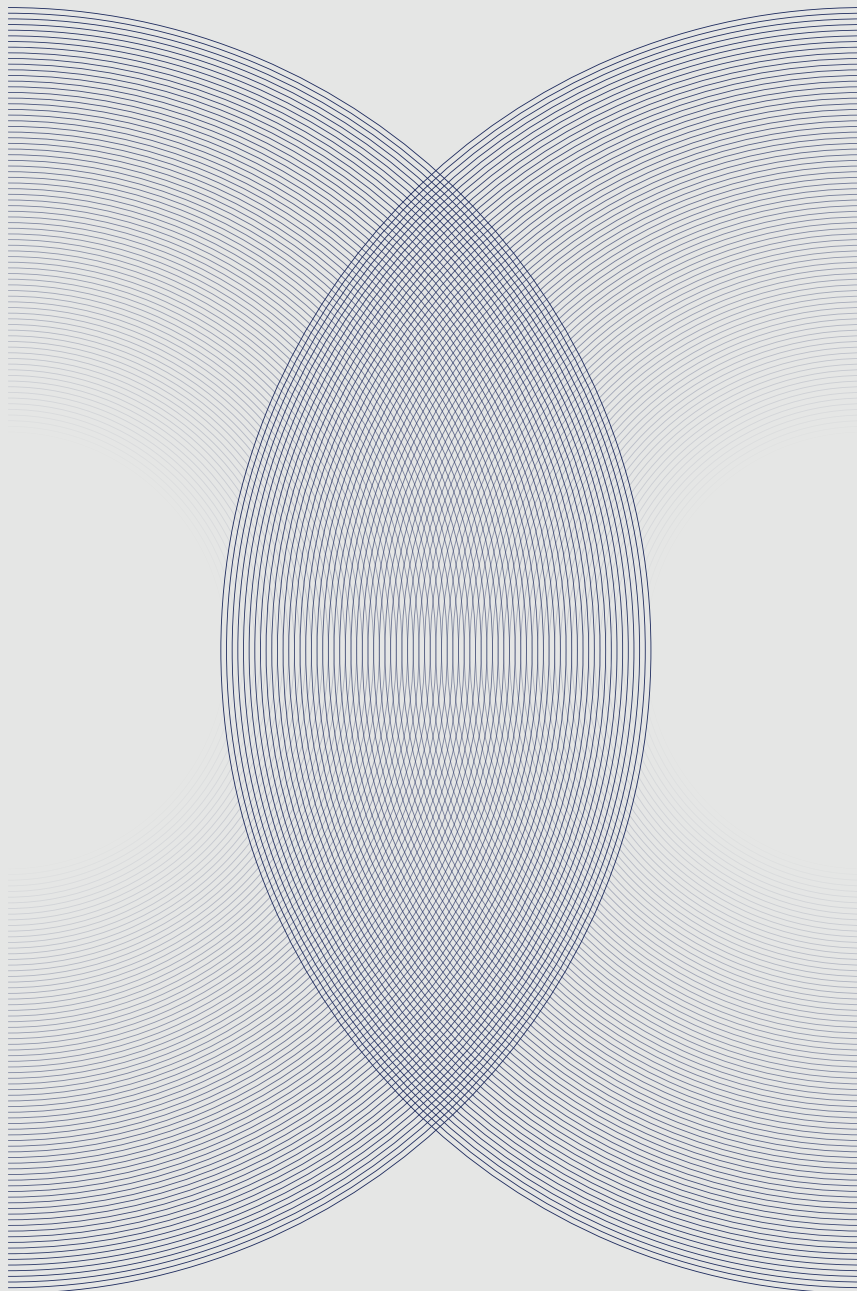




BYERA HADLEY TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP

GUIDE TO WRITING A STRONG APPLICATION

This Guide should be read alongside the **Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship (BHTS) [Application Form and Conditions](#)**, available [here](#).

Applications for the Scholarship must be made by completing the Application Form and submitting it with other required documents as a single PDF file not exceeding 15 x A4 pages (3MB max. file size) on or before 23:59 AEST on 31 August each year.

So, you want to apply for a BHTS?

Welcome to this short guide, aimed at helping aspiring applicants to pitch a more successful application for the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship (BHTS).

The BHTS is Australia's largest and longest-running program of its type. Scholarships are awarded annually by the NSW Architects Registration Board with funding from a Trust established by the esteemed architect and educator, Byera Hadley (1872-1937), administered by Perpetual Trustee Company Limited.

