Call for Artists

KAATAGOGING MEMORIAL SCULPTURES, WAUZHUSHK ONIGUM NATION, ON

Opening Date: September 24, 2026

Deadline for Submission: October 26, 2026

Project Overview

The Kaatagoging Memorial is a permanent, land-based memorial being developed in Wauzhushk Onigum Nation, Ontario, on the former grounds of the St. Mary's (Kenora) Indian Residential School, which operated from 1897 to 1972. This is land marked by the genocide of Indigenous peoples and by the children, families, and generations who continue to carry its impacts. St. Mary's was not an isolated institution. It was part of a broader colonial system through which churches and governments worked to separate Indigenous children from their families, lands, languages, cultures, spiritualities, and ways of being. Children were taken from their homes and forced into the school. Survivors have shared truths of punishment, forced labour, and emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse. Some children died from illness. Some died trying to escape. Some never returned home.

Since 2021, Survivors and Wauzhushk Onigum Nation have been undertaking a truth-finding and healing journey known as Kaatagoging. In Anishinaabemowin, Kaatagoging holds rich meanings including grave, returning to the earth, and growing together. It was also the name Survivors used for this place as children. The memorial is grounded in their truth: what happened here was part of genocide, its impacts did not end when the school closed, and Survivors are still here.

The memorial is being created so that what happened here is not softened, forgotten, or separated from the larger history of colonization and genocide. It will honour Survivors, remember the children who never returned home, protect sacred resting places, and carry these truths forward for future generations. Rooted in Survivor guidance, it is also a place of reclamation: for gathering, ceremony, reflection, education, healing, and the continuation of Anishinaabe relationships to land, story, family, and spirit that residential schools attempted to erase. As part of the memorial three artworks are envisioned and are shared in the appendix of this document.

Together, these artworks will serve as cultural and visual anchors within the memorial landscape. They are not intended to make the history of this place easier to look at. They must hold the truth of genocide alongside remembrance, survival, resistance, reclamation, healing, continuity, and responsibility to future generations.

This is a qualifications-based Call for Artists. Artists may apply for one, two, or all three commissions. A concept design is not required at this stage. Shortlisted artists will work directly with the Survivor Working Group to learn more about the site and develop the artistic vision.

How To Apply

Submit one PDF document by **October 26, 2026 at 11:59 pm CST** to **info@kaatagoging.ca**. Clearly identify whether you are applying for the Turtle Sculpture, Eternal Flame, Children's Sculpture, or more than one commission.

Please name the PDF using the following format:

LastName_FirstName_Kaatagoging_Memorial.pdf

Submissions should include:

- **Letter of Intent – Maximum 2 pages**
  Introduce yourself or your artist team, identify the commission(s) you are applying for, and briefly describe your artistic practice, relevant experience, connection to this work, and why the Kaatagoging Memorial is meaningful to you.
- **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
  Provide a current CV outlining your artistic and professional experience, including relevant sculpture, public art, memorial, fabrication, or related work. Artist teams should provide a CV for each core team member.
- **Connection to Indigenous Communities – Maximum 500 words**
  Describe your connection to Indigenous communities, lands, cultures, and/or traditions and how these relationships inform your artistic practice or approach to this work.
- **Examples of Previous Work**
  Provide a minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 images of previous work relevant to this Call. Include the title, date, materials, dimensions, and a brief description of each work.
- **Indigenous Self-Identification, if applicable**
  Artists who choose to self-identify may provide a brief statement describing their Indigenous identity and connection to their community.

- **References**
  Provide the names and contact information for two references who can speak to your artistic experience and ability to undertake work of this nature.

Artists are not required to submit a concept design at this stage. Shortlisted artists will have the opportunity to learn more about the site, Survivor direction, and technical requirements before developing a detailed concept.

Submission Delivery & Deadline

Submissions must be received by **October 26, 2026, at 11:59 pm CST.** Incomplete and/ or late entries will not be accepted. Entries must be submitted digitally via email.

Please send your submissions or any questions to **info@kaatagoging.ca.**

Artist Eligibility

This Call for Artists is open to individual artists and artist teams interested in developing one or more of the three Kaatagoging Memorial artworks.

Artists should demonstrate:

- a strong connection to Indigenous communities, lands, cultures, and/or traditions;
- an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the history of colonization, the Indian Residential School system, and its ongoing intergenerational impacts;
- an ability to work respectfully and collaboratively with Survivors;
- artistic experience relevant to the component(s) they are applying for, including sculpture, public art, memorial art, metalwork, fabrication, or other related practices;
- an ability to translate stories, cultural direction, and Survivor guidance into meaningful artistic expression; and
- the ability to create, or work with appropriate fabricators and technical professionals to create durable permanent artwork suitable for an exterior public setting.

