Sable Island Institute
2026-27 Artist in Residence Program

TERMS OF REFERENCE

APPLY NOW

February 13, 2026

2026-27 Sable Island Artist in Residence Program

The beauty, mystery, and magical quality of Sable Island - now a national park, the Sable Island National Park Reserve (SINPR) - coupled with its extraordinary historical and cultural importance in Atlantic Canada gives it an allure that attracts interest from around the world. However, the ecological sensitivity of the Island means that very few visitors can directly experience the Island each year, and for each of those there is a significant financial cost.

Many artists have been to the Island over the years and many more would like to go. In the past, there have been few opportunities for artists to work on the island for more than a day at a time. Parks Canada recognizes that an opportunity to go to the Island for a more extended period would be broadly beneficial. For this reason, the Sable Island Institute (SII) and partners have established an **Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program** in the SINPR.

In addition to providing time for an artist to gain experiences and insights through living and working on Sable Island during the residency and interacting with Island personnel, the artist may wish to access archival materials covering the history and environment of the island (for example, by visiting the Nova Scotia archives). We are looking for artists who will use their art to explore and interpret this resource to bring the environmental, ecological, historical and/or cultural qualities of the Island to life and convey their essence. By sharing this work with the broader community, the unique natural and cultural values of the Island can then be experienced by people who will never be able to go there themselves.

In recognition of the loading constraints of the aircraft servicing the Island and the need to carry other passengers and cargo, the artist would need to 'travel light' and bring only essential material and equipment to the island. It is therefore expected that the time spent there would mainly be used to explore, observe, document and reflect on the Island and its qualities. Any production work requiring heavy or bulky equipment would have to be done on the mainland. For additional information about Sable Island, the Sable Island Institute, and the SINPR, visit: https://sableislandinstitute.org/ and https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/ns/sable .

Please note: The current call for applications is open only to artists living in the four Atlantic Provinces.

Description of Residency

In 2026-27 **three artists** will be selected as Artists in Residence for 1-2 weeks of on-island work. **Two artists** will be selected for Fall 2026 residencies (October-November 2026) and **one artist** will be selected for a Spring 2027 residency (April-May 2027). Each artist will be on the island separately, for their own dedicated period of time.

The residency will include round-trip travel from Halifax International Airport to Sable Island, up to two weeks of on-island accommodation, and technical and logistical support as needed. On and off the island the artist will be helped to access archival materials and encouraged to engage with other island personnel and researchers so that their art is informed by this broader context.

While on the island, the artist will be expected to communicate to the public through social media at least twice a week and then, when back on the mainland, to hold a public presentation within six months describing their project and experience.

The artist would be encouraged, but not required, to eventually donate an item generated through the residency to the Sable Island Institute for its own archive.

A unique opportunity

The experience the residency offers is extraordinary: extended time in a uniquely beautiful, remote island within an exposed and dynamic natural environment; and relatively visible wildlife little affected by human contact or interference. It also offers an opportunity to learn about the impact of human interaction with a remote place, and how climate change affects the marine environment.

Background research will also reveal a dramatic past closely tied to the history and development of Nova Scotia and the maritime history of Atlantic Canada, and provide opportunities to learn from other researchers on and off the island. This can then support the integration of art with science and conservation.

Sable in Fall

The average temperature in October is 12°C, but there can be warm days rising to 24°C. In November, temperatures start to fall with averages around 8°C. Precipitation occurs during approximately 40% of the days.

The fall starts to see average wind speeds increase, with typically 25-30 kph, although tropical weather systems can pass through the area giving much higher winds. However, there are occasionally remarkably mild and sunny days with hardly a breath of wind.

This is a colourful season energized with ever-changing skyscapes (as well as some brilliant blue skies), flooded beaches, exuberant fall colours of vegetation, horses in peak condition and

wearing their fresh winter coats, and stormy days when the wind sculpts the dunes and sand is blown into intricate patterns on the beach.

Although the Ipswich Sparrow population migrates to the mainland to spend the winter along the east coast, there are still many on the island feeding on beach grass seeds and invertebrates. And large numbers of gulls. Other migratory bird species turn up – including warblers, finches, shorebirds, ducks, egrets, herons – staying a while feeding at the ponds or on the dunes before continuing their travels south.

Sable in Spring

The average temperature in April is typically 5°C, although there are days where the temperature will rise to the low teens. In May, the average temperature rises to 8°C, with some days rising to 15°C.

Winds are typically 15 to 20 kph, although in storms it can be much higher.

Precipitation occurs in approximately 50% of the days, and fog is common.

Fresh leaves of marram grass, beach pea, wild rose, strawberry, and yarrow are emerging from the cool, damp sand, and the landscape takes on a green glow. In early spring nesting birds, such as Herring and Great Black-back Gulls, and Ipswich Sparrows, are returning to the island, establishing colonies or selecting nest sites. Terns usually arrive in early May. Migratory non-nesting species, en route to breeding areas elsewhere, also turn up.

