

2013 Community Heritage Grants Assessment Report

CHG Assessors:

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CHG Staff:

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Assessment Process:

In 2013, the Community Heritage Grants program received 125 applications. Seventy-eight applications were selected for funding.

All eligible applications were initially assessed by two external consultant assessors. Tania Cleary assessed the national significance of the collection. Short-listed applications were then sent to Tamara Lavrencic who assessed each project's feasibility, value-for-money and the degree to which the project might benefit the collection.

Training projects were assessed primarily on the merits of the proposal including: the expected benefits; the quality and appropriateness of the training; the credentials of the trainers and the perceived value-for-money of the proposal. The national significance of the collection material that will benefit from the training is still important to the assessment.

A second short-list of applications underwent further consideration and a final funding recommendation was made by a panel of expert assessors comprising historians, preservation specialists, representatives from cultural collecting organisations and the CHG partners. The assessment panel considers the reports of the first two assessors as well as each application individually.

This report provides general feedback from the CHG assessors.

Tania Cleary (Significance Assessor)

This year the CHG program received applications from a range of organisations: educational, religious and welfare institutions, Aboriginal and multicultural community groups, local councils, libraries, arts, entertainment and sporting associations and clubs. The 2013 assessment process highlights that these organisations are not created equal, nor are their collections. The variation in a collection's 'national significance' rank essentially reflects three dimensions: time (when and how their collections were formed), scope (breadth and depth of subject matter) and cohesion (the quantity and quality of original content and unambiguous provenance). As important as these factors are in differentiating one collection's national significance from another, so too are factors like public access and interpretive potential. It is more difficult to argue a case for 'national significance' if a collection is essentially closed and opportunities for interpretation are either non-existent or, at best, limited to a few. Nationally significant collections have the ability to interpret or reflect aspects of national history. Custodians of such collections can also demonstrate long-

standing commitment to collection care and they can articulate why their collections engage the nation.

As collection management in its broadest definition is the core of the CHG program it is clear that most organisations applying for Stage 2 (PNA) and Stage 3 (Conservation or Training) funding demonstrates an increased level of commitment. Most applicants are seeking financial help to facilitate changes that will lead to better long term collection outcomes. An increasing number of collections are professionally managed (or endeavouring to be) and staff actively engaged in cataloguing, reviewing procedures or implementing key recommendations in a systematic manner. Every CHG applicant demonstrated professional awareness, that is, they know what needs to change although in a small number of cases there was less evidence of prioritising tasks or applying recently acquired skills to the projects at hand.

Tamara Lavrencic (Budget & Feasibility Assessor)

I assessed each application in terms of budget and overall feasibility of the proposed preservation project, and provided comment on the quality of benefit to the collection, feasibility of the project and value for money. I also assessed each training project on the merits of the proposal, the quality and appropriateness of the training, the credentials of the trainer and the perceived value for money of the proposal. Training was requested for a wide range of subjects including significance assessment, collection care, digitisation and digital file management, exhibition development, cataloguing and collection management.

General notes:

- Organisations that were able to prepare a more considered response to Section 4 National Significance usually succeeded in satisfying the criterion 'may be nationally significant'.
- Applications that clearly and concisely describe the significance of the collection, public access arrangements and exactly why the funding is required and what it will achieve, supported by a well considered budget are more likely to succeed.
- Do not leave writing or submitting applications to the last minute. Allow enough time to proof read the application and double check spelling and budget calculations.
- Applications that are proceeding through a planned, staged process are strongly supported, e.g. commencing with a Significance Assessment, then Preservation Needs Assessment (PNA), and then implementation of recommendations prioritised in the PNA.
- *Always include quotes* to support your budget, unless you are applying for the standard fee for a Significance or Preservation Needs Assessment. A considerable number of applications omitted to include quotes or provide sufficient detail of the funding requirements of the proposed project.
- Don't request miscellaneous budget items to take a grant request up to the maximum \$15,000. Ask for what is needed, making sure it is well researched and supported by quotes.
- As outlined in the CHG guidelines, public access is taken into consideration. Collections that are accessible to the general public are more likely to be considered for funding than collections that have limited accessibility.

- The use of a museum professional such as a Museum Development Officer or a Museums Australia Officer to assist with the completion of the application often results in a more considered application.
- Training projects that involve and benefit several groups or organizations are strongly supported.
- Organisations applying for funding for digitisation projects should investigate the options for using a commercial digitisation service prior to applying for funding. This can help organisations evaluate their options for best completing the project.
- Digitisation projects where the outcome is partly or fully for preservation should include information on how the digital data will be managed into the future so that it remains accessible.
- Digitisation projects should also address how the originals will be preserved.
- Projects to duplicate (either in analogue or digital format) audiovisual recordings, including private recordings of public performances, need to include evidence that the proposers of the project have rights clearance to do so.
- Organisations considering applying for funding for collection management software should investigate freeware software (software that is available free on the Internet) and seek advice as to suitability for their needs.
- Ensure that your response to the section of the CHG Application form about the size of the collection is completed adequately. Without this information, it is difficult to assess the significance of the collection, the feasibility of achieving the project outcome and the value for money of the project.
- Applicants *must* answer the section of the CHG Application form relating to the funding of their organisation. The assessment panel give consideration to whether or not the project could go ahead without the support of a grant.
- General character references and political letters of support add very little value to an application. Letters of support by curators, researchers, historians, conservators, librarians and other heritage professionals carry more weight, especially if they articulate a real understanding and familiarity with the collection that is the subject of the application.
- Consult *Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of collections 2.0*. Applicants could improve their applications, and their significance statements in section 4, by focusing on the significance criteria and including at least some reference to the terms: historic, social, research, scientific, spiritual, rare, representative, and interpretive and condition. This publication is available online:
<http://arts.gov.au/resources-publications/industry-reports/significance-20>
- Statements of significance in section 4 should relate to the specific component of the collection to which the application applies. For example, don't describe the significance of the building/ books/archives when seeking funding for a textiles collection.
- Photographic collections: include as much information as possible about photographic collections. For example, are the photographs originals or copies? Does the organisation own the copyright? Can people, places and events be identified and described? Who was the photographer? What is the condition of the photographs? Applicants often fail to link the subject matter of

the photographs to their significance

- Indigenous collections: identify the region the cultural material comes from, the production date, how it was acquired and why it is significant to the community and the nation.
- Military collections: provide as much detail as possible on the provenance and use of military collections. For example, does the material have significance to a particular unit, battalion or conflict? What is the purpose of the collection – research or display? Has the collection been used in the past and who has access to it?
- Paper based collections: where possible, provide details on the nature of any paper based collections. For example is the book/map/plan/record/document held in other collections? Is the material an original or a recently obtained copy? Are books held in other library collections? How has the material been used by the organisation? Who has access to the collection?
- Local history collections: many local history collections sound similar on paper. Distinguish the collection by establishing the connections between their collection, the history of the area and the significance criteria.
- Multicultural community groups: ascertain if a similar cultural group already exists in your city, state or interstate. As it is difficult to assess significance without knowing what other similar collections might exist and how they might be regarded as different.
- If the organisation or archives belongs to a particular network, for example a church archivists group or a school archivists group, use these networks to consider and assess the significance of the collections together. On paper, many of these collections appear to hold very similar material – coordinating significance research would identify collections that would benefit most from grant funding.

All applicants are encouraged to contact the CHG office to obtain specific feedback on their applications:

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