

HERITAGE NEWSLETTER



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Top Stories

NHC-Funded Heritage Project Creates 68 Youth Jobs While Preserving Shared Histories

Freedom Month: Preserving the Past, Shaping Our Future (Opinion Piece)

*Champions of African
heritage towards
social cohesion*



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CEOs MESSAGE

Dr Thabo Manetsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Heritage Council of South Africa

Dear Stakeholders and partners,

As we reflect during Freedom Month and prepare to celebrate Africa Month, we are reminded that our heritage is more than history, it is the story of who we are, where we come from, and the values that continue to unite us as South Africans. It carries the voices, memories, struggles, and triumphs of generations before us, while guiding the future we hope to build together.

At the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), we remain deeply committed to preserving and promoting our rich and diverse cultural heritage in ways that are meaningful, inclusive, and empowering for all communities. In a time when many South Africans continue to face social and economic challenges, heritage also has the power to create opportunities, restore pride, strengthen identity, and inspire hope.

This third edition of the NHC Heritage Newsletter highlights initiatives that show the impact heritage can have in people's lives. One of these is the Positive Change Youth Foundation project, supported through the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP),

which documented the shared histories of Batswana and Basotho communities while creating employment opportunities for 68 young people. Beyond preserving important stories, this initiative gave young people an opportunity to gain skills, contribute to their communities, and see themselves as custodians of our shared heritage.

We also reflect on the Joint Site Managers Workshop for the Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites World Heritage Site, which brought together heritage stakeholders committed to preserving the legacy of South Africa's liberation history. These UNESCO-recognised sites remind us of the sacrifices made for freedom, justice, and human dignity, and of our collective responsibility to protect these stories for future generations.

The NHC was also honoured to join the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Mr Gayton McKenzie, during the 2026 Shareholder Compact Signing. This engagement confirmed our shared commitment to accountability, collaboration, and responsible leadership in advancing South Africa's heritage mandate.

In addition, the opening of applications for the 2026/27 PESP7 programme presents another important opportunity for communities, researchers, and organisations to preserve cultural knowledge while creating employment and social impact. The programme's focus on youth, women, and persons with disabilities reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that heritage work remains accessible, inclusive, and transformative.

As we look ahead, we are excited about upcoming programmes and commemorative activities, including the Call for Golden Shield Heritage Awards (GOSHA) Nominations, Africa Day celebrations, International Museum Day, and Heritage Education School Outreach Workshops. These initiatives continue to encourage young people to engage with their heritage, take pride in their identity, and participate actively in shaping the future of our nation.

The NHC extends heartfelt appreciation to all our partners, communities, practitioners, and stakeholders who continue to walk this journey with us. Your dedication, passion, and support make this important work possible. Together, we continue to honour the past, empower the present, and build a more united, inclusive, and compassionate South Africa for generations to come.

Warm regards,
Dr. Thabo Manetsi
Chief Executive Officer, National Heritage Council of South Africa



NHC-FUNDED HERITAGE PROJECT CREATES 68 YOUTH JOBS WHILE PRESERVING SHARED HISTORIES

A heritage research project supported by the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC) and the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP) is helping preserve South Africa's shared cultural heritage while creating meaningful opportunities for young people in the heritage sector.

