Dear readers,

Thank you for your interest in the [program assessment](#) for *Digitizing Hidden Collections: Amplifying Unheard Voices* (DHC:AUV). We have shared this preprint as a way to request feedback, input, or comment from the community about the draft final report for the project. The report is the product of a year-long, formative assessment of the program, which was conducted from May 2021 to June 2022, and it summarizes the findings of an in-depth documentation review, focus groups with program stakeholders, and more than fifty interviews with program applicants and reviewers.

Additional information about the Digitizing Hidden Collections program can be found on CLIR's website at https://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/. The program, and the DHC:AUV assessment project, were generously supported by the Mellon Foundation. Former CLIR program officer Joy Banks worked closely with the research team through most of the study.

Sincerely,

Jesse Johnston and Ricardo Punzalan, authors
and Christa Williford, CLIR

Amplifying Unheard Voices: Program Assessment Report

Draft for Public Comment
October 2022

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1   Executive Summary

[*Will be inserted in the published report*]

2   Introduction

This report shares findings and recommendations from the assessment of "Amplifying Unheard Voices," the first iteration of a major revision of the Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant program. The assessment's primary goal was to assist the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) program staff, reviewers, and other stakeholders to understand what is working in the revised program and to consider areas of program improvement.

We also hope that the report reaches multiple audiences. Beyond CLIR, this report will be of interest to funders working in the cultural heritage space, program managers working to construct equitable review processes, those seeking grant funding, or anyone designing a qualitative program assessment. For grant seekers, we suspect that this will be of particular interest to those seeking support for work with archival, library, and museum collections, but also those looking for support to work with community-based collections. Finally, we hope the report benefits:

- Other funders who are providing financial support for cultural heritage activities;
- Those interested in applying for grants, whether working in libraries, archives, and museums, or with community-based organizations, non-profits, or others who support memory work; and

- Research administrators and development professionals, consultants, or volunteers at cultural heritage organizations.

2.1   Background

In early 2021, CLIR announced that the Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives program (DHC) would continue to offer grants supporting the digitization of rare and unique content in cultural heritage institutions, with financial support from the Mellon Foundation. The new iteration of the program, *Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives: Amplifying Unheard Voices* (DHC:AUV), emphasized support for the digitization of collections that "deepen public understanding of the histories of people of color and other communities and populations whose work, experiences, and perspectives have been insufficiently recognized or unattended" (CLIR 2021a).

Through DHC:AUV, CLIR aimed to "fund a cohort of academic, independent, and community-based organizations in the United States and Canada to digitize now-unavailable or under-utilized collections with the potential to broaden the range of racial, ethnic, and cultural representation in digital libraries and archives" (CLIR 2021b). Notable changes from the prior DHC program included:

- an expressed thematic emphasis on "unheard voices" through "collections documenting the hidden histories of people who have previously been under-examined or unknown to broader audiences";
- expanded eligibility to Canadian nonprofit institutions; and
- a shortened initial application. (CLIR 2021a)

Concurrent with the program revision, CLIR commissioned an external assessment to evaluate the program implementation and assess program clarity, transparency of operations, and applicant support. This report presents the findings and recommendations of the program assessment.

2.2   Scope of this Report

This report assesses DHC:AUV program activities from May 2021 through June 2022. Although our analysis included some materials documenting pre-application support, our formal activities did not begin until after the initial applications were received by

CLIR. Therefore, the bulk of data and findings for this report are based on information gathered after initial applications were received. We evaluated activity in three main program phases:

- **initial phase**, which included recorded webinars offered for interested applicants prior to application submission; applicant support; the submission, processing, and review of initial proposals, and invitations to submit full applications;
- **full application phase**, which included communication of initial panel review to applicants; a series of webinars for invited applicants; and the submission, processing, and review of full proposals; and
- **award phase**, which included the notification of awards, processing of final award documents, and beginning of funded projects.

Throughout these phases, we analyzed the initial and full proposals received, queried selected applicants and reviewers to learn about their experiences and receive input, observed panel review meetings, and met with CLIR staff.

We focused our activities on assessment of the DHC:AUV program implementation and recommendations for future program modifications. We specifically examined the program's language and guidelines, interpretation of these materials by applicants and reviewers, applicant support services, and reviewer engagement. In our recommendations, we identified actions to increase the equitability and transparency of the program, modify program structures, and increase clarity for participants in potential future grant cycles. We gave particular attention to participants based outside large institutional libraries or archives who may lack significant experience in grant seeking.

3   Methods

The assessment project undertook a series of qualitative evaluation activities to analyze the DHC:AUV implementation, including review of data received from CLIR as well as data gathered by the assessment team. These activities combined perspectives from program stakeholders and represented staff, reviewers, applicants, and those who expressed interest in the program. Data consulted or gathered has included program

handbooks and guidelines, application documents, the list of applications received, survey responses, semi-structured interviews with 59 program stakeholders, and four focus groups.

We used a range of methods to gather program information, including surveys and content analysis, but we emphasized qualitative interviews and focus groups in our assessment approach. We emphasized qualitative methods since these offered the best way to understand applicant experiences in the program. We additionally preferred interviews over a broad survey approach since we were able to select interviewees according to specific DHC:AUV priorities, particularly institution type and region.[1] In addition, we created and distributed a survey to "non-applicants," that is, those who had voiced interest in applying but did not ultimately submit an application. We also conducted a survey of applicants who withdrew from the full application phase. While we developed each of these assessment activities in consultation with CLIR, we primarily worked independently and shared insights only at specified times.

Our guiding questions included:

1. What does the breadth of material formats and topics represented among the letters of interest indicate about the level of demand for this program?
2. Are there obvious gaps among the range of topics, material types, geographic regions, or institution types represented among the letters of interest?
3. How do the outcomes of the competition compare with previous iterations of CLIR's program in terms of the overall funding rate; the breadth of topics, material formats, geographic regions, and institution types represented in the pool; and the breadth of topics, material formats, geographic regions, and institution types represented among awardees?
4. Are the values and criteria for assessment clear to potential applicants, and do they receive enough support in developing their proposals?
5. Are the values and criteria for assessment clear to program reviewers, and do they receive enough support in evaluating proposals?
6. What changes or improvements can CLIR make to the framing of the call, to the program guidelines, to allowable and disallowed costs, to applicant

communications and support, to reviewer communications and support, or to the program website to ensure a satisfactory experience for future participants?

We actively sought feedback from program stakeholders to answer these questions. To develop our findings (see Section 3), we used contemporaneous notes of observations, interview transcripts, and open-ended answers provided in feedback surveys. We also reviewed program application forms and the application system. We used the qualitative analysis tool Dedoose to tag, group, and annotate data (Dedoose 2022). We also met regularly with CLIR staff to learn about program developments and share findings.

3.1   Data Sources

The report's findings and recommendations are based on multiple data sources. Primary data sources included:

- Materials available through the program website, including documentation such as the Applicant Handbook (two versions, one for the initial phase and one for the full application phase), FAQs, application samples and templates, and webinar materials;
- Information about the 166 applications received in April 2021 and reviewed by the panel in June 2021;
- Semi-structured interviews with 8 members of the review panel, 17 initial-stage applicants, 15 applicants invited to submit full proposals, 3 full applicants who were not funded, and 4 grant recipients;
- Survey responses from 56 "non-applicants," who expressed interest in the program but did not submit an application;
- Survey responses from 5 applicants who were invited to submit a full proposal but withdrew or did not submit a proposal;
- Observation of one pre-panel planning meeting and one panel review meeting each for the initial phase (June 2021) and full application phase (January 2022);
- Three focus group discussions with review panel members (January 2022) and one with CLIR program staff (April 2022); and

- Additional materials shared by CLIR staff, including emails from applicants and feedback surveys from three informational webinars and six applicant support webinars.

We surveyed program stakeholders at two points. First, we developed a survey that we circulated to "non-applicants," who were identified from lists of registrants at webinars for prospective applicants who had not submitted applications (see Section 3.2).

All of our interviews, focus groups, and meeting observations were conducted via videoconferences on the Zoom platform. Because interviewing program stakeholders was our main data gathering activity, we discuss this in detail below.

3.2   Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews constituted the largest, most complex, and most illuminating data sources. We directed these toward two main stakeholder groups: 1) applicants at the initial and full application phases of DHC:AUV and 2) program reviewers.

We took a semi-structured approach to the interviews, providing standard opening and closing information, and organically following a set of questions developed with input from CLIR staff. Some interviews were conducted by both members of the assessment team, while most were conducted by just one member; use of the standard interview protocol facilitated this sharing of duties.[2] We shared the interview protocol (see accompanying data for the protocol) with interviewees prior to each interview. Interviews ranged from half an hour to one hour and were audio recorded with consent of interviewees. Interviews were transcribed by a third-party service and reviewed for accuracy by the assessment team. The quotations presented in this report are excerpted from interview transcripts.

Group Identifier	Group Description	Number of Interviews	Number of Interviewees
I	Initial-stage applicants, not invited to submit full applications	17	22

F	Applicants invited to submit full applicants	15	18
U	Applicant who submitted a full application but not funded	3	5
G	Recipient of a DHC:AUV award ("grantee")	4	6
R	Review panelists, including members and chairpersons	8	8

Table 1. Overview of semi-structured interviews and interview groups.

In total, we conducted 47 interviews, speaking with 59 individuals representing 31 unique organizations. Table 1 summarizes the interviews.

To maintain privacy, we anonymized interview excerpts in this report to the extent possible. Interviews were conducted with the aim of gathering information about the program rather than about the proposed projects, and aside from a few general characteristics, we did not find that the identify of individuals or specifics of proposals influenced our findings. In cases where a specific aspect is important to understand a quotation, such as the institutional context or background details, we provide that information in our discussion. When we reference interviews in this report, we therefore identify each interview by an alphanumeric identifier rather than by name. The identifiers, which are used to cite quotations from interview transcripts, are constructed as follows: interview group (I, F, U, G, or R, as explained in Table 1) followed by a two-digit number. So, for example, "I01" refers to interview 1 with an initial-stage applicant that was not invited to submit a full application.

3.2.1 Interviewee Selection

We selected potential interviewees to represent a range of perspectives from each stakeholder group. For interviews with reviewers, we aimed to speak with individuals representing various perspectives on the panel:

- US and Canadian reviewers;
- Reviewers with varied expertise, including subject specialists, domain specialists (library, archives, museums, and digitization), and intellectual property (IP) experts; and

- Reviewers new to CLIR's programs and those who had previously reviewed for DHC.

From the group of 22 reviewers, we invited 14 and conducted 8 interviews in August and September 2021.

When inviting applicants, we similarly aimed to include a variety of perspectives. We recruited interviewees by email, using data from applications and shared by CLIR. We followed these principles in selecting applicants to invite:

- A mix of academic and non-academic applicants;
- More smaller organizations than larger ones;
- A balance of US and Canadian applicants;
- Representatives of applicants whose initial applications had received highly positive or negative feedback; and
- Applicants representing groups or organizations who have less frequently applied to DHC, including Indigenous organizations and public libraries.

We interviewed a higher number of applicants from the initial phase, so we followed a more involved process here than in the full application or award phases. We sent invitations via email to four groups of 20-30 applicants, with the understanding that a lower number from each group would respond. Overall, we planned the initial-phase interviews using purposive samples that were intended to represent each of the desired perspectives we hoped to consult. While we identified representatives of each perspective using applicant information shared by CLIR, we were not able to guarantee representation of each perspective within the responses. We were, moreover, not able to effectively gauge institution size as a selection factor from the available data, but we did consult people from self-identified community organizations, which generally represented smaller organizations. Ultimately, however, we conducted interviews with applicants representing most of the perspectives identified in our selection principles (see Table 2). While applicants affiliated with academic organizations were highly represented, these applicants frequently overlapped with multiple communities of interest; for example, interviewees from at least two academic organizations worked on applications in collaboration with multiple Indigenous communities. We spoke with individuals from three public libraries (all from the US), and three

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Indigenous-identified organizations (all represented First Nations groups in Canada and were working on full applications).

	I	F	U	G
Community Organization	0	5	0	1
Academic	7	1	1	2
Public library	2	0	1	0
Indigenous	0	2	0	1
Government	0	2	2	0
Public	5	5	0	0
Previous applicant	3	0	1	1
US	15	9	1	3
Canada	2	6	2	1
Total interviews	**17**	**15**	**3**	**4**

Table 2. Selected aggregate information about interviewees. Information based on self-reported information provided by applicants.

Academic, government, and public organizations represented by interview participants comprised a variety of collections that document multiple communities and histories. Although we had not intended to interview previous applicants, multiple interviewees had participated in previous rounds of the DHC program, either as grant writers, advisors, or as applicants with other projects or organizations. While we were able to speak with individuals from both Canadian and US-based organizations, we spoke with fewer Canadian applicants. (In most interview groups, US and Canadian interview numbers were balanced given the number of interviewees in the group, but the "I" group notably underrepresented Canadian applicants.) The qualitative approach that we adopted in this assessment does not lend itself to broad generalizations—our

primary outcome has been to gain insight into the experiences of the program applicants and reviewers—but this information is presented to assist in contextualizing the interview data provided in the remainder of this report.

3.3   Focus Groups

Finally, we conducted four focus group discussions to gather perspectives from program reviewers and CLIR staff. These focus groups were particularly useful in eliciting discussion and shared experiences from these two groups. During the full application phase, we conducted three focus group discussions with the review panel, and during the award phase, we conducted one focus group with CLIR staff. In our focus groups with the review panel, we purposely excluded members of the panel who are also employed by CLIR. Of the remaining 20 members of the review panel, we were able to hear from half (10 of the 20 non-CLIR members). Our focus group with CLIR staff took place in the award phase and included perspectives from the four primary staff members who worked with DHC:AUV. As with interviews, we cite quotations from these sessions using an alphanumeric identifier (see Table 3).

Identifier	Group	Number of participants
FG01	Reviewers	4
FG02	Reviewers	3
FG03	Reviewers	3
FG04	Staff	4

Table 3. Overview of focus groups.

3.4   Limitations

While we view the qualitative approach as a major strength of this report, it is important to understand the limitations of this data, too. While we draw some overarching conclusions from the data, it is also reflective of a particular program and

social moment. This data was collected during a time of upheaval – social unrest around race, police violence, and tension regarding educational content and standards for educating students about race-related topics in history and other fields; likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic required numerous quick changes to the application review process, as well as many organizational struggles and changes for potential applicants which were not always visible in applications. The findings should be understood within this framework as a reflection of many subjective responses to a new funding program at a time of tension. Nonetheless, many issues are cross-cutting and not directly related to the challenges of the time including the program structure overall, peer review, organizational equity, and the changing approaches and needs for digitization of historical materials among cultural heritage repositories, community organizations, and Indigenous communities.

4   Findings and Discussion

This section summarizes the findings of our assessment activities. All quotations in this section come from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, while tables summarize analysis undertaken by the assessment team using data provided by CLIR. In analyzing these data, we were particularly interested to assess:

- Level of demand for the program, as indicated by the breadth of applications and feedback from applicants;
- Gaps in initial applications, including in the range of topics, material types, geography, or institution types represented;
- How the applications received compared with previous iterations of DHC;
- How CLIR may change or improve the framing of the call for proposals, program guidelines, allowable costs, or applicant communications and support for proposal development; and
- How reviewers and applicants understood the DHC:AUV program values.

4.1   Applications Received and Reviewed

This section characterizes the pool of DHC:AUV applications received and reviewed, at both the initial and full phases, to consider overall representation as well as to compare

with previous iterations of DHC. We also present findings on the representativeness of the applications and any gap areas that the program may better serve.

4.1.1 Invitation, Funding, and Award Rates

Looking across the DHC:AUV phases (initial applications, full applications, and funded projects) illustrates the program's overall invitation and funding rates. We calculated funding rates by comparing the number of applications received and reviewed with the number advanced to the next phase. In the multi-tier process, this shows how many initial applications were received, how many were invited to submit full proposals, how many withdrew, and how many projects were funded. (See Figure 1.)
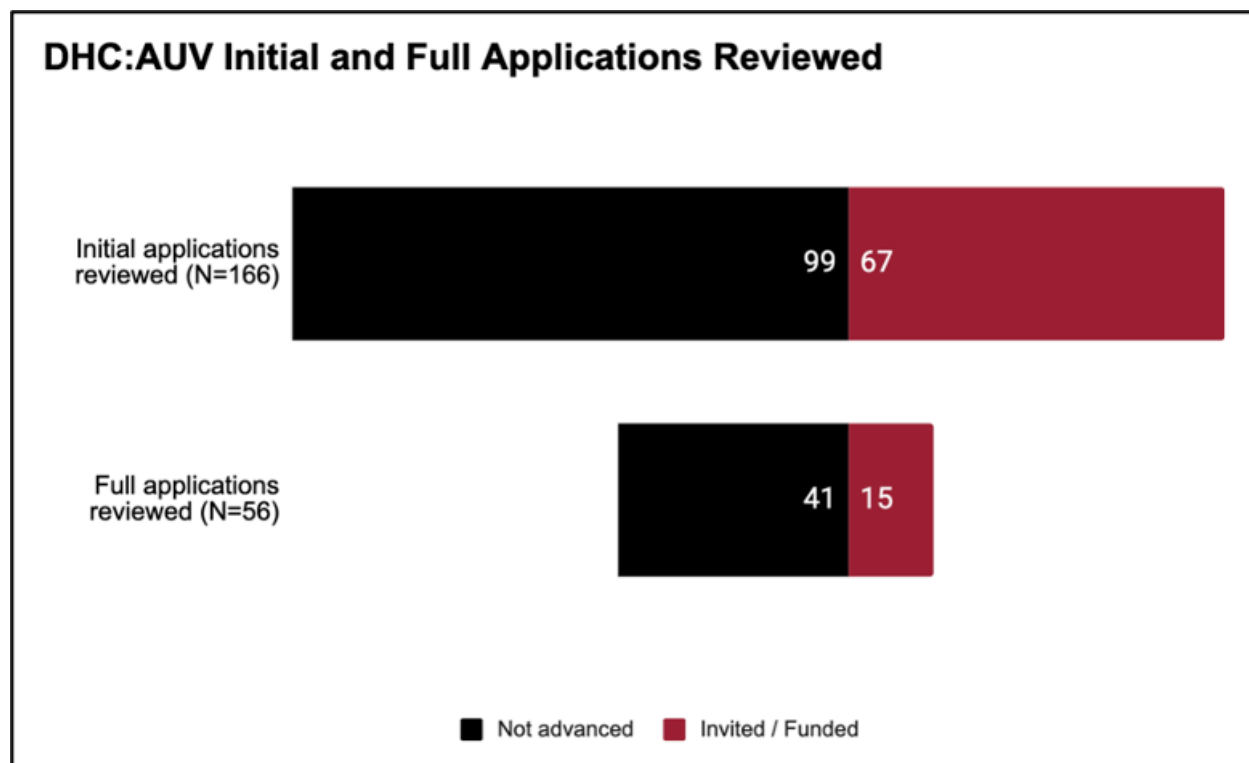
Figure 1. Initial and full applications received for DHC:AUV, comparing not advanced and invited or funded proposals.

