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Organisational sustainability in Australia's volunteer-managed community heritage organisations: a preliminary strengths-based framework with baseline indicators

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ABSTRACT

The volunteer-managed community heritage sector is a critical part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. The sector, however, faces significant organisational sustainability issues that threaten its capacity to collect and preserve the nation's diverse local, everyday and marginalised heritages. The current national cultural policy, *Revive*, offers no concrete actions to support volunteer-managed community heritage organisations (CHOs) to build resilience, continue operations or secure their futures. This article reviews scholarly and grey literature to identify aspects of organisational sustainability relevant to CHOs, organised into four key dimensions: governance, resources, volunteer experience and community engagement. To contextualise these dimensions, we draw on written submissions pertaining to sustainability challenges by CHOs to Australian federal, state and territory parliamentary inquiries. The article presents a preliminary framework with baseline indicators for organisational sustainability in the community heritage sector that takes a strengths-based approach. We argue that the preliminary framework can be used as a basis to develop a co-designed, strengths-based framework that has utility as both a practical tool for CHOs and a policy intervention that highlights the need for greater recognition and support for the community heritage sector within Australia's national cultural policy.

Introduction

Australia's community heritage sector – a sub-set of the cultural heritage sector – is defined as encompassing a diverse array of volunteer-managed organisations including galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies (see Baker and Cantillon 2020). Such institutions may also be variously known as radical libraries, community archives, artist-run initiatives and local museums. Distinct from local government-, state- or nationally-operated heritage institutions, CHOs are typically governed and sustained solely by volunteers, with no paid staff; operate on limited budgets; and are embedded within the social fabric of their localities. They frequently adopt a do-it-yourself approach

to heritage (Baker 2018) and, as sites of 'heritage from below' (Muzaini and Minca 2018), enable communities of interest to author and curate their own histories, reflecting local, marginalised or enthusiast identities and contested memories. CHOs are largely collecting institutions and tend to not limit their practice to institutional siloes – an institution with 'museum' in its title may also have a library and/or archive, while an 'historical society' may house an archive in addition to a gallery or museum. Located across Australia in urban, regional and remote areas, these institutions play a significant role in collecting, preserving, interpreting and/or transmitting local histories, cultural practices and collective memory.

While many countries are home to community-based heritage work, Australia's volunteer-managed community heritage sector is distinctive in its scale, decentralisation and historical lack of policy frameworks and equitable, sustained funding structures (Winkworth 2011). In Ireland, for example, a 2016 survey of Irish museums found 16.7% were staffed entirely by volunteers with no paid employees (Mark-FitzGerald 2016, 10). In Australia, on the other hand, the 2019 Museums & Galleries Queensland (2021) survey of 167 Queensland public galleries and museums (including historical societies, community libraries and archives) found 40% were volunteer-run, while the 2022 Museums & Galleries of NSW (2023) sector census found 58% of 240 respondent organisations to be operated entirely by volunteers. This proportion exceeds comparable sectors in countries where more formalised support structures for community museums and local archives are in place. Existing largely at the margins of formal cultural policy frameworks and chronically under-resourced,the sector is highly precarious. Reporting on CHOs that have recently closed or are at-risk of closure (see e.g. Evans etal. 2024; Kwon 2025) highlights that the sector faces acute sustainability challenges related to funding, volunteer succession, infrastructure and digital capacity. These challenges raise important questions about equity, recognition and support within national cultural policy regimes for avulnerable sector whose long-term future is essential if Australia is to retain diversity in its cultural infrastructure.

Revive, Australia's National Cultural Policy, lists 'strong cultural infrastructure' as its fourth pillar (Australian Government 2023, 75–76). However, while recognising CHOs 'provide free or low-cost access' to 'rich holdings of cultural material' that 'will inspire future creative and academic work', Revive offers no concrete actions to support such organisations to build resilience, continue operations or secure their futures (75–76). This omission underscores a broader policy blind spot in Australia in which these organisations remain largely unsupported within the national vision for sustainable cultural infrastructure, despite the community heritage sector's cultural, educational and social value.

Organisational sustainability refers to the capacity of an institution to maintain robust operational systems, engage in strategic planning and secure ongoing access to adequate resources in ways that support the meeting of goals and ensure a longer-term future (cf. Eschenfelder et al. 2019). In this article, we use the term to describe the ability of CHOs to sustain and adapt their operations, collections and community relevance over time in the face of persistent resource constraints, demographic shifts and wider sectoral and societal pressures. This includes not only financial and operational viability, but also the recruitment and retention of volunteers; the intergenerational transfer of knowledge among volunteers; the ongoing relevance of the CHO's work to its communities of interest; the preservation and curation of collections and dissemination of local histories in accessible

and meaningful ways; and the strategic agility to anticipate and respond to future challenges.

There has been limited scholarly literature focused on Australia's volunteer-managed CHOs, let alone research that is specifically concerned with the sector's organisational sustainability. This article sets out to review literature from wider national contexts to identify dimensions of organisational sustainability that could be reimagined as baseline indicators and applied in research with CHOs in Australia. The intention is to capture the common challenges or threats to sustainability that are already documented in scholarly and grey literature and then to reframe these using a strengths-based approach to provide a series of baseline indicators that can support sustainable practice. To contextualise the dimensions identified in the literature, the article draws on written submissions by CHOs to Australian federal, state and territory government parliamentary inquiries held between 2016–2025 that had relevant terms of reference. In doing so, the article provides insight into how the challenges of sustainability for the community heritage sector unfold in practice and offers a preliminary framework to support CHOs to develop evidence-based approaches to a more resilient future.

The article begins with a summary of relevant literature, including literature that has previously sought to produce indicators of organisational sustainability in CHOs. We then outline the methods underpinning this article, followed by our observations of four key dimensions of organisational sustainability – governance, resources, volunteer experience and community engagement – drawn from the literature and contextualised with data from the parliamentary inquiry submissions. In our discussion, we present a preliminary framework for organisational sustainability in the community heritage sector that takes a strengths-based approach. The article concludes by arguing for the importance of a strengths-based, co-designed organisational sustainability framework as both a practical tool for CHOs to plan for long-term viability and a policy intervention that highlights the need for greater recognition and support for the community heritage sector within Australia's national cultural policy.