The horses are usually lean (but gaining weight as they feed on the ever-increasing swaths of new plant growth), and scruffy as they shed their thick winter coat. First foals are born during late March and early April, with foaling continuing throughout May.

Sable challenges

- A remote location with basic shared accommodation and facilities.
- Highly variable weather.
- Aircraft travel weight & cargo limitations & restrictions.
- Weather that affects travel schedule, outdoor work, and occasionally, connectivity.
- On-island exploration mainly on foot, walking in sand. *Note: Access to on-island transportation is very limited. The island is about 35 km long so distance is a consideration in planning study locations, particularly if equipment is carried. Occasional vehicle support may be available depending on other operational requirements but cannot be guaranteed.*

On-island Accommodation, Services, and Orientation

There will be a private room in a house for sleeping but otherwise the accommodation is shared with SII personnel. Food prep and kitchen duties are cooperative. Food is provided by SII but the menu options are limited so advance notice is required of any dietary preferences or allergies. Very specific needs must be met by the participants themselves.

Internet connectivity is through Starlink satellite service. Cell phones must be wifi capable. Calls can only be made at the Sable Island Station.

There is very limited on-island medical support - essentially first aid and emergency evacuation, if necessary.

Travel to and from Halifax International Airport is by small aircraft (Sable Aviation) or helicopter (Vision Air), determined by Sable Island Institute and Parks Canada, and depending on availability and conditions (see http://www.sableaviation.ca/ , https://visionairhelicopters.ca/.)

Orientation and on-island support is provided by Parks Canada and Sable Island Institute.

Financial Contribution from Sable Island Institute

The selected artist will receive a stipend of $500/week while on the island, in addition to food accommodation, and return travel from Halifax airport to Sable Island.

The selected artist will receive up to $500 for off-island production costs and up to $500 for exhibition fees and public presentation.

Artist Responsibilities/Expectations

Off-island Preparation:
It will be an advantage to participants to have

- Outdoors experience.
- Remote location experience.
- Comfort with flying in small aircraft (see relevant website, links provided above)
- Scheduling flexibility within the approximate residency timeframe:

  Fall 2026: early October through mid-November
  Spring 2027: early April through mid-May

  Transportation to and from the island is via shared aircraft, and is highly dependent on weather and operations schedules. ***Scheduled dates for the residencies will be known in mid-March 2026****. Successful applicants must be flexible for one week before and 10 days after the scheduled dates.*

Participants are responsible for:

- Providing all personal medications for the duration of the residency, including extra for an additional 10 days in case of travel delays.
- Clothing and footwear suitable for inclement weather and rough terrain.

- The cost of all travel from their home to and from Stanfield Airport, and accommodation while on the mainland - including that arising from last minute weather delays.
- All art supplies and equipment needed for the on-island work (including protective gear against sand and sea salt).
- Providing advance notice of general dietary requirements (e.g., vegetarian, non-dairy foods) and also dietary allergies.
- Providing any very specific foods/supplements required to meet dietary needs and/or allergies.
- First Aid training (recommended).
- Review of the following SINPR information pages, including links within these pages:

  Sable Island National Park Reserve - Protecting Sable Island
  Sable Island National Park Reserve - General Information
  Sable Island National Park Reserve - Safety and guidelines

  You will be required to attest to having read these guidelines in your application.

  Note: If selected, Sable Island Institute will arrange for your Permission to Visit approval, and you will not be responsible for Entry Fees

- Application to other funders if additional support is needed to complete the residency.

On-Island Responsibilities:

- Participants are expected to take all reasonable steps to protect their own safety and comfort and the safety and comfort of others.
- Participants are expected to adhere to SINPR regulations regarding interactions with terrain, wildlife, fauna and flora (Protecting Sable Island / General Info / Safety and Guidelines)
- Comply with SII's operational guidelines, including a daily safety check-in schedule.

Public Outreach and Engagement during and after the Residency

- The participant must prepare a minimum of 2 public posts/week for posting on SII's social media while on island. SII will assist and provide guidance.
- A public presentation/artist's talk or workshop within three months following the residency.
- A piece of art documented for future exhibition and inclusion in Sable Island Institute's on-line archive within 12 months. SII would seek the right to show/exhibit/display the artwork on occasion as part of the promotion of the

program or, potentially, to promote a fundraiser, for a 2-year period following the residency.

- The artist may wish to donate a piece of their work to the Institute that can be used for future fundraising. This would be voluntary.

Application Guidelines

Prior to application please thoroughly review the Parks Canada SINPR website: https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/ns/sable

Eligibility

Eligible artists must be professionally recognized as described in the *Status of Artist Act*, https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/s-19.6/ including but not limited to the following criteria:

- Have peer recognition.
- Have a history of public presentation.
- Have training appropriate to the artist's chosen discipline (including mentorship and/or apprenticeship).
- Earn income, fully or in part, from artistic activity.
- Demonstrate serious intent and devotion of energy to practicing.

