleagues and visitors in advance.

Consider the following factors:

- **Location:** Where does the digital depot visit take place?

- **Role assignment:** Who will handle the objects and who will operate the camera? Decide in advance whether an additional depot staff member or another member of staff is needed for this.
- **Visuals and sound:** Who or what needs to be visible during the visit? For example, is a curator present on site? If so, an external monitor and wireless microphones can improve communication.
- **Equal participation:** Think about equality. It may be preferable to have the curator of the collection also take part via the online link, rather than having them stand next to the depot staff member.
- **Lighting:** Check that the existing lighting is sufficient for the objects to be clearly visible. Use additional lighting if necessary.
- **Internet connection:** Check that your internet connection is stable enough. Test the connection beforehand and, if necessary, use a wired connection or a Wi-Fi booster.

3. Plan the meeting

Arrange the digital visit to the depot via Microsoft Teams or Zoom and send the invitation to all participants.

Tip: Bear in mind any time differences.

4. Have a quick run-through

It is advisable to organise a run-through prior to the digital depot visit with the colleagues who will be present on site during the visit. It is best to schedule this a day in advance, so that any technical or practical issues can still be resolved.

5. Other preparations

- Make sure the camera, power bank and wireless microphones are fully charged. Also check that there are enough power sockets available to power the laptop and other equipment.

Tip: Set a reminder in your schedule the day before the visit to charge all your devices.

- Please ensure that the objects are available at the agreed location on the day of the visit. The necessary preparations will depend on your organisation's working procedures.
- You should also allow sufficient time to carry out a final technical check just before the visit. If necessary, ask an IT staff member to assist.

Let’s get started!

Step 1: Prepare the objects

Ensure that the objects are placed stably and securely on the table. It is helpful to arrange them in the order in which the researcher wishes to examine them. When dealing with communities of origin, we often choose to remove the object labels, so please check that each object is physically numbered to prevent any loss of information. Also, ensure that there is sufficient supporting material available to position the object stably when you wish to zoom in on a detail or a specific side. Examples include filler, foam, acid-free paper or similar materials.

Step 2: Prepare the setup

- Connect your laptop and other devices to the power supply. Connect all equipment to the correct inputs and outputs on the video and audio production console (RØDECaster Video) and then connect it to the laptop.
- Connect the camera to the wireless HDMI transmitter and power it using a power bank. Then connect the receiver to the console and establish a connection between the transmitter and the receiver.
- Connect the additional monitor (if required) to the production console and position it in a convenient spot so that participants can see the screen clearly.
- In the meeting menu, check that the audio and video are connected to the console.

Step 3: Run a test!

Make sure you allow plenty of time to test the connection and all the equipment in advance. Should a technical problem arise, there will still be time to call in the IT department.

Tip: Plan a trial meeting in advance, without any guests, and invite an IT staff member to attend. Any technical issues can then be resolved straight away before the actual meeting begins.

Step 4: Start the meeting

Admit the participants to the meeting and start the digital visit. It may be helpful to follow the example script at the end of this guide.

Step 5: Follow the instructions and switch between the cameras

The production console allows you to switch easily between the different camera feeds using the buttons. If you're only using your laptop, you can switch cameras during the meeting in both Microsoft Teams and Zoom via the menu.

What should I buy?

A digital depot visit can be organised in various ways and made as comprehensive as you wish. Be sure to consider what equipment your organisation already has.

Below is an overview of the equipment used by the Wereldmuseum for digital depot visits. We have also included a cost estimate for purchasing a complete basic set (excluding a laptop and monitor). The digital microscope camera is also included as a separate item.

Basic set	
Camera	Sony ZV-1F (compact vlog camera)
Camera tripod	Joby GorillaPod
Wireless HDMI transmitter and receiver	EDUP Wireless HDMI Kit
Power bank	Any power bank will do
video and audio production console	RØDECaster Video
Microphones	RØDE Wireless GO
Total price of the basic set (excl. VAT)	**€ 1.083,61***

For research into materials and techniques	
Digital microscope camera	Dino-Lite
Rack for microscope camera	Dino-Lite Gooseneck Stand RK-02
Total price of the Dino-Lite with rack (excl. VAT)	**€ 894,20***

* The amounts quoted are cost estimates and may vary depending on the supplier, availability and price changes.