Literature review

Fifteen years ago, Winkworth (2011) described a 'sustainability crisis' in the 'volunteer-managed museum movement' in Australia. Limited funding, the growing number of CHOs, 'decaying buildings and collections, aging volunteers, rising standards and the expectations of visitors' were identified by Winkworth (2011) as key challenges to the sector's viable future. Part of the challenge for CHOs is that they 'operate under a heterogeneous array of policy guidelines and tenuous funding arrangements' (Robinson 2018, 720). The funding landscape for CHOs has captured the imagination of a number of scholars, particularly in relation to the Australian Government's community heritage grants program (Gibbons 2019; McCausland and Thompson 2014; Meredith, Sloggett, and Scott 2019). Organisations eligible for those grants include 'not-for-profit, incorporated organisations and federal, state/territory and local government agencies and university groups, that own or manage a moveable heritage collection of nationally significant material and which is accessible to the general public' (National Library of Australia 2025). At the federal level, then, volunteer-managed CHOs compete against better resourced, highly professionalised institutions for a small pot of project funding.

Some funding streams are more targeted, such as the suite of volunteer museum grants available from Museums & Galleries of NSW, but these too are project based with small monetary values. Funds are not geared to supporting organisational sustainability and, as (Gibbons 2019, 221) notes, there is also a question of the 'sustainability of funding' in an environment where only 'a small fraction' of CHOs are awarded grants. This echoes McCausland and Thompson's (2014, 175) findings that 'additional federal support is needed to sustain' CHOs. In Australia, it often falls to local government authorities to support CHOs with forms of recurrent funding or provision of accommodations like peppercorn rents that can help shore up short- to medium-term viability (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Robinson 2018).

Although sustainability issues are frequently mentioned in studies focused on the community heritage sector, only a handful of this literature looks specifically at sustainability, with the majority of this work from outside of Australia. Of these studies, most concentrate on community archives (Chung 2025; Davies 2017; Du Laney 2019; Froese-Stoddard 2014; Lian and Oliver 2018; Newman 1998, 2011; Sheffield 2020; Wessell and Thorpe 2023). Beyond the community archives field, we (Baker and Cantillon 2020) take a whole-of-sector approach to examine sustainability issues that cut across institutional silos in Australia. Our work conceptualises organisational sustainability in terms of institutional well-being, identifying three 'interconnected and mutually informing' attributes: 'the vitality of the organisation's social and affective dimensions', 'the effectiveness of the organisation's cultural aims' and 'the sustainability of the organisation's activities' (Baker and Cantillon 2020, 81).

Newman (1998, 2011), focusing on community archives in New Zealand, provides one of the more systematic frameworks for organisational sustainability. Newman (2011, 37) identifies three key aspects for sustainability: 'archives', 'organisation' and 'community'. They initially list eight factors that relate to these three broad categories: preservation, archival practices, governance, funding, skilled staff, collaboration, dynamism and community engagement. They subsequently identify three additional factors: 'Collections (the nature of them), 'Archivist (their character)' and 'External support' (Newman 2011, 41). Not all of the archives included in Newman's (2011, 41) study were volunteer-run, and they observe that 'fully voluntary archives may be essentially unsustainable while those within local government, whether directly or indirectly controlled, have a much greater likelihood of being maintained over the long term'. They note however, that such arrangements may come at the expense of independence (Newman 2011).

Froese-Stoddard (2014) provides another useful framework drawn from their research on community archives in Nova Scotia, Canada. Froese-Stoddard (2014, 144)argues that the four strongest indicators of success, in order of importance, are: 'diversified and stable *funding*; active support of social *community*; strong *leadership* with vision; close ties with *professional communities*' (emphasis added). While the author notes overlap of these factors with those identified by Newman (1998, 2011), Froese-Stoddard's (2014) study places more emphasis on 'the strength of the relationships between archives and their communities' (146) and on 'maintaining relationships with professional communities' (147). They note these factors 'appeared to have greater impact on an institution's sustainability than the actual level of professionalism in the preservation facilities and robustness of archival capabilities exhibited by an institution, as Newman's study suggested' (147).

Beyond the scholarly literature, organisational sustainability is a prominent issue that is frequently acknowledged within documents produced by peak bodies in Australia representing the country's museums, galleries, archives, libraries and historical societies. Surveys administered by peak bodies highlight some of the key challenges facing such organisations. For instance, Museums & Galleries of NSW's (2023) most recent sector census, for which 58% of its 240 respondents were volunteer-only organisations (2), indicates the top six most common risks to collections identified by respondents were, in order, 'Inadequate collection storage space' (58%), 'Unsuitable or limited storage and archive materials' (51%), 'Falling volunteer numbers' (49%), 'Lack of funding' (47%), 'Lack of trained staff and/or volunteers' (45%) and 'Long term building maintenance' (44%) (12). A similar survey conducted by the Federation of Australian Historical Societies (2016, 23) identified the most common major problems among historical societies as being 'the maintenance of volunteer numbers ... including attracting younger volunteers and volunteers with skills', funding, an ageing workforce and a lack of space. The Federation of Australian Historical Societies provides a particularly rich resource in its *Guide to Succession Planning* (2017a) and *Succession Planning Workbook* (2017b). Guidance in these documents focuses on attracting and retaining volunteers, enhancing the organisation's reputation within the community, and ensuring accurate documentation and effective knowledge transfer. Though not targeted specifically to CHOs, the *National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries* from The National Standards Taskforce (2023) provides guidance for sustainable practice through its emphasis on effective management and governance and is of particular relevance to CHOs seeking accreditation.

From the review of scholarly and grey literature, we identified four dimensions of organisational sustainability: governance, resources, volunteer experience and community engagement. We use these dimensions to analyse our dataset and to guide the development of a preliminary framework of organisational sustainability.