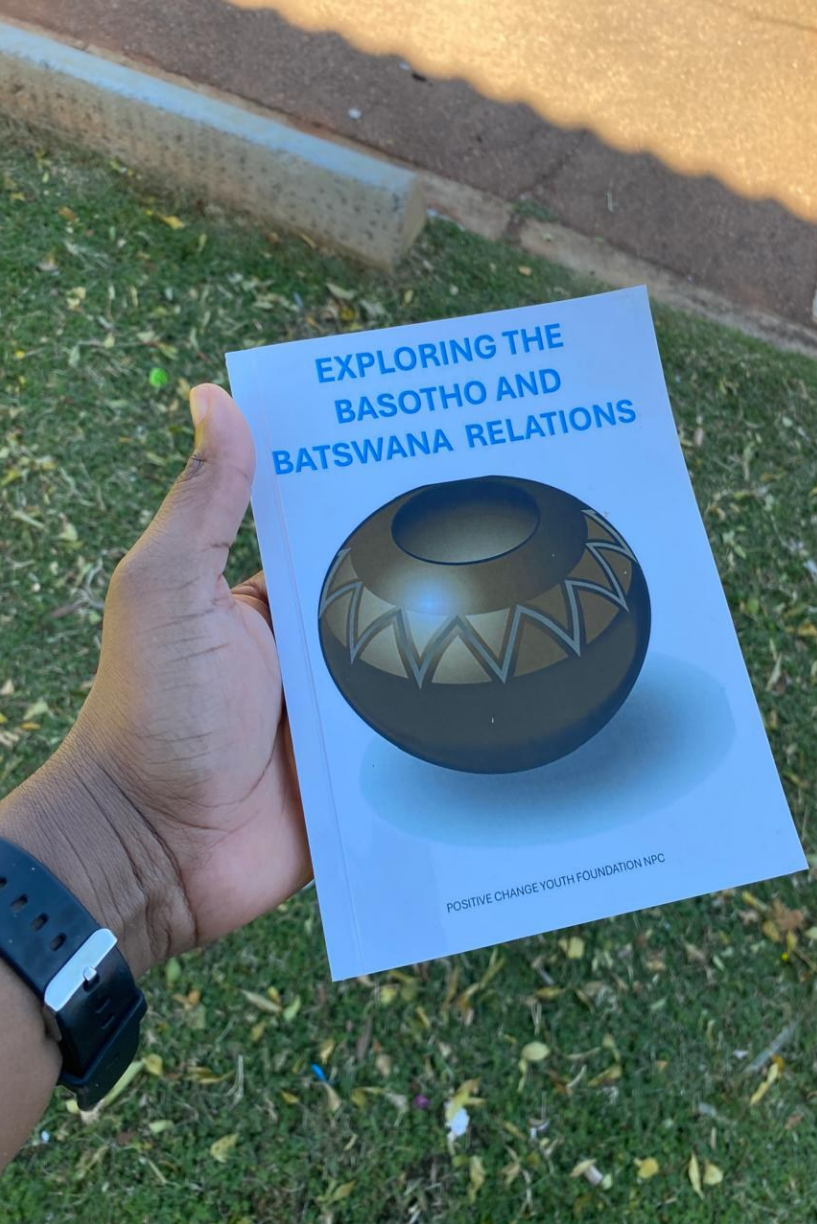
Led by the Positive Change Youth Foundation, the initiative documented the historical and cultural connections between Batswana and Basotho communities while creating 68 job opportunities for youth involved in research, administration, fieldwork, and community engagement.

Project Manager Mr Khutso Raphepele said the initiative was developed to ensure that important stories, traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems that have long been passed down orally are documented and preserved for future generations.

“We wanted to create a platform where the stories, traditions, and historical connections of our communities could be documented and shared with future generations,” said Raphepele.

The research explored the longstanding relationship between Batswana and Basotho communities, uncovering shared oral traditions, leadership structures, clan systems, migration patterns, and customary practices. The findings highlighted the deep historical connections between communities whose shared heritage is not always fully reflected in written records.

“Many of these stories have not been fully documented, so the project allowed us to highlight shared heritage, mutual influence, and unity,” Raphepele explained.



Support from the NHC and PESP enabled the project team to conduct extensive community engagement, field research, documentation, and publication work. Beyond preserving cultural knowledge, the initiative also provided practical workplace experience for dozens of young participants entering the heritage sector.

For many of the young people involved, the project represented more than temporary employment. It provided an opportunity to develop research, communication, and documentation skills while contributing directly to the preservation of African heritage and identity.

Raphepele said the work also highlighted the importance of approaching oral history research with care, respect, and cultural sensitivity. Because much of the information existed primarily through oral tradition, the research team worked closely with community members and knowledge holders to verify and accurately document historical accounts.

The project reflects a broader national effort to preserve indigenous knowledge systems, strengthen cultural pride, and promote social cohesion through shared understanding.

By documenting the historical links between communities, the publication contributes to dialogue, mutual respect, and a deeper appreciation of South Africa's diverse cultural heritage.

The Positive Change Youth Foundation hopes to expand the initiative in the future by researching more under-documented African histories, engaging additional communities, and creating further opportunities for young people to participate in heritage and cultural research.

Reflecting on the project, Raphepele described the experience as both meaningful and rewarding because it brought together community memory, youth development, and the preservation of African heritage in a way that benefits both present and future generations.

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FREEDOM MONTH: PRESERVING THE PAST, SHAPING OUR FUTURE

Each year in April, South Africans commemorate Freedom Day, marking the historic moment in 1994 when citizens voted in the country's first democratic elections. Freedom Month is more than a remembrance of political transition; it is a call to reflect on the journey of a nation and the responsibility we all share in preserving its story.

Freedom did not emerge in isolation. It was shaped by generations of sacrifice, resilience, and collective action. These stories live on not only in history books, but in the landscapes, languages, traditions, and memories that define South Africa's heritage.

From the fossil-rich grounds of the Cradle of Humankind to the enduring legacy of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, our heritage reflects both where we come from and what we have overcome.