Pitching a research proposal is a specialist skill, and one that falls beyond the day-to-day practice of architecture but there are a series of tips and tricks you can use to help structure a more compelling application.



Hello, I'm Dr Rebecca McLaughlan, a NSW registered architect and (now) full time academic at the University of Sydney.

Part of my job is pitching research proposals and teaching students how to write these. I am also a recent Chair of the BHTS Selection Committee (2023-2024). In this short guide you'll find advice about how to structure a BHTS application, followed by a short overview of the different types of projects that were funded by the BHTS in 2024.

A research proposal is not an architectural theory essay

The above statement may sound obvious but my experience of reviewing BHTS applications is that many applicants fail to make the distinction between a research proposal and an academic essay. The most likely explanation is that, for most architects, the closest thing to a research proposal you might have written was an academic essay as a student. Yet, the way we write essays at university tends to be more like an (educated) opinion piece, backed up by references. There are few parallels between this and a research proposal. The best proposals to come before the Selection Committee over the last 2 years have been those that observe this distinction. Below you'll find advice so that you too can do this.

There are 2 key steps to follow. The first is to understand the purpose of the BHTS scholarship, and the second is to ensure you write with a clear and purposeful structure.

Step 1: Start with the purpose of the scholarship

Whatever great idea you have, however passionate you are about that idea, it cannot succeed if it does not meet the selection criteria for the scholarship. Quite plainly, this is the only criteria the Selection Committee can assess your application against. A summarised version of those criteria, as stated in the [BHTS Application Form and Conditions](#), is as follows:

- Significance to the discipline of architecture
- Feasibility relative to the proposed methodology, outcomes, timeframe and budget
- Potential to promote an understanding of architectural matters in the community (which we could also term "dissemination")
- Clear and compelling communication

For the purposes of conceptualising what project you will pitch (step 1 of this process), the most important question to ask yourself is “How is this project significant to the discipline?”

A project must go beyond your interests as an individual. Instead, the knowledge you propose producing through your project must offer broader benefits for the discipline of architecture (it can sometimes be even more compelling if you can target it to NSW).

While all awarded projects succeed in doing this, an example from 2024 where this benefit was exceptionally clear was Joshua Zoeller’s Industrial-Led Mixed-Use project. This investigated the emerging typology of industrial-led mixed-use spaces that integrate work and residential living. Zoeller positioned the need for this research relative to a mixed-use development his practice had recently been engaged to work on; making the argument that this is a typology being seriously considered for Sydney, that we (as a profession) have a responsibility to understand in terms of both the benefits and drawbacks. Odours, noise, traffic, light pollution—these are all things associated with industrial buildings, so how can those drawbacks be mitigated in an urban location, where those facilities will stand shoulder to shoulder with residential dwellings? Zoeller argued that the only way to understand this was to visit international examples that have been ‘lived in’, i.e. that have been in operation for at least a few years, to get a sense of what works and what doesn’t. This knowledge, he suggested, could be valuable for architects, developers, planners, councils, and other urban decision makers.

In an academic context, I often advise colleagues of the difference between pitching the project you want to do versus the one that is likely to get funded.

For example, you might be obsessed with the architecture of Tiki (cocktail) Bars. If you can make an argument that understanding these buildings will have a direct benefit to the discipline of architecture, particularly here in NSW, then run with it. If you can’t, this is probably not the right topic for this scholarship.

It is worth thinking about what the major challenges facing our profession are right now. Of equal importance is how could you bring a unique perspective to that problem?

Returning to the example of Zoeller’s project, it spoke to the challenge of housing, but it came at this challenge in a way that others haven’t yet done and that’s what made it impossible not to fund.

There are a few questions we ask ourselves in academia when pitching research projects, and indeed, deciding what research project to pitch and how to shape it for the best chance of success:

- Why this project?
- Why me?
- Why now?

While I’ve spoken to the question of “Why this project?” above, “Why me?” is a reminder to lean into your expertise and to what is unique about what you can contribute to that research topic that others can’t.

Hypothetically speaking, nothing could stop someone else from pitching Zoeller’s project, but it would not be as compelling without the benefit of knowing he was, at the same time, knee deep in thinking through the issues of this emergent typology while working on a live project in Sydney.

“Why now?” is another way to add gravitas to your pitch.