Methods

This article emerges from the Australian Research Council funded Discovery Project, 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector' (2025–28). The project seeks to collaborate with volunteer-managed CHOs across Australia to co-develop resources that address organisational sustainability in the community heritage sector. The focus is on co-developing strategies for recognising value, measuring organisational sustainability and creating benchmarks for sustainable practice. The project design centred on initially developing a preliminary framework of organisational sustainability (method: literature review, parliamentary inquiry submissions), followed by iterative stages of data collection with volunteers to capture their experiences (method: interviews, arts-based zine-making workshops) and co-design resources (method: roundtables) including a re-worked framework that can guide sustainable practice in the sector. The project received ethics approval from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 2025/199).

This article reports on the first component of the project design. We deployed the dimensions that emerged from the literature review as codes to analyse a set of Australian Government and State and Territory Government parliamentary inquiry submissions.

Inquiries were selected for inclusion based on a focus on issues relevant to CHOs, including cultural policy, volunteering, heritage, cultural institutions and cultural industries. Inquiries were limited to 2016–2025 to ensure currency. Parliamentary inquiry submissions were identified as a valuable source of qualitative data due to the insights they could offer into how CHOs articulate their challenges, assert their cultural value and engage with policy processes to influence recognition and support within, in this case, federal-, state- and territory-based policy frameworks. This dataset included written submissions by volunteer-managed CHOs to:

- Parliament of New South Wales' 2016 'Inquiry into museums and galleries'
- Parliament of New South Wales' 2020 'Select Committee on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales'
- Parliament of Australia's 2020 'Inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions'
- ACT Parliament's 2022/3 'Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements'
- Parliament of Australia's 2023 'Inquiry into the National Cultural Policy'
- Queensland Parliament's 2025 'Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland'

We also reviewed submissions to the Parliament of Victoria's 2024 'Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria' and the South Australian Parliament's 2024 'Inquiry into the South Australian Museum and the Art Gallery of South Australia'. These were subsequently excluded from the dataset as they did not include submissions from volunteer-managed CHOs. In total, 1501 submissions to parliamentary inquiries were reviewed with the intention of identifying those produced by volunteer-managed CHOs. We recognise that these parliamentary inquiries do not capture organisations from every state, territory or locale; however, the article does not seek to be nationally representative. Rather, we aim to explore context-specific examples that have been selected 'meaningfully and strategically' (Liamputtong 2020) to generate *transferable* (rather than nationally *generalisable*) insights (Drisko 2025).

The Queensland Parliament Inquiry aimed to understand the current landscape of volunteerism across the state, including the challenges volunteers face. The Inquiry received a total of 567 submissions. Of these, 8 were submitted by, or on behalf of, CHOs. The two NSW inquiries had terms of reference predominantly focused on the Government's management of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, also known as the Powerhouse Museum, and this was reflected in the majority of submissions. These inquiries were also seeking broader information on, for example, 'government policy, funding and support for museums and galleries' (2016, 2020), including for 'volunteer managed museums' (2016). There were 179 submissions to the 2016 Inquiry and 151 submissions to the 2020 Inquiry. From these, 20 submissions in 2016 were from CHOs, with a further 3 in 2020 – two of which had also made a submission in 2016. The 2020 Parliament of Australia Inquiry included considerations of economic and non-economic benefits of cultural industries and institutions and mechanisms for policy delivery. From 352 submissions, only 1 was from a CHO. The 2023 Parliament of Australia Inquiry sought reflections on *Revive* and received 76 submissions, with 3 from CHOs – one of which had also made submissions to the 2016 and 2020 NSW inquiries. The ACT inquiry focused on

matters relating to the ACT's heritage arrangements, including the effectiveness and adequacy of operations, structure, administration and resourcing related to heritage legislation, the ACT Heritage Council and ACT Heritage Unit. Of the 65 submissions, 9 were from CHOs, with one CHO providing two separate submissions. Table 1 lists the CHO submissions that inform this article.

An initial review of the 44 submissions from 40 CHOs was conducted to identify explicit concerns and implicit challenges related to organisational sustainability, and any proposed solutions articulated by the volunteers. On completion of the literature review, the issues presented by each organisation were then coded according to the emergent dimensions: governance, resources, volunteer experience, community engagement. A deductive thematic analysis was then undertaken, placing the experiences of the 40 CHOs in conversation with each other to reveal shared challenges to organisational sustainability that reflect the dimensions as well as distinct concerns that arise from organisation-specific contexts. All challenges and solutions observed in the submissions were captured by the four dimensions that emerged from the literature review and went on to inform the corresponding categories of the preliminary framework.

Dimensions of organisational sustainability

Governance

Participation

Good governance is essential for a positive organisational culture in CHOs (Pryce 2021). In particular, the literature suggests that participatory and collaborative modes of governance align best with the goals of these organisations. Such approaches reflect the values of democratisation which underpin the founding of these institutions (Flinn 2007). Scholars including Flinn (2007) and Zavala et al. (2017) advocate specifically for a 'post-custodial' model, a form of governance that shares power and authority among management, volunteers, members and communities, involving various stakeholders in 'appraisal, description and access' (Zavala et al. 2017, 212). In our previous research, we note 'ineffective leadership' in CHOs as a significant factor in creating negative volunteer experiences (Cantillon and Baker 2020b, 266). Likewise, the drawbacks associated with heritage volunteering are most pronounced for those who hold management positions (Cantillon and Baker 2020a). This is reflected in submissions from Toowong and District and Capricorn Coast historical societies, who describe a struggle to find new individuals to step into leadership and committee roles as 'people prefer to . . . not get stuck in administration' (Capricorn Coast Historical Society).

Collaboration

Another crucial dimension of good governance is building alliances and collaborations with other organisations, including governments and heritage organisations (Arts Victoria & Department of Planning and Community Development 2009; Baker and Collins 2017, Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2017a; Caswell 2014; Flinn 2007, 2010, 2011; Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009; Lian and Oliver 2018; Morales Lersch and Cuauhtémoc Camarena 2010; Poole 2020; Welland 2015; Zavala et al. 2017). For example, Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum initiated the establishment of an alliance of 'like-minded museums'

Table 1. Submissions from volunteer-managed community heritage organisations to Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Australian parliamentary inquiries, 2016–2025.