Due to the variation between the application phases (see Appendix D), we are hesitant about stating a single overall fund rate. Instead, we highlight three important funding ratios corresponding to the three program phases: invitation rate, fund rate, and award rate. From the initial applications reviewed, 67 were invited to submit full applications, an **invitation rate of 40%**. Of these invited full applications, 56 were received and reviewed; of these, 15 were funded, a **fund rate of 27%**. When considering the funded

projects in comparison with the total number of initial applications reviewed, the program's overall **award rate was 9%**. It is important to note that the two application phases differ significantly, suggesting that the award rate obscures some of the program's work to attract and support applicants proposing to digitize materials documenting underrepresented historical groups. Moreover, we noted that applicants have different experiences of the program phases: while significant work is required to submit a proposal at either phase, at least one withdrawn applicant reported that the increased logistical and administrative work to complete a full application were disincentives, suggesting that for applicants the two phases were related but not necessarily comparable. We would, therefore, suggest considering these three rates as distinct indicators of the program phases.

4.1.2 DHC Program Rates over Time

When viewed in comparison with DHC cycles since 2015, the invitation, fund, and award rates for DHC:AUV do not appear significantly different. DHC:AUV has a lower overall fund rate than previous years, but the 2018 and 2019 award rates appear as high outliers that raise the average fund rate. In addition, DHC:AUV received a notably higher number of initial applications than any previous round of the program.
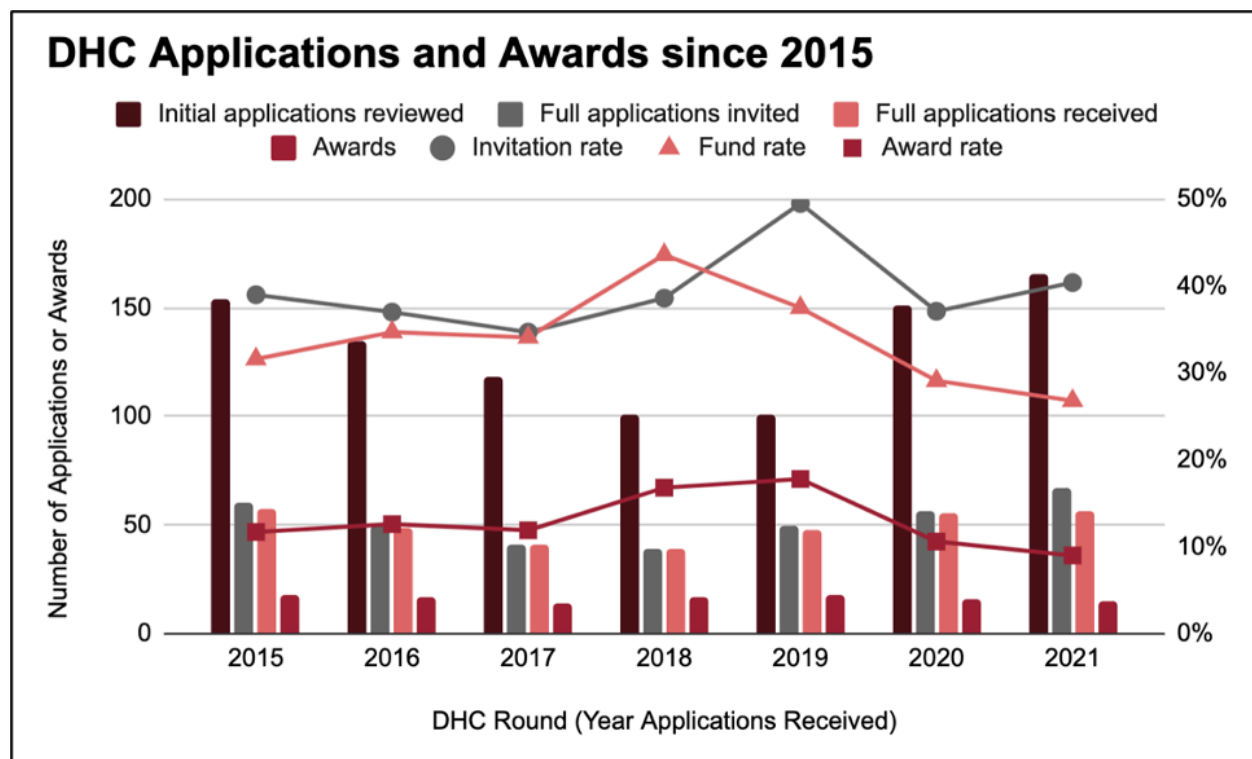
Overall, the program's application and award numbers have remained relatively consistent over time (see Figure 2). Initial applications reviewed have varied most (dipping to lows of 101 reviewed in 2018 and 2019 to the high of 166 in 2021 for DHC:AUV), while the slight rise in fund rates and award rates (2018 and 2019) appears to coincide with a multi-year award from the Mellon Foundation for DHC, which offered increased program stability. While numbers of full applications reviewed have increased since 2018, the number of awards has gone down, and the program's overall fund rates and award rates have trended slightly downward since 2015. Over the award cycles illustrated here, CLIR made intentional program changes to increase representativeness of the review panel, support collaboration, engage communities of applicants, and address equity and diversity in the application process (see Banks and Williford 2018, Ferraiolo 2019a and 2019b). As suggested below (Section 4), additional work to address program expectations around collection ownership, staff involvement, and intellectual property requirements remain as critical areas for further attention if DHC:AUV intends to change or increase funding and award rates. Moreover, multi-year funding arrangements, which would allow CLIR staff to offer more definite advice to potential applicants year to year, would likely increase application numbers, particularly resubmissions, as well as contribute to program stability.

4.1.3 Assessing Broad Representation

To assess representation within the DHC:AUV application pool, we understood the **representation rate** to be the percentage of applications representing a given applicant category within the total applications at a given stage of the program. Thus, if 64 initial applications were reviewed from applicants that identified as academic organizations, and the total of initial applications was 166, the representation rate of academic institutions was 64% of the initial applications received. In the full application phase, if 29 applications from academic organizations were reviewed and 56 full applications were considered, then academic institutions had a 52% representation rate within the full application phase.

Since we also wanted to understand how many applications were successful within a given group, we also considered the relative success of applications within the context

of a given group. We described these related measures as **invitation rate** (percent of initial applications reviewed within a category invited to submit full applications) and **funding rate** (percent of full applications reviewed within a category that received funding), which indicate success within specific categories at each phase. These rates provide useful indicators of how specific groups fared in relation to similar applicants. So, for example, although Indigenous-identified organizations show a low representation rate (a representation rate of 4% of initial applications received, and 7.5% of full applications invited), we also note a high invitation rate for this group of 71%. That is, 5 of the 7 applications received were invited to submit full applications, resulting in a larger representation rate in the full phase. At the full phase, 40% of applications reviewed from Indigenous-identified applicants received awards. Thus, while representing a small portion of the overall pool of applications, as compared to similar applications, these applicants saw a high rate of success.

While we found invitation rate and funding rate to be useful measures, they should be used with some caution. In cases where very small numbers were received, very small numbers of invitations would result in high invitation rates. For example, only 2 applications representing multiple sectors ("joint" applications) were received in in the initial phase, since one was invited to the full phase, there is a 50% invitation rate in this category. Given the small underlying numbers, this rate does not seem particularly informative.

4.1.4 Material Type and Institution Type

Initial applications were broadly representative of mixed cultural heritage collections. We noted collections comprising a wide variety of materials, from large paper and text collections to ethnographic and audiovisual materials. A notable number of collections included oral history materials (at least 13), and at least one-third of applicants (55) mentioned some sort of audiovisual portion in the collection.[3] This suggests a high level of multiformat collections, which would require significant collection management resources, specialized care, and complex planning for digitization activities.

Lead organization sector	Initial applications	Invited to Full phase	Invitation rate	Full applications reviewed	Funded projects	Funding rate
Academic	64 (39%)	32 (48%)	50%	29 (52%)	5 (33%)	17%
Government	9 (5%)	5 (7%)	56%	5 (9%)	1 (7%)	20%
Independent	52 (31%)	14 (21%)	27%	11 (20%)	5 (33%)	45%
Indigenous	7 (4%)	5 (7%)	71%	5 (9%)	2 (13%)	40%
Public	32 (19%)	10 (15%)	31%	5 (9%)	1 (7%)	20%
Joint	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	50%	1 (2%)	1 (7%)	100%
Total	**166**	**67**		**56**	**15**	

Table 4. Distribution of applications by sector of lead applicant.

A variety of institution types were represented in the applicant pool at each phase. A large portion of these were cultural heritage collecting institutions, including about two-thirds of applicants affiliated with some sort of library, archive, or museum (112 initial applications, or 67%). Notably, following these types of cultural heritage organizations, nearly ten percent of initial applicants identified themselves as representing a "Community Organization" (14 initial applications, or 8%). While a small portion of the initial applications, over 40% of these were invited to submit full applications, and 75% of full applications from self-identified community organizations (3 out of 4 reviewed in the category) were funded. When analyzed by sector (see Table 4), the applications again demonstrate a broad diversity. Academic-identified organizations represented over a third of all applications (39%), but just under a third identified themselves as "independent" organizations (31%) and about a fifth said they were "public" organizations (19%). We would note that "Indigenous" applicants only comprised about four percent of the applicant pool (7 applications), but a very high proportion of these applicants were invited to submit full applications (5 applications, or 71% of the received initial applications). Thus, **applications from**

Indigenous-identified organizations saw a notably high invitation rate, and among the funded projects, a 40% fund rate. In other words, we would suggest that Indigenous organizations were under-represented in the overall application pool, but this was balanced by a high invitation rate following the initial proposal review.

4.1.5 Unheard Voice Groups

To characterize the communities represented in the various collections nominated for digitization, we considered the groups of "unheard voices" mentioned in proposals. To assess this element, we used the list of community histories identified on the program website as a taxonomy to identify groups whose voices were documented in collections identified by applicants. Thus, we categorized each application as representing one of the following: Persons with disabilities; LGBTQIA+ individuals; Hispanic or Latino; Black or African-American; Asian/Asian-American or AAPI; Middle Eastern, Arab, or -American; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; First Nations or American Indian; Alaskan Native; or Women. In many cases, applications were not adequately represented by these categories. In these cases, we identified three additional categories: Multiple specified by applicant; Another group specified by applicant; Not specified (see Table 5).

Applicants invited to submit full proposals reflected greater percentages of many groups, particularly those groups represented by relatively small numbers of initial applications. This suggests that as the program's reviewers and review processes evaluate proposals in the initial pool, they tend to favor applications perceived to broaden the range of underrepresented social groups and communities included in the pool.

Voice groups	Initial applications	Invited	Invitation rate	Full applications	Funded projects	Funding rate
Persons with disabilities	2 (1%)	2 (3%)	100%	2 (4%)	1 (7%)	50%
LGBTQIA+ individuals	10 (6%)	3 (4%)	30%	3 (5%)	1 (7%)	33%
Hispanic or Latino	12 (7%)	2 (3%)	17%	1 (2%)	1 (7%)	100%
Black or African-American	48 (29%)	27 (40%)	56%	23 (41%)	4 (27%)	17%
Asian/Asian-American or AAPI	9 (5%)	4 (6%)	44%	3 (5%)	1 (7%)	33%
Middle Eastern, Arab, or -American	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	100%	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3 (2%)	2 (3%)	67%	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0%
First Nations or American Indian	22 (13%)	11 (16%)	50%	9 (16%)	3 (20%)	33%
Alaskan Native	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	100%	1 (2%)	1 (7%)	100%
Women	10 (6%)	2 (3%)	20%	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0%
Multiple specified by applicant	20 (12%)	5 (7%)	25%	3 (5%)	1 (7%)	33%
Another group specified by applicant	24 (14%)	7 (10%)	29%	7 (13%)	2 (13%)	29%
Not specified	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0%
Total	166	67		56	15	

Table 5. Distribution of "voice groups" by proposed taxonomy of community voices identified in the program call for proposals.

4.1.6 Potential Representation Gaps in Applications Received

When speaking with program staff and reviewers, we asked if they perceived any notable gaps in the applications, or voice groups that appeared to be under-represented. In general, responses indicated that reviewers saw the applicant pool as quite broadly representative. As one stated, "I was pretty impressed with the array of voices and originating communities … that the collections represented" (R03). Some reviewers even noted that the array of collections nominated for digitization exceeded their expectations: "there were some pleasantly unexpected voices that were included—some expected ones as well—that … I found refreshing to see" (R02).

Some reviewers also noted that the program saw a good response from applicants with collections representing Indigenous communities. As one reviewer noted:

> There was a very broad gamut of unheard voices or under-represented communities, and … there wasn't any particular [time when] I thought, "Oh, I wish they would have had more of this." Even in terms of my real area of expertise, which is Indigenous people, … I felt like we had Inuit, we had First Nations, we had Native Americans, we had all different sort of Indigenous peoples, and so I thought it was quite strong actually in terms of a broad cross-representation of some of these voices. I can't think of anything specific that I felt was a glaring omission. (R04)

Meanwhile, other reviewers named specific groups for which they hoped to see greater representation. Multiple reviewers pointed out an under-representation of differently abled communities. Said one, "A couple of voices that I wish I was able to see [in the pool] were communities that were differently abled, … [especially voices that would help researchers] get more deeply into some mental health conversations" (R02). Another noted, "I was surprised that there weren't more archives around people with disabilities.... To be honest, I don't know what's out there, but it was not something that I thought had a ton of visibility in terms of the applications" (R01). A third reviewer observed, "there was maybe one application that dealt with incarcerated individuals. . . . Going forward, it would be good to see more representation from that segment of our communities" (R03).

Beyond these voice groups, some reviewers mentioned types of applicants that were under-represented. For example, one reviewer noted that "I was heartened to see that there were several" applications that had to do with Native American collections, "they tended to be from universities and from organizations. . . . I would like to see more from actual tribes themselves" (R03).

Likewise, various areas of the United States may be under-represented. One reviewer observed, "There were some proposals that had to do with some other US territories, Pacific Islanders, and it would be good to continue to see proposals from there and perhaps even increase. . . . [I was glad to see] two or three proposals from Puerto Rico" (R03). Another reviewer noted that some cultures were not highly represented: "In terms of the United States, . . . we saw South, we saw Midwest, and then within Native populations. . . . [But] there's so many more stories from Asian cultures and Latino-Latina cultures that could have really gotten a little bit more engagement" (R02).

Overall, it was difficult for individual reviewers to assess the degree of broad representation. This is due to multiple factors, but primarily that reviewers only read closely a subset of the pool, and reviewers tend to have preferences that focus their interests into specific technical or social areas, which shapes the group of applications that they review in depth. One reviewer noted this challenge from their perspective:

> I find that hard to answer because I know I was assigned files that reflect my specialization, which is also on categories of identity. And I had a sense from that hearing the discussion that other people were assigned … files [matching their interests]. So I think if you probably put everything together, there's a broad range, but I don't know that I can evaluate that based on the files that I read. But within the world of the fields I specialize in, I thought there was really good reflection of really, really different kinds of collections. (R06)

Since the applications that each individual reviewer reads are already narrowed from the whole, we think it may be prudent to discuss how each set of submissions reflects the program's value of "broad representation" separately from discussions of the individual applications. While this value should remain part of the evaluation rubric and reviewers should be prompted to offer comments about how each proposed project holds the potential to broaden the array of digitized materials available to researchers

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and interested communities, it may be useful to use the concept of "voice groups" as we have here to ground a whole-panel discussion of "broad representation."

While we cannot yet make conclusions about the representativeness of the projects to be funded by DHC:AUV over time, we found that the perception of broad representation of unheard voices within the pool of applications received by the program in this first round is very good. Proposals were received representing each area identified by the program, as well as other groups identified by applicants as "unheard voices."