For example, in 2023 Victoria King proposed a shop/house project looking at the traditional typology of residential living above small shopfloor spaces in urban and rural main streets. In pitching this, King linked it to the recent Lismore floods and the questions of urban renewal raised in that context. Given that Lismore has a main street comprised of this typology, it felt both timely and important to fund.

Step 2: Write with a clear and purposeful structure

As noted above, a research proposal is not an architectural theory essay. In my role on the Selection Committee, I have read many pages of beautiful architectural prose that, hand on heart, have not communicated what the research question was; what methodology was being proposed; or exactly what problem was being responded to. The Selection Committee is not looking to assess creative writing in BHTS applications. The most useful thing you can provide is a document that is clear; employs subheadings usefully; and is straight to the point.

The [BHTS Application Form and Conditions](#) suggests the Applicant Statement (or research proposal) should include the sections listed below “in any order.” Below, I have suggested the order I would find most logical (however, it may make sense to vary this as suits individual projects). Remember that a strict 5-page limit applies to your Applicant Statement.

1. Project title

Your project title should reflect the topic and research intent clearly and succinctly.

2. Project outline

This is your elevator pitch:

What’s the big idea? What is the project? Why now? Why you?

I would refer to this as the “project context” or “project justification”. It’s where you set the scene for what your project is; why it’s needed and/or relevant to the discipline (either Australian or NSW context); and why what you are proposing is unique and/or timely. Ideally, this would be a half-page in length. It should be succinct and punchy and make key points quickly. It is, in effect, the elevator pitch of your project: Why this project? Why you? Why now? Who will benefit? and (if possible) What makes your approach distinct? Also, make sure you briefly describe what the project is at the end of this justification.

An example from my own research is: ‘This project will use architectural methods to map how architectural and urban form within leading medical innovation precincts (such as Melbourne’s Parkville Biomedical Precinct) can support and improve collaboration in medical research.’

3. Aims and objectives

What will you investigate?

You should craft a few clear, answerable research questions.

As an academic who writes multiple research grants in a year, I still find myself confused regarding the difference between aims and objectives. As the definitions go, aims are broad, general statements of intent, while objectives are specific, measurable steps taken to achieve those aims. Clear as mud? Thought so. In the context of the BHTS, I would retitle this heading “Research Questions” and I would literally list my research questions under that heading. However, there is an art to this ...

Research questions must be answerable with the time and methods you have available. There is no point listing 20 questions in a year-long project that the Selection Committee knows you will be trying to complete while also holding down a full-time job in architectural practice.

Three clear and well considered questions is enough (but one or two good ones might also suffice relative to the nature of the project). Ideally, those questions would build on each other and, essentially, resemble the steps you will take in the project.

For example, I’m currently working on a project that investigates the design of chemotherapy day units, and our three questions are:

- 1. How do various unit designs perform from a nursing perspective, relative to patient visibility; efficiency of staff movement; access to equipment and supplies; accessibility; and ambiance?*
- 2. How do various unit designs perform from a patient perspective, relative to nursing visibility; privacy; comfort; supporting family and friends to attend chemotherapy with you; and ambiance?*
- 3. Is there an optimum unit design for chemotherapy day units relative to balancing nursing needs and patient needs/ preferences?*

While this example would not be suitable for a BHTS project (owing to the multi-institutional ethics approvals required), I am using it here to illustrate how the research questions and methods should closely inform each other, while also indicating to the Selection Committee that the project is feasible relative to the scope (the size or ambition of the project), methods, budget and timeframe.

Here's a tip: being tangible and specific when writing your questions can help to scope the project more clearly because it makes what is "in" and what is "out" of scope more obvious, both to you and to the Selection Committee.

In terms of the research design for the example above, the first question suggests we would need to observe nurses providing care and ask staff about these experiences. The second question suggests we would need to obtain views from patients themselves, either via interviews or a survey. The third question suggests we would need to repeat this method across a handful of units with different designs to be able to draw any conclusion from the data; but it also requires the data from questions 1 and 2 to draw those conclusions (hence the 'building on' idea). Question 3 also suggests that a desktop precedent study would be required, in the first instance, to identify which units to include to obtain a broad survey of different layouts.

4. Identification of the significance of the proposed project to the discipline of architecture and/or its potential to promote an understanding of architectural issues in the wider community

Why does your project matter?

Explain its benefit to the profession and the broader community.