Inquiry	Submission #	Organisation	Location	Est.
QLD, 2025	59	Capricorn Coast Historical Society	Yeppoon, QLD	1986
QLD, 2025	83	Southern Downs Steam Railway Association Inc./Downs Explorer	Warwick, QLD	1996
QLD, 2025	147	Toowong and District Historical Society Inc.	Toowong, QLD	2003
QLD, 2025	324	Queensland Air Museum	Caloundra West, QLD	1974
QLD, 2025	332	The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses Inc.	Caloundra, QLD	2007
QLD, 2025	347	Port Curtis Historical Society/Calliope River Historical Village	River Ranch, QLD	1979
QLD, 2025	392	Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society/The Woodford Railway	Woodford, QLD	1971
QLD, 2025	492	Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association Inc./ Rockhampton Heritage Village Radio Museum	Parkhurst, QLD	2011
ACT, 2022	6, 6.1	Canberra & District Historical Society	Curtin, ACT	1953
ACT, 2022	7, 9	Kosciuszko Huts Association Inc.	Canberra, ACT	1971
ACT, 2022	24	Fire Brigade Historical Society of the ACT	Forrest, ACT	1978
ACT, 2022	26	Hall Heritage Centre	Hall, ACT	2011
ACT, 2022	31	Manning Clark House Inc.	Forrest, ACT	1997
ACT, 2022	32	Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association	Tidbinbilla, ACT	1983
ACT, 2022	35	Tuggeranong Schoolhouse Museum	Chisholm, ACT	2011
ACT, 2022	64	Family History ACT	Cook, ACT	1964
AU, 2023	19	Prince Henry Hospital Nursing and Medical Museum	Little Bay, NSW	2003
AU, 2023	20	Willoughby District Historical Society & Museum Inc.	Chatswood, NSW	1974
AU, 2020	38	Women's Art Register	Richmond, VIC	1975
NSW, 2020	144	Sydney Tramway Museum	Loftus, NSW	1950
NSW, 2016, 2020; AU 2023	31; 21; 12	Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum	Lithgow, NSW	1998
NSW, 2016, 2020	154; 83	Port Macquarie Historical Society/Port Macquarie Museum	Port Macquarie, NSW	1957
NSW, 2016	13	Dutch Australian Cultural Centre	Smithfield, NSW	1983
NSW, 2016	15	Pyrmont History Group	Pyrmont, NSW	2011
NSW, 2016	17	Friends of Fagan Park	Galston, NSW	1985
NSW, 2016	20	Gunnedah Rural Museum Inc	Gunnedah, NSW	1988
NSW, 2016	23	Millthorpe & District Historical Society/Golden Memories Millthorpe Museum	Millthorpe, NSW	1965
NSW, 2016	26	The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc	Lithgow, NSW	1990
NSW, 2016	28	NSW Steam Preservation Co-Op Society Limited/ Campbelltown Steam and Machinery Museum	Menangle Park, NSW	1972
NSW, 2016	34	Mount Victoria and District Historical Society Inc/Mount Victoria Museum	Mount Victoria, NSW	1992
NSW, 2016	47	Adaminaby Snowy Scheme Collection Inc/Snowy Scheme Museum	Adaminaby, NSW	2002
NSW, 2016	49	Border Flywheelers Club Inc	Barham, NSW	1995
NSW, 2016	52	Shoalhaven Vintage Machinery Club Inc	Bomaderry, NSW	2005
NSW, 2016	58	Delegate Progress Association/Bundian Way Gallery and Delegate Museum	Delegate, NSW	1979
NSW, 2016	59	Cherry Capital Collectors Club	Young, NSW	
NSW, 2016	63	Bega and District Historical Machinery Club Inc	Bega, NSW	1977

Table 1. (Continued).

Inquiry	Submission #	Organisation	Location	Est.
NSW, 2016	89	Riverina Vintage Machinery Club Inc	Coleambally, NSW	2000
NSW, 2016	91	Harden-Murrumburrah Historical Society	Harden, NSW	1970
NSW, 2016	152	Orange and District Historical Society	Orange, NSW	1949
NSW, 2016	171	Woodford Academy Management Committee	Woodford, NSW	2008

to deliver a collective voice on issues impacting museums like theirs. Writing on the relationships between mainstream and community archives, Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd (2010) note that collaborations might relate to custody arrangements for materials, connecting with relevant communities to fill gaps in institutions, assistance with organising exhibits and events, training in particular skills, or sharing specialist knowledges. Sydney Tramway Museum, for example, noted a long-standing 'productive working relationship' with the state-run Powerhouse Museum, including 'the exchange of museological advice and information and mutual loan of exhibits'.

Local governments are often important sources of support (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Newman 2011); however, their support was highlighted in the submissions to be inconsistent. Port Macquarie Museum noted that in their region the Council demonstrates 'little interest in supporting and resourcing' CHOs 'to the level necessary for a sustainable future'. Council amalgamations were highlighted as a concern by Delegate Progress Association and Millthorpe and District Historical Society, who both reflected that the strong relationship and high level of support experienced with their former Council will not be easily replicated with a new, larger council. Shoalhaven Vintage Machinery Club pointed out there are also CHOs whose approach is 'to do the best you can without the assistance of a Government type body. This path is followed so as to keep control of the collection theme, and have some uninterested unconcerned public servant make misguided direction decisions'.

The literature notes it is important that partnerships between mainstream heritage organisations, local government and CHOs are based on mutual respect, trust and sustained engagement (rather than 'short-term one-off exercises') (Flinn 2011, 15); that they operate as a 'two-way process, with knowledge and benefits flowing both ways' (14); and that CHOs are enabled to 'retain their autonomy and independence' (Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009, 80) throughout the process. Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum reported agreeing to a three-month loan of a historically significant iron ballast from their collection to a national museum. However, the object was then never returned due to the national museum placing 'onerous conditions and requirements' that the CHO 'could not fulfil'. They have also had more positive experiences such as a loan arrangement with a regional Council in which the 'transaction was approached with mutual respect and need'.