FREEDOM
MONTH 2026

Freedom and The Rule of Law—Thirty
Years of Democratic Citizenship

HAPPY FREEDOM DAY

In this context, the role of the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC) becomes especially significant. The NHC's mandate, to preserve, protect, and promote the country's diverse heritage, is closely aligned with the ideals of Freedom Month.

True freedom includes the ability to tell our own stories, honour our identities, and ensure that future generations understand the foundations of our democracy.

The NHC's work in funding community projects, safeguarding heritage sites, and promoting living heritage directly contributes to nation-building. By investing in local initiatives, the NHC empowers communities to take ownership of their cultural narratives.

Whether it is revitalising indigenous languages, documenting oral histories, or restoring sites of historical importance, these efforts ensure that heritage remains a living, evolving force.

Freedom Month also reminds us that heritage is not static. It is dynamic and inclusive, shaped by all who call South Africa home. As the country continues to grow and modernize, there is an increasing need to balance development with preservation.

This is where innovation, such as digitization and improved access to heritage resources, plays a critical role in advancing the Council's goals and making heritage more accessible to all.

Yet, the responsibility of preserving heritage does not rest solely with institutions. It belongs to every citizen. Freedom brings with it the duty to remember, to protect, and to pass on.

When communities actively engage with their heritage, through storytelling, cultural practices, and participation in heritage programmes, they strengthen the social fabric of the nation.

As we observe Freedom Month, we are reminded that the journey towards a united, inclusive South Africa continues. Supporting the work of the NHC and embracing our shared heritage, we honour the past while building a more cohesive future.

Freedom, after all, is not only about where we have been, but also about how we choose to remember, preserve, and move forward together.

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JOINT SITE MANAGERS WORKSHOP STRENGTHENS COLLABORATION ACROSS NELSON MANDELA LEGACY SITES

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), in partnership with the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) and the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), hosted a three-day Joint Site Managers Workshop for the Human Rights, Liberation and Reconciliation: Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites -World Heritage Site from 6 to 8 May 2026 at the 26° South Bush Boho Hotel in Muldersdrift.

The workshop brought together managers and representatives from all 14 component sites to discuss strategic priorities aimed at strengthening the conservation, preservation, promotion, and sustainable management of the Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites-World Heritage Site.

Other invitees and strategic partners included the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) – focal point for the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention in South Africa, the National Department of Tourism, and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), which provided technical advice and insights in the management and conservation of the site through applicable legislative frameworks and programmes.

Over the three days, participants shared updates on initiatives at their respective sites, reviewed management plans, and identified collaborative projects and operational priorities for the coming financial year. Discussions focused on strengthening stakeholder engagement, improving communication and visibility, mobilizing funding opportunities, and deepening cooperation among the component sites.



“This inscription is a critical heritage and legacy initiative for our country. It represents not only South Africa’s liberation history, but also the universal struggle for humanity and emancipation. The 14 component sites across four provinces collectively tell a powerful story of resistance and freedom, now recognized globally through UNESCO World Heritage status.

“This achievement reflects the collaborative efforts of government departments, heritage practitioners, and communities that worked tirelessly to secure the inscription in July 2024.

As the National Heritage Council, we believe this recognition will strengthen South Africa’s cultural identity, promote heritage tourism, and position the country as a globally significant destination of outstanding universal value,” said Dr Thabo Manetsi, Chief Executive Officer of the NHC.

Speaking at the workshop, Dr Albino Jopela, Executive Director of AWHF, said the organisation has proudly supported South Africa since 2016 in strengthening the nomination of the Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites, culminating in their successful inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2024.

“As South Africa moves to implement recommendations linked to the listing through the State of Conservation Report, AWHF remains committed to supporting the preservation and conservation of the site for future generations, including strengthening the country’s report ahead of the upcoming World Heritage Committee Session in July.

This milestone also comes as AWHF celebrates 20 years of supporting African States Parties in fulfilling their obligations under the 1972 World Heritage Convention,” said Dr Jopela.

The NHC Resistance and Liberation Heritage Route (RLHR) Manager, Mr Khwezi Mpumlwana, highlighted the global significance of the Liberation Heritage Sites programme and South Africa’s responsibility to preserve and present the country’s resistance heritage to the world.

“In the 50-year history of the Convention, there has never been a site that deals with human rights, decolonisation, or the African road to independence,” said Mr Mpumlwana.

Day Two of the programme featured educational visits to several significant heritage destinations, including the Cradle of Humankind, Constitution Hill, and Walter Sisulu Square.

The workshop concluded with a renewed commitment from stakeholders to work collectively to preserve and promote the World Heritage site for future generations.

The Joint Site Managers Workshop confirmed the importance of South Africa’s Liberation Heritage Sites programme as both a national priority and a contribution to the global recognition of human rights, liberation, and reconciliation.