This section should speak back to the project outline (context or justification), and some of this should certainly have already been answered in that first half-page introduction. However, this part of your Applicant Statement presents a chance to expand upon some of the following:

- Who will use your research?
- How will they use it?
- How will it be useful / what might it influence / what impact could it have?
- Who else has done similar research; and how is what you are proposing different / or how does it build further on that?

5. Outline of proposed research methodology

How will you do your project?

What methods will you use and are they feasible for travel?

A common mistake in research proposals is that the suggested methodology cannot feasibly deliver what the proposal is promising.

For example, in the case of Zoeller's project on industrial mixed-use developments, if, hypothetically, he had proposed a tour of abandoned industrial estates this might identify reuse opportunities, but it certainly wouldn't tell us about the benefits and drawbacks of observing this urban typology 'in use'. Similarly, if, hypothetically, he'd proposed a literature review on this typology, given it is an emerging typology, that likely wouldn't tell us much either.

Be critical in making sure that the questions you set up can be answered by the methods you are proposing. Ask yourself, what kinds of information will this method deliver; and will that information help me to answer the question(s) I've proposed?

Also, this is a travelling scholarship, so make sure that your travel destinations and/or case studies make rational sense relative to your research questions. This is another mistake we see frequently in BHTS applications—you can't successfully shape a project around where you want to go, the project should dictate your itinerary.

6. Proposed Scholarship outcomes

How will you share your findings?

Show how your findings will be useful, visible and deliverable.

We could otherwise title this “Dissemination” because it concerns how you will share the findings of your research with the architectural (or broader) community. This section, thus, speaks closely to the selection criteria relating to the project’s feasibility and its potential to promote an understanding of architecture in the community. As per the **BHTS Conditions of Award**, you are required to submit a “final report and/or approved alternative outcomes [including...] exhibitions, publications, seminars, talks, education programs.”

When planning your dissemination strategy, think about the audience you want to reach but also the kinds of knowledge that you will generate, and if that knowledge is a natural fit with the dissemination strategy you have in mind. A series of interviews, for example, might suit a written report or a podcast, but to turn that project into an exhibition would likely require a whole new work phase, engaging different skills, outcomes and significantly more time.

Try not to be over ambitious in proposing these outcomes. Remember that the Selection Committee is familiar with reviewing over-ambitious proposals and it won’t help your case to promise too much. Instead, it will suggest a lack of realism relative to your capacity to deliver. Be realistic.

7. Outline of your personal motivations and/or interest in the project topic and any relevant background or experience you bring to it

Why you?

What is your connection to the topic and relevant experience?

Many applicants begin their application with this, but I recommend leaving it to the end. A well-considered, thoughtful proposal will broadcast your passion, commitment and expertise without you having to wax lyrical about this in the opening paragraphs. Leaving your personal motivations to the end can demonstrate a higher degree of criticality around what you are proposing while also providing you with the opportunity to explain, in more tangible detail, “Why you?”. For example,

- What experience do you have with this typology / research question?
- What are your personal motivations for proposing it?
- What prior experience do you have with the methods you are proposing? If none, then what supports have you put in place (mentor or other) to help you come to grips with delivering those methods successfully?
- Have you done any background work that will assist in making the proposal more successful that the Selection Committee should know about?

8. Proposed research timeline with key dates and milestones, including indicative travel itinerary

What's the timeline?

Ensure your plan is achievable and includes preparation for travel, wrap-up and reporting.

While preparing a research timeline is fairly straightforward, this is the part of your application where the feasibility of your proposal and methodology becomes most visible. Your application needs to show that the scope is achievable within a 12-month period. For your timeline, this means thinking beyond the travel itself to map out time for:

- **Planning and preparation:** time to research case studies, make initial contact with key subjects / places, secure access, and shape your itinerary.
- **Travel window/s:** optimum times for when and where you will go, with attention to local conditions (climate, closures, logistics, etc).
- **Synthesis and consolidation:** time post-travel to pause, reflect, and shape the raw material of your experience into something legible and useful.
- **Delivery of outcomes:** time to prepare your final report or plan other outputs, including writing, editing, formatting, curating images, preparing your executive summary, and ensuring that what you promised can be submitted before life and other career pressures take over.

This last point is worth emphasising. Many scholars have taken what began as a BHTS project and built it into something bigger—but the final output promised here must be completed within the agreed timeframe.

9. Proposed research budget, including indicative costs of travel, accommodation, living expenses, and other associated research costs

What's the budget?