Strategies, policies and procedures

As part of effective management, CHOs need to keep clear, thorough records and develop strategic plans, policies and procedures that are accessible, secure and up-to-date (see,

e.g. Pryce 2021). For example, Port Macquarie Museum, Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum and The City of Greater Lithgow Mining Museum all described developing planning documents focused on aspects of cultural tourism, collection management or budget stabilisation to enhance organisational sustainability. Planning documents may relate to mission and vision statements (Newman 2011; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2017a); disaster preparedness and response (Wessell and Thorpe 2023); and contingency plans for the stewardship of materials if organisations close down (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Baker and Collins 2015, 2017). Closely related to this point is the need for CHOs to develop clear, organised practices relating to collecting, appraisal, cataloguing, and so on (Newman 2011), including undertaking significance assessments.

Strategies related to succession planning and volunteer recruitment and training are perhaps some of the most critical procedures that CHOs can have in place to support sustainability. The literature notes that CHOs are often founded and initially sustained by passionate, enthusiastic individuals who eventually move on from their roles due to ill health or death (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Baker and Collins 2015; Copeland 2014; Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009; Newman 1998, 2011; Welland 2015). Relatedly, many CHOs have an elderly or ageing workforce (Baker and Cantillon 2020, 2022; Baker and Collins 2017; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2016, 2017a; Holcombe-James 2022). Proper succession planning ensures the knowledge of these key individuals is transferred to others who may take over (Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2017a). Similarly, succession planning ensures there are effective strategies in place to recruit volunteers to fill essential roles. The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses observed that it is 'getting harder and harder to attract volunteers', particularly the 'retiree age group in their 60s to 70s', with Port Curtis Historical Society noting 'difficulty securing new, younger, and more able volunteers'.

Beyond the recruitment phase, retention can be supported by strategies that monitor and support volunteers (Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021). The Queensland Air Museum identified volunteers as a key area of risk in their strategic planning, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach to the entire 'volunteer life cycle' within their organisational strategy. The 'life cycle' approach takes into account 'identifying areas of need, to recruiting, inducting and orienting, then deploying, training, encouraging and resourcing volunteers, right through to an exit strategy'. Since implementing their strategic plan, the museum has increased the proportion of active volunteers among their membership.

Regulatory requirements

Effective governance of CHOs also involves adhering to regulatory requirements (Lian and Oliver 2018) and achieving and maintaining legal status (Newman 2011), such as Incorporation or Registered Charity status. Despite limited engagement with these issues in the literature, legal and regulatory issues emerged as significant burdens across multiple submissions. Kosciuszko Huts Association described volunteers as not being interested in 'compliance paperwork' nor wanting to be 'legally accountable for works performed'. Their submission asked for legislation to be amended 'to provide protection from prosecution to volunteers undertaking an approved conservation activity as part of an approved volunteer program'. Capricorn Coast Historical Society noted 'a reluctance [by volunteers] to accept positions that may lead to legal proceedings' and also pointed to

'Blue Card[1] compliance [being] seen [by volunteers] as a stumbling block'. The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses noted that contractual language implying excessive safety measures or which demands 'expert' levels of performance from volunteers creates fear of personal liability and is 'off-putting'.

The submissions highlighted particular regulatory challenges experienced by railway-focused CHOs in Queensland and, in NSW, CHOs with firearms in their collections. The Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society 'understand that some levels of control and risk management are necessary' but highlighted issues with 'one size fits all' regulations which do not adapt to scalability of operations. They pointed out that tourist and heritage railways are not 'the same as high risk mainline commercial railway', yet recent changes to regulations now impose the same medical standards, resulting in 'volunteers being failed unnecessarily'. Southern Downs Steam Railway Association argued that 'huge and ever increasing levels of red tape' and 'the burdens associated with compliance … detract from the core purpose of volunteering'. Port Macquarie Museum noted 'the Firearms Museum licence requirements have impacted how [they] interpret and exhibit [their] firearms collection', removing the museum's capacity to meet the expectations of contemporary museological practice by taking these objects out of 'their true context' and removing the capacity to 'exhibit[] them within themed exhibitions'. They observed that 'policy changes to Firearms Museums in New South Wales and heritage arms and armour collections in 2019 was poorly handled' with 'little consultation' with CHOs which hold 'Firearms Museums licences' and are 'most impacted by the legislative changes'.

Resources

Funding

There is a strong focus in the literature on the need for adequate financial resources to support the operations of CHOs (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Baker and Huber 2013; Cantillon and Baker 2020a; Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021; Caswell 2014; Chung 2025; Davies 2017; Du Laney 2019; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2016; Flinn 2011; Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009; Froese-Stoddard 2014; Holcombe-James 2022; Lian and Oliver 2018; Newman 1998, 2011; Paschild 2012; Poole 2020; Welland 2015; Zavala et al. 2017). Typical funding streams for such institutions include a mix of grants from philanthropic and government sources; donations; fees paid for membership, entry or events/workshops; and revenue from gift shops or merchandise (Baker and Huber 2013; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2016; Poole 2020). Froese-Stoddard (2014) notes that drawing funding from diverse streams is crucial to sustainability. Inquiry submissions often commented on the scarcity of financial resources, leading to CHOs having to 'operate on a shoestring' (Orange and District Historical Society). Capricorn Coast Historical Society pointed to fundraising being an 'ongoing issue' and, along with the Southern Downs Steam Railway Association, drew attention to rising insurance costs, as well as rates and electricity charges. Fundraising efforts are identified by Port Macquarie Museum as 'tak[ing] the focus off the important issues of collection management and building maintenance'.

Public funding, while often a key source of income for CHOs, comes with a number of challenges as well: 1) its availability is increasingly limited due in part to neoliberal austerity policies (Cantillon and Baker 2020a); 2) it is often tailored to short-term projects

rather than supporting long-term operations (Flinn 2011); and 3) in some circumstances can impinge on an organisation's desire to be autonomous and independent (Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009). The Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society lamented the limited public funding made available for heritage compared to the arts and sporting sectors. Port Macquarie Museum outlined that project-based government grant programs have limitations regarding the number of applications allowed and their small dollar value, while noting there are no grants for operating funds available to CHOs. Canberra and District Historical Society further noted that available funds for individual projects 'may not have kept up with rising costs' and does not adequately cover the budgets needed for the purchase of digitisation equipment. The funding landscape also makes it challenging for CHOs to undertake collection valuations – the costs of these are described by the Port Macquarie Museum as 'prohibitive', but are 'important tools in understanding and engaging with funding partners around project investment and economic returns'.

