

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2022 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report Sections:

- **Overview of 2022 Round**
- **Significance Assessment review for New Applications**
- **Final tips for future applicants**

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The 2022 Round of the Community Heritage Grants received 100 applications with 58 applications selected for funding. In line with recommendations made in the 2021 Program Review, this year the program offered three tailored application categories, receiving the following applications:

Category	No received
New applicants First time applicants and organisations who completed their previous CHG stage more than five years ago.	49
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.	5

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2022 Round:

- 38 organisations were first time applicants
- 48 applicants had previously received a CHG grant before
- 7 applicants had previously applied to CHG but were unsuccessful
- 13 organisations who had successfully completed their 2021 Round projects submitted applications
- 55 % 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 2022 Round the assessment stages included:

Stage	Responsible
Eligibility check of organisations, activities and project costs. Organisations were advised of ineligible projects or costs at this stage	CHG Program Team

For New Applicants only – significance assessment and ranking of the collections that are the subject of the project.	Two external assessors (see separate report below)
Project feasibility assessment and ranking	CHG Program Team
Following these stage, shortlisted applications are considered by an Expert Panel on Assessment Day. Members provided additional specialist advice, reconsidered applications against the selection criteria, undertook comparative analysis and agreed on final recommendations	CHG Expert Panel Members included the external assessors, and experienced collection management and conservation, cultural sector policy and Indigenous engagement officers from the CHG partner programs (NLA, NMA, NAA, NFSA, Office for the Arts)
Recommendations from the 2022 Round are finalised by the CHG Program Team and were 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). These 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 continued to improve and were pleased to see many organisations follow through the three staged process to ensure the maximum benefit to the management of their collections.

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:

- Several new applicants sought funding for both a Significance Assessment and Preservation Needs Assessment in the same Round, often in the same application. Generally 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 also considered the need to ensure widespread distribution of funds across the maximum number of applicants.
- The Panel noted increasing demand for collection digitisation, both for access and preservation reasons, however that some applications did not demonstrate an understanding of digital preservation principles and failed to provide digitisation plans. Such applications were difficult to support as they do not present durable and long-term outcomes or represent value for money. The inclusion of a solid digitisation plan should address important details such as the creation of

master and access copies in suitable formats, ongoing file management for long term access, and appropriate storage and back-up procedures.

- A high number of either wholly or partially ineligible applications were received in this Round. Organisations are strongly encouraged to check their final application against the ineligible activities listed in the CHG Guidelines. If in doubt, organisations should contact the CHG Program Team.
- Only a small number of applications for training were received. These were assessed for value for money and how activities would support the needs of the applicant and other organisations in the region. Those that aligned with the recommendations in the Significance Assessment or Preservation Needs Assessment were prioritised for funding, especially if the training would benefit multiple organisations. The CHG Program Team continues to encourage both collecting organisations and professional heritage associations to consider training projects to assist with capacity building for community-based organisations.

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 for New Applicants in the 2022 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.

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, the 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. A number applied for several projects at once, eg a significance assessment, preservation needs assessment, and ongoing tasks such as digitisation, provision of storage, light and temperature control, and conservation of specific objects. Alternatively, some applied for a preservation needs assessment without having had a significance assessment.

Having observed this, it is acknowledged that the CHG guidelines clearly state that a significance assessment is the first stage in the CHG sequence.

Frequent funding shortfalls: travel and accommodation

Several applications only requested the base fee for the consultant, without requesting additional travel and accommodation expenses. This is most particularly a problem where the nominated consultant is

- not located in the same city/town as the project and the applicant fails to include travel expenses
- has not been identified at the time of the submission of the application – the danger of not identifying the assessor at the time of submission is that their expenses are not able to be included in the budget.

A quick review of sample number of applications in the 2022 CHG Round revealed that about 25 per cent of applicants did not include travel and accommodation expenses.

In this situation, most organisations cannot cover these expenses and the consultant must meet them out of their own pocket. In some cases, this can be close to 50 per cent of the fee (based on the experience of the assessors).

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 and how applications are considered. The feedback from the many experienced officers involved in the program, reaffirms 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 should provide a stronger understanding 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 contact 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.