

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2024 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report Sections:

- **Overview of 2024 Round**
- **Assessment for New Applications by external assessors**

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The 2024 Round of the Community Heritage Grants received 105 applications with 55 projects selected for funding. The following applications were received in each category:

Category	No. received
New applicants First time applicants and organisations who completed their previous CHG stage more than five years ago.	54
Repeat applicants Organisations who had completed the previous CHG stage within the past five years.	47
Training projects Open to collecting organisations and professional heritage associations.	4

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2024 Round:

- 39 organisations were first time applicants
- 60 applicants had previously received a CHG grant
- 19 organisations had completed their 2023 Round projects
- 43 (41%) of applicants were from regional Australia.

Assessment Process

The CHG team works with experienced officers from other collecting institutions and the heritage sector to assess the applications. In the 2024 Round the assessment stages included:

	Stage	Responsible
1	Eligibility check of organisations, activities and project costs. Organisations were advised of ineligible projects or costs at this stage	CHG Program Team
2	<i>For New Applicants only</i> Significance assessment and ranking of the collections that are the subject of the project and project feasibility assessment and ranking.	Two external assessors (see separate report below)
3	<i>Repeat Applicants and Training Projects</i> Project feasibility assessment and ranking	CHG Program Team
4	<i>Assessment Day</i> Shortlisted applications are considered by an Expert Panel. Members provided additional specialist advice, reviewed applications against the program criteria, undertook comparative analysis and agreed on final recommendations.	CHG Expert Panel Members included external assessors, and experienced collection management officers from CHG partner organisations (NLA, NMA, NAA, NFSA, Office for the Arts)
5	Recommendations from the 2024 Round are finalised by the CHG Program Team and approved by the NLA Director-General.	CHG Program Team NLA Director-General

The following A – D model was used to rank the significance of collections:

A	clear national significance that meets the criteria in Significance 2.0 where the applicant demonstrated that the collection has historic, social, spiritual, scientific or research significance – or that the collection holds rare or unique material with clear provenance, in good condition, and with interpretive potential.
B	meets many of the criteria for national significance.
C	it is possible that the collection has national significance but insufficient information has been provided in the application.

D	has demonstrated local and/or regional significance but clearly does not meet the threshold of national significance. The collections could also be poorly documented and described, or have limited or no access. These applications do not continue in the assessment process.

The following A – D model was used to rank the project feasibility:

A	funding should be provided (sound budget; feasible project plans; demonstrated available resources to undertake project; represents good value for money)
A-part	funding should be provided but only for selected activities (some ineligible; some not recommended at this time)
B	funding should be provided, but a lower priority (not urgent or a priority; not feasible with requested funding; activities not supported by recommendations in the SA and/or PNA)
C	project should not be funded as not feasible (in sufficient detail to support budget; digitisation activities not supported by plan; quotes not included; preparatory work required before proposal undertaken)

In making the final recommendations, the Panel were guided by the national significance and project feasibility rankings and overarching program aims criteria (as presented in the CHG Guidelines). The program aims criteria aim to maximise support for community-based organisations with limited access to other funding and professional support, encourage new applicants to begin their CHG journey, assist organisations to care for collections at risk in a timely fashion and ensure an equitable and widespread distribution of funds across collecting organisations in all states and territories.

Feedback from Expert Panel

The Expert Panel noted that the quality of applications and were pleased to see many organisations progressing and completing the three stages and reap the benefits of the grants and capacity building journey.

As in previous years, the Expert Panel also welcomed proposals by organisations who were previously unsuccessful but resubmitted improved applications that addressed Panel concerns and feedback.

Other feedback from the Assessment Day included:

- **Value for money** is a strong consideration. Conservation projects were also reviewed to ensure that the treatment was appropriate and proportional to the nature of the problem. They should also focus on collection management needs, rather than display or aesthetic considerations.
- Guidance on **affordable and museum standard archival supplies**. Experienced conservators on the panel provided advice that expensive archival boxes (eg solander boxes) were not required (nor used by NCIs) with studies confirming that they are more harmful than regular corrugated cardboard boxes. Similarly, members questioned the purchase of preassembled disaster bin kits, rather than purchasing readily available household items to assemble disaster bins. Panel agreed that where possible, archival supplies are purchased from within Australia supporting local suppliers and minimising freight costs.
- CHG applications for **collection management activities should focus on nationally significant items** and preferably, linked to the recommendations of the Significance Assessment and Preservation Needs Assessment reports.
- CHG projects are generally not suited to groups wanting to deliver **one-off, commemorative projects** (eg books, displays, websites) for anniversaries or special events. The program is a long term capacity building process that will usually take 4-6 years to complete.
- Following a new requirement that new applicants firstly contact the CHG team to confirm their eligibility, only **two ineligible applications** were received in this Round, a welcome improvement from previous rounds. Organisations are also urged to check their final activities in their application against the ineligible activities listed in the CHG Guidelines. If in doubt, organisations should contact the CHG Program Team.

