

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2020 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Community Heritage Grants Round in 2020 received 123 applications with 61 applications selected for funding.

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2020 Round:

- 33 organisations were first time applicants
- 73 applicants had previously received a CHG grant
- 17 applicants had previously applied to CHG but were unsuccessful
- 16 organisations who had successfully completed and acquitted their 2019 projects submitted applications to the 2020 Round
- 61 applicants were from regional Australia and the remaining 62 applicants were based in metropolitan areas.

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

- Eligibility check of organisations and projects (CHG Secretariat)
- Significance Assessment and ranking (external assessor)
- Project Assessment and ranking (external assessor)
- Following assessment, the CHG Expert Panel convened in August to consider shortlisted applications. Panel members included the external assessors and collection management and preservation specialists from the CHG program partners (NLA, NMA, NAA and NFSA). The Expert Panel discussed the external assessment reports, provided additional advice on shortlisted projects, reconsidered applications against the selection criteria and agreed upon recommendations for funding.
- Recommendations were then reviewed and finalised by the CHG Secretariat in line with available funding, and approved by the NLA Director-General.

The Expert Panel noted that the quality of applications continued to improve, as organisations attended workshops (including those funded by CHG) and participated in the three staged process, commencing with the first critical step, a significance assessment. 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:

- Preservation Needs Assessments (PNA) projects must be undertaken by registered conservators, as required in the Guidelines. PNA reports not undertaken by assessors with conservation experience, can fail to adequately address environmental conditions and the condition of collection material.
- A small number of applicants did not include documented travel and accommodation costs, in cases where consultants need to travel to undertake assessments, as required in the Guidelines.

A summary of the reports provided by the external assessors is provided below.

Significance Assessment Report (Tania Cleary)

This year I followed the established procedures for assigning a 'national' significance rank:

- read the application to understand the organisation and the project, cultural material and the applicant's claim for national significance

- read all relevant support documentation and if a Significance Assessment (SA) report and/or a PNA is included I cross-check the cultural material in the application with the material described in the report, noting any anomalies or discrepancies.
- refer to any significance statements and if no statement for the whole collection is provided, I note the four primary and five comparative criteria, listed in Significance 2.0, used to support the claim to significance.
- consider whether the applicant has addressed the CHG prompt questions listed in the application form, and if the applicant's claim for national significance is poor or not attempted.

After I have read the application a number of times, I assign the national significance rank to the entire collection unless a component of the collection, or a single object, or group of objects, is nominated.

At the end of the assessment process I review all the applications to ensure 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. I note any incomplete sections in the application form. I also note if the same organisation is requesting funds for multiple projects within the one application form or in different application forms. In cases where the application is seeking funds for a PNA and/or conservation or collection management activities, I also make reference to the relevant section of the SA and/or PNA.

The final national significance rank that is assigned to each application (as set out below) considers the previous assessment rank, the conclusions of a recently completed significance assessment and my assessment 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;
- 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. *These applications are excluded from further consideration.*

2020 Evaluation

This year the CHG program attracted 121 eligible applications. Although there is a slight drop in the total number of applications in 2019 (130) - the applications submitted from each state and territory are in line with previous trends.

Of the 2020 cohort, 41 applications are from organisations based in New South Wales; 27 applications are from Victorian organisations; 20 applications are from Queensland; 11 applications

from Western Australia; 9 applications from South Australia; 5 applications from ACT; 4 are from Tasmania; 4 from the Northern Territory.

The majority of applicants are aware that a Significance Assessment is key to achieving better collections management outcomes and improved long term collection care. Generally applicants are including more detailed collection descriptions in their application thus reducing the number of 'C' ranked collections due to insufficient collection information.

From the 2020 Round applications:

- 40.5 per cent were ranked A for 'national' significance. Essentially, these collections have integrity; they have focus, they stimulate thinking, they offer multiple storylines and opportunities for interpretation, and perhaps most crucially, they are well managed.
- 32 percent were 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 comments, are in poor condition.
- 14 per cent of the 2020 cohort were ranked C. This may reflect applications that did not supply sufficient collection detail. Sometimes the items singled out for conservation treatment are not prioritised in externally authored SAs or PNAs (although may be prioritised in-house produced SAs). Sometimes the application lacks supporting collection information and quotes to support the conservation request.
- 7 per cent were ranked D. These included poorly described collections, collections not catalogued or only partly catalogued, collections with unstructured or miscellaneous content, collections with clear local or regional focus (in both the geographic sense and social sense), collections with limited or no public access and collections with little capacity for audience engagement through exhibition or other means of interpretation.

A good deal of effort has gone into the 121 applications submitted this round and each one demonstrates that a great many people work to ensure the survival of significant cultural heritage materials. The picture that emerges from the sector this round is that applicants are aware that a Community Heritage Grant can be transformative because once cultural material has been assessed as nationally significant it is no longer obscure, it becomes the focus of policies and ongoing actions.

Often the CHG is the only option open to the applicant and this round sees a conscious and deliberate push from many to pivot limited resources to improved collection care.

Training

This year there are seven applications requesting CHG funds for training projects. I assessed the training projects, paid attention to the merits of the proposal, the quality and appropriateness of the training, the credentials of the trainer and the perceived value for money.

In assessing the training projects, I read the quotations and associated documentation and support projects where a compelling 'need' case is mounted for training and the training represents effective service delivery and value for money. Training also scores a high recommendation if it can support critical tasks prioritised in a Significance Assessment or a Preservation Needs Assessment.

Project Assessment Report (Tamara Lavrencic)

Following shortlisting during the significance assessment, I assessed 111 applications received for the 2020 CHG Round. Sixty-two per cent were requesting funding for Significance Assessments or Preservation Needs Assessments, compared to 50% in 2019.

I assessed each application in terms of budget and overall feasibility of the proposed preservation project and provided comments 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.

Each application was ranked as follows:

A	<p><i>The project should be funded.</i></p> <p>The applications have a sound budget, a feasible project, available resources to undertake the project and representing good value for money</p>
A-part	<p><i>Funding recommended for part only of the project.</i></p> <p>Applications may include items that may be ineligible or preemptive, e.g. requesting funds for implementing recommendations of a preservation survey before the survey has been undertaken.</p>
B	<p><i>The project could receive funding, but a lower priority.</i></p> <p>Applications may include an urgency or priority not being established, some doubt as to whether the project can be completed with the grant requested, feasibility not supported by the preservation needs assessment report</p>
C	<p><i>The project was not feasible and should not be funded.</i></p> <p>Applications include insufficient detail to support the budget requested; digitisation without reference to preservation of original material and a management plan for the digital copies; quotes not included; may need prior assessment of significance or cataloguing before any further action can be taken.</p>

Following assessment, applications received the following rankings:

- A (or A-part) - 47 per cent.
- B - 37 per cent
- C - 16 per cent.