4.2   Program Appeal

Interviewees provided a lot of information about the level of interest in the revised program's focus. In the spirit of assessing the level of demand for and interest in the program, this section addresses various aspects of the program's appeal that applicants, and potential applicants, shared. In general, the newly articulated DHC:AUV values were highly appealing to applicants and appeared to be received with enthusiasm. As one initial applicant enthused, "The prospect of amplifying unheard voices was really exciting!" (I17) Another interviewee noted that the emphasis on unheard voices made the program more appealing:

> I'm a queer person, and so being able to look at our history to be able to bring [people] that are not White, male, cisgender to the forefront to be able to say, "We've always been here": … this was pretty amazing. . . . Digitizing Hidden Collections is cool in the first place because there's not a lot of different places that are really supporting digitization work at this point in time, and then to be able to look at doing it at scale, where I might be able to get my entire collection [online], was super amazing. And raising hidden voices made it even better." (I12)

This applicant represented a large research university and was not invited to submit a full application, but even looking back on their application, they spoke enthusiastically about the values articulated for DHC:AUV. This response appeared to be heightened by their personal identification with an historically underrepresented group. Similarly, one community organization working on a full application noted:

When I saw that this year, it was more for amplifying unheard voices, it really encouraged me to apply on behalf our institution because we are the only state-designated repository for African-American history and culture in [our state], and we have an amazing collection that is almost entirely donated by the community . . . it is a very small archive that . . . that doesn't have a lot of outside funding, and I kind of worry that I would [not] be able to stack up against other larger intuitions who can afford to contract out [grant writing work] because it was all just us—we were the ones writing. So it was really nice to be able to see the increased focus on a particular subject that very perfectly lined up with our mission statement [and] our history. . . . even if we don't have the best infrastructure, if we don't have all the pieces together, I know that I can craft a story in a narrative that shows the amazing material that we have, the community passion that we have, [and] the community involvement that we have." (F02)

As this applicant related, the DHC:AUV values were a key factor in the organization's decision to apply. In this case, it helped them to make this decision since they understood that their collections answered the program's new call, even though they did not think they had all of the necessary technical elements in place at the time of the application.

We also heard from multiple applicants for whom the program's values and emphases were not only appealing, but also encouraged them to support new aspects of their organization's work. A small museum that submitted an initial application noted that the program aligned with their community values but also spurred local collaborations:

We are doing a cataloging and inventorying project right now, and so it really felt perfect because our project is about uncovering untold stories in our collection, and we've been working towards a partnership with our local public library who also has a collection, a special collection of photographs and documents. . . . A lot of us here are interested in why . . . the marginalized peoples and communities … have been left out of the history of this town. So it really just seemed perfect: a perfect alignment of our museum, the library, our town's, efforts towards inclusivity and our attempt to really understand our own collection better. (I16)

This applicant represented a small museum that had not yet undertaken a large digitization project, but they did see that the kind of work they were doing might be supported through the program in future. Another applicant noted that the emphasis on "unheard voices" helped them not only to advance current initiatives but to see their organization's activism in a more historical context:

> I noticed that this is an opportunity for us to really dig into [our archives] . . . taking a more holistic approach to these issues of justice. We can be forward-looking … with our activism, or we can be trying to do things that are advancing justice and mercy in society now, but by looking back and elevating a lot of our historical documents—or these resources that we have—allows us to say that [our organization] has been doing this throughout our entire history. And it allows us the opportunity to lift those up and to show those to the public in ways that we haven't been able to do before. (I08)

In this case, it appears that the DHC:AUV program values appealed to a community organization with a history of social justice and activism, which was also building its archives to celebrate the organization's ongoing activism. They saw their socially engaged work and archival interests as harmonious with the new program goals.

Apart from digitization, applicants mentioned other activities connected to ongoing conversations and initiatives that we have noted in the archives field, including the growing attention toward reparative description and community archives. For example, a Canadian-based research center aimed to advance decolonial descriptive practices:

> The program itself was very appealing because [of our] initiative to . . . develop critical cataloging within the institution. So it was, in a way, a program that we thought could help . . . move forward and develop further this initiative and help us decolonize the collection more, so it was really the nature or the fundamental objectives of the program that were appealing to us. (I05)

Similarly, a public library saw an application to the program as a way to advance its engagement with community history:

> Just by looking at the title of it is appealing enough . . . . It was using the terminology that we've been using when we were talking about community engagement, and amplifying other stories that aren't necessarily people who

think [they] are here in the archives. . . . So just the marketing on the title was enough to make me go, "Okay, ... it's not just a leadership grant or a digitization grant. This is … a lot more active." [The program] fits both our community engagement side as well as our preservation side. (I04)

As these quotations suggest, numerous applicants saw the DHC:AUV values as highly responsive to their interests in critical cataloging and community engagement. Even those who were not invited to submit full applications noted a high sense of alignment with priorities for advancing social justice goals through collections work. Although unsuccessful, this applicant's feedback suggests ongoing interest in the program: "There's so many community collections that you could be seeing. Some of the Native American communities, other Indigenous populations, but just minorities and that. So I think it's very timely. And I definitely think that should be the focus going forward." (I09) Even though they were unsuccessful, this applicant saw a high value in continuing the DHC:AUV focus going forward, with the suggestion that there would probably be growing interest in future rounds.

4.2.1 Appeal for Canadian Applicants

Canadian applicants noted that there are few comparable Canadian sources of funding to support digitization activity of the sort that they are interested in. As one applicant from a university archive stated:

We have the possibility of applying for SSHRC grants up here, . . . but this wasn't so much a research project as an accessibility project, so I thought CLIR was really the best option for us, and … the funds available would support the kind of work that was going to be required to work with Northern communities. (I01)

Likewise, an applicant from a government-supported Canadian research center noted:

In Canada, a lot of the funding or digitization programs are directed at community-based archives, and … we're not eligible for a lot of the granting programs because we're … a government body…. So we fall into a gap. (F03)

These applicants indicated that the program serves particular needs and functions for quasi-governmental institutions in Canada, which are similar to some US-based nonprofits but operate on different funding models than state-supported cultural

organizations in the US. This suggests an ongoing demand for grant opportunities like DHC:AUV among Canadian applicants.

4.2.2 Appeal to Reviewers

Reviewers likewise communicated high enthusiasm for the program's goals and timeliness. One reviewer succinctly summarized that the attraction of participating in the program was the potential to effect positive change in the preservation of collections for underrepresented people: "Archives have traditionally been not as open to amplifying those voices, so I think that [this service as a reviewer] is very important. . . . Being able to be involved with something that is more proactive and contributing to the general body of knowledge was rewarding" (R01). Others noted that the work of reviewing applications was a chance to support the sort of collaborative, community-focused archival work that they value, while others referenced the value of serving communities and collections that they have worked with or supported.

Reviewers expressed a sense of satisfaction in doing work that served collection needs, scholarly goals, and also social needs. As one observed, their service satisfied both scholarly and archival goals:

> The nature of the grant [program] combined a topic that is part of both my scholarly interest but also my interests as a community member and the volunteer work I've done in the past with community archives. So if this funding opportunity only funded universities or large institutions, it wouldn't have interested me. I was really interested in the idea of a grant for centering the records of marginalized voices that meaningfully can partner with community groups, . . . and I liked that the process was framed as being also about bringing together a community of reviewers in the adjudication process, and also in a kind of celebratory way. (R06)

Another reviewer pointed to the broad impact of informing the review process and supporting communities and collections:

> Everyone I work with is a perfect candidate for [this program]. . . . I'm excited about this grant, from a couple of different angles, so that's why I was excited to review for it. I'd never been a reviewer …. It's a huge honor, and I know what

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goes into making those applications because I've had to do that kind of work before, so I felt like it was just a huge gift to be asked. (R08)

These two perspectives suggest that the DHC:AUV values motivated reviewers to accept the time-intensive work of reading, commenting on, and reviewing complex project proposals, since they felt that this work was helping to move the archival work they value in positive directions. Moreover, even though we know from program staff that the work of recruiting reviewers is time intensive, there seems to be a dedicated corps of scholars and archivists who want to support the DHC:AUV program emphases.

While the program's service to communities and collections was appealing, so was the authentic consideration and development that reviewers saw in the way that CLIR has assembled the program. Not only did numerous reviewers note that it was an honor to be asked to review, they also noted the care that CLIR took in demonstrating the program values. As one reviewer noted:

> I thought for an organization like CLIR to be leading with those themes at this time, with the way that it was framed, it was intriguing rather than, "Here they go again. It's 2021/2020 and it's on brand." But it felt deeper. (R02)

This reviewer's example suggests that, as with applicants, reviewers regard CLIR's efforts and priorities with the DHC:AUV program as meaningful, not only for the individual projects it supports, but also for its potential benefits across historical collections and the cultural heritage sector.

The sense of community among reviewers, which was nurtured by CLIR staff and the panel process, was clearly attractive to reviewers as well. Other reviewers appreciated the opportunity to gather with others who shared interests in archives and communities, both for the collaborative and the informative potentials. As one put it, "I was interested to collaborate with other people who would have been invited to review as well" (R06). Another noted, "My interest is both in the topic and … in learning how it's done, because I'm not really an archivist" (R04). These responses illustrate the need to continue cultivating a community of reviewers who embrace the program's values as much as they bring scholarly and technical expertise to the work of DHC:AUV.

4.3   Perspectives of Potential Applicants

We considered two types of "potential applicants": 1) individuals who may have considered an initial application but chose not to apply, as well as 2) those who were invited to submit full applications but either chose not to submit one or withdrew after submission. In both cases, we aimed to identify reasons that led to these applicants choosing not to proceed. For the first group, we surveyed a group of "non-applicants"—people or organizations that showed interest in the program but did not submit or complete an application—about their decisions in order to identify barriers and disincentives. The second group, "withdrawn applicants," consisted of a smaller, clearly defined group of eight teams who chose not to proceed with full proposals.

4.3.1 Non-Applicant Survey

This survey was conducted in June 2021, following the receipt of initial applications. We created a list of these "non-applicants" by comparing the list of applications received with lists of attendees at three informational webinars held prior to the deadline and a list of applications started but not completed. By eliminating matches to affiliated institutions and email address domains cited in received applications, we created a list of 445 potential non-applicants.

We circulated invitations to these non-applicants via email using a Web-based survey tool (SurveyMonkey). Of the 445 invitations, nearly 20% were opened (85), and we received 54 responses to the survey (45 complete responses, and 9 responses to some but not all questions). We estimate this as a 12% response rate, which is significant given that most of these individuals had not submitted applications.

The non-applicant survey aimed to identify barriers or motivations that led potential applicants not to apply. Survey questions covered two major areas: first, aspects of the program requirements and timeline that influenced the respondents' choice; second, open-ended questions about what considerations went into the choice not to apply. (The non-applicant survey instrument and a question-by question analysis is available in the documentation accompanying this report at clir.org and Appendix C.)

4.3.2   Notable Non-Applicant Survey Findings

Overall, the responses from non-applicants indicate high enthusiasm for the program. When asked if they would "plan to apply in the future" (Q6), two-thirds of respondents answered affirmatively and nearly half strongly agreed with the statement. (See Figure 3.)
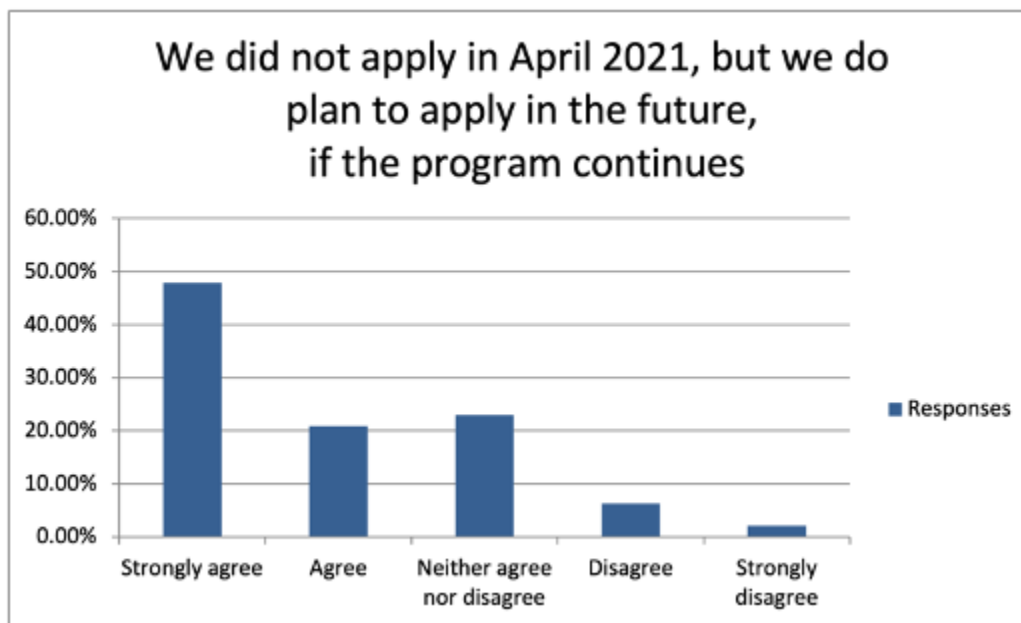
Figure 3. Most non-applicant respondents indicated strong enthusiasm to apply to a similar program in a future year. Non-applicant survey, Q6; N = 46.

Lack of time to assemble an initial application was a significant reason that potentially interested applicants did not submit in 2021. When asked specifically about the timeline of the application process, one third of respondents indicated that they felt strongly that they did not have enough time to complete the application, and half agreed with the statement. (See Figure 4.) One respondent noted that this issue was particularly acute for tribal applicants, who may have additional internal processes that require significant lead time in grant seeking:

> Many TALMs [Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums] are understaffed and have little support or time for research and writing proposals. RFPs need to be

released to underrepresented groups at least a year before the deadline so that there is time to research, develop, write, and garner support.

Another respondent noted that the complexity of the application and short timeframe prevented their application this year, but they hope to apply in future:

Sometimes the notices arrive so late and the deadlines are so tight that it is hard to apply because of the complexity of doing the application process. So, best to flesh out the concepts and writing and have it set to go the next time the opportunity arises to submit.

We suspect that the newness of the RFP for this year's DHC:AUV program was welcome but that some applicants were not well-positioned to prepare a submission given the new guidelines. In that respect it seems likely that some of these applicants would consider applying in a future round.
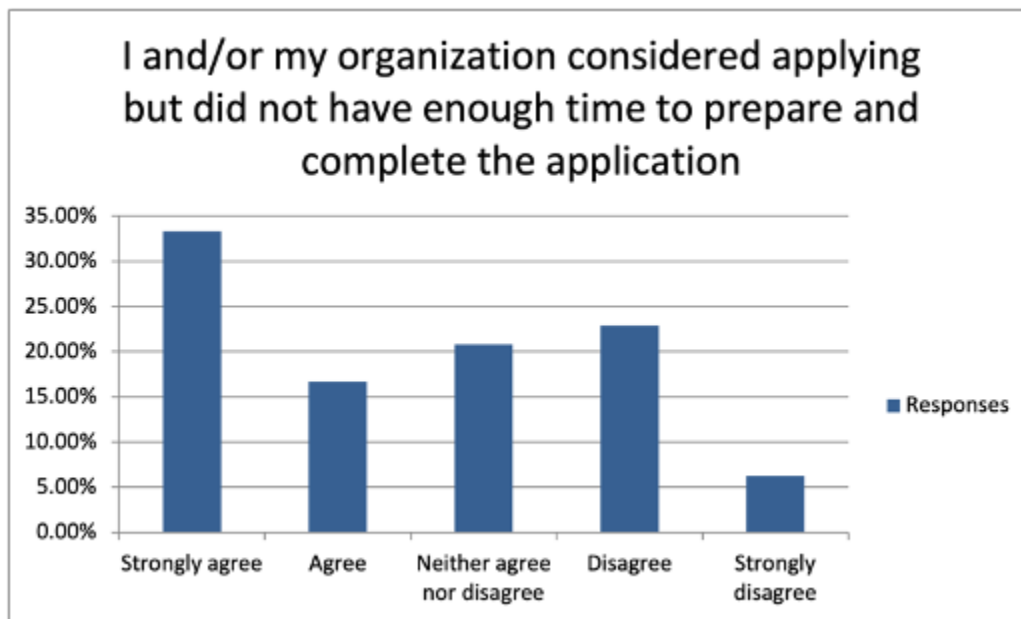

Figure 4. Half of applicants agreed with or felt strongly that they did not have enough time to prepare an application. Non-applicant survey, Q4, N = 48.

A few barriers that were mentioned multiple times in survey responses. First, multiple comments pointed toward a perceived institutional bias in the program. Second, some

comments pointed out the inherent power dynamics that complicate the relationships between community organizations and collecting institutions. Third, despite the open and specific identification of numerous "unheard" groups in the program guidelines, some groups felt alienated in the process, notable those who identified themselves as Native American and/or First Nations. Fourth, numerous comments suggested barriers regarding readiness for work that would focus on digitization activities, from needs for greater processing to concerns about ownership and copyright of collections.

4.3.2.1 Perceived Bias toward Large Institutions

Multiple responses described a perceived bias toward large, established cultural heritage institutions and organizations. One respondent, for example, noted the challenge of serving non-collecting organizations through cultural heritage grants:

> As someone who used to work inside a large cultural heritage org, who is used to working with funding like the CLIR program, it is extremely enlightening to work outside that system and think about what would be truly appropriate. It is an entirely different world. These folks deserve support and their collections are worthy, but the whole process, from appraisal to use, is just really different and needs to be allowed to be different. I feel like the DHC program's heart is in the right place, but it is not a good fit. I'd characterize their needs as being mainly a combination of capacity building and a long and flexible timeline. The grant cycle in general is not conducive to their needs.