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NHC JOINS MINISTER GAYTON MCKENZIE FOR 2026 SHAREHOLDER COMPACT SIGNING

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC) joined fellow public entities under the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) for the official signing of the 2026 Shareholder Compacts with Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie, on 7 May 2026 in Hatfield, Pretoria.

Organised by the DSAC Entity Oversight Unit, the ceremony was an important moment for strengthening accountability, improving governance, and reinforcing the working relationship between the Department and its entities.

Representing the NHC at the ceremony were Chairperson of Council, Mr Tau Masemola, and Chief Executive Officer, Dr Thabo Manetsi. Their participation reflected the organization's ongoing commitment to providing strong leadership and advancing South Africa's heritage mandate.

The Shareholder Compact sets out the key responsibilities, performance expectations, and governance priorities that guide the relationship between the Department and its public entities.

The event also emphasized the value of alignment and cooperation in helping the Department deliver on its cultural, heritage, and nation-building goals.

As the NHC continues to carry out its mandate, the signing of the compact reaffirms its commitment to accountable leadership, meaningful collaboration, and the preservation and promotion of South Africa's rich heritage.

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CALL FOR PESP 7 FUNDING APPLICATIONS OPENS



CLOSING DATE: 31 MAY 2026

NHC OPENS PESP7 FUNDING APPLICATIONS TO BOOST HERITAGE AND EMPLOYMENT

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC) has opened applications for the 2026/27 Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP7), inviting heritage practitioners, researchers, institutions, and community organizations across South Africa to submit projects that preserve the country's rich cultural heritage while creating meaningful employment opportunities.

As an entity of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), the NHC continues to position heritage as a driver of economic recovery, social cohesion, and community empowerment.

Through PESP7, the NHC aims to support impactful, community-based initiatives that create jobs, especially for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

The funding programme places strong emphasis on projects focused on research, documentation, heritage education, and the transfer of indigenous knowledge and heritage skills. Eligible projects may include oral history documentation, language preservation initiatives, indigenous knowledge systems, archival and heritage research, cultural education programmes, intergenerational storytelling, and heritage skills development projects.

Applications are invited under three key categories:

- ◇ Living Heritage
- ◇ Cultural and Natural Heritage
- ◇ Education and Training

The programme is open to a broad range of applicants, including educational and academic institutions, non-profit organizations (NPOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), associations, foundations, traditional councils, community trusts, and individuals working in partnership with qualifying organizations.

Speaking on the significance of the initiative, NHC Chief Executive Officer Dr Thabo Manetsi said the programme extends beyond financial assistance.

"PESP7 presents an opportunity for communities to become active custodians of South Africa's heritage while participating meaningfully in the country's economic recovery efforts. We are particularly interested in projects that amplify local voices, preserve indigenous knowledge systems, and create employment pathways for young people and marginalized groups within the heritage sector."

Dr Manetsi further highlighted the role of heritage in nation-building and inclusive development.

“Our heritage tells the story of who we are as a nation. Through this funding initiative, the NHC seeks to support projects that not only preserve that story but also ensure that heritage becomes a catalyst for skills development, social inclusion, and community empowerment.”

Interested applicants are encouraged to review the funding guidelines and eligibility criteria before applying through the NHC's online Praxis Grant Management System.

Applications close on 31 May 2026.

For more information and application access, visit www.nhc.org.za or <https://nhc.praxisgms.co.za/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

CALL FOR GOLDEN SHIELD HERITAGE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

The National Heritage Council invites South African communities, heritage activists, enthusiasts, universities, heritage organisations, and non-profit organisations to submit nominations for the Golden Shield Heritage Awards. **The call for nominations**

aims to:

- ◇ raise awareness of the Golden Shield Heritage Awards;
- ◇ increase the number of nominations; and
- ◇ educate the public about the different award categories open for nomination.

AFRICA DAY CELEBRATION

Join us for a vibrant Cultural Exchange Programme in celebration of Africa Day, where arts, culture, and heritage practitioners, activists, and community members will come together to share knowledge, creativity, and lived experiences. The event will celebrate the richness and diversity of African heritage through performances, dialogue, and cultural activities that promote unity and continental pride.

HERITAGE EDUCATION SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAMME (HESOP) WORKSHOPS

The Heritage Education School Outreach Programme (HESOP) Workshops continue to empower learners through interactive heritage education initiatives. These workshops are designed to deepen understanding of South Africa's cultural and historical heritage while encouraging young people in schools and communities to participate actively in its preservation and appreciation.

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM'S DAY

International Museum Day is an international day held annually on or around 18 May, coordinated by the International Council of Museums. The event highlights a specific theme which changes every year reflecting a relevant theme or issue facing museums internationally.



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