Show how you will use the funding realistically and responsibly.

Your proposed budget should align with the same spirit of realism and deliverability. It doesn't need to be granular in detail but must break down the key costs and make sense with reference to your project's scope and the scholarship amount (up to \$15,000 for students and \$30,000 for graduates).

You'll want to cover:

- Travel (international and internal)
- Accommodation
- Daily living costs (meals, transport, insurance)
- Relevant costs associated with your methodology, such as site fees and permissions.

The timeline and budget are straightforward to prepare and can be an appendix to the main document. Alternately, you might pull your timeline, key dates and milestones forward into the methodology section if this helps to explain the sequencing of your project (in this option, you will still include your travel itinerary as an appendix type document).

A good rule of thumb is to not promise more than the available time and budget can reasonably support. A single country and a clear research method is often far stronger than a global sprint. A podcast, if that's your medium, might make more sense than an exhibition, depending on what kind of material you'll be generating. Choose a format that fits the project—and give yourself the space and resources to deliver it well.

In summary

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, 5 x A4 pages is not an invitation to write an architectural theory essay. You are asking the NSW Architects Registration Board to make an investment in the knowledge that you believe the architecture profession (or broader community) would benefit from having. Focus on the value of that knowledge, and your passion, experience and capacity to deliver it. Let that be the story you tell.

The BHTS funds all kinds of projects

Candidates apply for the BHTS at a range of different career stages and from different areas of architectural practice. Some candidates are practising architects with a passion for a particular typology, others are recent graduates (at Bachelors, Masters or PhD level) who are held in the grip of unanswered questions.

Below is a short overview of six recent projects that we hope will inspire you to reflect on your own experiences and ambitions to identify not only the right project to attract funding, but also the project most relevant to your career trajectory. Given that no one has ever said “Gosh, delivering that BHTS was easy,” it may be worth keeping in mind the Japanese concept of *ikigai* which relates to finding fulfilment by combining what you love; with what the world needs; what you get paid for; and what you’re good at. Achieving *ikigai* is not generally considered easy to accomplish ... but it’s worth a shot nonetheless!



Student Projects

Dr Jason Dibbs

Edgelands: The creek and Aerotropolis

Jason Dibbs pitched a BHTS to take his research in a new direction, post-PhD. His project looked at a “forgotten and neglected waterway” that intersects land zoned as part of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis. It recognised the importance of Indigenous links to Country and identified that the opportunity to capture “cultural and ceremonial” connections to Wianamatta (on Dharug land) may be about to foreclose with the ongoing development of the Aerotropolis. This will irreversibly transform the landscape by accommodating 10,000 new households in addition to associated infrastructure. Utilising mapping, archival research, and local and international interviews, the aim of his project was to:

‘elevate the Creek and Western Sydney’s edgelands in educational, public and professional discourse, and record Wianamatta’s narratives for posterity, offering guidance to the architects, planners and policy makers in the continued development of the Aerotropolis precinct.’

In positioning this project, Dibbs pointed to Grace Karskens’s (2020) historical narrative of the Dyarubbin (the Hawkesbury-Nepean River), suggesting he would follow a similar approach to create a similarly careful history. Interesting about Dibbs’s project, within the context of his career trajectory, is that he pitched this at the end of his PhD (which was on an entirely different topic), and at the same time as he was applying for permanent academic positions. This meant that this project served as evidence, in a job interview context, to demonstrate his capacity to lead important new research beyond the topic of his PhD.

Zoe Skinner

Honouring the Memory of a Life Still Lived: Designing Environments for Dignity, Purpose, and Connection in Dementia through Models from Japan and Denmark

Zoe Skinner pitched a BHTS that brought her personal experiences to ask critical questions of architecture and the built environment. Following firsthand experience of caring for a loved one with early-onset Alzheimer's, Skinner obtained a deep appreciation of the critical role of the built environment in "providing spaces that are safe and enriching, where individuals living with dementia can be extended dignity, purpose, and connection." Her project proposed travel to Japan and Denmark—two countries renowned for their progressive and human-centred approaches to architecture—to investigate dementia-responsive design through a series of case studies.

Skinner's project was proposed after completing a Bachelor of Architecture, during a formative period of transition. This research opportunity provided space to reflect and define priorities for an academic and professional trajectory centred on higher degree research. Her project is a compelling example of how the BHTS can support research-led inquiry in architecture and help shape the direction of practice through deeper understanding and evidence-based engagement with urgent social issues.

