# Guide to referees for Heritage Advisors

## *How to prepare a written reference in support of an applicant seeking to meet the ‘experience’ requirements of the Minister’s Guidelines for Heritage Advisor Qualifications and Experience*

Heritage Advisors play an important role in the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act). In broad terms, Heritage Advisors conduct research and assessment activities and develop and supervise protection measures to be followed before, during and after land use and development activities that may impact Aboriginal cultural heritage. Importantly, the work of Heritage Advisors involves engaging with Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owners as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

A person can only be engaged as a Heritage Advisor if they satisfy either of two pathways set out in subsection 189(1) of the Act:

1. by being **appropriately qualified and experienced in a discipline** directly relevant to the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage such as anthropology, archaeology or history; or
2. by having **extensive experience or knowledge** in relation to the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The [Minister’s Guidelines for Heritage Advisor Qualifications and Experience](https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/ministers-guidelines-heritage-advisor-qualifications-and-experience) explain the minimum duration and the type of experience in each of these pathways. Experience must be in an Aboriginal cultural heritage management setting in south-eastern Australia and must include fieldwork involving direct engagement or liaison with Traditional Owners.

Meeting the Minister’s Guidelines means a person can offer their services as a Heritage Advisor, and they can apply for Heritage Advisor access to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

A person applying to meet the Minister’s Guidelines must provide two written references in support of their claims to experience.

## Who can prepare a written reference for a Heritage Advisor?

Written references must be prepared by:

* a Registered Aboriginal Party (from the CEO or a senior employee); and/or
* a Heritage Advisor who has already met the Minister’s Guidelines.

If the applicant’s practical experience is in another Australian state or territory in south-eastern Australia, written references from equivalent types of referees in those jurisdictions may be accepted.

## What should a written reference include?

A written reference should set out the referee’s understanding of the length and type of the applicant’s experience.

It should cover the following 4 things:

1. Identify yourself by name, as the referee, and whether you are a Heritage Advisor or a RAP employee, and your contact details.
2. State the known length of the applicant’s practical experience in a cultural heritage management setting in south-eastern Australia, either:
	1. for persons applying on the basis of ‘appropriate tertiary qualifications and experience’, a minimum of either 1 or 2 years full time (or equivalent) practical experience, depending on whether tertiary studies have included a focus on Aboriginal Australia (see points 1 to 6 under Section 189(1)(a) in the Minister’s Guidelines); or
	2. for persons applying on the basis of ‘extensive experience or knowledge’, a minimum of 3 years employment with a Registered Aboriginal Party or similar Aboriginal organisation (see point 1(b) under Section 189(1)(b) in the Minister’s Guidelines).
3. Describe the setting of that experience (for example, the name of an employer organisation and the geographic or cultural region of the applicant’s work).
4. Comment on the relevance of the applicant’s experience, as follows:
	1. for persons applying on the basis of ‘appropriate tertiary qualifications and experience’ including via professional association membership, practical experience must include fieldwork involving direct engagement or liaison with Traditional Owners and cannot be limited to desktop assessments (see points 1 to 6 under Section 189(1)(a) in the Minister’s Guidelines); or
	2. for persons applying on the basis of ‘extensive experience or knowledge’, experience should include assisting with cultural heritage assessments, surveys and/or excavations, and the evaluation of cultural heritage management plans under the Act, or similar processes in another jurisdiction (see points 1(b) and (c) under Section 189(1)(b) of the Minister’s Guidelines).

A suggested [Template for a written reference](https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/Written-reference-template_0.docx) is provided online at <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/guide-referees-heritage-advisors>. Referees may choose to use this template, but it is not compulsory to do so. Written references should include the information outlined above.

If you have any questions regarding the preparation of a written reference, or its use or storage by FPSR, please email vahr@dpc.vic.gov.au or call 1800 762 003.