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## CALL FOR ARTISTS: REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS Canalside Mural Fest

**Location:** Canalside, Buffalo, NY (Lakefront/Inner Harbor Area)

**Festival Dates:** July 11<sup>th</sup> – July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Painting Time:** Two Days (Live Painting Event)

**Submission Deadline:** May 13, 2026

### Project Overview

Arts Services Inc. (ASI), on behalf of Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation, along with Buffalo Waterfront, invites artists, muralists, and creatives from Western New York to apply for Canalside Mural Fest, a temporary mural festival designed to activate Canalside, Buffalo's premier waterfront destination.

In preparation for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, this event seeks to create a "living gallery" that explores New York's pivotal role in the Revolutionary Era and its evolution over the past 250 years. These murals will be temporary, offering a vibrant, evolving ode to Buffalo's history, resilience, and creative community.

### Project Background and Goals

Selected artists will be assigned one of the following themes, drawn from the [NYS 250th Commemoration Field Guide](#), to guide their design proposals. Artists may indicate a preferred theme; however, preferences are not guaranteed, as each theme will be assigned to only one artist.

1. **Indigenous History is New York's History:** Highlighting peaceful trade, coexistence, or the complex political/military alliances of Indigenous nations during the Revolution. *Please note: This theme centers Indigenous contributions and will prioritize artists who identify as members of a regional Indigenous community.*
2. **Power of Place:** Exploring how the geography of Buffalo, Lake Erie, and the Erie Canal shaped history and local identity.
3. **Unfinished Revolutions:** Examining ongoing struggles for equity, justice, and the changing definition of who "belongs" or is considered a "citizen."
4. **Community Builders:** Highlighting underrepresented stories, including those of women, enslaved people, and diverse populations on the homefront.
5. **Changing Interpretations of the Revolution:** Interpreting the past through modern eyes, or focusing on how historical events were commemorated (or ignored) over the last 250 years.

### Site Specification & Measurements

- **Surface:** Murals will be painted on temporary, freestanding walls constructed of MDO plywood panels. The panels will be primed and ready for painting in advance of the event.



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- **Measurements:** The two 4' x 8' MDO panels will be mounted side by side, creating a single 8' x 8' paintable surface.
- **Timeline:** Artists are required to paint live over two days, **Saturday, July 11 and Sunday, July 12**, to complete the mural. Artists should be prepared to work from 10 am to 4 pm each day, or until the mural is finished. In the event of inclement weather, the rain dates are Saturday, July 18 and Sunday, July 19.
- **Materials Provided by the Artist:** Artists are expected to supply all necessary painting and access equipment (ladder, etc.). Exterior-grade acrylic paint is recommended.
- **Materials Provided by the Buffalo Waterfront:** A tent, table, and chairs will be provided at no cost. Artists may sell their work during the event; however, due to the tight timeline, bringing assistance for sales is strongly encouraged.
- **Removal:** Murals are temporary and will be removed following the event.

### Compensation

- **Artist Stipend:** Each selected artist or artist team will receive \$2,000. Artists are responsible for purchasing and bringing their own materials but are not required to provide insurance.
  - Once selected, artists will be required to complete a W-9 and sign a contract with the appropriate parties. The contract will outline terms of participation, including the project timeline (with contingencies for inclement weather), insurance requirements, payment terms, and details related to the mural's lifespan.
- **Semi-Finalists Stipends:** Artists selected to advance to the semi-finalist round, but not ultimately chosen for the event, will receive a \$150 stipend in recognition of their time. Selected artists will not receive this stipend, as the design fee is included in their total project compensation.
- All mural surfaces will be primed and prepared in advance. Artists are not responsible for this cost.

### Eligibility

- This call is open to all artists/creatives, including (but not limited to) visual artists, graphic designers, muralists, tattoo artists, painters, sketch artists, and graffiti or street artists.
- Applications are open to individual artists and collaborative teams with mural experience.
- Preference will be given to artists living in Erie, Niagara, Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties, or the Native nations that share this geography.

### Application Requirements

Proposals must be submitted electronically through an online Jotform, wherein artists will be prompted to submit the following;

- Contact information (name, address, phone, email)
- Artist bio or résumé (maximum one page)



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- 2–3 relevant professional references
- Portfolio of past work (up to 5 images of previous mural or large-scale work)
- Theme preference (top 2 choices)
- Preliminary concept: A 200-word description or rough sketch demonstrating how the theme would be interpreted in a temporary context

### **Selection process**

The following, 4-Phase selection process is designed to ensure a fair, professional, and history-grounded transition from initial applications to the final four festival artists.

#### **Phase 1: Semi-Finalist Selection**

A jury consisting of local historians, arts administrators, and/or community members will review all initial applications. They will score applicants based on five specific criteria;

- **Artistic Excellence & Originality:** High-quality work that demonstrates a unique and consistent style.
- **Mural Experience:** Proven ability to work on a large scale within a specific timeframe (live painting experience is a plus).
- **Cultural & Community Merit:** How well the artist's past work reflects inclusive storytelling and public engagement.
- **Thematic Alignment:** Evidence that the artist can translate complex historical concepts into accessible visual art.
- **Professionalism:** A history of meeting deadlines, effective communication, and problem-solving skills.

#### **Phase 2: Theme Assignment & Sketch Submission**

The chosen semi-finalists will move into a design phase. Each artist will be assigned a specific theme from the [NYS 250th Commemoration Field Guide](#), such as "Power of Place" or "Unfinished Revolutions".

- **Design Brief:** Artists will receive background on the historical significance of Canalside and the goals of the festival.
- **Sketch Requirements:** Submission of a rough sketch or digital mockup, along with a 200-word artist statement explaining the design's connection to the assigned theme.
- **Stipend:** Semi-finalists not selected for the final event will receive \$150.

#### **Phase 3: Final Artist Selection**

The jury will reconvene to review the sketches. The selection will be based on the following considerations:

- **Visual Impact:** Does the design provide a "wow" factor for a live public audience at Canalside?



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- **Thematic Depth:** Does the sketch successfully interpret the assigned NYS 250th theme without being overly literal?
- **Feasibility:** Can this design realistically be completed in **2 days** of live painting?

#### **Phase 4: Notification & Contracting**

- **Notification:** Selected artists will be notified via email.
- **Contracting:** Final artists will sign a project agreement outlining payment milestones (e.g., 50% upfront, 50% upon completion). Artists who do not adhere to the approved design or contract terms may forfeit final payment.

#### **Key Dates**

- **Call Open:** April 15, 2026
- **Deadline to Apply:** May 13, 2026
- **Preliminary Artist Selection:** May 27, 2026
- **Semi-Finalists Artist Sketch due:** June 10, 2026
- **Final Artists Selection:** June 17, 2026
- **Mural Fest Event:** July 11-12, 2026
- **Mural Fest Event (Rain Date):** July 18-19, 2026

#### **Questions?**

Questions about the call, application requirements, deadlines, or submission process can be directed to Arts Services Inc. (ASI) at [info@asiwny.org](mailto:info@asiwny.org) or (716) 833-3004 x.515.