Another, who identified themselves as representing an independent religious organization, noted organizational infrastructure, specifically the lack of support to manage a grant, as a notable barrier:

> There was a lot of scary wording about how we would select and pay our staff. As an all-volunteer organization, with volunteers already stretched thin, we would need to hire a professional [to manage the grant] and pay them market rate, with benefits. None of our regular staff get benefits or professional salaries. … That's when the ship went down. . . . A nice established organization like a college or museum does not need you as much as we do! But they, unlike us, have the infrastructure to allow help to come.

We would note that, whatever the type of applicant organization, should that potential applicant be substantially unstable or facing major challenges beyond collection needs, then it is unlikely that the DHC:AUV program is the solution. Nevertheless, this response does point out unique staffing challenges that may be similar for other small organizations or less frequent grant seekers. Moreover, the high level of detail solicited for the initial application may contribute to the sense of "scary wording." Another volunteer-led organization added that the emphasis on salaried positions put them at a disadvantage:

> We are an all-volunteer organization. We were concerned that the emphasis on paid, salaried employees would disqualify us from receiving funds, because our mission statement prevents us from instituting that structure. It felt like there was an implication that social justice can only be enacted through salaried employment.

Multiple responses suggested that some potential applicants perceived the initial proposal requirements as prohibitively complex and time-consuming to meet:

> Time to complete the application would have been a barrier if we had continued.

> We could have completed the application with current capacity, but based on the previous year's application, it is a very heavy lift. The application has many more questions than most federal grant applications. Some questions seemed overly esoteric or theoretical. More focus on simple, practical outcomes and clear, direct questions would help.

> The length of the application, the lack of assistance from program directors, and the requirements that are a barrier for small budget institutions . . . without reassurances from the officers or leaders of CLIR, we could not commit to another time-consuming process that had several barriers and unknowns for our team.

> The application is too time-consuming for small budget institutions.

These challenges may be addressed to some extent by reworking language in the guidelines about "collecting organizations," removing some of the initial application elements such as itemized budget attachments, and communicating openness to

contract positions (versus a perceived emphasis on permanent or salaried staff). We explore these possibilities in more detail in our recommendations (see 4.3.1).

One respondent suggested creating a tier of support for smaller-scale projects: "A lower tier with less programming requirements ($15,000 with focus on finding aids and collections) maybe... for small museums that have less staff." This kind of opportunity could support greater capacity building for smaller organizations. Were such a possibility to be explored, however, it should be planned to complement existing funding or capacity building programs for smaller institutions, such as the Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH 2022) or the Museum Assessment Program supported by the Institute for Museum and Library Services and American Alliance of Museums (AAM 2022). Despite the existence of other opportunities, none of the alternative programs available to US applicants is explicitly designed to support the intellectual work of collections processing and analysis suggested by this respondent.

4.3.2.2   Organizational and Cultural Power Dynamics and Differentials

In addition to perceived challenges for smaller organizations, we noted that additional power dynamics, including past extractive cultural relationships and the "outsider" status of collecting organizations, were noted by individuals tied to Indigenous or Native organizations as disincentives to their application plans. For example, one respondent who identified themselves as representing an Indigenous archive wrote:

> Funding parameters were really more focused on supporting large, well established entities to further their collection of marginalized communities versus allowing communities such as our tribal community to build and enhance its capacities for archival and documentary histories and tell our own stories in our own voices.

This comment suggests that program biases, perceived or real, that favor "established" organizations can cause applicants from Indigenous communities to hesitate, perhaps due to a distrust of outside funding agencies. While the exact reasons were not clearly explained in the comments, this hesitation may be linked to the program's requirement to entrust intellectual property created through projects to CLIR if a grant recipient cannot sustain access. While important for making materials available for research, this

condition may be seen by Indigenous communities as a request by outsiders for control of collections. The institutional bias concerns may also be related to applicants' worries about organizational capacity: time to research and understand a grant program, plan and write a complete application, and to manage an award if offered. Tied to this observation may be concerns—again perceived or real—about the power dynamics inherent in partnerships between smaller and larger, more established collecting institutions. These comments point toward a perception that larger organizations tend toward controlling not only the items themselves ("collection of marginalized communities") but also their representation ("tell our own stories in our own voices").

In other words, we detect here a significant concern that organizations originating or stewarding collections of underrepresented social groups may not only lose control of the materials by partnering with larger organizations or funders, but might also cede control of the narrative. Applicants representing Native American and First Nations groups, as well as some community organizations, mentioned similar apprehensions in interviews.

4.3.2.3　　　Concerns about representation within the program

Possibly related to the perception of organizational power dynamics in cultural heritage, some potential applicants perceived or assumed they were under-represented within the program:

> It seemed like a lot of the webinar participants were from non-Native institutions, and that made me question our eligibility.

> Who are the reviewers? Do they represent a tribal or ethic community?

These concerns were voiced by only a few respondents, but we think they deserve attention. Whether based on perception, assumption, or some other factors, these hesitations shaped the applicant pool and would continue to do so if not addressed and therefore weaken the program's ability to inspire broad representation in digital cultural heritage. Other studies of peer review processes have suggested that diverse applicants within a group of proposals are "evaluated and judged most fairly when they make up a critical mass" of the pool (Wigginton et al. 2021), so if potential applicants are self-selecting to not apply, this creates a feedback loop. Thus, if CLIR

hopes to reach new applicant communities, they face the challenge of breaking a feedback loop wherein applicant perceptions reinforce the perceived exclusion in the program, despite increased outreach to new applicant groups. If the program makes more awards to recipients that ethically serve and support groups underrepresented in the historical narrative, including notable projects led by or partnering with community-based organizations, that may change the loop over time by communicating that Indigenous applicants and community-based organizations do indeed receive support.

4.3.2.4 Collection readiness

Finally, numerous comments suggested that the significant work of processing collections posed a barrier for some applicants. Others noted the challenges posed by ownership and copyright:

> We struggled with copyrights. We have collections that we want to make available, but we don't own those copyrights. We would like to digitize those collections and make them accessible within our library branch for public access.

> There were some questions about whether or not the material would be considered "owned" by the group, since they share ownership with the people who originally submit the material and gladly return that material or withdraw it if the original creator or submitter requests. The creator clearly consents in the consent form to having their material digitized and shared online, but we explicitly want to ensure that the creator continues to have agency over their materials. It was also difficult to [address] all of these questions during the small amount of time we had to prepare, especially as a small organization without any grant-writing staff.

> Our partner organization has no interest in "owning" the materials in that sense, because the creators are already marginalized …. The materials seemed to fit beautifully with the CLIR description of "hidden collections" but to us, the ownership requirement is in real conflict with the ethical considerations we have put into our consent form with the partnering organization.

If the program continues to prioritize public access to digitized materials, collection ownership expectations are advisable. If greater involvement of community organizations is desired, however, this may require additional attention.

Finally, some applicants were just not yet ready to proceed to a major digitization project:

> The materials still need to be collected and archived first in a library.

> The collection assessment and description was the trickiest part for us, especially right now when we don't have easy physical access to the materials.

Some of these issues may be intractable. A feasible digitization project requires a certain level of planning on the part of applicants, and the program aims not only to fund digitization but also to encourage responsible collections care and management. Additionally, the pandemic has created challenges to collections managers that are beyond the control of the grant program. Taken together, the above comments, nonetheless, suggest a need for additional capacity-building resources for potential applicants who desire to prepare collections for digitization.

4.3.3 Withdrawn Applications

In the full application phase, the review panel considered 56 applications. This was slightly smaller than the invited number of applications from the initial phase, when 67 initial applications (of the 166 initial applications reviewed) were approved for advancement. CLIR staff determined that three of the full applications submitted did not meet the program's eligibility requirements (5% of the invited applicants), and eight applicants either withdrew or did not complete the full application (14% of the invited applicants). We sought the perspectives of the eight applicants who withdrew through a survey circulated to principal investigators and collaborators listed in the initial round applications. Five applicants responded to the survey. (The withdrawn applicant survey instrument is available in the data accompanying this report at clir.org.)

Applicants withdrew for different reasons, and no single issue stood out. We did, however, identify the following themes in decisions to withdraw or decide not to submit a full application:

- Concerns about privacy (one respondent noted a "lack of clarity on who would have access to all documents");
- Concerns about control of digital materials (for example, non-Native people working with and making decisions about what collections are digitized and how they are accessed);
- Inability to get quotes from the vendor they wanted due to the pandemic;
- Tensions around collaboration, which took various forms, including asymmetries between collaborating partners such as:
    - organizational power (for example, tensions between an academic institution working with a tribal organization, or between a local public media station and a national-level partner),
    - staffing (staff from larger organizations outnumbering smaller organizations); and
- Concerns about readiness to pursue a large digitization project (applicants relayed decisions to prioritize work such as a collection inventory, digital asset survey, or preservation assessment prior to pursuing DHC:AUV funding).

These responses indicate that some withdrawals were spurred by factors that could be addressed by DHC:AUV program changes, but many other circumstances are beyond what the program can accommodate. For example, lack of readiness, collaborative tensions, and the difficulty of obtaining quotes during the pandemic are largely outside of the program parameters. It may be possible for CLIR to address elements of the feedback centered on privacy and control, through program modifications in areas impacting the ownership of collections, open access and intellectual property (see Section 4).

Despite their choice to withdraw applications, many of these applicants noted their continuing interest in the program. At least one respondent highly praised CLIR's work to support them, writing, "We had a great experience and the CLIR staff who assisted us with our application were very helpful." Of the five respondents, four voiced interest in applying to a possible future round of DHC:AUV.

4.4   Applicant Perspectives

In our interviews with program applicants, we aimed to learn more about their experiences applying to the program. Specifically, we aimed to gather information that helped to answer the question, "Are the values and criteria for assessment clear to potential applicants, and do they receive enough support in developing their proposals?" We asked questions about what led them to apply, how useful the program resources were in preparing their application, how clear and understandable the review process was to them, and the usefulness of feedback received when they received decisions from CLIR. (See Appendix B for the question protocols that guided our semi-structured interviews.) As explained in the methods section (2.2.1), we conducted forty semi-structured interviews with applicants; about half of the interviews were with applicants who had not been invited the final round, and about half were with those who had been invited to complete full applications. Although this report includes views from both groups, the emphasis is on initial applicants.

4.4.1 Program Values

In general, applicants appeared to find the program values appealing and in many cases noted them as a significant factor in their decision to apply to the revised DHC:AUV program. At the same time, we often noted that applicants did not strongly differentiate between the program's five articulated values; in many cases during interviews, we were asked to reiterate the values or paused while applicants reviewed the program resources or their application. We expect that this was partially due to the amount of time that had passed between applicants' direct work on applications (often four or five months), as well as the wording of our questions (we did not specifically outline the program values in our question protocol). It is nonetheless worth noting that applicants often voiced a *general* agreement with the program's principles and values but did not always directly articulate them. For example, this statement from a university-based archivist discusses community, partnership, and representation within collections in complex ways while also stating their alignment with the program:

> Community partnership is really important to us, and as we work to decolonize and unsettle our collections, working with communities to provide more appropriate access led by the communities is really important. So it was like a

custom fit for us; it seemed like the CLIR program values had been written with us in mind. (I01)

This respondent seemed to elide at least three of the program values including community-centered access, authentic partnerships, and public knowledge, suggesting general alignment with the program but not clearly differentiated among stated values.

When discussing the program values, applicants most often mentioned approaches around community and partnerships, which we assume to align with the program values of "community-centered access" and "authentic partnerships." For example, one public librarian noted the intersection of community and partnership values in the program:

It was very realistic, very finger-on-the-pulse of what people are trying to do with community archives, and working and not having transactional partnerships, but having authentic partnerships and building off of those. So that's where I really thought, that's where I really valued this grant and the vision here. (I04)

Another applicant from a public library likewise noted that "even though we're a public library, …we tend to operate more like a public history program" (I07). This applicant also mentioned that "sustainable infrastructures" was "something that we were focusing on, and again, I think the reviewers felt that we didn't have the infrastructure in place for that. But we were trying to build the infrastructure to have it" (I07).

We noted scant mentions of public knowledge and broad representation by applicants. One possible reason for this, as noted above, is that the conversations were conducted well after applicants had been working on applications. We would also suggest, however, that these two values actually relate to the overall constellation of the applications received, invited, and ultimately, funded by the program. So while some questions in the application do solicit information about these aspects, these two global values are perhaps of less immediate relevance to applicants than are their local collection and community needs.

4.4.2   Program Resources for Applicants

Program resources for applicants were primarily available via the DHC:AUV program page on CLIR's website. These resources included:

- the Applicant Handbook (two versions: v.2 for the initial phase and v.3 for the full application phase),
- a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page,
- application materials (including two sample intellectual property agreements and templates for the list of collections proposed for digitization, 1-year budget, 2-year budget, 3-year budget, budget narrative, and work plan), and
- webinar transcripts and recordings.

Applicants generally praised the materials for their high level of comprehensiveness, clarity, and usability. One applicant exuberantly related high praise for DHC:AUV program resources:

> Honestly, this is an absolute gold standard. This is the way that I think that everybody should do it, the help that you had in place, the structures that you had in place, the clarity, the ease of access, y'all knocked it out of the park. (I12)

While others were less enthusiastic, we found that similar sentiments about the high responsiveness, clarity, and approachability of the program documentation were shared by many other applicants.

> The handbook was awesome. We just used that, and it answered all our questions. (I12)

> The handbook, I would say, is definitely the most useful, and the fact that it could be a collaborative tool through Google Docs, that was extremely helpful. (F03)

> The fact that it also had a guide book or a guideline… was ... so super helpful, and... it's an easy read, too... It really helps when... the guide book that's supposed to help you is an easy read." (I15)

> CLIR resources are really good. . . . [The program] was well documented. (I14)

> All of the resources were really well organized, CLIR was actually one of the most well-organized funders that I've come across in a while. The information was, I think, … well structured. The webinars were clear. . . . The information was pretty concise. (I07)

As these quotations show, the applicant resources available appear to be highly appreciated by applicants. There were, however, requests for additional types of resources. Other requested support included:

- webinars farther in advance of the application deadline,
- reading drafts by program staff and offering comments prior to the program deadline (I02, I16),
- information about funding ratios and numbers of applications in previous rounds (I02, I13), and
- potential for conversation or direct contact with program officers (I08, I15, I16).

Moreover, multiple applicants noted the utility of sample applications from previous rounds (I02, I09, I11, I14, I17, F03). Such materials could obviously not be included in 2021 since this was its first year, but is worth noting for future iterations of DHC:AUV.

4.4.3 Application System

Applicant experiences with the application system (SurveyMonkey Apply, or SMApply), as well as the process of assembling and submitting applications, were overwhelmingly positive. As one applicant stated directly, "I thought it was really easy" (I11). Another enthused, "It was super easy to use, because the instructions were so clear and I understood what needed to be submitted in PDF form and what the size of the documents were and things like that. It was brilliant, it was a really easy-to-use system" (I01). One recalled "no problems, and I remember it being easy, . . . and working just fine" (I08). The complementarity between program handbook and application was frequently noted: "I found [the application system] to be fairly easy to use, especially because we prepared most of the materials ahead of time in the handbook template" (F03).

Other applicants praised specific features. One appreciated that it was possible to change and modify attachments without direct permission from CLIR, which was not allowed in other systems they had used (F02). Another noted the helpful indicators from the system about whether applications were complete or not: "It was great. It was actually great. . . . I believe it was green" (I15).

Some frustrations or desired additional features were noted. One applicant encountered frustration when they thought the handbook asked for a word count but the application system used a character count, which required changes at the last minute (I12). Another applicant requested more full-featured text formatting, which hampered their preferred approach to grant applications: "There was no way to format our narrative or anything like that. One of my grant writing strategies is to underline things that are important, to bold them" (I04).

4.4.4 Application Structure

Few applicants shared specific feedback or suggestions about the structure of the application, but some did offer insights on their experience during the application process. In general, although the program application phases appeared to be clearly explained in program resources, the significance of these phases was variously interpreted by applicants. For example, multiple applicants misjudged the amount of detail to include in their initial applications, perhaps assuming that they could supply it later should they be invited to submit a full application. As one explained,

> Two phases. If I understand correctly, there is the first phase to, let's say to do this first application, and then if you were selected, you had another period in which you had to give more detail and we thought, . . . that the detail that we would give more specifically would be part of that second phase and maybe we misunderstood that. (I05)

We believe this sort of confusion may have been amplified through the review process, when reviewer comments prompted many applicants to provide more detail on budgets, workplans, or preservation solutions. Some applicants had assumed they could provide this later. One applicant from a public library system felt that their initial-phase application was questioned about technical capacity even though they did not think they were asked to provide such detail in the first phase:

> We have all of these other technology questions that we could have answered for them. They didn't ask those questions. . . . When you're asking touchy-feely sort of questions, you're not going to get very technically-based formatting answers. . . . Part of the frustration, I think, is that we are very well situated to do this. Also, I think part of it is, we do look small. We're not as small as we look. (I07)

The full application was notably more complex than the initial application, but the abbreviated application was nonetheless perceived as a challenge. While this seemed to be expected by larger institutions, representatives from smaller organizations suggested that the complexity of the initial application heavily factored into decisions about whether to apply. Said one archivist:

> It's really overwhelming to apply. . . . I would say we probably put 40 or 50 hours into that. . . . And that's paying people, because everybody is contracted here. . . . grants are, they're not free money. They actually takes a lot of time to [manage] and to apply for. I do think though that getting all of this together for us, gives us a proposal we can take to community funders. So I'm not regretful that we spent time on it, and in some ways it maybe is like the kick in the butt to get you to get your stuff together so you can go out to these other people. But when you just don't have lot of resources, any time you take on anything, is [significant]. (I11)

This applicant suggested that it would be useful to have additional feedback from CLIR to indicate whether a proposed project would be competitive within the program. As this applicant continued,

> It might even be nice to have another review that's maybe just like a letter of interest or something. . . . Maybe having some sort of first level like, "Hey, you guys are a good fit." . . . With all these grants like this, it's just … a lot of time and effort, and if you're a small organization putting that in, there's a cost to it. (I11)

Another solution may be to reduce the amount of materials required for the initial-round application. Either way, to attract more applicants from smaller, community-based organizations may require lessening the burden of this administrative tax; many larger organizations have significant administrative staff, whereas community-based organizations may or may not.