Report on New Applications from Independent Assessors

Maxine Holden and Roslyn Russell are both experienced and highly regarded heritage practitioners who had the task to review the national significance of collections for new applicants in the 2024 CHG Round and undertake project feasibility. A summary of the process and their observations is provided below.

The methodology used to assess the national significance of the applications includes the following steps:

Careful reading of applications and their supporting material;

1. Researching collections and historical sources online, including reviewing authoritative publications (e.g. Australian Dictionary of Biography);
2. Referencing comparative collections;
3. Balancing primary and comparative criteria, to assign a ranking;
4. The review of all applications as a group and cross checking to ensure consistency.

The assessment of national significance is clearly based on the **primary** and **comparative criteria** as described in the publication [Significance 2.0](#) which applicants are urged to consult and address the criteria outlined below:

Primary criteria

Historical significance

Artistic or aesthetic significance

Scientific or research significance

Social or spiritual significance

Comparative criteria

Provenance

Rarity or representativeness

Condition or completeness

Interpretive capacity

Feedback from significance assessors

Descriptions of national significance

The assessors emphasised that ‘**national significance**’ is a distinct threshold that must be met before a grant can be awarded. Some applicants failed to demonstrate their understanding of national (as opposed to local, regional or state) significance:

- without attempting their own initial assessment of their collection against those criteria before approaching a consultant;

- lacking sufficient information on which to base the request to proceed to a national significance assessment;
- stating in their application that a collection (or its most significant items) was of local, regional or state significance, and attaching supporting material that explicitly described the collection and nominated items as meeting one (or all) of these thresholds of significance;
- failing to address the prompt questions described in *Significance 2.0*'s section on assessing **national significance** (pages 48-49) explicitly requested in the application form.

Given the CHG Program's priority to fund **nationally significant** projects, these applications are then ranked much lower on the scale of national significance.

Whilst the concept of national significance is not easy to grasp, and with a certain amount of belief that the organisation's collection or particular items are perceived as vitally important at the national level, some applicants:

- are unsure of - or unable to - clarify this concept that they feel gives great significance to their collections;
- by this failure to articulate national significance, they miss the chance to strengthen their claim, where it may in fact be possible to establish this with better documentation and examples of potentially nationally significant items in the collection.

On some occasions, it was apparent that the independent significance assessments had only reinforced the regional significance rather than attempting to explore the possibility of **national significance**, which would deem the project not eligible to advance.

The CHG staged program

Whilst the program is clearly a staged approach (where a Significance Assessment is then followed by a Preservation Needs Assessment, laying the foundation for further collection management activities) many applicants failed to acknowledge this staged approach. This led to several organisations seeking multiple projects at once. The purpose of staging this program is to ensure organisations undertake a Significance Assessment, then (if successful) a Preservation Needs Assessment, then the specific conservation of objects, or perhaps moving on to digitisation or a storage review or certain training needs that will have been identified along the journey.

The CHG guidelines (and the document [Are You Ready for a Significance Assessment?](#)) clearly state that a Significance Assessment is the first stage in the CHG sequence and requires an independent, professional examination of the collection in consultation with the members of an organisation. It cannot be hurried.

Some organisations went directly to a request for a Preservation Needs Assessment without seeking a professional and (most importantly) an independent Significance Assessment of their collection, in which most consultants will clearly identify which items require future conservation or care, and set priorities.

Furthermore, some organisations moved swiftly from a Significance Assessment within weeks of the report being delivered, giving them little or no time to consult as a group and review the report, which is part of absorbing the findings and considering what might be required next.

Frequent funding shortfalls: travel and accommodation

It was noted that a number of applications only requested the base fee for the consultant, without considering and requesting additional travel and accommodation expenses, which they are entitled to do.

This is particularly problematic if the consultant is:

- based outside of the city/town where the collection or organisation is located and the applicant fails to include additional travel and/or accommodation expenses;
- has not been identified when submitting their application, leaving the consultant or the organisation itself to meet those expenses.

Approximately 25% of the 2024 applications did not include travel and accommodation expenses, which most small organisations cannot reasonably cover. It is not uncommon for consultants to have to cover these costs themselves, if the grant application has not taken them into account.

Maxine Holden and Roslyn Russell

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