Indigenous artists, particularly artists with connections to Wauzhushk Onigum Nation and surrounding Indigenous communities, are strongly encouraged to apply. Artists are also encouraged to mentor young or upcoming artists as part of this work.

Artists do not need to have all fabrication, engineering, or installation expertise in-house. Artist teams and collaborations with fabricators or other technical specialists are welcome.

Artists may apply for one, two, or all three artwork components. Different artists may ultimately be selected for each component.

Estimated Project Timeline

The following represents the anticipated timeline for the Call for Artists and initial artist selection process. Dates may be adjusted as the project progresses.

Step One – Call for Artists

- **Call for Artists Issued:** September 4, 2026
- **Deadline for Submissions:** October 26, 2026
- **Review of Submissions:** October 2026
- **Shortlisted Artist Interviews:** October–November 2026
- **Selected Artist(s) Notified:** November 2026

Following Step One, the project team and Survivor Working Group will continue working directly with the shortlisted artist(s) to further develop and refine the three memorial artworks, with the goal of having **completed designs by Spring 2027.**

Future fabrication and installation of the artworks will be dependent on project funding.

Appendices

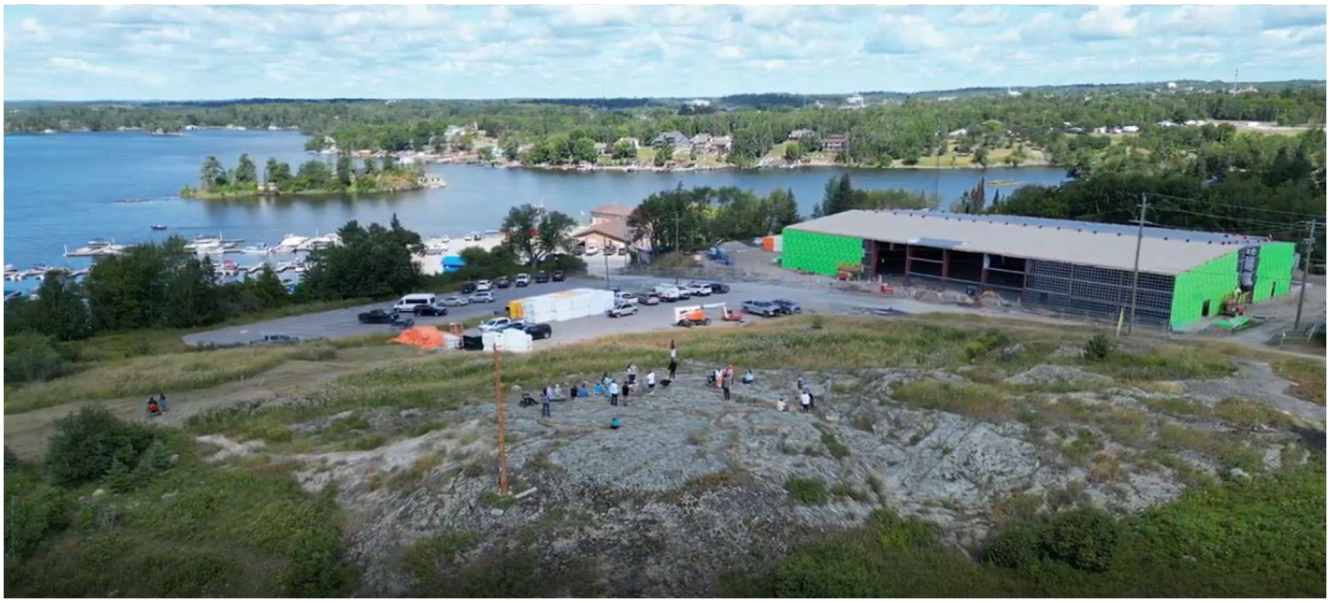
Site Map

Three Memorial Design Briefs

Image References

Area of Interest

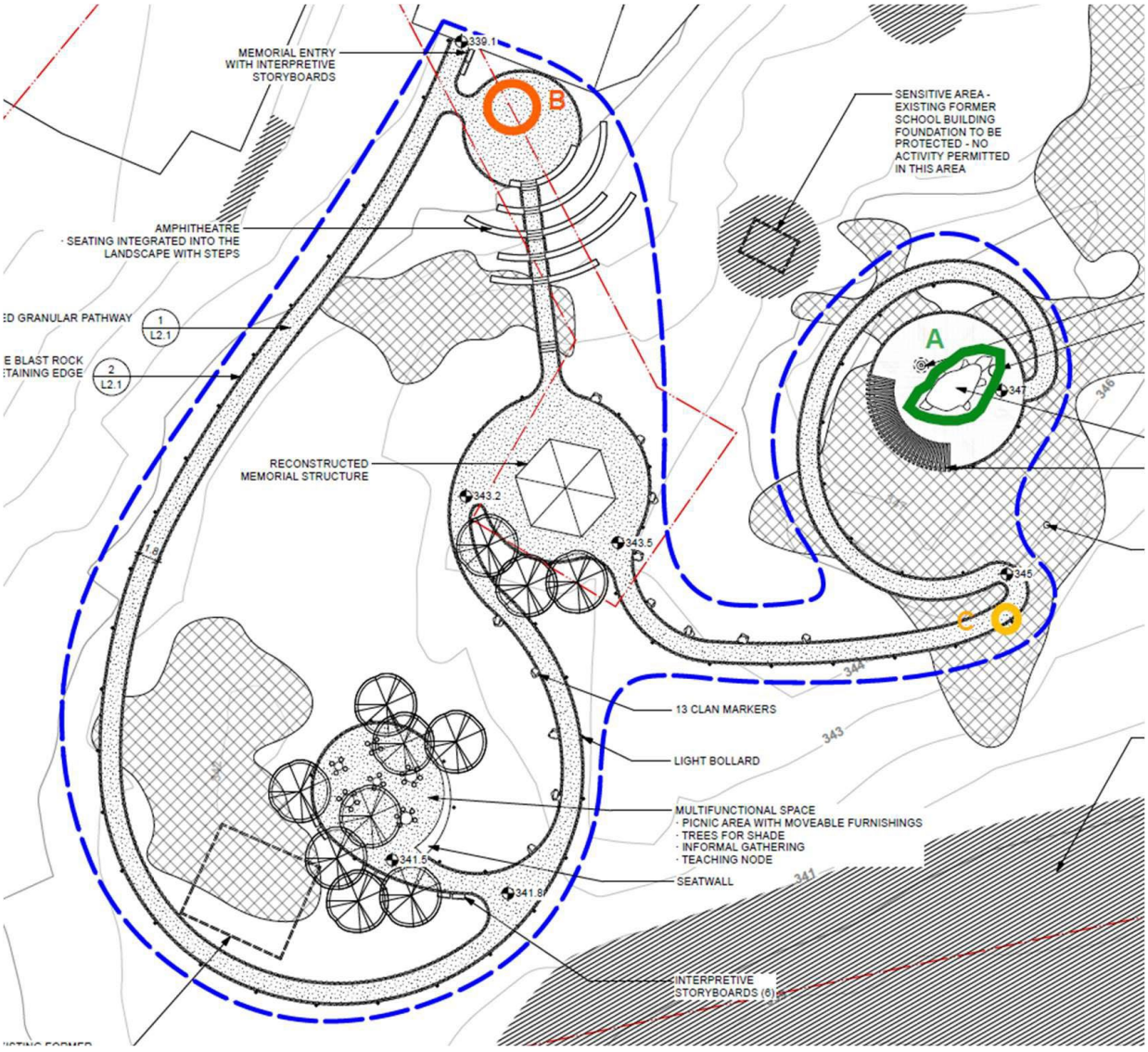
Site Photos



The Three Memorial Commissions

The three commissioned artworks will be permanently installed on exposed granite bedrock overlooking the cemetery grounds and water. They will stand on land where Survivors have carried memories of St. Mary's and where children who never returned home are remembered. The artworks must acknowledge that the residential school was part of a larger system of genocide while refusing to define Indigenous peoples only through what was done to them. They should hold grief and truth alongside the enduring presence of Survivors, Anishinaabe law, ceremony, kinship, resistance, and return. The sculptures should feel powerful, grounded, enduring, and alive. See project location map and site images below:

SITE A - Turtle Sculpture, B - Eternal Flame & C – Children's Sculpture



Site A: Turtle Sculpture

The Turtle will serve as one of the primary cultural and visual anchors of the memorial.