We (Cantillon and Baker 2020a, 2020b) note that funding applications can be onerous, with failed attempts leading to significant feelings of disappointment for volunteers. Southern Downs Steam Railway Association stated that restrictive and burdensome grant processes deter volunteer organisations from accessing much-needed funds. The Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society pointed to inequities in accessing public funding due to competing against 'big organisations with professional paid grant writers'. Similarly, Adaminaby Snowy Scheme Collection described CHOs as being 'at a resourcing disadvantage' when applying for grants also open to regional and state operated museums. Further, Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum noted funding applications are a 'hit and miss exercise' and CHOs often 'lack the wherewithal to complete the mass of paperwork required' to secure grants.

Volunteers

Adequate volunteer numbers are necessary to ensure key operations can be maintained (Cantillon and Baker 2020b; Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021). Many CHOs found it 'very difficult to secure volunteers' (Port Curtis Historical Society), reporting numbers to be 'relatively static' (Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association) or decreasing (Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses), with particular risks in regional areas where local populations are smaller (Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum). Attrition is a challenge, with Port Curtis Historical Society drawing attention to 'current volunteers ageing out or reducing their contribution'. Toowong and District Historical Society reported that the loss of existing members/volunteers due to death, relocation, clash of commitments, new employment, health problems or spousal illness were the major factors in attrition. Older volunteers who continue in the CHOs may 'find the work increasingly tiring', particularly as 'the number of responsibilities increases' for the volunteers who remain (Delegate Progress Association). Attracting a younger cohort of volunteers is needed because 'relying on the "older brigade" for volunteering is not sustainable' (Lithgow Small Arms Factory), but due to work commitments, younger people do not have the time to volunteer (Toowong and District Historical Society).

CHOs need an appropriately skilled workforce, including the capacity to offer opportunities for learning (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022) and professional development in essential areas like acquisition and collection practices (Baker and Cantillon 2020). CHOs

can function as 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) for experiential and situated learning (Baker 2018; Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021), but it is also important for more formalised training processes to take place. Both Port Curtis Historical Society and Southern Downs Steam Railway Association noted, however, the need for financial assistance (e.g. from local government) to help cover the costs associated with formal training for volunteers.

Training in digitisation (see, e.g. Holcombe-James 2022; Flinn 2011; GLAM Peak 2021; Wessell and Thorpe 2023) and technological skills that support both pre-servation and outreach is often noted in the literature and empirical data. Millthorpe and District Historical Society observed that the collection of oral histories is integral to its mission but that this activity 'requires support in both training and updating technologies'. Port Macquarie Museum noted that many CHOs 'do not have the resources' for digitisation, and, because 'volunteers come and go', these places require 'on the ground and consistent' 'resourcing, training and ongoing professional support'. Delegate Progress Association highlighted that 'volunteers have varying levels of computer literacy' and as a result 'much of the administrative and advertising work is shouldered by an even smaller number of people'. They added that website upgrades are 'an onerous and time consuming task which needs continuity'.

Space and equipment

Another essential resource for CHOs relates to space – that is, appropriate venues for storage, display, work, research and socialising (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Caswell et al. 2018; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2016; The National Standards Taskforce 2023; Sheffield 2020). Appropriate space includes a consideration of size, but also safety and security (for collections and for volunteers) and climate (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Froese-Stoddard 2014). Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge (2013) observe that community archives must be safe spaces for records so that source communities can trust their heritage is being cared for. Keeping artefacts safe within these spaces also requires appropriate equipment and supplies for preservation (Newman 2011). Port Macquarie Museum noted that many CHOs operate from heritage-listed buildings, which can 'present challenges for collection management and appropriate building maintenance and upgrades including adequate fire services, security and public access'. Mount Victoria and District Historical Society, for example, relayed issues with an electrical switchboard's capacity to provide adequate heating for the museum's cold, mountainous location. The Friends of Caloundra Lighthouses observed that volunteers often bear the burden of maintaining premises, including undertaking minor repairs, assessments, cleaning, pest control and dealing with graffiti. Toowong and District Historical Society suggested that societies which have their 'own pre-mises . . . are not under as much threat' and 'are more likely to attract members' and volunteers. However, obtaining premises is a 'big issue' due to the inability of small groups to afford lease fees. Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum emphasised the challenge of the museum and its collection being located in a building that is 'in the hands, and at the whim, of a foreign owned corporation who cares little for our heritage'.

Volunteer experience

Social atmosphere

CHOs should strive to cultivate a safe, inclusive, equitable and welcoming environment (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022; Federation of Australian Historical Societies 2017a; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013). Drawing on the work of Oldenburg (1999), we (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022) describe CHOs as 'third places' that can act as 'levelers' that promote democratisation and inclusion. To promote this kind of environment, it is important for CHOs to strive for diversity among the volunteer workforce (Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021). Fostering a social and affective atmosphere (Baker 2018; Baker and Cantillon 2020) that is conducive to volunteers building friendships, camaraderie (Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021) and a sense of community is noted by Stamer at al. (2008, 207) as vital for volunteer recruitment and retention. These dimensions of CHOs reap 'social rewards' for volunteers (Cantillon and Baker 2020a). The Border Flywheelers Club explained that they 'deliver[] tremendous social benefits', 'giv[ing] the opportunity for like minded members to come together to get away from other pressures of life to discuss their problems and solve issues, all while doing something they love'. Likewise, the Capricorn Coast Historical Society noted 'the social interaction with like minded people of all age groups' to be a benefit of volunteering.