Speaking about the initial application structure, one applicant working with a large, national-level museum application expressed a concern that the application would be a heavy lift for many small organizations:

> This would be a very difficult application for a smaller or less sophisticated institution, so if you really are talking about amplifying unheard voices, you might want to try to find a way to make this a little less complicated.... I'm thinking about smaller organizations. Even some of our partners ... probably couldn't be successful at this, but what they have is just this enormous wealth of information that nobody knows about or can get to.... So if you really want to get this out, it probably needs to be more user-friendly to smaller organizations. (F08)

In an effort to maintain information quality of the application but also reduce complexity, we would suggest reducing the number of attachments that applicants are asked to include during the initial round. For example, rather than a separate timeline, the application might include an abbreviated timeline that accounts for the requested funding period, staffing, and a general description of digital asset management resources for beginning the project. A 2-page timeline at this point also encourages reviewers to give more attention toward a project's technicalities rather than whether it fits the program's values and priorities.

Similarly, the budget section could be reduced from a standalone attachment to a budget summary section - 500 words or less - that describes staffing and salaries (including consultants or training), any outsourcing or vendor costs, and equipment. Additional costs could be mentioned, and it would still offer CLIR and initial reviewers a chance to spot any disallowed or ineligible costs. Reviewers could still make general recommendations and evaluations, including on staffing levels, reasonableness of salaries, or proposed service providers estimates.

4.4.5   Feedback to Applicants

All of the applicants we spoke with, regardless of whether they had received positive or negative comments, confirmed that it was useful to receive written feedback from the panel regarding their applications.

4.4.5.1 Characteristics of Useful Feedback

Applicants generally appreciated comments in the written feedback that were direct and clear, specific, and actionable. As one applicant at the initial phase observed:

> It was quite good feedback…. There were several points throughout that were actionable, and that we can... incorporate … into another proposal, and possibly have a higher chance of succeeding next time around. (I13)

Others observed that receiving the written comments made their work feel valuable, even if they did not receive an award:

> [The reviewer comments] were very, very useful. It's like, "Wow, a human read this and took the time."... That was really gratifying. (I16)

Feedback quality from the panel varied, however. For others, the feedback caused confusion or left them wondering how they should have approached their application differently. As one applicant noted, vague feedback left them with questions:

> I think we were left … with more questions…. If we had to do another application,... it wouldn't be that clear…: What do we have to work on more? How can we do it better? (I05)

Applicant experience influenced how feedback was received in the initial round. Experienced grant applicants had more context that aided their interpretation of feedback. As one observed, though, that experience would not necessarily be shared by each applicant:

> [The feedback] really was sort of like, "This is a great project. This is wonderful, great." Which … was totally fine with me. There were a couple very specific comments, . . . to give more details, so we did. . . . I was like, "Okay, good. Let's just make these changes and go." . . . [But] I think we're at a … different position . . . being experienced grant writers. . . . If I was inexperienced and the project was new and I had only gotten the minimal comments, I would have been a little nervous. (G03)

Applicants also related concerns about feedback that was not connected to stated program objectives, application elements, or content of the application submitted. These

concerns were amplified when feedback was not accompanied with a clear statement about why an application was not advanced to the next phase. As one finalist stated,

> The feedback that we received after the initial application was helpful as we developed our final application. I will say … I do remember one reviewer on the final version really making some assumptions that I believe were inaccurate. And I have to presume that it negatively impacted our application. … If somebody has made a presumption about your project, and you weren't able to clarify it, I find that less helpful, other than thinking that probably the next time you present it, you need to be a little more clear. (U02)

Beyond the frustration of receiving advice that was perceived as careless or biased, the previous two responses suggest possible program actions: guidance for reviewers to specifically note areas where they do not have enough information to make a recommendation, and a channel of response for applicants to address critiques or misperceptions from evaluators. We explore these further in later sections of this report (Section 4 and Appendix C).

4.4.5.2   Impacts of Feedback

In many cases, applicants relayed examples of how the feedback had impacted their projects and organizations in ways that reached beyond the proposal. As one applicant observed, "Not everybody is sitting there thinking they're going to get the money . . . they're using this positive feedback as leverage for other things" (I03). These broader benefits were varied, including: improving and clarifying project plans (I03, I07), identifying areas where writing needed revision or greater focus (I16), gathering institutional support for digitization projects, raising awareness of collections preservation needs (I17), building relationships with allied organizations or community members (I11), and arguing for the need for additional staff positions or salary (I04, I07).

4.4.5.3   Clarity of Feedback

Various aspects of reviewer feedback caused confusion for applicants, including vaguely worded comments, comments perceived as reflecting a lack of comprehension of the proposed project, and apparent contradictions between comments from different reviewers. The issue of disagreement between reviewers, or perceived

misunderstandings of a proposal as exhibited in feedback, were greater causes for applicant frustration. Although these situations appear to be rare in the process, they caused alienation and annoyance among applicants. One example shared with us displays both reviewer disagreement and a misunderstanding. It is also useful in the way that it suggests possibilities to address such split feedback:

> [The response] starts with rights and ethical review. Very impressed with the extent. And it goes on to say, that this is great. That's the person who is an ethics expert. Okay. Then we get reviewer number one, who goes on and on about how we're not properly considering ethics, and brings up things that of course we did consider, and we have addressed. And so, if you're asking about the process here, I would say that a gap in the process... somebody should be responsible for looking at those reviews and being able to have the right to say, "This one is out in left field by itself, and I'm gonna disregard it." (U04)

This finalist observed inconsistent comments between reviewers regarding their approach to creator privacy, and they felt that they were critiqued for deficiencies that had been well addressed in the proposal. While this situation is difficult to avoid entirely, it is worth noting the suggested remedy: a change in review process. As we discuss later (Section 4), we propose that a more defined role of the program staff in addressing concerns of this nature, as well as a specific mechanism for CLIR to address or settle these concerns, would be useful.

In addition, applicants noted some alternatives for ways that feedback could be communicated. In one example, particularly useful in cases where applicants might be encouraged to resubmit a proposal at a future time, one applicant (U04) noted that Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) has adopted a mechanism for recognizing applications "recommended by the committee" but for which there is not sufficient funding at the present time (SSHRC 2022). In a second example, another applicant (U03) noted that they appreciated an approach taken by the U.S. National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC), in which program staff share feedback with applicants and ask specific questions, after which "applicants have an opportunity to answer these questions" (NHPRC 2022). Both of these approaches would require systematic changes, which have implications for program staffing as well as policy, which we discuss in the recommendations section.

4.5   Reviewer Perspectives

In our conversations with reviewers, we attempted to gain insight into their interest in the program, understandings of their task as reviewers, interpretations of the program's values, and their experience of the process. The cross-section of perspectives represented in the sample came from both subject experts and technical experts, as well new and returning reviewers. Our goal was to gather data to address the question: "Are the values and criteria for assessment clear to program reviewers, and do they receive enough support in evaluating proposals?"

In general, as with applicants, we noted high enthusiasm among reviewers for the program, but there was a range of approaches to the review task. Multiple reviewers noted the positive, and generative, experience of participating in the panel discussion (conducted via Zoom in June 2021):

> [The panel meeting] was so positive for me. . . . I really felt that it was one of the most thoughtful groups of people that I've ever been part of, and I'm like, "Wow, I just want to be in conversation with these people my whole life." . . . I was wondering how can this be sustained beyond this? It really felt like that, like, does it have to be this sort of moment in time and then everybody goes back to their lives? Or could we be in a network? And maybe that was part of the COVID, just longing for a connection and like-minded people, but I do think that CLIR really was successful in communicating sort of a communal feeling of like we're in this together, and I think everyone took it very seriously and was very thoughtful. . . . My overall experience was so overwhelmingly positive. (R08)

Although this comment largely addresses the panel meeting itself, it also shows how engaging the service of reviewers can be. We heard similar, positive sentiments from others, who generally found the review meeting to be intense, but also an evocative, intellectually rewarding activity, and focused on communal and supportive dialogue. As the above quotation also shows, there was even a longing to extend this conversation beyond the scope of the review meeting; this suggestion is beyond the scope of this program assessment, but we thought it may also be shared as something that might be taken up in other CLIR programs, groups or venues.

Below we share more detail about reviewers' understandings of the program values and the review process.

4.5.1 Interpretation of Program Values

Reviewers were asked to evaluate each of the eligible applications and to explain how confident they were that the proposal exemplified the program values, followed the program's rights and ethical access requirements, signaled readiness to conduct a digitization project, and demonstrated the applicant's need for external funding. The panel seemed relatively comfortable discussing the technical aspects (readiness and need), but while there was much discussion of values, we noted comments from multiple reviewers that suggest more guidance around the program values would be useful:

> The guidelines were really clear and it was helpful to have the handbook that applicants had. That was probably actually more helpful than any of the other documents. The one thing that … [n]eeds a bit more work is the core values, I forget how many there are, that we are told to evaluate on. I feel like, for me, really following the spirit of those core values, it became really hard to distinguish between the kind of middle of the pack applications. It was really easy to identify an applicant that did not have the capacity to plan for a long-term stewardship. It was really easy to identify an applicant that really had that sorted out, but it was hard to score through those values and have distinction between people who had good applications but not stellar applications. (R06)

As this reviewer notes, additional clarity about the program's values, how they relate to each other, and how to identify features of applications that exemplify an application's strengths or drawbacks with respect to the values would be welcomed. In our conversations with other reviewers, we noted additional differences in emphasis around the program values (highlights are added to emphasize the values mentioned):

> When I was reading applications, the thing that I was probably closest to, like sort of in the front of my mind, was the **community** piece always, like, to what extent are you engaging? If you're not in community, are you engaging community? I think that I always had the other values sort of around that. (R08)

My second sort of run [through my set of proposals] focused on how the work was being done, so what were the **partnerships**? That was really, really important to me …, to think about some of those voices and how people were working with folks . . . . I always like to see it pretty well thought out about how people are gonna do this work because otherwise sometimes what you get back is not what you thought you were gonna get back. So, that was my big concern. (R04)

I did tend to place greater weight on **authentic partnerships** than on **representation**, but especially in the partnerships just because especially with universities and other large institutions, there might be lots of great ideas around. The authentic partnerships, I think is the missing key element a lot of times. And so, yes, I did tend to weigh that. (R03)

Sustainable infrastructures, I guess with this one, there were definitely discrepancies in how I ranked more under-resourced community-based projects with institutional projects. A lot of folks applying for this grant from community archives, they don't know what they don't know about how to ensure the continuity of digital objects over time. And so that tended to be a place where those community projects lost points. (R06)

In terms of weighing them all against each other, I kind of weighed them all the same except that fundamental kind of **broad representation** question like are these histories hidden and will this grant help to make them unhidden? (R06)

In general, while we found that reviewers seemed enthusiastic about the program's values, their individual approaches to the review process emphasized some values over others. There did not seem to be a high level of agreement or cohesion between individuals. Only one reviewer mentioned deliberately taking a "whole systems programming" approach to evaluating all values (R02). While we would not expect reviewers to emphasize values equally, it would be advisable in the spirit of transparency and equity for applicants to arrive at a clearer idea of how reviewers evaluate the degrees to which proposals exemplify program values. It might be helpful to identify for applicants specific questions about engagement with the program's values that reviewers want applicants to answer in initial applications or specific characteristics of initial applications that will be competitive for advancement. We

explore in the final section of the report some ways to cultivate consensus about values across the panel, and also ways that consensus view may be communicated with applicants.

4.5.2   Review Processes and Support for Reviewers

In general, the panelists seemed highly appreciative of the breadth of the reviewer backgrounds and attention to an open, supportive discussion. As one panelist observed, "This was a … collegial group of people who were there because they had real stakes in these materials and it felt very supportive and everyone seemed to be there for the right reasons. So I think that's 'cause they were chosen really well" (R06). Others applauded CLIR for assembling a representative and diverse group: "I thought that the review panel was quite, quite diverse as well. . . . I would imagine it's not always necessarily the easiest thing in the world" (R01). In other words, reviewers applauded the outcomes of the conscientious work of program staff to create a responsive and balanced panel.

We noted some areas in which reviewers may benefit from additional support. Some requested that information be provided in a central place, not only by email (R04). A few requested that staff might remind them about how much time the review could take (in terms of reading applications, writing evaluations, and attending the meeting). Nonetheless, the considerable time required to read applications was largely seen as offset by the benefits of learning about new projects and participating in the conversation: "It was an incredible experience both to read the applications and see how they might fit the core requirements of the grant program, and then to also participate in the conversations with the other reviewers" (R03). Thus, while the time commitments of reviewing should not be downplayed, many reviewers expressed significant levels of satisfaction and reward from being part of the process.

As far as support resources were concerned, there appeared to be a process of norming that went on throughout the two days of the panel meeting. As one first-time panelist put it, "There was a feeling of like, 'Wow, day two felt so different,' and really like if it was a conversation" (R08). In addition, at least one reviewer reported feeling that it took a while to become accustomed to the panel culture, a challenge that was compounded by the intense scheduling of the meeting: "Probably because it was in my first year of doing this review work, I didn't really feel comfortable and wasn't able to kind of

quickly formulate a response … to address [a comment that I disagreed with] at that time. So I think also the fast pace of it might prevent people from saying things" (R03). As we understand this, while reviewers had information about the process, the panel seemed to develop a shared sense of how it would do business, conduct discussions, and interact, which settled in on the second day of the review.

Given the short time available for the panel review meetings, it would be advisable to address as much of the panel process and expectations as possible in advance of the meeting. Additionally, since there was a high percentage of reviewers new to CLIR during the inaugural cycle of DHC:AUV, a greater amount of expertise will likely transfer between different program iterations, reducing time required for onboarding reviewers in future rounds.

4.5.3 Scoring the Rubric

Panelists offered comments on the initial phase scoring rubric. As with the program values, there were divergent approaches to how the rubric was implemented. As one reviewer stated, "It seemed like when we started the discussion in the initial round that some of us had pretty different philosophies of how we scored" (R03). For first-phase applications, reviewers were requested to apply point values on individual aspects of each application according to a rubric. This was a 50-point rubric, with reviewers asked to provide a value of 1 to 10 in four aspects: program values (10 x 2), rights and ethical considerations (10), applicant preparation and readiness (10), and apparent need (10). (The value for program values was doubled, emphasizing its importance, and constituting up to 40% of an application's total score.) Some reviewers felt that the rubric was too broad:

> There's a lot more room for variation, and then there's not really a good way to express what the difference between a six and a seven was. And I guess in keeping my comments earlier on, when you're onboarding people, [if] you say exactly what those things mean, then that's helpful, but it's a lot of work in four or five different categories to elaborate what one means and what 10 means and everything in between, had we provided or had we been provided with a bit of a more concrete sort of a system for assigning value, I think that would have maybe helped. (R04)

This reviewer seemed to appreciate the program's values but expressed that the 10-point scale was unwieldy, not to mention onerous to determine and apply a score in each of the four areas. Another reviewer suggested that they appreciated the granularity provided by the ten-point ranges (R03). The rubric presents a tool that communicates to both reviewers and applicants a shared understanding of how applications will be evaluated, so we recommend retaining a rubric in future iterations.

4.6   Direct Applicant Support

Given the new communities that CLIR aimed to reach in the DHC:AUV program, applicant support was a critical component of managing the solicitation and review of proposals. As noted above (section 3.4.2), many applicants requested additional modes of support, including phone consultations, draft proposal reviews, and sample applications. For the initial round of DHC:AUV, staff offered three informational webinars, posted transcripts of the Q&A sessions from the webinars, and provided direct support to applicants via email. We used the email messages with applicant inquiries as our major data source for evaluating current applicant support. CLIR shared with us a set of 476 email messages from the initial open application period, which covered the time between the public announcement of the program's revision (February 2021) and the time when applications were submitted (late April 2021). For reference, we refer to specific messages based on the order in which they were supplied to us by CLIR.