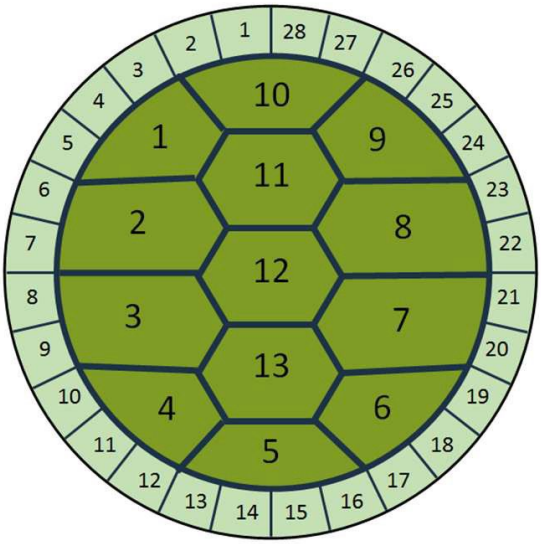
The Turtle represents truth emerging from the land: truth that colonial institutions attempted to bury, deny, and erase, but that Survivors continued to carry. It also reaches further back than the residential school system, grounding the memorial in Anishinaabe Creation and the life of Turtle Island. The sculpture should hold both realities: the genocide that sought to sever Indigenous peoples from land, family, culture, and spirit, and the continuity of Anishinaabe life that survived it. Its emergence speaks to revelation, reclamation, family, healing, and movement toward future generations.

Survivors have identified several important directions for the artwork. The Turtle should:

- depict a **snapping turtle**, including key details like the face, claws, spiked tail, and textured skin;
- appear to be **rising and emerging from the land;**
- face **East**, representing emergence, new beginnings, and future generations;
- have a strong, realistic, grounded, and enduring presence;
- incorporate the **13 moons and 28-day lunar cycle** into the shell;
- explore opportunities to respectfully incorporate Survivor names;
- consider materials such as natural stone, granite, copper, bronze, other durable metals, or mixed-material approaches; and
- respond directly to the surrounding exposed granite and landscape. The anticipated overall scale is approximately **8 feet high by 13 feet long.**

We anticipate a total budget range of $150,000-$250,000 for this art piece.

Reference Images for Turtle Sculpture



SITE B: Eternal Flame

The Eternal Flame will serve as a place of remembrance, spiritual connection, and witness within the memorial. Its continuous light will honour Survivors and the children who never returned home, including those whose lives were taken or forever altered through the residential school system.

The flame should carry the truth that the violence of St. Mary's was part of a larger system of genocide, while also affirming that Indigenous life, spirit, family, and ceremony were not extinguished. Its light represents memory that cannot be erased, the spirits of the children, the survival of those who returned home, and the gathering back together of families and clans that colonial systems worked to separate.

Survivors have identified several important directions for the artwork. The structure is a conical flame like form; we are looking for artists to design the illustration cutouts for this piece. The Eternal Flame should:

- consider LED lighting to create a continuous source of light within the memorial;
- incorporate artist-designed cut-outs that use light and shadow to tell a story about all the clans coming back together as themes of family and healing;
- honour the journeys of Survivors and the children who never returned home;
- create opportunities for the artist to explore imagery and storytelling through the form and cut-outs;
- respond to the surrounding landscape and its relationship to the other memorial elements.

The scale of the Eternal Flame will be developed in response to the site and in coordination with the project team. **We anticipate a budget of $75,000 for this work.**

Reference Images for Eternal Flame Sculpture

SITE C: The Children

The Children's Sculpture will carry one of the most painful stories remembered from St. Mary's: two boys who tried to escape the residential school and make their way home. They did not survive the journey. They froze before they could reach home.

Their story speaks directly to what residential schools did to children.

The two boys should be represented together, creating a quiet but unmistakable presence in the landscape. Their relationship to one another, the land, and the direction of home should carry the story without requiring the sculpture itself to depict their deaths.

Survivors have identified several important directions for the artwork.
The Children's Sculpture should:

- depict two boys together, based on the story of the children who escaped St. Mary's and froze while trying to make their way home;
- convey that they are on a journey home, rather than standing passively in remembrance;
- reflect companionship, determination, vulnerability, and childhood;
- use realistic child proportions;
- be respectful and restrained, avoiding graphic representations of suffering or death;
- consider orientation, movement, clothing, gesture, and relationship between the two figures as ways of communicating their journey;
- use durable materials appropriate for permanent outdoor installation; and
- respond directly to the surrounding land and the other memorial elements.

The final representation of this story will be developed carefully with Survivors and the selected artist.

We anticipate a budget of $100,000 to $130,000 for this art piece.

Reference Images for Children Sculpture

(Example images only of material)

We invite artists who are prepared to listen closely to Survivors, to work with the weight of this history without softening it, and to help create artworks that carry truth forward. These commissions are an opportunity to contribute to a memorial that names genocide, honours the children and Survivors of St. Mary’s, and affirms the continuance of Anishinaabe life, story, ceremony, and presence.