COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS 2026 ROUND

Grants Assessment Report

This report provides past and future applicants with more information on the 2026 Round including an overview of applicants, assessment process and feedback from the independent assessor and the CHG Expert Panel on how to build a competitive application and avoid common pitfalls.

Overview (CHG Program Team)

The 2026 Round of the Community Heritage Grants received 140 applications, the highest number of submissions for many years. A total of 45 projects were approved 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.	**90**
Repeat applicants Organisations who had completed the previous CHG stage within the past five years.	**43**
Training projects Open to collecting organisations and professional heritage associations.	**7**
TOTAL	**140**

Among those organisations who applied for grants in the 2026 Round:

- 53 organisations were first time applicants
- 12 had applied unsuccessfully in previous rounds
- 75 applicants had previously received a CHG grant
- 17 organisations had recently completed their 2025 Round projects
- 43 applicants were from regional Australia, five from remote areas and two 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 2026 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	*For New Applicants only* Significance assessment and ranking of the collections that are the subject of the project and project feasibility assessment and ranking.	Independent external assessor (see separate report below)
3	*Repeat Applicants and Training Projects* Project feasibility assessment and ranking	CHG Program Team
4	*Assessment Day* 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 2026 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 2026 Round was a highly competitive round with the highest number of applications for nine years.
- With limited funds, the selection criteria were rigorously applied and only 45 of the highest ranked applications were able to be supported. The Panel also awarded part funding in many cases by prioritising the most urgent activity within the application. Applicants are reminded that multiple applications are unlikely to be supported.
- The Expert Panel noted the quality of applications and were pleased to see many organisations progressing and completing the three stages, thereby maximising the benefits and increasing capacity building.
- As in previous years, the Expert Panel welcomed proposals by organisations who were previously unsuccessful but resubmitted applications that addressed concerns and feedback.
- In line with the program aims criteria, the Panel prioritised new applicants who were commencing or progressing their CHG journey, in preference to repeat recipients who had already received substantial support and multiple collection management grants.
- The Expert Panel considered a number of conservation treatment projects. Members were more likely to support artwork or artefacts that had been identified as nationally significant and where conservation would improve access through research or display.
- Several projects were not supported as members agreed that the organisation needed more time to prepare and document their collections and in some cases, undertake community consultation. These applicants were encouraged to reapply in future rounds and use this time to address the recommendations.

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 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.
- Following the new requirement that all applicants firstly contact the CHG team to confirm their eligibility, there was only one wholly ineligible application – this is a welcome trend. However five applications included ineligible costs. All organisations are urged to check the final activities in their application against the Ineligible Projects and Costs heading in the CHG Guidelines. Ineligible costs include:
    - internal salary or labour costs;
    - staff or equipment costs for in-house digitisation;
    - contractor costs for non-prescribed activities such as cataloguing or rehousing project;
    - travel costs for assessors and conservators to undertake research trips;
    - computer hardware;
    - recurrent costs for collection management systems subscriptions; and
    - administration, utilities and contingency costs.
- If in any doubt about eligible costs, contact the CHG Team at chg@nla.gov.au.

Independent Assessor Report (Maxine Holden)

I am an experienced and highly regarded heritage practitioner who was tasked to review the national significance and project feasibility of New and Returning Applicants in the 2026 CHG Round. A summary of the process and observations are provided below.

Assessing the potential national significance of the collections that are the focus of the applications is the primary focus of the initial assessment stage. The assessments were based on several factors:

- the ability for the applicant/organisation 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;
- the inclusion in the application of relevant supporting materials, such as details and images of proposed or verified significant items, and letters of support from experts in the relevant collection area; and
- my experience of over 30 years of engagement with the Community Heritage Grants program, having undertaken CHG-funded collection assessments since 2007, allowing her to confidently benchmark current applications against previous successful applications.

In 2026, I assessed 102 applications that were mostly new requests for Significance Assessments and Preservation Needs Assessments along with many important returning applicants/organisations seeking improved storage as well as museum-standard conservation, digitisation and training.

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

- careful reading of applications and their supporting material;
- referencing comparative collections;
- balancing primary and comparative criteria, to assign a ranking; and
- 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. They are:

Primary criteria	**Comparative criteria**
Historical significance	Provenance
Artistic or aesthetic significance	Rarity or representativeness
Scientific or research significance	Condition or completeness
Social or spiritual significance	Interpretive capacity

Of further importance is the claim 'National significance' which is a distinct threshold that must be met before a grant can be awarded. Given the CHG program's priority to fund nationally significant projects, all applications must demonstrate this understanding and if not, will be graded lower during the initial reviews.

Whilst the concept of national significance is not easy to grasp, the assessor noted that many applicants had a certain amount of belief that their organisation's 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. Some applicants failed to demonstrate their understanding of national, as opposed to local and/or regional significance. Common pitfalls included:

- not 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.

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. In some instances, it was apparent that the applicants had only reinforced the regional significance of their collections rather than attempting to explore the possibility of national significance, which deemed their project unable to advance.

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 (previously granted) Significance Assessment to the next application 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 the next steps.

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.

Varied applications for 'next-stage support' were received with some needing to bolster their application with further supporting evidence or failing to justify an excessive funding request leading to a recommendation that they apply next round with clearer documentation.

Nevertheless, I was delighted to see so many applications in 2026 from remote and regional communities with many projects holding culturally diverse collections in particular objects, stories and items from First Nations people. It is always a privilege to take part in this program to ensure that heritage collections across Australia receive the support they need.

Maxine Holden
Expert Assessor, NLA Community Heritage Grant program
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