These messages show not only the range of inquiries that prospective applicants posed, but also offered insight into the amount of staff time required to provide direct support. The themes of the messages varied from mundane requests (such as permission to edit a shared document) to complex inquiries regarding applicant eligibility. While not exhaustive, we provide the following general themes addressed in the messages:

- **Applicant requests for resources**:
    - At least **10 incoming emails** were automated messages sent by Google Drive to request edit permissions for the GoogleDoc that contained the program handbook. Edit access was not allowed to each user, but in some cases the closed permissions were inherited

when users made their own copy of the document. (Including messages 086, 170, 185, 192, 228, 244, 297, 356, 421, 452.)
  ○ Additional, numerous requests for sample materials, including successful applications, budgets, and collection lists, and
  ○ Many requests for direct consultations with program staff, including phone meetings, materials review, or videoconferences.
● **Webinar administration**:
  ○ At least **34 incoming messages** were generated in response to automated confirmations of webinar registration, or in following up on webinar reminders to request webinar recordings or slides. In some cases, webinar messages led to more substantive inquiries.
● **Application system administration**:
  ○ These messages included answers to questions about the application system, confirming receipt of or replacing corrupted attachment files; confirming, changing, or updating applicant information in the system; or confirming behavior of the system, such as how it calculated word counts, eligible file types for attachments.
● **Detailed applicant questions, such as**:
  ○ Confirmation of organizational eligibility,
  ○ Inquiries about the requirements of collection ownership,
  ○ Intellectual property questions,
  ○ Budget questions or concerns, including questions about allowable costs or concerns about why certain types of work were not allowed (such as reparative description, message #209).
● **Above and beyond assistance**:
  ○ In one case (message #014), the staff identified that an applicant had submitted all of the required application materials but under two separate, individually incomplete, applications. Staff helped to confirm these were the same and assembled them into a single, complete application.

Outgoing Support Email	
Response time required	No. of messages
Minimal	11
Small	62
Medium	81
Significant	46
NA	3
Total messages	203

Table 6. Emails sent by CLIR staff (outgoing), categorized by by response time. Note: 3 messages ("NA") did not appear to be providing application support.

Just as these topics represent a broad range of inquiries, the amount of time required to respond to the messages was considerable. CLIR staff limited applicant inquiries to email, as they stated in one response, "due to the volume of inquiries we receive, we are unable to take [phone] calls even for brief questions" (message #165). Additionally, CLIR staff collaborated to reduce time spent on email by allowing multiple staff to monitor a shared email inbox and reply directly to incoming messages (at least three program staff were regular respondents). They also created standard replies to frequent questions, which could be reused.

Despite these strategies to reduce time spent providing email assistance, the time required was still significant. Using the log of messages provided by CLIR, we determined which emails were "outgoing" (that is, sent by CLIR staff) and tallied 203 messages. We then estimated the staff time required to respond (see Table 7). We categorized emails as follows:

- A **minimal** response email was a very brief response of one line or a few words. For example, staff might confirm receipt of a message and promise to follow up later; we estimate such emails would require 5 minutes or less of response time.
- A **small** response email had no more than one paragraph, often contained a response similar to one in another reply, or routed an inquiry to another staff member. we estimate that such emails might have occupied 10 minutes or less.
- A **medium** response email required more than a brief reply. Such emails might require staff to: look up information in the program policies; read and understand a basic question about a specific, proposed project or application issue and respond; do research on relevant resources to recommend to the prospective applicant; compose a multi-paragraph response; respond to an issue raised by an applicant that required action in another system (such as the application portal) and provide confirmation to the inquiry. We estimated such emails could require 30 minutes or less.
- Finally, a **significant** response email included a multi-paragraph response with original text (no elements copied or pasted). Examples included researching an organization beyond information provided in the message; reading and understanding detailed information about a proposed project, and providing a detailed response to an applicant about how well their project fit within the program scope; making detailed recommendations about how to formulate a specific activity within a proposed budget; researching potential funding programs that an applicant might want to consider in addition to CLIR. In many cases, a significant email reply appeared to require additional time to coordinate with other staff. We estimated this kind of response to take up to 60 minutes.

Although a rough estimate, we suggest that **staff devoted nearly 100 hours (97.8 hours) hours, or 2.5 weeks of one full-time staff member, to managing email assistance** for DHC:AUV over the course of three months. Given a program staff of three in 2021, this

would account for nearly **7% of staff time** to provide direct applicant assistance (assuming total staff time of 1440 hours over 12 weeks). CLIR staff noted that the time required to respond to email inquiries increased significantly as the application deadline approached (FG-04). Given the frequent requests for other time-intensive assistance from applicants (such as draft reviews and phone consultations), a significant increase in staff time and resources is likely to be required if the program aims to expand applicant support.

5   Areas for Attention and Recommendations

We found that the first iteration of the DHC:AUV program has elicited a positive response and holds a durable interest among many stakeholders, including potential applicants, applicants, and reviewers. Overall program accessibility, the appeal of the call for proposals emphasizing underrepresented perspectives in collections, and support for digitization was enthusiastically welcomed. Nonetheless, there are many program areas that could benefit from further attention and refinement if the program is to more effectively serve its stakeholder communities while also ethically supporting the expansion of a diverse, digital historical record. In this section, we draw attention to specific program areas that may require attention, as well as recommendations that may address some of these areas.

5.1   Allowed Activities

While DHC:AUV does allow work beyond digitization, applicants are advised that digitization should be the focus of their proposals. Numerous applicants expressed concern that they had higher needs for collection description and processing to fully engage with the program's emphasis on underrepresented perspectives. Some mentioned a need for more work to select or identify materials within collections, especially if they are starting with collections created by groups that are already well represented in historical collections. Others noted the importance of redescription, creation of new metadata, or "reparative description," as a resource-intensive but also critical activity to amplify voices in collections that may have been previously described from mainstream perspectives.

5.1.1 Support for reparative description

Since many collections have been described from the point of view of dominant groups, archivists and others have noted the importance of updating descriptions to better represent perspectives and groups that have not been mentioned, effectively made invisible, in catalog records, finding aids, or similar tools for discovery.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) defines such "reparative description" as metadata creation that addresses "practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resources" (SAA 2022). Recognition of the importance of such work has grown in the past few years, including the establishment of practices for initiating reparative projects and numerous case studies (Hughes-Watkins 2018, A4BLiP 2019, Dean 2019, SSDN 2020, Frick and Proffitt 2022).

CLIR should consider offering some level of support for reparative description or redescription of collections through DHC:AUV. This kind of work is not only a step toward reducing systemic bias in collection descriptions, but also an area of growing interest. Such support would be particularly apt, given the DHC program's strong support for description and cataloging over time (Banks 2019), which could be programmatically linked to digitization activities. In other words, while the emphasis of the program can remain on digitization, reparative description could be explicitly requested or defined as an allowable cost.

One applicant pointed out how critical metadata work was for their process:

> You've got to have metadata before you can really digitize things to be able to do it in the large batches that we've got. . . . And quite frankly, people that don't have folks that understand the metadata side of things enough to address social justice concerns in that space could be at quite a disadvantage. . . . Particularly in a community-based setting, working with community members and subject matter experts in that space to be able to bring in their expertise and help them be a part of the process to make sure that any kind of harm wouldn't be perpetuated, is something that, at least, we've started to talk about and think about in different ways. (I12)

A second applicant noted they could not separate the descriptive work from their digitization projects:

> It's not just about digitizing hidden collections 'cause it's very much about the descriptions. If you don't describe it in a certain way, you will not find it. . . . This is also why we . . . have started this project on reviewing our already existing descriptions because we know that they are, let's say, to a certain extent colonial or they are done with a certain intention, which leaves out narratives and voices. . . . We try to make a case for the interpretation of the collection. [An object in a collection is] not just hidden because it wasn't digitized but also it maybe is digitized but it's not described properly. (I05)

These comments illustrate our observation that organizations taking deliberate steps to ethically recognize silenced communities documented in records may require significantly more, and perhaps qualitatively different, descriptive work than projects focused directly on the creation of digital surrogates. Unless the program is only open to applicants that already explicitly document cultural heritage of marginalized peoples, the creation of digital collections without support for related reparative work would likely reproduce systemic exclusion of outsider perspectives, effectively continuing to mute unheard voices, rather than amplifying them.

5.1.2 Identifying and evaluating collection strengths

Traditional collection management conventions, descriptive practices, and colonial descriptions hinder the work DHC:AUV's aim to make the digital historical record more broadly representative. Archival and museum collections in particular have been described and cataloged with high attention toward provenance, which typically involves organizing materials according to the categories or organizations of dominant social groups. This has resulted in many materials being associated with dominant categories and organizational schemes without attention to their relevance to other experiences or ways of thinking.

For this reason, underrepresented groups can be doubly "hidden" in collections—that is, documented in collections that are minimally described, difficult to access, and discoverable only through records created from mainstream perspectives. Additional work to identify and select content that documents underrepresented communities may

be required prior to digitization, in order to enable collections maintainers to focus on the histories of those communities. An archivist from a community-based archive described some of the challenges of amplifying unheard voices within collections created by dominant social groups:

> Most of our collections are donated from community members who identify as cis and white, and so a lot of the materials of BIPOC are in these collections and they are good. Some are unprocessed, some of them have been processed, but . . . no one has been able to bring those materials out, to bring that narrative out, to piece it together. (I15)

To begin preparing "unheard voices" collections for digitization, then, **CLIR may also consider directly supporting work to identify collection strengths and evaluate representation within collections.** Some level of collection work or processing could be allowed for within the scope of the grant activities; for example, smaller award amounts could support initial steps such as the creation of community advisory groups, locating materials within collections, supporting community-based researchers, or identifying themes and confirming collection representativeness.

5.2   Applicant Support

For the initial round of DHC:AUV, CLIR offered considerable information for applicants, as well as resources to assist applicants in preparing submissions. These included program information on the CLIR website, a series of three information webinars prior to the initial application deadline, and a series of six webinars for those invited to the full application phase. Below, we explore some areas in which CLIR may consider increased support for applicants while also building capacity for less frequent grant seekers.

5.2.1 Increase Direct Applicant Support

Several applicants pointed to the need for more time-intensive support mechanisms, such as phone or video consultations with program staff (before and after deadlines), preliminary draft reviews, and unstructured "office hours" to speak with CLIR staff.

Similar ideas were also suggested by reviewers. As one put it:

Sometimes the way that we do things in terms of written comments is not particularly inclusive or sensitive…. In some instances, panelists … were really clear that they wanted to invite these people to apply again, and in other cases they weren't, and my position was …, everybody should try to apply again, but we should provide them with the support that they need to do it better. …Not surprisingly, the strongest sort of technical applications were from big institutions—people that already have capacity—but that's the rub. If you're from a community where you've got four volunteers essentially trying to get this off the ground, and our comment is, like, this should be a little bit more sophisticated or sleeker, that's not helpful, right?

[CLIR should think] about ways to better prepare people to apply or to re-apply through guided sessions or virtual grant writing workshops. These are all really important skills, and the reason that under-represented groups are often under-represented is because they don't have the capacity or time--or money, really—to hire someone to do all of that work. … If the idea is to be more equitable in terms of including under-represented groups, then we have to think about … how we communicate…—like the medium—and then also the message that we're providing and how do we open the door. (R04)

This reviewer noted that written comments may not always be the most inclusive or sufficient approach to communicating feedback to applicants coming from smaller organizations or under-represented groups. Another reviewer elaborated, "Especially with Native American communities—it would probably apply to others as well—it would be helpful to be able to have some conversations and not [for] everything [to] just be written feedback" (R03). Since the program is now open to Canadian applicants, as well as groups that may not identify English as their first or primary language, it may also be important to consider multilingual program support, in at least French as well as Spanish (see R04). As a possible corrective, it may be desirable to **offer more tailored, one-on-one feedback** via phone, video chat, webinars, or workshops. As discussed below, this entails significant time investments from program staff, so it is a recommendation that could make the program more appealing to some applicants but one that would also require increased resources. As indicated in our analysis of applicant support emails, provision of this level of support requires both time and different kinds of expertise. If DHC:AUV does aim to offer this level support, this

should be accompanied by an increase in program staffing, which we discuss further below.

5.2.2 Make Information Available Earlier

As the program moves ahead, we would suggest **offering more information about the funding opportunity farther in advance of the initial deadline**. This would not only promote effective planning for collaborative projects but would also assist less frequent grant seekers in preparing submissions. In the non-applicant survey, multiple applicants noted that the amount of time between the program's announcement and the initial application due date was a challenge. We would suggest making available more robust support and program materials at earlier points. This may include offering more preparatory webinars to applicants **prior to the initial deadline**, specifically like sessions hosted in 2021 for full-phase applicants covering the structure of the application, collection assessment, as well as pointers on intellectual property requirements, rights, and ethical use and access.

5.2.3 Information for Less Frequent Grant Seekers

Because the program aims to better serve organizations that are less frequent grant seekers, it would be useful to offer additional context for how CLIR structures the evaluation of applications and award selection processes. Although the review panel is listed on the CLIR website, and it is referenced directly in the applicant handbooks, it was evident that many applicants did not have a clear understanding of the review process, who the reviewers were, or what the various stages of the process entail. We would suggest offering additional explanations to support applicants, specifically a process diagram as well as a useful terms list.

A process diagram could illustrate the various steps that a submission would advance through in a typical cycle, serving as a visual representation, or map, of the process. This would be helpful not only to applicants but also to reviewers in helping them understand how their feedback can be most useful. (See Figure 5.)
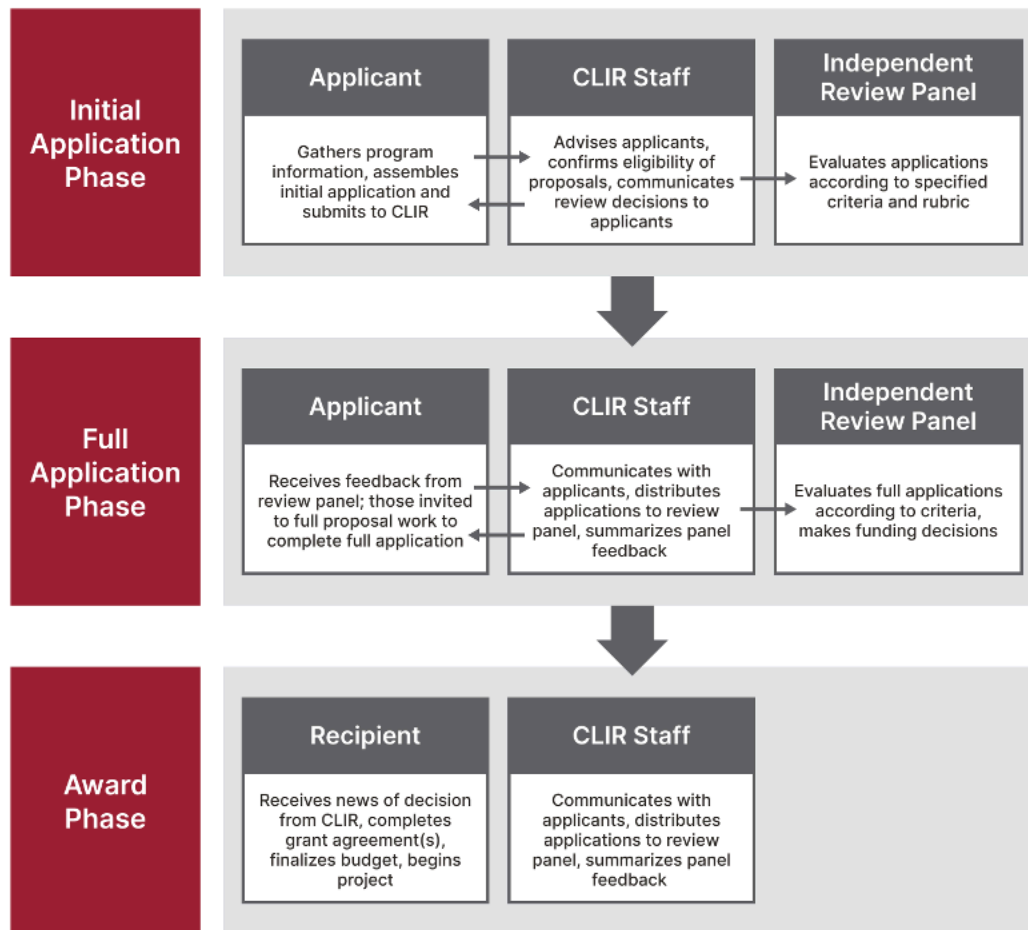
Figure 5. Process diagram illustrating the application and award process.

A useful terms list would clarify basic roles and concepts in a single place. Many common terms employed by grantmakers are not easy to understand without additional context, and these terms can vary slightly between different funders (for example, "partner organization" may have different meanings for different kinds of applications). In addition, it would be helpful to have these terms gathered together rather than dispersed throughout program documentation. We would suggest the

following as initial candidates for such a list, developed from the 2021 DHC:AUV applicant handbook (v.3):

- **Principal investigator, or PI,** is an individual who takes direct responsibility for completion of the project, should funds be awarded. A maximum of three PIs are allowed, regardless of the number of collaborators on a project.
- **Application contact** is an individual who is not the PI but should receive communications regarding the application. In many cases, this is a local grants administrator, project manager, or finance officer. This is an optional position to include in the application.
- **Applicant organization** is the organization applying for the grant. This is the organization that would accept payment, should the proposal be selected for funding, and would assume fiscal responsibility for the project. If multiple organizations are working together equally, one must be designated as the lead applicant organization.
- **Collaborating organization** is a partner in the project who also holds collection materials and will be required to agree to the collaboration agreement and also sign the intellectual property agreement, should the application be funded. These are explained and specified in the applicant handbook in the budget appendix.
- **Allowable costs** are expenses that are eligible to be requested in the project budget.
- **Disallowed costs** are expenses that may not be included in a project budget. These are explained and specified in the applicant handbook in the budget appendix.
- **Budget** is a document that itemizes each area of cost in the project and tallies the amounts to provide an explanation of how a proposal would use funds if it is awarded a grant. CLIR provides a template of cost categories that should be used to structure the budget.
- **Budget narrative** a document that accompanies the budget and justifies the calculation of each item. For example, how fringe benefits are calculated or what rates used to calculate travel costs.