Example script

Duration: 60 minutes

Roles and responsibilities

- Chairperson: chairs the meeting and operates the camera.
- Depot staff member: assists the chairperson and handles the objects.
- Visitor: gives instructions to the chairperson and the depot staff member.
- Curator: where necessary, the curator provides additional information about the objects.

Structure of the visit

0:00 – 0:00: The chairperson opens the meeting

0:00 – 0:05: Once everyone is online, the chair welcomes the guests to the digital visit and asks for their permission to record the meeting.

0:05 – 0:10 The chair gives everyone the opportunity to introduce themselves briefly. All staff members from the museum in question state their position and the role they will play during the digital visit.

0:10 – 0:15 The chairperson presents the objects and explains the itinerary for the visit: the depot staff member presents the first object, and visitors are invited to indicate how they would like the object to be presented and what they would like to see. The depot staff member, the curator or the chairperson (to be agreed in advance) states the object's inventory number and provides other relevant information.

When there are many guests present, consider asking whether the microphones can be switched off and whether the 'hand-raise' button can be used if anyone wishes to speak. This will allow the chairperson to maintain control.

0:15 – 0:50 The chairperson films the objects.

The curator or chairperson states the inventory number and provides relevant background information (if necessary). The depot staff member handles the object.

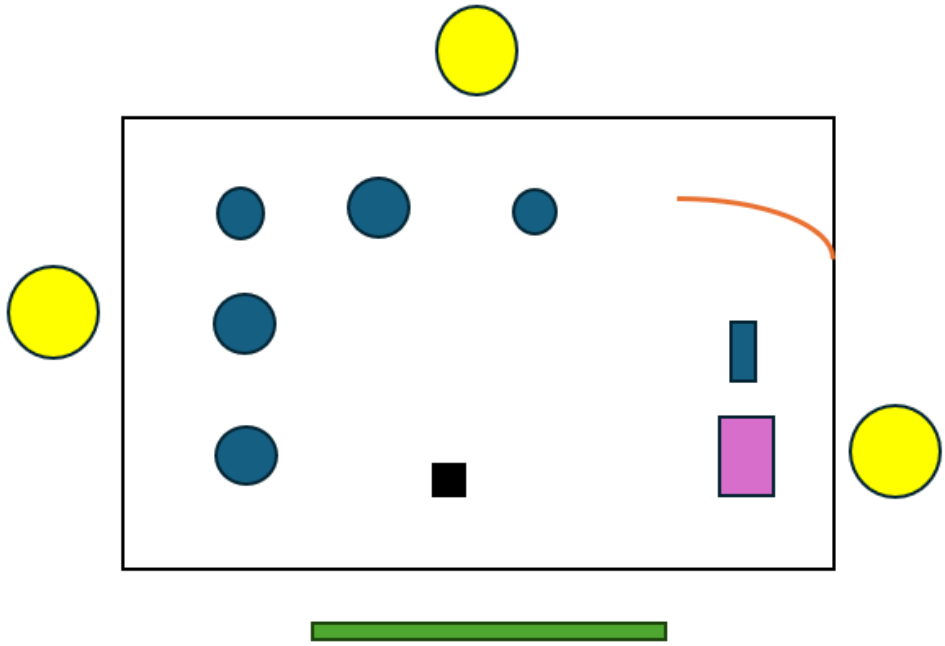
Following an initial inspection of the object, the microscope can be used for further examination if necessary.

Once the visitors have seen and asked what they need to, you can move on to the next object.

0:50 – 0:57 Round off: the chairperson checks that the visitors are satisfied and that all questions have been adequately answered. Allow time for any final questions and discuss any (follow-up) arrangements.

0:57 – 1:00 The chairperson thanks those present for their contribution to the visit and closes the meeting.

Example positioning set-up



Legend

Black: camera on a tripod
Blue: objects
Pink: laptop
Orange: microscope camera
Green: monitor
Yellow: staff on site