Graduate Projects

Bobbie Bayley

Cool Living in 'Hot Dry' Climates

Bobbie Bayley pitched a BHTS to extend her existing practice, connecting to issues of regional interest. Following her first BHTS in 2016, that took her across remote and rural Australia, Bayley now lives in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), working with NGO Healthabitat to improve housing for remote Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory. The project she pitched in 2024 was to extend her Masters thesis "Cool Living Ed. Hot Dry" that "offers a suite of targeted passive design upgrades specific to common existing community house types across NT communities." This empowers community members and provides an easy set of steps for housing organisations to implement targeted improvements when funding becomes available (which often comes with tight timelines for expenditure). While Bayley felt proof of concept was established, she applied for BHTS funding to further develop several critical parts of the project. Two of her key questions were:

- What are other advocates, researchers, individuals, community and social housing departments and organisations in similar contexts prioritising, thinking, and doing; and how are they financing the retrofitting of existing houses for climate change?
- What can I learn by visiting, accompanying, understanding and documenting findings from pilot programs underway in this space?

The benefit of this project is summed up in the following justification, as provided in Bayley's application, in the context of global warming, where extreme heat causes immediate and long-term adverse health impacts:

'the un-maintained, inappropriately designed for climate, sub-par existing housing stock will increase already experienced disadvantages – issues of energy poverty will see more energy disconnections on hot days, poor housing stock will become a bigger burden on the hip pocket and poor or no maintenance programs means active cooling (with electricity) will stop working when needed most.'

Marston Bowen

Cultivation and Salvation in Architecture: Material Alternatives to Extraction and Landfill

'The construction industry is the largest consumer of raw materials. Mining, logging and other extractive processes present a particularly short-sighted way of practicing, especially when these finite resources are used only once before their true home: landfill... This proposal will explore alternatives to extraction and landfill and move to a more circular economy.'

These were the opening lines of Marston Bowen's application, citing global problems that cannot possibly be solved within the span of a BHTS. Yet, the application stated this awareness clearly and positioned this project as a critical first step in what Bowen sees as a lifetime career trajectory in which he posed the question "Why not an architectural version of OzHarvest?" The project proposed investigating this problem using 3 lenses (or case studies): (1) a material study—selecting one material and understanding its novel construction techniques, deconstruction and reuse; (2) a project study—selecting one project that innovatively reuses material; and (3) a studio study—interviewing an architect whose practice specialises in the use of salvaged materials. In this way, a problem of overwhelming scale was cleverly broken down into achievable parts. The investment in this project can perhaps be seen as less about the immediate knowledge it will produce and more about supporting capacity-building in terms of potential future leadership for the profession. This is something that all BHTS awardees demonstrate, but in other proposals (such as Slattery's below) precedence is given to the knowledge itself, and potential impact of that knowledge.

Sarah Slattery

Let's Get Moving: New Directions in Sports Architecture and Urban Planning

Sarah Slattery pitched a BHTS to deepen her expertise in a particular typology; and to understand how to leverage the benefits of that typology for Australian youth. Slattery is passionate about the architecture of sporting facilities and, in her project, brought this to bear on broader societal issues impacting young people in Australia. As her application outlined, 83% of 15-17 year-olds in Australia do not undertake sufficient physical activity to meet current health guidelines. Slattery's project thus aimed to understand how architecture and urban design can play a role in encouraging greater rates of physical activity for young people. She proposed visiting a range of sports facilities across Europe to understand how new architectural models—including briefing, operational models, urban context, design solutions, and user experience—can encourage engagement. Slattery's expertise in leading sports and community architecture projects supported this compelling application because the Selection Committee could see how she was already well positioned to implement translatable lessons into the Australian context.

Joshua Zoeller

Sheds & Beds: Industrial-Led Mixed Use

Joshua Zoeller pitched a BHTS to investigate an emerging typology observed through his architectural practice in Sydney. His project focused on the emerging urban typology of industrial-led mixed-use precincts that combine residential and industrial functions. Grounding his proposal in professional experience, Zoeller identified an urgent knowledge gap and proposed a targeted program of international site visits to observe how this hybrid typology functions in established urban contexts. His application stood out for its clarity, real-world relevance, and value to developers, councils, planners, and architects. It serves as a strong example of how lived professional challenges can lead to research with broad disciplinary impact.

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Disclaimer

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