



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



PACIFIC VIRTUAL MUSEUM PILOT PROGRAM – CONCEPT NOTE

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------|
| PACIFIC VIRTUAL MUSEUM | 2 |
| <hr/> | |
| PROJECT DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND | 2 |
| Background | 2 |
| Value to Pacific Communities | 3 |
| Objectives | 3 |
| <hr/> | |
| PROPOSED PACIFIC VIRTUAL MUSEUM PILOT PROGRAM | 4 |
| Approach | 4 |
| Stakeholders | 4 |
| Dependencies | 5 |
| Key Issues | 5 |
| Resourcing and Funding | 6 |
| Risk | 6 |
| Estimated Project Timeline | 7 |

PACIFIC VIRTUAL MUSEUM

PROJECT DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

This 'Pacific Virtual Museum' project (working title only) broadly entails the concept design, piloting, and implementation of an aggregated online repository (or virtual museum) to facilitate access to cultural artefacts originating in the Pacific.

The project would connect Pacific island people to Pacific cultural artefacts held around the world through a digital repository within a well-structured cultural heritage framework (covering intellectual property, ethical issues, cultural sensitivities etc.). The development of this tool would serve as a major cultural resource for Pacific countries, a way for communities to connect and contribute to records of traditional knowledge, an academic and research resource, and an educational resource. The digital collection tool would be scalable to accommodate other forms of national heritage at a later stage.

A similar concept has been successfully implemented in:

- Virtual Museum of Canada – houses more than 500 virtual exhibits shared by large and small Canadian museums¹
- British Museum²
- Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery³
- Smart Management of Heritage Sites in Apia – a mobile phone application developed by the Museum of Samoa, intended to expand on the cultural holdings of the physical museum, and developed in partnership between Scope Global and Pacific Islands Trade and Invest.⁴

BACKGROUND

Australian museums, galleries, archives and libraries hold significant collections of the Pacific's cultural heritage. A 2017 collection mapping project, funded by DFAT, revealed substantial collections of over half a million Pacific cultural objects held in around 650 public institutions around the world. The data from this collection mapping project will assist in any future work on the Pacific Virtual Museum.

¹ Virtual Museum of Canada, <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca>

² http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx

³ <http://npg.si.edu/portraits>

⁴ Pacific Islands Report, 'Museum of Samoa launches mobile app, online cultural, history website', <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2017/02/14/museum-samoa-launches-mobile-app-online-cultural-history-website>

The Pacific Virtual Museum project concept emerged as part of Australia’s commitment to a ‘step-change’ in engagement with the Pacific, and increased people-to-people contact at all levels. The initiative was cited as a specific digital archive project in a speech by then Foreign Minister Bishop in Suva on 12 August 2017, and aligns with Australia’s commitment to invest in strengthening people-to-people links in the region in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper⁵. It complements other Pacific Step-up initiatives.

VALUE TO PACIFIC COMMUNITIES

“Culture is who we are, and what shapes our identity. Placing culture at the heart of development policies is the only way to ensure a human-centred, inclusive and equitable development.”⁶ (UNESCO)

Culture is central to identity and to strengthening communities. This project has been developed on the basis that a Pacific Virtual Museum would provide a valuable contribution in making Pacific cultural collections and associated knowledge freely and easily accessible to anyone with internet access.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 by the United Nations, wove the importance of culture and heritage into socio-economic development targets for the first time. It is acknowledged as a vital aspect of building inclusive cities by contributing to sustainability and social cohesion ([SDG 11](#)), economic growth through cultural tourism opportunities ([SDG 8](#)), and contributing to women’s empowerment and gender equality ([SDG 5](#)). Access to records of traditional knowledge systems in other parts of the world has been shown to assist in mitigating effects of climate change, building community resilience and recovering from natural disasters ([SDG 13 Climate Action](#), [SDG 14 Oceans](#) and [SDG 15 Biodiversity](#)).

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective in developing the Pacific Virtual Museum is to enable Pacific island countries to better connect with and share knowledge about their cultural heritage, by delivering a high-quality, durable, adaptable, scalable, and valuable open access digital collection database, bringing together multiple Pacific cultural digital collections.

In the long-term, additional objectives in developing the Pacific Virtual Museum project are as follows:

- build Pacific institutions’ cultural heritage management capacity, including empowering Pacific countries to own and manage the digital collection
- capture and share digital data on Pacific collections from around the world
- deliver improved educational outcomes at all levels
- support contemporary local Pacific art and culture industries through provision of an open access digital collection
- increase international research collaboration on Pacific cultural heritage
- provide a mechanism for private and public international support for Pacific art and culture
- establish a platform that is scalable to include other forms of national heritage.

Guiding principles for the development and delivery of the project are that it should be:

- usable
- accessible
- relevant

⁵ <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper/chapter-seven-shared-agenda-security-and-prosperity/stepping-our>

⁶ UNESCO, Culture: at the heart of the SDGs, April 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2017-april-june/culture-heart-sdgs>

- scalable
- sustainable.

PROPOSED PACIFIC VIRTUAL MUSEUM PILOT PROGRAM

APPROACH

Following discussions with senior experts in the digital collections field, we have decided to test the concept and demonstrate viability before expanding by an initial focus on **Pacific photographs only**.

The development of the test portal design will facilitate Australian Government engagement with Pacific island partners, and international and private sector partners, to build support for the project. The project would then progress to pilot implementation. Depending on the outcome of the pilot, scale-up would follow.

