

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS ROUND 2025 – GRANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report Sections:

- Overview of 2025 Round
- Assessment for New Applications by external assessors

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The 2025 Round of the Community Heritage Grants received 108 applications with 50 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.	49
Repeat applicants Organisations who had completed the previous CHG stage within the past five years.	55
Training projects Open to collecting organisations and professional heritage associations.	4
TOTAL	108

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2025 Round:

- 41 organisations were first time applicants
- 66 applicants had previously received a CHG grant or applied unsuccessfully
- 15 organisations had recently completed their 2024 Round projects
- 38 applicants were from regional Australia, two from remote areas and three from very remote areas.

Assessment Process

The CHG team works with experienced officers from other collecting institutions and the heritage sector to assess the applications. In the 2025 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 2025 Round are finalised by the CHG Program Team and approved by the NLA Director-General.	CHG Program Team NLA Director-General

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

A	clear national significance that meets the criteria in Significance 2.0 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)

In making the final recommendations, the Panel was guided by the national significance and project feasibility rankings and overarching program aims criteria (detailed 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 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:

- Stage 3 **Collection Management planning projects undertaken by consultants** are unlikely to be competitive. For example, projects where consultants develop strategic plans for storage, collection management or digitisation are generally considered to be outside the scope of the CHG funding model. They may also overlap with the preservation needs assessment; the standard support offered to CHG groups. Applicants are encouraged to focus on practical collection management improvements based on PNA recommendations: shelving, storage materials, conservation treatment, environmental controls or digitisation.
- Similarly the development of **collection management guidelines or policies** (eg Storage and Handling Guidelines, Disaster Preparedness Plan) by external consultants may not be supported where the Panel considers that the organisation could draw upon freely available resources and templates to develop their own documents. A training project to develop skills and capacity among staff or volunteers in these areas, may be a more competitive proposal.
- The Panel considered a number of **digitisation** applications, with many referencing the [Magnetic Media Deadline 2025](#) campaign. While magnetic media items (eg VHS, cassettes) are undoubtedly at risk, members noted a misperception that this was the last year applicants could undertake digitisation. Audio-visual experts on the panel provided reassurance that many magnetic media items will survive beyond 2025 and groups could continue to apply for funding. Future applications should continue to prioritise nationally significant items, demonstrate thorough planning processes and make strong claims against the criteria. Digitisation is also only one preservation strategy, and groups can minimise risk by improved housing and storage.
- The Panel strongly encouraged small, community museums and historical societies to ensure that **Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols** are being implemented when working with Indigenous cultural material. More guidance can be found at:
 - National Library of Australia [Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol](#)
 - Australian Museums and Galleries Association [First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries](#).
- Applicants for **significance assessments** are encouraged to thoroughly discuss their project with their nominated assessor and ensure that both parties have a clear understanding of the activity (based on the methodology outlined in Significance 2.0) and how it will be applied to the collection (or part of the collection).

- A reminder that the Panel will support **smaller organisations who are commencing or progressing their CHG journey** (from significance assessment to preservation needs assessment) in preference to repeat recipients who have already received substantial CHG support and multiple collection management grants.
- Following the new requirement that new applicants firstly contact the CHG team to confirm their eligibility, there were no ineligible applications among this cohort – this is a welcome trend. However three **ineligible applications** were received from repeat and training applicants. All organisations are urged to check their final activities in their application against the Ineligible Projects and Costs heading in the CHG Guidelines. Ineligible costs include:
 - staff or equipment costs for in-house digitisation,
 - computer hardware,
 - recurrent costs for collection management systems subscriptions,
 - administration, utilities and contingency costs.
- If in any doubt about eligible costs, contact the CHG Team at chg@nla.gov.au.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS PROGRAM 2025

Roslyn Russell + Maxine Holden

Roslyn Russell and Maxine Holden are both experienced and highly regarded heritage practitioners with the task to review the national significance and project feasibility of New and Returning Applicants in the 2025 CHG Round. A summary of the process and their observations is provided below.