Writing further on third places, we (Baker & Cantillon 2022 [2018]) note that the voluntary nature of CHOs is not only a necessity due to funding constraints, but also has the benefit of creating 'neutral ground' in the sense that all volunteers are participating freely rather than out of obligation. In this regard, the Port Curtis Historical Society raised concerns about volunteers that participate in the Society as part of the Job Seeker and Work for the Dole government benefits programs. In this case, the Society is required to enforce the 15 hours of engagement that are mandated by these schemes, which they fear 'run[]s the risk of the volunteer leaving'.

Personal rewards

In addition to social rewards, volunteers can accrue a series of personal rewards stemming from their involvement in CHOs, including 'having fun, learning new skills, self-actualisation, and creating a sense of belonging' (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022, 225) and contributing to a common good (Cantillon and Baker 2020a). For volunteers who are retirees, volunteering at CHOs enables the opportunity to continue using skills developed during their working lives while simultaneously learning new skills and knowledge (Cantillon and Baker 2020b, [2018] 2022). Capricorn Coast Historical Society emphasised 'the learning of new skills, and the opportunity to pass on skills to new members' as a key benefit of volunteering. Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum 'offer training and development across an array of roles, thus adding to volunteers' capability and competencies'. Similarly, the Queensland Air Museum explained their volunteers undertake a diverse array of activities that align with their skills and/or interests, 'fulfil[ing] a wide range of roles' in the organisation. The variety of activity does not necessarily equate to capacity to sustain or grow volunteer numbers, however. The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses also had a diverse array of activities

available for volunteers – from conducting tours and developing a Conservation Management Plan, to building maintenance and liaising with Council – yet volunteer numbers have contracted. Similarly, while the varied activities of the Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association provided volunteers with 'an additional purpose to an enjoyable hobby', they struggled to attract new members.

Community engagement

Accessibility

It is essential that CHOs are accessible to the community (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022; Caswell 2014; Paschild 2012). Indeed, in CHOs, community access is sometimes more important than factors like preservation (Du Laney 2019). This accessibility can take on many forms: having regular opening hours for the public and researchers (Newman 2011); catering to people with disabilities or accessibility needs (Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022); having adequate parking and/or being close to public transport routes or urban centres (Baker and Collins 2015; Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022); digitising a collection so that physical attendance is not required at an institution to engage with its materials (Caswell 2014; Holcombe-James 2022; Wessell and Thorpe 2023). For example, Port Macquarie Museum, which is located in a heritage-listed building, lamented that part of its collection is inaccessible to some visitors and volunteers as there is no lift access to the second level. Woodford Academy Management Committee, on the other hand, spoke of how a highway upgrade removed a rest stop opposite its museum, 'restrict[ing] the viability of the museum to develop as a cultural tourist attraction' due to limited parking.

Visibility

Through outreach and engagement activities – such as events, public programming and social media – CHOs are able to build a positive reputation and trust among their local community and communities of interest (Newman 2011; Poole 2020; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013). As Lian and Oliver (2018) observe, building 'cultural consciousness' and a sense of belonging among source communities or communities of interest can encourage their participation in CHOs, potentially leading to greater volunteer or member numbers (see also Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021). Women's Art Register, for example, described their public programming and advocacy work as 'bridg[ing] loneliness and isolation' and enhancing a 'sense of identity and belonging'. Outreach activities, including media opportunities, can also assist CHOs in articulating their cultural value and importance to society at large (Lian and Oliver 2018). In the inquiry submissions, greater visibility was noted as being challenging to attain (e.g. Friends of Fagan Park). Port Curtis Historical Society saw a role for the local council in providing 'more opportunities . . . to promote' the Society and the 'benefits' volunteering has for the 'local area'. For Toowong and District Historical Society, greater visibility does not necessarily lead to increased volunteer numbers, noting that despite 'many followers on our Facebook account, we struggle to find financial members'.

Intergenerational engagement

A particularly important dimension of community engagement is outreach targeted at young(er) people (Carnicelli et al. 2021; Chung 2025; Federation of Australian Historical

Societies 2016; Froese-Stoddard 2014). Intergenerational engagement underpins sustainability in terms of succession planning, but also creating positive experiences for volunteers (Baker and Cantillon 2020; Baker and Huber 2013; Cantillon & Baker [2018] 2022; Caswell etal. 2018; Zavala et al. 2017). Engagement with school students is a key outreach activity for a number of organisations (e.g. Central Queensland Amateur Radio Association). The Friends of the Caloundra Lighthouses reported engaging in bimonthly delivery of 'group tours and school excursions', but also recognised the need to appeal to new audiences beyond that existing group, including 'writers' and 'community groups' who may 'explore the value of the site creatively and educationally'.

Flexibility and dynamism

Another important factor in community engagement is being attuned to changes in the local community, source communities and communities of interest (Carnicelli, Drummond, and Anderson 2021; Paschild 2012; Sheffield 2020; Zavala et al. 2017). Dynamism is an important quality for sustainable CHOs (Newman 2011), and being committed to growth in the face of change ensures CHOs remain relevant and appealing within a broader social, cultural, political and geographic landscape. For instance, Zavala et al. (2017, 210) note how the gentrification of urban neighbourhoods can shift an area's demographics, therefore affecting the 'values and identities' of the community that a CHO serves. Writing on community archives borne out of a shared, marginalised identity (e.g. lesbian or queer archives), Sheffield (2020, 15) notes that such CHOs must undertake 'intervention and re-imagining' to recognise diversity within those communities, lest they reinforce marginalisation and 'become unsustainable'. The submission from Toowong and District Historical Society recognised that changes afoot in the local community – such as rising property prices and rental charges, as well as the 'inflation-driven cost of living' – are impacting volunteer recruitment and the capacity of the organisation to work towards its mission. They described efforts to find suitable meeting times that better reflect the needs of the local area's changing demographics.