This list is not exhaustive but reflects some of the application terms and concepts that were frequently mentioned in our interviews with applicants.

5.3   Application Process

The feedback we collected about the application process was generally positive. In particular, applicants praised the clarity of the program documentation and usefulness of the applicant handbook and interactive documents provided as templates. The most frequently heard feedback from potential and actual applicants was that the time between the announcement of the DHC:AUV call and the application deadline was a challenge. As one museum applicant stated, "It would be nice to have a little bit more time between the information session and the due date, if that same level of detail was going to be required. . . . That would be a very acceptable time frame if it was … a more traditional kind of letter of intent, or a slightly more detailed letter of intent, but this was a rather intensive initial . . . proposal stage." (I13) We would point out the following elements of the of the proposal process where further refinements may benefit the program.

5.3.1   Shorten Initial Application

Additional steps to reduce time required to complete the initial application may make the program more accessible, particularly if the goal is to increase responsiveness and effectiveness of the program for smaller collecting organizations and community-based organizations. Changes to this aspect would also follow recommendations from the Trust-Based Philanthropy project, which suggests that funders reduce paperwork demands on applicants, when possible, to lower barriers to less-frequent applicant organizations (Trust Based Philanthropy Project 2021; Wright 2021). Reviewers also suggested that a more concise application might encourage a broader array of applicants: "I do think having a shorter application in the initial round does make it a lot easier, and hopefully attracts more of an array of applicants" (R03).

We wonder if the complexity of the initial application may have led to a greater focus on technical aspects of proposals in the initial review, such as budget, staffing, and project planning. As one reviewer noted, the request for a full budget with initial applications in 2021 tended to give reviewers the impression that they should be evaluating the budget details:

> When a person is given a budget, they may be automatically looking for that budget to be 100% complete, but with the new application process, it could just

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be a whole different set of why we are asking for this budget and what type of budget we're looking for at this phase. (R02)

If shortened, we would not suggest removing technical elements from the application, but rather requesting less detail for those elements. An initial application, for example, should introduce the collection proposed for digitization, describe how the project would advance the program's values, and offer a high-level statement of how long the proposed work would take, who would do the work, and what resources would be required to complete the project.

One way to reduce focus on a proposal's technical elements in the initial round could be to **eliminate attachments from the application altogether**, requesting shorter, prose descriptions of the project timeline and budget elements. Unlike other programs, such as NEH Humanities Collections and Reference Resources where the expectation is that funded projects be "shovel ready" (that is, ready to begin work as soon as an award is made and to conform to the highest levels of broadly-accepted, professionally-endorsed standards), DHC:AUV may place more emphasis on building an inclusive historical record and building the capacity of cultural heritage organizations to forward that goal. Since these projects may not yet be fully planned, a high-level, narrative budget and project timeline may offer enough detail for reviewers to assess the reasonableness and potential feasibility of a project given the applicant's grasp of their current capacity and the resources they need. Such potentials would form the basis for an organization to develop a full budget and project plan—with guidance from applicant webinars and resources—if invited to submit in the full application phase.

More radically, these "technical" sections (budget, timeline, preservation plan) could be eliminated altogether from the initial application, drawing more focus to an organization's collections and potential to help diversify the historical narrative. This may require further clarification about the functions the first phase of review is intended to serve. Abbreviation of these elements could make sense if CLIR and reviewers agreed that the goals of the first stage are to understand the voices amplified in the collections and the potential of proposed actions to contribute to the program's goals. If there is a perceived need to address planning, staffing, and budgets at this stage, however, it may not be prudent to drop these sections altogether. Essentially,

CLIR needs to answer the question of whether or not it matters at the initial stage whether an organization is ready to undertake digitization or not.

5.4   Review Process

Overall, reviewers and applicants voiced positive experiences with the review process. The panel process worked smoothly and equitably, and it provided informative feedback for applicants at both stages of the process (initial phase applicants and those continuing to submit full applications). Below, we discuss numerous aspects of the review process, which were mentioned by reviewers during focus groups (FG-01, FG-02, FG-03) or developed from our analysis of the assessment data. The panel discussion, currently emphasizing the relative merit of the entire pool of proposals, may be refined based on program themes or priorities, such as "unheard voice" groups, regions, or organization types.

5.4.1   Panel Process

Responses from reviewers and applicants suggest that the panel process has largely produced fair and equitable feedback. At the same time, given the potential of the panel to assist in assuring broad representation across applications that are invited to the full stage and, ultimately, to receive funds, we would suggest exploring ways in which the panel may also embed the program values in its process. Potential changes include:

- **Establish clear understanding of the phases of the entire review process for the panel, and with panel facilitators and panelists, establish expectations for each stage of review**. We noted in a few conversations that the overall structure of the process and outcomes for the review meeting were not clear. As one reviewer noted, "I actually wasn't clear on how much they [the initial applicants] were expected to have a real detailed preservation plan. Or whether that would mostly be something that would come out in … the final round" (R03). It is a challenge for reviewers, who generally have short, intense relationships with the grant process (that is, only for a few weeks as a reader for applications and an additional few days as a participant in review panel meetings) and are under other demands, to recall all details of the program structure. In this spirit, panel co-chairs, program staff, and reviewer orientation materials

should emphasize even more strongly the overall application, decision, and award processes and the place of the review panel within it (see also Section 4.2.3). Along with streamlining the application, removal of attachments might also reduce the perceived expectations to comment on every detail of a proposal during the initial round.

- **Ensure contextualizing or explanatory remarks are provided as feedback for each proposal**. This may help to convey a greater sense of cohesion around program decisions, particularly when individual written comments are limited or misaligned with one another. To do this, the panel process could designate a single reviewer as a primary reviewer for each application; this reviewer would take notes and compose a short "panel recommendation" or explainer of what happened during the panel deliberations. Where possible, this statement should explain reasons for not advancing to the next phase (or receiving an award). We noted significant variations of detail among different reviewers' written comments, and sometimes between comments from the same reviewer, which suggests all proposals do not receive comparable levels of feedback. One drawback of this recommendation is that this would necessitate significant further work on the part of each reviewer; were such an approach implemented, we would advise panel facilitators to integrate feedback writing or revising as part of the panel meeting agenda since reviewers have already blocked off this time. For example, many in-person review panels for proposals to the National Science Foundation (NSF) assign a **lead reviewer** for each application, whose role is to guide discussion for assigned applications, as well as a **scribe** for each application, whose role is to record and summarize all discussion about assigned applications. The goal is to ensure comment-writing is shared among the reviewers. The discussion leaders and scribes encourage a consensus recommendation for each proposal, and each proposal discussed is guaranteed to receive a summative panel comment (NSF 2022). Instituting this or a similar approach would require additional staff support to organize the meeting in advance as well as to set up

appropriate orientation and guidance to prepare reviewers to perform these roles.

- **Address "split decisions."** Split decisions are cases in which reviewers have antithetical opinions or conflicting evaluations. Applicants reported confusion or frustration when receiving comments that appeared to be contradictory, and it would be useful for the program to institute a mechanism to provide clearer explanation of these situations to applicants. In the words of one frustrated applicant, who received conflicting responses about the panel's expectations: "It would seem that the reviewers did not consult with each other. Or how else would they have put those comments in without reading those of the others that had said that they approved? . . . I just don't understand" (U04). Beyond frustration, split decisions raised questions about the panel's integrity: "Our whole team is convinced that reviewer one . . . sunk us. And from my point of view, reviewer one should not have been considered. . . . because they clearly didn't know what they were doing" (U04). In response, a "panel statement" might explain that the proposal was carefully considered before reaching a decision.
- **Consider alternative decision communications.** The current DHC:AUV structure offers binary results: an initial proposal is either invited to make a full proposal or not invited, while a full proposal is either funded or not funded. While we are not sure there are alternative outcomes in the current process, these could be communicated in ways that suggest additional options. For example, strong and clear encouragement from CLIR staff and panelists to resubmit proposals in the future, or decisions stating that an application was highly recommended but not funded. Other decision processes and feedback processes were described earlier by some applicants (see Section 3.4.5.3).
- **Structure the panel discussion to de-emphasize collection merit and focus more closely on program values**. At the June 2021 initial panel meeting, applications were ordered in the discussion starting with most highly ranked proposals, which guaranteed that applications on which panelists were in highest agreement received the most expansive,

least-hurried consideration. This start established panel rapport, but we would suggest ordering proposal discussion in other ways, such as by key groups, such as Native American/First Nations applicants, clustered by regions, or according to applicant organization types. We think this would result in surfacing issues related to broad representation, and possibly public knowledge, in ways that highlight these components. While there is not a direct correlation between order of discussion and overall award profile, we believe that ordering discussion according to factors other than merit would lead to discussion of benefits of promoting proposals based on those characteristics in addition to reviewer agreement.

- **Hold an open discussion or orientation for reviewers regarding bias prior to review panel deliberations**. Discussion of and reminders about the potential for biases to enter the review process, whether explicitly or implicitly, is a best practice that will help to raise awareness about possible bias areas can be repeated in guidance to reviewers and before panel discussions. It is important to acknowledge that all reviewers carry biases. Reviewers may be reminded to avoid multitasking while reviewing (time and task pressure can amplify biases), and panelists may be reminded of implicit or unconscious biases (Wigginton et al. 2021). (Note: This was implemented in June 2021, and we received positive feedback from reviewers regarding this aspect; see Appendix A.)

- **Create guidance to reviewers for composing constructive and actionable feedback for applicants**. This guidance may be based in part on findings from this assessment. As part of this recommendation, we would propose a feedback and focus group session to discuss and create additional resources that may assist the panelists in arriving at clearer, shared concepts, language, and evaluation criteria relating to the program values (Appendix B and Appendix C).

- **Time management.** The panel consistently felt time pressure. As one panelist stated, "I did feel that kind of panic-anxiety of clock is ticking" (FG-01). This poses risks to the panel's decisions since time pressure and limited information are likely to result in situations where decisions are taken without the acknowledgement of implicit biases or mistaken

assumptions. Given the complexity of the panel situation, we would suggest designating a staff member to be timekeeper so that panel chairs can focus on the meeting agenda.

- **Number of reviewers assigned to each application.** In focus groups, some reviewers suggested that three reviewers per application was too few. With this small number of perspectives, a critical evaluation from one reviewer could "sink" an application, or conversely, if one reviewer is very topically aligned with or particularly passionate about a project, that could disproportionately raise an application. Assigning five reviewers per proposal would result in additional panel voices that are closely familiar with a project and create a more coherent "panel voice." Challenges to this approach are that increasing reviewers would extend the length of an already full panel discussion, and moreover, recruiting, orienting, and compensating additional reviewers would require increases in the program's staffing and operating budget.

- **Assign reviewers according to expertise.** Some reviewers reported that they felt they were assigned to applications somewhat at random. In other words, while they might have a topical expertise, they did not always receive applications related to that subject area. To the extent possible, we would suggest that CLIR consider matching reviewers to proposals by expertise or topic area, or providing additional context to reviewers about their role and the way that applications were assigned. As above, addressing this concern implies greater administrative efforts from program staff in the management of panel relationships and assignment of applications.

5.4.2 Panel Membership

Given that notable applications were received from public libraries, we would suggest to **include at least one member on the review panel who represents or works with public libraries**. In our interviews (particularly I04, I06, U02), applicants affiliated or collaborating with public libraries felt equitably considered within the review, but they also shared a sense that they had more capacity, technically as well as in outreach to local communities and historical programming, than was readily apparent to CLIR's

panelists. All mentioned robust programs for digital collections and local history, which could be well aligned with the goals of the DHC:AUV project.

5.4.3 Specific Feedback Areas

Responses from some applicants suggested that it would be helpful in the initial round to **structure feedback to applicants so that it addresses specific aspects of the proposed project**, as understood and assessed by the review panel. This would be additionally important if the application is shortened as described above. See, for example, this feedback from an initial applicant who is an experienced grant seeker:

> [I would like to see] the set of questions or the parameters that the reviewer is looking at … in a condensed form: . . . clarity of the mission, how close were you aligned with the amplifying unheard voices mission … and maybe just things like that. How clear was the digital aspect or the core part of it. . . . That …would help everybody." (I09)

This applicant suggests specific areas in which they would like feedback from the panel, including how closely the proposed work fits the program, to what extent the proposed project would advance the program's priorities, and what additional technical questions the panel would like answered if the applicant is invited to proceed with a full application. To facilitate effective review and consistent comments, we developed a set of principles and additional resources for reviewers, as well as a reviewer rubric to encourage consistent evaluation of applications (Appendix B and Appendix C).

5.5   Award Process

The DHC:AUV approach to intellectual property and collection ownership requires further attention. Although we gathered only a small amount of data on this stage (primarily the "G" group of interviews and FG-04), we drew additional data from applicant support emails and the withdrawn applicant survey.

5.5.1 Intellectual Property and Ethical Access

Multiple applicants and recipients raised concerns regarding the current DHC:AUV approach to intellectual property, rights, and ethics. While the review process appears quite sensitive to this area of concern, with incorporating two ethics and copyright specialists on the panel, the award process continues to require all recipients to sign an

intellectual property contract, which currently establishes a legal mechanism for CLIR to license any "digital copies" created with grant funds, in the case that a grantee fails to store and provide access to digital files created through funded projects. This was designed to enable CLIR to rescue digital assets, should an organization dissolve or become unable to meet digital preservation obligations. Our findings suggest, however, that this agreement when applied in DHC:AUV has been understood to appear incongruent with the program values of *authentic partnerships* and *community-centered access*.

The current agreement assumes that each DHC:AUV lead applicant, as well as any collaborating organizations, owns and controls all collection items nominated for digitization. Multiple inquiries to the program included requests to confirm this prior to the initial application deadline (applicant support email threads #466 and #118). The concern underlying these questions was largely motivated by the requirements of the model agreement to make stipulations concerning: a) the "right, title, and interest" to any digital content created through the program (which may not be possible if community members hold claims over the possession, licensing, or accessibility of contents or items) and b) that CLIR or its designees be granted a "perpetual, irrevocable, [and] nonexclusive" license to all digital copies created with award funds.

Multiple sources raised concerns about this requirement. For example, in an email inquiry, a potential applicant noted that they could not apply if they were to require community participants to sign the agreement:

> The IP agreement is an insurmountable barrier to our application. . . We could not in good conscience lead community-based organizations to sign an (eventual) IP agreement that indicates they have acquired all permissions to avoid infringement of publicity, privacy, or copy rights. We . . . cannot state as fact that we have permission from the rights holders to digitize every single item. (applicant support email #102)

The broader issue confronts many archives and is particularly pressing for community-based organizations: often the holding repository cannot in good faith assert that it holds legal rights to distribute or license digital versions of collections.

A second concern was raised by applicants collaborating with Indigenous groups. They noted the program's current requirements may cause Indigenous communities to avoid participation while also making it difficult to build collaborative projects:

> The problem is that they're looking to **a legal structure that is violent and coercive** and implements hierarchy. . . [The IP requirement] is going to damage relationships at the very least with Native nations. . . . Those are sovereign nations [with] particular histories of collection that almost guarantee that some kind of an intellectual property agreement where they're **re-assigning ownership is going to seem like a re-colonization**. . . . Taking it further, you're going to marginalize **communities who may want to do it [apply to DHC:AUV] but then also feel threatened**. What if it's immigrant communities? . . . If we default to these things needing to be accessible and public, we don't know in the future—some of those things—it may be very harmful for the people for them to be open." (G03, emphasis added)

Such rigid structures of control, particular when associated with the history of extraction and surveillance faced by many historically marginalized groups, do not align with the DHC:AUV program values, nor would they be useful in forging authentic and ethical partnership between source communities and collecting institutions. As a second recipient representing a First Nations museum put it: "The language was quite unsuitable for our context" (G02).

With the DHC:AUV emphasis on underrepresented voices, we recommended that CLIR and the program's primary funder (the Mellon Foundation) revise the program's approach to intellectual property. Currently, the program requires all recipients and collaborators to sign a legal, and pre-set, contract governing intellectual property. While recognizing the need for terms and conditions in a funding arrangement, any program attempting to reach community-based memory organizations will be hard pressed to do so while also requiring each collaborator to guarantee "right, title, and interest." Community organizations may not own all materials in their collections, or they may steward only digital versions of physical items. Most concerningly, communities representing vulnerable or oppressed groups, perceived the request as a requirement to sign rights over to an external entity, creating a perceived removal of collections from

community partners. Various alternative models have been suggested and endorsed by professional societies and legal scholars, such as:

- The encouragement of access restrictions where appropriate and in consultation with source communities, as expressed by the First Archivist Circle through the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (First Archivist Circle 2007), recently endorsed by the Society of American Archivists.
- Use of culturally-guided indicators for contextually appropriate access to materials, such as the Traditional Knowledge Labels (Anderson and Christen 2013) for collections and CARE principles for data (Carroll et al. 2021).
- Rather than copyright assertion, suggestion of appropriate rights statements have been promoted through initiatives such as RightsStatements.org and Creative Commons (see Fallon 2016).
- Requiring applicants to adopt informed approaches to copyright and ethical access, such as the open copyright education materials developed by and for cultural heritage organizations, such as that recently pioneered by the Open Copyright Education Advisory Network (OCEAN 2022).

