

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2023 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report Sections:

- **Overview of 2023 Round**
- **Assessment for New Applications by external assessors**
- **Final tips for future applicants**

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The 2023 Round of the Community Heritage Grants received 114 applications with 59 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.	60
Repeat applicants Organisations who had completed the previous CHG stage within the past five years.	46
Training projects Open to collecting organisations and professional heritage associations.	8

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2023 Round:

- 38 organisations were first time applicants
- 63 applicants had previously received a CHG grant
- 10 applicants had previously applied to CHG but were unsuccessful
- 19 organisations had completed their 2022 Round projects
- 49 (42%) 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 2023 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 2023 Round are finalised by the CHG Program Team and approved by the NLA Director-General.	CHG Program Team NLA Director-General

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. Some projects including costly travel and catering expenses were declined or reduced. Conservation projects were also reviewed to ensure that the treatment was appropriate and proportional to the nature of the problem.
- Several applicants sought funding for **both a Significance Assessment and Preservation Needs Assessment in the same Round**, often in the same application. These were not supported, as the Panel reaffirmed the importance of establishing and articulating collection significance first before progressing to a Preservation Needs Assessment or collection management projects. The Panel is also focussed on supporting widespread distribution of funds across the maximum number of applicants.
- There continues to be a steady number of **digitisation projects**, however some did not demonstrate an understanding of digital preservation principles and planning. Such applications were difficult to support as they do not present durable and long-term outcomes or represent value for money. A considered digitisation plan and detailed quote should be included and address important details such as the creation of master and access copies in suitable formats, ongoing file management for long term access, metadata and appropriate storage and back-up procedures. The Panel noted that some applications also sought the maximum amount of funding for digitisation activity, without identifying which collections have been selected. Members are more receptive to applications which has identified the highest priority collection items and a supporting plan and quote for these items.
- 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.
- **Potential conflict of interest** - organisations applying for significance and preservation needs assessments should nominate an independent consultant that is not closely involved in the organisation. There are potential conflicts of interest in nominating a consultant who is a board member, volunteer or part-time staff member. The panel also reaffirmed the value of experienced assessors taking a fresh look at the collection and providing independent advice and recommendations.
- **Preservation needs assessments** are intended to review an entire collection and its housing and storage conditions, not a single item or small group of iconic items.
- A total of **11 ineligible applications** were received in this Round. Organisations are urged to check their final application against the ineligible activities listed in the CHG Guidelines. If in doubt, organisations should contact the CHG Program Team.

Significance Assessment Report (Louise Douglas and Roslyn Russell)

Louise Douglas and Roslyn Russell, two experienced and highly regarded heritage practitioners, reviewed the national significance of collections and project feasibility for New Applicants in the 2023 Round. 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:

- 1) Careful reading of applications and their supporting material
- 2) Researching collections and historical sources online, including reviewing authoritative publications (eg *Australian Dictionary of Biography*)
- 3) Referencing comparative collections
- 4) Balancing primary and comparative criteria, to assign a ranking
- 5) The review of all applications as a group and cross checking to ensure consistency.

The assessment of national significance was based on the primary and comparative criteria as described in the publication [Significance 2.0](#):

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

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

A	clear national significance that meets the criteria in <i>Significance 2.0</i> 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)

Feedback from significance assessors

Descriptions of national significance

The Assessors emphasised that ‘national significance’ as a distinct threshold must be met before a grant can be awarded. Some applicants failed to demonstrate their understanding of national significance by:

- Not providing sufficient information on which to base a national significance assessment
- Not attempting to address the prompt questions described in *Significance 2.0*'s section on assessing national significance (pages 48-49) which are also explicitly listed in the application form
- Providing only a reference to – where one exists – to an independent significance assessment without attempting their own assessment against the criteria.

In the context of a grants program whose priority is to fund nationally significant collections, this generally means the application is ranked lower on the national significance scale.

It is acknowledged that the concept of national significance is not easy to grasp. This, in tandem with a certain amount of regional pride means some applicants:

- don't recognise the best way to frame the significance of their collections;
- miss opportunities to strengthen their claim where it is possible for them to do so.

On some occasions, applicants and independent significance assessments reinforced the regional significance rather than attempting to explore the possibility of national significance.

The CHG staged program

Despite the efforts of the CHG team, it is clear that the CHG staged approach (ie where the significance assessment followed by the preservation needs assessment lays the foundation for collection management activities) is not understood by all applicants.

While most applicants who applied for a CHG grant for the first time did abide by the staged process, there were several that a) wanted to jump straight to a later stage, for example, digitisation; or b) also applied for digitisation in addition to a significance assessment.

Usefulness of previous significance assessments

A number of applications provided significance assessments funded by state and local government bodies, or other organisations which are often written to fulfil a range of aims not necessarily aligned with CHG. In some cases, the guidelines do not require the consultant to address national significance, or pay attention to it in any way.

While these significance assessments (sometimes) provided useful additional background, they were not always germane in determining national significance.

Final tips for future applicants

We hope the report provides insights into the assessment process. This feedback aligns with the advice that we give applicants in every round:

- Read (and re-read) the CHG Guidelines, [Significance 2.0](#) publication and the additional resources provided on the [CHG webpages](#), including details of past projects and case studies created by past CHG recipients. This combined information provides a detailed explanation of the program purpose and stages, its link to nationally significant collections and how your organisation can benefit from CHG support.
- If you have specific questions, seek advice from the CHG Program Team. You could also speak to professional heritage associations in your state or territory for more information on broader collection management issues. An email or phone conversation could greatly increase the quality of your application or in some cases, confirm that CHG might not be the right fit for your organisation.
- Please complete all headings in the application form, carefully reading the instructions. This includes budget information and providing attachments (eg Digitisation Plan, quotations) where requested.

- Make the most of your existing collection documentation including past significance reports/statements. However be aware of the original purpose of these documents and consider what additional information needs to be developed to meet the CHG selection criteria.