A preliminary framework of organisational sustainability

Evidently, many of the dimensions that emerged from our literature review are reflected in the CHOs' parliamentary inquiry submissions. From this work we have developed a preliminary framework (see Table 2) that captures the dimensions of organisational sustainability, attendant categories and baseline indicators. It is critical at this juncture to emphasise again that this is a *preliminary* framework shaped by the limitations of the article's literature review and data set – literature dominated by scholarship on community archives, and submissions by CHOs to parliamentary inquiries not intended to address organisational sustainability and which do not represent experiences from all Australian states and territories. The framework also does not capture the interconnections between the different dimensions, or between macro and micro factors that play into the overall feasibility of long-term operations. Like Newman (2011, 37), we recognise that different factors of sustainability are 'interrelated and interdependent' (see also Froese-Stoddard 2014). For instance, procedures surrounding volunteer management and support (Governance) or the availability of training in necessary skills (Resources) are intrinsically linked to volunteer satisfaction (Volunteer experience). As another

Table 2. Preliminary framework of organisational sustainability in volunteer-managed community heritage organisations.

Dimension	Category	Strengths-based indicator
Governance	Participation	Adopts a participatory, democratic mode of governance
	Collaboration	Builds alliances and partnerships with like-minded organisations
	Strategies, policies and procedures	Emphasises strategic planning and clear recordkeeping
	Regulatory requirements	Attains and maintains accreditation/legal status and adheres to regulations
Resources	Funding	Procures funding from diverse sources
	Volunteers	Recruits, trains and retains a skilled workforce
	Space and equipment	Secures an appropriate venue for artefacts and activities
Volunteer experience	Social atmosphere	Cultivates an inclusive, welcoming social environment
	Personal rewards	Provides opportunities for volunteers to activate their interests and learn new skills
Community engagement	Accessibility	Ensures venue and activities are accessible
	Visibility	Engages in outreach and builds a strong reputation
	Intergenerational engagement	Pursues younger audiences and volunteers
	Flexibility and dynamism	Adapts to changing local, political and social contexts

example, accessibility of collections (Community engagement) hinges on an adequate volunteer numbers to support opening hours or to digitise collections (Resources).

The submissions by CHOs focused on challenges and problems, which is unsurprising given that the inquiries were intended to address issues that required policy solutions. The inquiries therefore did not necessarily seek to capture what was working well and instead predominantly capture deficits. Similarly, the bulk of the literature, when talking about organisational sustainability, tends to focus on threats to sustainability. Newman (2011) and Froese-Stoddard (2014) are an exception in that the models they provide offer some guidance that CHOs could use for benchmarking their practice. For example, Newman's (2011) framework offers a series of characteristics that, whether absent or present, would indicate unlikely or likely sustainability. Froese-Stoddard (2014) likewise describes factors that would lead to unsustainable or sustainable practice, but also offers a category in between which recognises practices which indicate the *potential* for sustainability.

Unlike Newman (2011) and Froese-Stoddard (2014), whose frameworks emerged as outcomes from their empirical research, we have intentionally developed our framework at the outset of our project to act not as a fixed model but rather as a generative tool. Our framework is designed to prompt critical conversations and reflections with CHOs, inviting volunteers to shape and revise its content in line with their knowledge and expertise and based on their organisational context. This iterative approach acknowledges that the ways we have assembled, categorised and defined the dimensions and categories of sustainability and associated indicators may not fully align with the lived experiences of volunteers working on the ground. We anticipate that engagement with CHOs in the next stage of our research will lead to significant refinements to the framework, including how indicators of organisational sustainability are presented.

Rather than offering a prescriptive solution to the challenge of organisational sustainability, our framework creates space in the next stage of the project for CHOs to co-design what a spectrum of good practice might look like. Ours is a strengths-based approach which shifts the emphasis from what is lacking in institutional practice

to the opportunities for developing more viable futures. The intention of strengths-based approaches is to identify and leverage 'the strengths and resources' of individuals and organisations 'to better help them to achieve their goals' rather than on 'assess[ing] and correct[ing]' failings (Rapp, Pettus, and Goscha 2006, 4). For the next stage of our research, the preliminary framework will be disassembled, rebuilt and expanded upon in co-design roundtables with volunteers from participating CHOs. That process is supported by the preliminary framework's positioning of the CHOs not as deficient organisations in need of external correction, but as active agents in defining their mid- to long-term viability. The emphasis in both the preliminary framework and the co-design roundtables is on empowering volunteers to work toward sustainable change on their own terms, and in ways that reflect their capacities, ambitions and needs. While not disregarding challenges, this is an approach that seeks to build on the structures, resources and capabilities already in place for the pursuit of long-term goals. Our preliminary framework takes as its starting point that 'simply listing troubles is not enough' (Back 2021, 5), with the strengths-based approach offering instead a 'hopeful orientation' (4) to tackling the organisational sustainability crisis facing the community heritage sector.

Conclusion

Australia's national cultural policy, *Revive*, identifies the importance of strong cultural infrastructure yet, while acknowledging the place of CHOs in the national cultural infrastructure landscape, it offers no concrete mechanisms to support the sustainability of this sector. As the Prince Henry Hospital Nursing and Medical Museum highlighted in their submission, 'the absence of a policy and appropriate funding framework' for CHOs 'imperils our future and the security of our collection'. Their position is echoed by the Women's Art Register: 'Strategic and targeted policies and an ongoing funding structure' for CHOs 'would go a long way to securing the precarious position of such organisations'. In this context, the development of a strengths-based, collaborative framework for organisational sustainability is a necessary intervention. In the absence of targeted policy, it is imperative that the community heritage sector be supported to develop tools that facilitate long-term planning, strengthen sector advocacy and help articulate their value to government and funding bodies. This article marks the first step towards that goal. The preliminary framework offers a foundation for the development of co-designed tools, indicators and benchmarks that can guide best practice in this sector, strengthen organisational viability and highlight pathways to long-term sustainability. The tools that spring from this developing framework may also serve a policy function: providing CHOs with a shared language through which to engage local, state and national governments, and to identify the structural and legislative changes required to better secure their futures. Ultimately, if *Revive* is to realise its vision of strong, diverse cultural infrastructure, then greater recognition and resourcing of the community heritage sector is essential. As custodians of local, everyday and marginalised heritage, as spaces of social connection, and as regional tourism attractions, CHOs play a vital role in Australian society. This research underscores the urgent need for policy frameworks that not only recognise this contribution but provide the practical support necessary to sustain the community heritage sector.

Note

1. A check required for those in Queensland in roles where they may be working with children.

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