We would suggest that DHC:AUV recipients be allowed to waive the current requirement to sign an "intellectual property" contract. This has been perceived as a mandatory mechanism to license digital copies created through funded activities to CLIR or its designees in the event an award recipient can no longer preserve or sustain access to the copies for research purposes as described in the proposal. Instead, **we would encourage the program to move away from toward other models of agreements respectful of community notions of ownership and access.** For example, recipients could be required to sign a more general indemnity agreement or terms and conditions to formalize the grant arrangement.

5.6   Program Values and Voice Groups

Our conversations with applicants and reviewers indicate that the program values and emphasis on unheard voices are highly appealing. The revised program was recognized as a critical funding resource that joins support for collections digitization with social

justice interests, clearly expressed in the program values, which will positively benefit the preservation of and access to more representative collections and records. In response to the call for proposals, our analysis of the applications received suggested a good level of response from collections and organizations stewarding materials that hold materials documenting underrepresented perspectives. In order to better understand and assess the level to which the program is expanding *broad representation*, and to a lesser extent *public knowledge*, we suggest that it would be useful to **enumerate and code applications in ways similar to the "unheard voices" groups** that we identified here, based on the underrepresented groups noted in the application materials. Likewise, it would be useful to **monitor invitation rates as indicators of the program's effectiveness in supporting collections that document under-represented communities**. (See section 3.1 for additional details about these indicators.)

While all the voice groups identified would benefit from further representation in future application pools, feedback from reviewers and our analysis of the received applications suggested that representation of the voices of incarcerated populations and disability communities could be increased.

5.7 Program Administration

Many of the above recommendations would require additional staff time and resources. The current program was managed by a team of four (three program officers and a grants manager) who reported to a CLIR director-level supervisor. While we would leave the specific configuration of the staffing to CLIR, we conclude these recommendations with some suggestions about areas of **the program that might benefit from an additional program officer or program coordinator**. Various activities identified in our findings suggest additional investments beyond current resources:

- Providing enhanced, direct support to applicants to develop capacity, hone applications, and to refine ideas. As noted in our analysis of applicant support emails (Section 3.6), the time required to provide support via one channel is already significant, and any of the additional approaches requested would require additional staff resources.
- An expanded staff role in panel administration, including additional panelist recruitment, relationship management to facilitate the pairing of

reviewers with particular application groups, the coordination of panel scribes, and myriad additional activities described in the panel process recommendations.

- Outreach to community organizations to develop relationships with potential applicants and reviewers.
- Creation and maintenance of additional orientation materials for reviewers.
- Planning, production, and hosting of new applicant support webinars.

In addition to these areas of program administration, we would suggest an additional role that functions as a program manager or senior program officer. This recommendation is offered as one way to provide a more coherent voice for the review panel. Specifically, this person could chair the review panel, summarize panel decisions, and manage communications with awardees and applicants on behalf of the panel, assign applications according to panel expertise, and be a panel moderator responsible for interpreting conflicting recommendations from the panel. This would not necessarily supersede the current arrangement of panel chairing, but it would provide a stronger voice for program policy and assist in shaping the program. In our discussions with panelists, we observed that each individual is an excellent evaluator of individual proposals, or even small subsets of proposals, but it does not seem reasonable to leave the shaping of the program's overall award profile to a group that only meets twice per year. Vision and shaping of DHC:AUV policies, priorities, and award profile requires a sustained and consistent engagement with the program throughout the year.

For the reviewers, then, a program coordinator would provide a staff voice to the panel. For applicants, this position would serve as a sort of third party who can speak for the panel. Specifically, it would be useful to have a staff member who could speak with the authority of the panel.

A senior-level staff member would help to explain and strategize how the program values are promoted and implemented throughout the program. Our focus groups with the reviewers (FG-01, FG-02, and FG-03) suggested that while some values are applicable at the level of an individual proposal, others are program-wide. For example, Public Knowledge and Broad Representation are program level: any single application

shouldn't be solely responsible for advancing these values on its own, they are exemplified through the cohort of funded projects. On the other hand, Sustainable Infrastructures, Community-Centered Access, and Partnerships may be exemplified in each particular application. Therefore, the senior officer would be highly responsible for articulating how and why the funded projects promote public knowledge and broad representation that can only be promoted through the aggregate.

6   Conclusion: Preliminary Successes and Challenges

To close this report, we discuss some of the notable successes and challenges of DHC:AUV's initial implementation. These are based on our findings and areas for attention noted previously, as well as our own perspectives on DHC:AUV after a year of observing the program, as cultural heritage practitioners, as researchers, and as funders.

While we made use of brief, quantitative analyses of some elements of the program, we are particularly hopeful about the ways that the report shares and illustrates the applicant experience of a cultural heritage grant program. While many funders assess their programs, we find it rare that applicant experiences are gathered in qualitative ways, and we hope that the interview-based approach that we took brings to light the voices of stakeholders who are not always possible to consult or contact when planning or revising funding programs.

Applicants and recipients alike frequently expressed high levels of trust for CLIR, as well as high enthusiasm for the DHC:AUV program. Many stakeholders noted the value of the program's continuing support for collection digitization, with the added emphasis on increasing representation. Interest among applicants was one illustration of this enthusiasm. Even initial-stage applicants who were not invited to submit full applications frequently communicated that they hoped to submit revised applications in future rounds of funding, if available; these applicants usually cited reviewer feedback as a critical tool in their work to revise proposals. And of the group of "non-applicants," more than half hoped to submit applications in future competitions. The most frequently reported barrier to these "non-applicants" was the short amount of time between the announcement of the new program and the due date of initial applications.

In addition to enthusiasm, the program supports useful capacity building among applicants. These are particularly notable in the webinar series and informational resources available for applicants via CLIR's website. This aspect may be strengthened by providing more complete feedback to applicants, clearly explaining application shortcomings (if any), providing actionable remedies, and a mechanism for staff to offer clearer explanations of program-level decisions. Additional workshops, moreover, could be made available to all applicants and potential applicants, rather than primarily to those invited to submit full applications.

Numerous applicants also reported benefits of the program in arguing for improved recognition of the labor required to produce, maintain, and make available memory materials and heritage collections. In multiple cases, we noted that the opportunity for increase program funds along with feedback from the review panel were crucial in arguing for higher salaries, greater hours, or additional resources to support collections work. This appears to advance related movements for more responsible labor arrangements within projects that rely on term-limited workers (Arnold et al. 2020, Rodriguez et al. 2020, Baines 2014). At the same time, we heard clearly from some community-based applicants that such expectations were challenging since in some cases wage expectations were higher than they could realistically manage as an organization.

We would also highlight some of the structural challenges that arose. At a basic level, while the intention to support community-based organizations through DHC:AUV is laudable, built-in challenges accompany the project grant mechanism. Various community-based memory organizations have suggested that they would benefit more greatly from unrestricted operating support or types of funding that do not come attached to specific deliverables (see Jules 2019; Ferraiolo 2019a; Caswell, Harter, and Jules 2017). In addition, many large organizations have dedicated staff or resources that support the seeking, applying for, and managing grant-funded projects. While applicants from community-level organizations we spoke with rarely had in-house grant writers and administrators, most of the individuals from research institutions that we spoke with had robust support for applying for and managing grants like this. Some of the concerns raised in the "non-applicant" survey reflect the fact that smaller

organizations are often hesitant to pursue project grants that may entail high administrative costs for the organization.

The roots and development of DHC:AUV from the Cataloging Hidden Collections and Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives programs (see Banks 2019) suggest that project grants are an aspect of program continuity. We encourage CLIR to continue its mindful approach toward listening to applicants, responding to needs and concerns as they are reported, and building upon the considerable capacity-building resources for applicants and recipients. Along with this, the program's website already reminds potential applicants, who may not be interested in this sort of funding mechanism, of related funding programs, including some that follow other models. Looking at the program's inaugural cohort of recipients (CLIR 2022), it seems clear that a project-oriented funding mechanism can effectively support some categories of projects, such as large collaborative projects involving community-based partners. We would not expect to see a "one size fits all" approach to funding in an area like cultural heritage, which appears to be a relatively coherent domain of activities but is also carried out by a considerable diversity of organizations.

In concluding this program assessment, we are simultaneously optimistic about the program's possibilities but also aware of the significant work required to maintain and improve cultural heritage funding programs. We are glad to note the high enthusiasm for increased support for memory activities that will diversify the historical record, make that record more digitally available, and ensure that cultural heritage collections are responsive to and inclusive of the communities that create the items and knowledge in many collections. At the same time, we are aware of the complexity of funding programs in cultural heritage; the significant time required for design, implementation, and management of multi-year programs; and the challenges of taking ethical action within this complex system. We identified myriad areas for attention in DHC:AUV—attention toward the scope of activities eligible for funding; the needs for robust applicant support; equity-centered design of the processes for applying, reviewing, and awarding proposals; clarification and communication of program values and priorities; and the significant, day-to-day work required to sustain and administer a funding program. Changes in some areas may lead to positive impacts in the near term, but other changes will have indeterminate outcomes; the difficulty of comparing the

unique experiences of stakeholders and measuring progress toward the program's goals means that tangible, long-term results may remain unknown. Overall, however, our insights from this assessment revealed enthusiasm for and potential of the future of DHC:AUV and, more broadly, the potential for increasing equity in representation among cultural heritage collections.

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Appendix A.   Implicit Bias Orientation

The assessment team developed an implicit bias orientation for the initial meeting of the DHC:AUV review panel. We developed this in accordance with recommendations from various studies of review activity, which have suggested that although implicit bias can not be removed, discussion of the concept is a useful reminder for proposal evaluation (see Wigginton et al. 2021). This is underscored in studies of many other evaluation processes, such as anonymous orchestra auditions and job applications, where we know that evaluators rely on context clues taken from beyond the contents of materials submitted. We recommended, therefore, that implicit bias be introduced and discussed among reviewers for DHC:AUV. Although this orientation was formulated for DHC:AUV, we would suggest it can be a template for similar discussions among other review panels engaged in proposal evaluation.

Unconscious Bias: Implicit Bias and Tacit Bias

This short orientation provides an overview of how to understand and to approach bias in the review process, which is a key consideration for you to keep in mind as you discuss and enact the new program values and apply them to your evaluation of the initial applications. We will briefly introduce some variations of implicit bias, as well as some of the factors in a review setting that make these issues particularly challenging. We present this in the spirit of opening the discussion and as a framework that reviewers might use to consider, discuss, and evaluate ideas and assumptions so as to most fully enact and equitably review proposals.

These ideas offer a way to surface or amplify considerations and questions about bias. Each evaluator brings biases into their own work, but bias awareness is an active way to address this challenge. We hope that this conversation begins to normalize our discussion of biases and assumptions.

Implicit Bias. An "implicit" bias may be described as a generally non-conscious hypothesis or "schema" about a group or idea: a model that helps us to interpret and understand the behavior of other people and groups (see Fiske 2002). For example, a schema may shape associations about the nature, characteristics, or abilities of a group. Bias has been quite clearly documented in multiple review situations. For example, a

2003 study by Bertrand and Mullainathan analyzed callbacks for interviews based on resumes; after analyzing responses to nearly 5000 resumes sent to job announcements, distributed between experience and with the substantive differences being in racially "marked" names, resumes associated with "white" names received approximately 50% more response than those for people of color. Similarly, analysis of screened (without visual cues of an applicant) and unscreened orchestra auditions by Goldin and Rouse in 2000 suggested that the presence of a screen (an anonymization method) created some initial benefit to female applicants. This suggested that the removal of identity markers influenced results of auditions.

While these studies demonstrate the presence of biases, the best way to address them is less clear, particularly in a complex process like a grant proposal review where there are many stages of uncertainty. That said, we would encourage you to keep biases in mind as you are working and discussing today, particularly to keep in mind when schemas about groups or assumptions may influence or shape your evaluations. In a review setting this may include:

- categories of gender and race (frequently discussed as sites of implicit bias),
- collection type,
- topic,
- institution type,
- size (or perceived size and resources) of the applying institution,
- geographic location,
- and other factors unrelated to an applicant such as perceptions about level of application editing, socioeconomic status of an applicant, or other language cues.

Tacit Assumptions. A second area of unconscious bias that may influence the discussion may be described as "tacit assumptions": known but unspoken schemas or models that may be frameworks for actions. For example, what is your frame for understanding a 10-point scale and how do you apply it? Perhaps you see it as a teacher or grader who has a certain threshold for a pass/fail performance, perhaps you aim to create a distribution of scores more-or-less equally, or perhaps you want to group most scores in the middle with only a few at the extreme highs or lows. Like these models of grading,

your experience working as a scholar or researcher, a faculty member, or working with or managing collections may push your evaluation style in certain directions. For example, if you are expert in certain fields, you may associate mentions of well-known scholars, institutions, or collections with certain levels of quality. As you work through the initial discussions of applications, some of these will likely surface and there will be a group process of norming, where everyone becomes more comfortable with the program values, shares experiences, and comes into alignment.

Complicating Factors during the Meeting

As you begin the review, we would remind you of some factors that accentuate implementation of implicit bias and unconscious schemas. These include situations in which we have limited information, which often causes us to rely on existing schemas when evaluating aspects of proposals. For example, your discussions may be largely constrained by what you learn from the applications, or in some cases when a panelist may have direct knowledge of a collection or applicant. Likewise, we may be more likely to rely on schemas in high pressure situations. These are frequent in a review panel, such as when we are under stress to explain varied evaluations, working on potentially competing tasks (such as our Zoom meeting and what's happening at home), or are under time pressure (to reach a decision during the meeting). Finally, despite the many efforts to create a diverse and representative panel, even groups of a dozen or more are limited, so it is likely there will be many situations in which there is not a "critical mass" of some groups or perspectives.

In all these situations, our experience has been that raising and naming these sorts of biases is a key element in addressing them. The complexity of the situation and the nature of the process, proposals, collections, and range of topics make it difficult to present a specific remedy to eliminate biases, but we hope that this presents a framework to help open up and begin discussions that will help your reviews to be informed by the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access as you discuss creating ethical access to collections of underrepresented groups a historically marginalized groups or communities in "Amplifying Unheard Voices."

Appendix B.   Proposal Evaluation Rubric

[*This will be inserted at publication*]

Appendix C.   Principles for Useful Feedback

This set of reviewer principles offers a "reviewer guide" based upon feedback from both reviewers and applicants to DHC:AUV. The intent is to distill some of the overarching themes that we noted regarding proposal feedback, so we have structured this as a list of topics, briefly elaborated. Although arising from DHC:AUV, we hope that this advice is complementary to other programs that review grant proposals in the cultural heritage sector, and it may also be using in conjunction with similar advice from other domains (such as Aggarwal et al. 2022, Davis et al. 2020, Martín 2016).

Plan to take more time

Multiple reviewers mentioned that the review task always took more time than they initially thought it would. This is related to many factors, including the time commitments in a reviewers' own life, the complexity of proposals under review, as well as the need to understand a complex program and evaluation approach. In addition, as one reviewer related, even when using a rubric a reviewer's evaluation of proposals may change as they read through more proposals, so there may be a need to review or re-visit evaluations and feedback on previous proposals.

Make substantive comments

- In some cases, reviewer comments are brief, such as "great project" or "well planned" or "this proposal needs more work before it can be funded." These are good starting points, but they do not provide actionable or specific information to an applicant.

- For a program like DHC:AUV, which aims not only to support important digitization work but also hopes to build capacity and knowledge among the applicant pool, these do not provide useful feedback.
- Longer comments are not necessarily more substantive, but very brief written comments usually do not contain actionable feedback.

The following recommendations offer additional ways to provide more substantive comments:

Be specific, be direct

It can be most helpful to applicants to know which areas of a proposal are in need of work or require further planning.

- Specific feedback may identify a particular section of a proposal, then provide advice for particular actions or plans to address that element.
- Illustrating your feedback with specific examples helps an applicant understand more clearly what sorts of things the review panel takes into account. What makes the project so appealing? Alternatively, what is missing from the proposal?
- If your comments point to elements that an applicant has already addressed, your feedback can help to point out elements of a proposal that need to be revised or made clearer.
- Finally, some applicants reported they appreciated directness: if a reviewer does not support funding for a particular proposal or finds it ill-suited for the DHC:AUV program, applicants appreciate knowing that.

Build capacity and promote growth

If one outcome of grant programs in cultural heritage is to support and advance the field, it is important for reviewers to provide feedback that helps to build capacity: a growth mindset for the cultural heritage field. Whether or not the advice is something that an applicant can implement, the planning of a project and codification of it in a proposal suggests an interest in working toward completion of a project. The proposal review process is not only for the panel to make decisions or recommendations about funding, but also an opportunity for applicants to receive feedback and advice, which

may be used to shape or improve future applications and project plans. Feedback to proposals can provide advice, encourage emphasis on particular topics or areas of activity, and provide motivation, whether or not proposals are funded.

Adopt empathy

When writing comments for a proposal, imagine yourself as an applicant or potential applicant receiving the feedback:

- What advice would you like to hear if your proposal is not selected for funding?
- Have you offered a clear explanation of why you reached your recommendation?
- As a reviewer, what advice do you think that an applicant needs to hear?

Appendix D. Comparison of Initial and Final Application Elements with Values

[This will be inserted in the final publication]

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[1] The DHC program overall has seen a plurality of applications and awards from libraries, archives, and museums based at academic institutions (Banks 2019).

[2] We elected not to include the protocols in the report, but these materials are available from CLIR's website as accompanying documentation.

[3] We identified audiovisual materials by searching applicant statements about the collection materials for mentions of the terms audiovisual, audio-visual, VHS, cassette, film, or tape.