Delivery of this pilot program would be split into phases, as follows:

1. **Pilot Consultation and Design (6 months)** – assessment of the feasibility of the project, and designing options for the appearance, function, use and name of the Pacific Virtual Museum.
2. **Pilot implementation (2 years)** – trial the implementation of the aggregated virtual museum concept, focusing initially on photographs.

Should it be determined at the conclusion of the second phase that the Pacific Virtual Museum concept is feasible, this project will progress to phases three and four, which are:

3. **Expansion** – expand the project to include other digitised Pacific cultural artefacts. An early estimate is a follow-on program of three to five years to incorporate other relevant digitised collections.
4. **Scale-up** – extend the project to other heritage collections such as and contemporary Pacific arts. The time-frame will be informed by the outcomes of the pilot program. This could be funded through budget allocations by DFAT and/or through corporate sponsorship.

Phases three and four are not included in this pilot project.

STAKEHOLDERS

- Pacific island people
- Pacific island governments
- Pacific and Australian education sector
- Pacific island museums and cultural institutions
- Australian and New Zealand Governments
- Australian and New Zealand museums and cultural institutions
- Other governments, international museums and cultural institutions
- Private collecting institutions
- Potential sponsors and commercial investors

- International and regional organisations.

DEPENDENCIES

- Support from Pacific island institutions and governments
- Support from Australian, New Zealand and international museums and cultural institutions
- Identification of an IT solution(s)
- Identification of legal solution(s), in particular for access and copyright
- Securing reliable ongoing funding
- Identifying an appropriate implementing organisation, management structure, ethics oversight
- Effective delivery plan.

KEY ISSUES

Following consultation with experts in the cultural collections, museums and digital access sector in 2018, key issues identified for consideration in a concept design and pilot program are:

- aggregating large numbers of structurally different collection databases is technically complex
 - using people with content knowledge, combined with database expertise, can overcome this
 - major cultural collecting institutions have the capability and relevant background so should be given the opportunity to have input;
- selection of a robust scalable platform is essential
 - digital platforms can be fragile and can have short life-spans, so leveraging proven existing cultural heritage databases will mitigate risk
 - not only does the selected platform need to be able to adjust to an expanded database if the pilot is successful, it needs to be scalable to adapt and change as technology and internet connectivity improves in the Pacific;
- consultation with Pacific island users will inform appropriate design
 - that will be tailored to how Pacific peoples will want to access the collections
 - including a ‘crowdsourcing’ element – open access with moderated user input, currently used successfully by many public cultural collection databases will enhance the data, empower users and drive outreach and engagement
 - and to ensure information is provided in a non-discriminatory accessible manner, it will need to meet [web content accessibility guidelines 2.0](#) (for example, text alternatives and clear colour contrasts for people with vision impairment, clear understandable text, easily navigable, captions for any audio content in videos);
- current poor internet connectivity in parts of the Pacific will affect the design
 - and the increasing proliferation of mobile phones in the Pacific suggests the digital archive should be mobile-compatible;

- copyright and intellectual property will vary between participating institutions;
- ‘future-proofing’ measures will ensure longevity and continual improvement
 - ideally the platform will eventually be housed in the Pacific
 - funding models to ensure longevity will need to be explored
 - consolidation of appropriate database models to ensure maximum access by Pacific users in the longer term;
- building partnerships with Pacific countries and relevant organisations will greatly enhance the project.

RESOURCING AND FUNDING

Assuming an existing and proven robust IT infrastructure is leveraged, it is anticipated costs can be contained.

Advice from major Australian and New Zealand collecting institutions is that required funding for the Pacific Virtual Museum pilot program would be in the range of **\$800,000 to \$1 million AUD over 2.5 years**.

RISK

The successful development of a Pacific Virtual Museum will achieve the core objective of enhancing Pacific island countries’ access to their cultural heritage, and making it more accessible to the world.

This proposal acknowledges there are risks and obstacles associated with the development of a digital museum. These include:

- public and private museum concerns over potential requests by Pacific countries for the physical repatriation of their cultural artefacts ⁷;
- huge variations in the quality of metadata associated with digitised objects;
- technological challenges in finding a globally compatible platform for housing digital copies of cultural artefacts;
- ethical and legal challenges associated with obtaining access to and use of digital copies of artefacts (in particular, intellectual property issues)⁸;
- challenges in securing ongoing funding; and
- managerial and organisational challenges related to the governance of a digital collection database.

⁷ For example, see call from PNG Lake Murray villagers in January 2018 for repatriation of artefacts collected by Australian photographer Frank Hurley in 1922, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-30/png-lake-murray-villagers-seek-repatriation-of-artefacts/9370478>

⁸ See, for example, Kukutai & Taylor (eds), *Indigenous Data Sovereignty* (2017: ANU Press).

ESTIMATED PROJECT TIMELINE

2019

- Early June Pacific Virtual Museum Pilot Program commences
- November Design and consultation completed

2020

- January Commence building of Pacific Virtual Museum portal
- April Soft Launch of Pacific Virtual Museum portal
- May/June Official launch
- July 2020 Outreach programs and continual uploading and refining of portal – continuing to form partnerships with international institutions holding digitised Pacific cultural material

2021

- Feb/March DFAT Review of Pacific Virtual Museum Pilot Program progress
- July DFAT decision on extension of Pacific Virtual Museum project
- Dec 2021 Completion of Pacific Virtual Museum Pilot Program

2022

- February 2022 Final report and acquittal of grant by recipient