



Joint News Release – Government of the Northwest Territories and NWT Art Centre Initiative sign Memorandum of Understanding to explore future art gallery site

YELLOWKNIFE (July 24, 2026) – The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery, operating as the NWT Art Centre Initiative, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support the development of a non-commercial art gallery for the Northwest Territories.

The MOU identifies the former Akaitcho Hall site (Block 102, Plan 551), located next to Sir John Franklin High School in Yellowknife, as the preferred location for the gallery. The Government of the Northwest Territories currently holds a Government Land Reserve on the site for use by Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (YK1), which runs Sir John Franklin High School. YK1 has been engaged and supports this proposal.

The proposed art gallery would provide dedicated space to exhibit art, support NWT artists in building their careers, host community events and public programming, and preserve the territory's artistic and cultural heritage. The vision also includes a resource library, a permanent art collection, and space for learning about the history and impacts of residential schools in the Northwest Territories.

The MOU sets out the work that must be completed before any land transfer can be made. This includes completing required consultation, completing environmental assessments of the site, addressing any environmental or other liabilities, and completing any required surveying, rezoning, subdivision and land title work. Environmental Site assessments and all costs associated with preparing the land for transfer would be the responsibility of the NWT Art Centre Initiative.

As part of this work, the GNWT and the NWT Art Centre Initiative have engaged with the Tłıchǵ Government, the North Slave Métis Alliance and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation regarding the proposed transfer of the site.

The agreement does not approve the project or commit the GNWT to transferring or selling the land. Instead, it sets out how both parties will work together while the necessary work is completed.

Quotes

“The future art gallery will be a place where artists and creators thrive, where art and creativity are valued as an integral part of everyday life, where community members feel welcomed and inspired, and where Northern art, culture, and ideas can be recognized,

studied, shared, and celebrated. This MOU is an exciting next step towards this vision and we look forward to working with the Government of the Northwest Territories to realize it."

- **Toby Kruger, Board Chair, Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery**

"The Northwest Territories has incredible artists, storytellers and cultural traditions, but it does not have a dedicated public art centre to showcase them. This agreement allows us to begin exploring whether public land could support that vision. There is still work ahead, but this is an important step toward creating a space that celebrates northern art, culture and history."

- **Caitlin Cleveland, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment at the Government of the Northwest Territories**

Quick facts

- The Northwest Territories is the only jurisdiction in Canada without a dedicated, public, non-commercial art gallery.
- The NWT Art Centre Initiative is led by the Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery, a non-profit charitable organization.
- The proposed art gallery would include exhibition space, community gathering areas, an art collection, a resource library, and space dedicated to learning about the history of residential schools in the Northwest Territories.
- The proposed site was the former location of Akaitcho Hall, which operated from 1958 to 1994 as a residence for children from across the North who attended Sir John Franklin High School. Akaitcho Hall is one of the institutions recognized in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and was one of the last residential schools in Canada to close.
- The GNWT supports efforts to strengthen arts and culture across the territory. A non-commercial art gallery has the potential to create new opportunities for artists, expand cultural tourism, provide new learning spaces, and contribute to a stronger northern economy.
- The project supports the goals of the NWT Arts Strategy 2021–2031, which identifies arts infrastructure as a priority for the GNWT.

Related links

- [NWT Art Centre Initiative website](#)

For media requests, please contact:

Agata Gutkowska
Manager of Public Affairs and Communications

Department of Education Culture and Employment
Government of the Northwest Territories
Agata_gutkowska@gov.nt.ca

Sara Komarnisky
Art Centre Development Specialist
NWT Art Centre Initiative
sara.komarnisky@nwtartcentre.ca