

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2021 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The Community Heritage Grants Round in 2021 received 106 eligible applications with 55 applications recommended for funding.

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2021 Round:

- 46 organisations were first time applicants
- 57 applicants had previously received a CHG grant
- 3 applicants had previously applied to CHG but were unsuccessful
- 12 organisations who had successfully completed and acquitted their 2020 projects submitted applications to the 2021 Round
- 37 applicants were from regional Australia and the remaining 69 applicants were based in metropolitan areas.

Assessment of CHG applications is a staged process, drawing upon internal and external expertise. The stages included:

- Eligibility check of organisations and projects and project assessment and ranking (CHG Program Team)
- Significance Assessment and ranking (external assessor)
- Following these processes, the CHG Expert Panel convened to consider shortlisted applications. Panel members from the CHG Program Partners, included staff with expertise in conservation, collection management, archives, audio-visual material, collecting sector policy and Indigenous engagement. Members provided additional advice on shortlisted projects, reconsidered applications against the selection criteria, made comparative assessments and as a group, agreed upon final recommendations for funding.
- Recommendations were then reviewed and finalised by the CHG Program Team in line with available funding, and approved by the NLA Director-General.

In making the final recommendations, the Panel were guided by the national significance and project feasibility rankings and applied additional principles (consistent with the CHG Guidelines), including:

- Needs assessments of applicants and collections, including their core funding, staffing resources and ability to attract other income.
- Support for smaller organisations and new applicants to commence or progress in their CHG journey.
- With a focus on value for money and widespread distribution of funds, the Panel also assessed individual activities within applications and recommended part funding for several projects.
- Equitable geographical distribution of projects across all states and territories.

Significance Assessment Report (Tania Cleary)

This report outlines the procedures used to establish the 'national' significant rank of the cultural materials included in the 2021 Community Heritage Grant round.

This year I followed the same assessment procedures for assigning a 'national' significance rank as done in previous years:

- read the applications to understand the organisation and the funding project(s) and re-read to understand the cultural material and the applicant's claim for national significance.
- considered all relevant support documentation and if a Significance Assessment report and/or a Preservation Needs Assessment is part of the application I cross-check the cultural material described in the application with the material described in the report(s), noting any anomalies or discrepancies.
- reference the 'significance statement' from the Significance Assessment report and if no statement for the whole collection is provided I note the four primary and five comparative criteria, listed in Significance 2.0, that the assessor used to support their evaluation. I include the relevant assessor comment(s) and information to support the 'national' significance rank.
- consider whether the applicant has, to the best of his/her ability, addressed the CHG questions listed in the application form, and if the applicant's claim for national significance is poor or not attempted.
- After the third reading I assign the 'national' significance rank to the 'entire' collection as per the description provided in the application unless a component of the collection, or a single object, or group of objects, is nominated. In these cases collection items are included under the heading Subject of Application and the 'national' significance rank is assigned to this material.
- Finally I review the applications to ensure that a consistency of approach throughout the process. During this review stage I highlight any collection management concerns or issues re cataloguing, storage, project budget line items and public access and note if the applicant did not complete required sections of the CHG application. I also note if an organisation is requesting funds for multiple projects in one or more application forms. In cases where an applicant is seeking funds for a PNA and/or conservation materials or conservation treatments also make reference to the relevant section of the SA and/or PNA.

Rank

The 'national' significance rank pays attention to factors such as a previous assessment rank, the conclusions of a recently completed significance assessment and my assessment as measured against the CHG threshold criteria:

- A** the collection is of 'national' significance because the applicant could demonstrate the collection had historic, social, spiritual, scientific or research significance. The applicant could also demonstrate that the collection contained rare or unique material with a clear and strong provenance, was in good condition or had interpretive potential;
- B** the collection was less nationally significant, however it could demonstrate historic, social, spiritual, scientific or research significance in addition to sound provenance and interpretive potential;
- C** the collection may be of 'national' significance, but the application did not express this well, or the collection demonstrates historic and social significance, good provenance and interpretive potential however the application lacked adequate supporting information; and
- D** the collection has clear local or regional significance. The collections demonstrated historical or social significance to a smaller community, they demonstrated poorer or limited provenance and interpretive potential. This category also includes poorly described collections, collections not catalogued or only partially catalogued, collections with unstructured or miscellaneous content, numerically small collections or single items,

collections with limited or no public access. These applications are excluded from further consideration.

From 106 eligible applications, just under half of this year's applications are ranked A for 'national' significance. The rank reflects the findings of a Significance Assessment or my application of the significance criteria against the collection described in the application. Essentially, A ranked collections meet the threshold for national significance and they have integrity, focus, offer multiple storylines and opportunities for interpretation, and, perhaps most crucially, they are well managed.

Twenty-three or 22% of this year's applications are ranked B indicating that, while aspects of the collection are ranked highly significant, the collection is on the whole representative of other collections and according to the applicant components of the material it cares for, or significant items in it, are in poor condition.

Generally applicants are including more detailed collection descriptions in their application thus reducing the number of 'C' ranked collections. In 13 cases where the collection is ranked C - it reflects the fact that the collection is described in general terms or the applicant did not upload assessment documents mentioned in the application. Sometimes the subject of the application is a component of the entire collection or a part of the collection but the applicant did not focus on this material in the application. Sometimes the items singled out for conservation treatment are not prioritised in externally authored SAs or PNAs (although prioritised in in-house produced SAs). Or the application lacks necessary information and quotes to support conservation requests.

Eighteen collections were assigned in the D rank category.

General Observations

What is notable is that so many of the 2021 applications are well written, clear and focused however in some cases the applicant has failed to describe the collection or draw out the national significance of the material. Most applicants have linked specific projects e.g. Preservation Needs Assessments, conservation materials and/or treatments to recommendations in a Significance Assessment or Preservation Needs Assessment. There is a good deal of report variation in the Significance Assessments. While most authors acknowledge the primary and comparative criteria in Significance 2.0 some authors pay more attention to the criteria than others in the concluding Statement of Significance.

Trends

In 2021 several trends make themselves felt. There is an increasing trend to apply for funds to update Significance Assessments or prepare a new Significance Assessment even though the findings of the old assessment have not been addressed in the application or the need for a new assessment not fully explained.

There is an increasing number of digitisation project applications. There is a clear separation between organisations that have digitisation plans and procedures in place and seek funds to further the preservation of audio-visual material and those that have no digitisation plan in place but who may see digitisation as an adjunct to promotion/publicity. Importantly the former applicants can link proposed digitisation projects to a recommendation in a Preservation Needs Assessment.

As mentioned in previous reports the structure of the Smartygrants application form requires applicants to include collection information in several parts of the application. Some applicants

mistakenly choose to focus on the entire collection rather than the material that is the subject of their application.