Assessing the potential national significance of the applications for Community Heritage Grants is based on several factors:

- the ability of the applicant to make an effective argument that the collection embodies key elements of national historic themes that transcend local and state boundaries, or contains material relating to nationally significant people, locations and events; and
- the inclusion in the application of relevant supporting materials, such as previous significance assessment or preservation needs assessment reports, collection details and images of significant items, and letters of support from experts in the relevant collection area.

Our experience of over 30 years of engagement with the Community Heritage Grants program, includes undertaking many CHG-funded significance assessments of collections since 2009 and 2007 respectively. This has given us both an appreciation of the nature of the projects funded by CHG over many years and has allowed us to benchmark current applications against previous successful applications.

Our methodology used to assess the national significance of the applications includes:

1. Careful reading of applications and their supporting material;
2. Researching collections and historical sources, both online and by reviewing authoritative publications;
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 is clearly based on the primary and comparative criteria as described in the publication Significance 2.0 which applicants are urged to consult:

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

Descriptions of national significance

‘National significance’ is a distinct threshold that must be met before a grant can be awarded. Some applicants failed to demonstrate their understanding of national (as opposed to local) significance:

- without attempting their own initial assessment of their collection against those criteria before approaching a consultant;
- lacking sufficient information on which to base the request to proceed to a national significance assessment;
- failing to address the prompt questions described in Significance 2.0’s section on assessing national significance (pages 48-49) explicitly requested in the application form.

Given the CHG programs priority to fund nationally significant projects, all applications must demonstrate this understanding and if not, will be graded much lower during the initial reviews and placement of likely project funding.

Whilst the concept of national significance is not easy to grasp, many applicants have a certain amount of belief that their organisations’ collection or particular items are vitally important. This may be so at a very local level and many applicants spoke passionately about their collections without placing their claim at a higher level.

Furthermore, some applicants were unsure or unable to clarify the concept of national significance and missed the chance to strengthen their claim, where it may in fact have been possible. On some occasions, it was apparent that the applicants had only reinforced the regional significance rather than attempting to explore the possibility of national significance, which deemed their project unable to advance.

The CHG staged program

Whilst the program is clearly a staged approach (where the Significance Assessment is then followed by the Preservation Needs Assessment, laying the foundation for further collection management activities) many applicants failed to acknowledge this, which led to several organisations to inadvertently seeking multiple projects at once, or in fact making an unverified claim of national significance and leaping forward to seek support in the preservation of certain items.

Clearly, the purpose of staging this program is to ensure that organisations undertake a significance assessment in order to examine the breadth of their collection with a ‘critical eye’ and then (if successful) a preservation needs assessment to ascertain what specific conservation of objects is required, or perhaps moving on to digitisation or a storage review or certain training needs that will have been identified along the journey.

This year, some organisations moved swiftly from a Significance Assessment to the next request within weeks of the initial report being delivered, giving then little or no time to consult as a group and review the report - which forms part of the vital process of absorbing their findings and considering what might be required next.

Furthermore, some organisations went directly to a request for a Preservation Needs Assessment without seeking a professional and (most importantly) an independent significance assessment of their collection, where most consultants will clearly identify what they believe will be the collections' future conservation or care.

The CHG guidelines (and the document 'Are You Ready for a Significance Assessment?') clearly state that a Significance Assessment is the first stage in the CHG sequence and requires an independent, professional examination of the collection in consultation with the members of an organisation. It cannot be hurried nor executed without the engagement of those caring for the collection.

Frequent funding shortfalls: travel and accommodation

It was noted that several applications only requested the base fee for a consultant, without considering and requesting additional travel and accommodation expenses which they are entitled to do. This is particularly problematic if the consultant is based outside of city/town where the collection or organisation is located or (if not identified) leaving the consultant or the organisation itself to meet those expenses. Conversely, some applications contain estimates of travel costs that are significantly larger than could have been anticipated, given the relative locations of the collections and the assessors.

Overall, organisations must ensure they understand the parameters of the grant application process given the highly competitive nature amongst Australian State and Territories, along with the limited pool of funds that vary each year.

July 2025