2-Part Application Process

Artists are invited to engage in a **two-part** online application process where the initial **Part 1** proposal, if of interest, will lead to an invitation by SII to submit a **Part 2** application.

Applicants must visit https://sableislandinstitute.org/artist-in-residence/application/ and complete the application form. Applications must be submitted prior to the closing date and time. You must hit “Submit” on the application form after completing all fields and file uploads; you will receive confirmation that your information has been submitted.

Guidelines for completing the form are provided below:

Part 1 (Closing Date: March 17, 2026, 11:59pm)

Applications will not be accepted after the Closing Date

Please submit the following via the application form:

1. Applicant Information

   Please provide your contact information, and indicate whether you are applying for the Fall 2026 residencies (two available) or the Spring 2027 residency (one available).

2. Residency Proposal and Relevant Experience.

   Submit responses A and B in one document:

   A) Brief description of the proposed residency project (250 words max) including:
      a. Goals and Process.
      b. Expected outcome from the residency.
      c. Future public dissemination or distribution of outcomes

   Note: The statement should include reflections on how the work could expand the public perception of the Island culturally, environmentally or in other ways. It is recognized that once the artist has had direct experience on the island, the scope and focus of the concept may change.
   Note: Proposals for artistic collaborations with scientists and historians on and off the Island are welcome.

   B) Relevant experience that will aid in the applicant's successful tenure in the unique life/work conditions of Sable Island (for example outdoors/backcountry/remote location experience, self-reliance, resiliency, common living, etc) (150 words max).

3. A current CV (or list of most recent relevant projects and exhibitions) in chronological point form. It should not exceed 2 pages, OR 250 words if written as a narrative biography.

4. The following supporting material:

   Examples of your creative practice (submit those relevant to your practice):
      a. 10 images of visual art (min resolution 150dpi; max file size 500kb/image)
      b. 3 samples of literary works (maximum 1000 words per sample)
      c. Links to 3 samples/excerpts of time-based visual or performative art, approx 2min per sample (6 min total). Please provide **streaming** links (YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, etc) in a pdf document; do not include links to audio or video files that must be downloaded from a server.
         Examples of time-based work include:
            i. Music/sound/audio projects
            ii. Dance/movement-based projects
            iii. Dramatic/theatrical projects
            iv. Poetic/spoken word projects
            v. Time-based visual performance or digital art
            vi. Other

5. The following annotations for support material:

   Brief captions for examples of creative practice. Suggested formats:
   a. Visual art:
      i. Title/year/medium/dimensions
      ii. 100-word Artistic Statement if relevant for related works (optional)

   b. Time-based or performative practices:
      i. Title/year/duration of full project
      ii. 100-word narrative description of each project

Attestation and Submission:

Prior to submitting your proposal you must attest to having read through all three Sable Island National Park Reserve information links.

Please hit "Submit" when you have completed your application. You will receive an on-screen confirmation that your application has been submitted.

Part 2 (By invitation; closing date 2 weeks after the invitation.)

Please think ahead to the more detailed Part 2 submission, which, if your Part 1 application is successful, will close approximately 2 weeks after receiving an invitation to complete Part 2:

1. An indication of the materials and equipment that the applicant will want to bring to the island and the facilities that will be required (e.g., storage, bench space, wash-up facilities) in order to undertake the work.

2. Artists should elaborate on their Part 1 proposal and describe how they will carry out their artistic practice/research while on Sable Island. You can think about some of these questions: What are you interested in? How will you investigate it? How do you anticipate the environmental, historical, ecological, and/or cultural qualities you select will be integrated into your work? What do you expect to create following the residency? How do you anticipate sharing your creative process with your community following the residency? (500 words)

3. A 150-word bio and a head shot that can be used for publicity materials.

4. Two letters of recommendation or support in PDF format.

5. Any limitations in the time availability of the applicant owing to other commitments (e.g., teaching) should be noted.

Applicants chosen to submit Part 2 will receive detailed submission instructions.

Application Review

First Stage Application Review Process by SII staff and Arts Committee:

- Applications will be reviewed for completeness, eligibility, applicability, and depth and quality of engagement with the Island's natural and cultural values. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
- A selection of applicants will be invited to submit Part 2. Applicants will be notified within approximately 4 weeks of the Part 1 closing date. Applicants who are not invited to submit Part 2 are encouraged to apply to a future residency.
- Part 2 applications will be assessed by an internal committee, and finalists will move on to the Second Stage Review.

Second Stage Review Process (Peer Review):

- A committee of up to 5 people, including artists and arts administrators with knowledge of cultural sector and/or arts practice, and a representative of the Sable Island Institute, will analyze finalists' proposals for:
    - the innovation of the proposal in representing the qualities of the island through the work and communicating them to the public
    - the artistic merit of the project
    - the ability of the artist to carry out the project based on their qualifications and experience
- The review will include an assessment by Parks Canada staff to ensure compatibility with SINPR policies and mandate.
- Short-listed applicants may be asked to participate in a remote interview
- For ease of communication with SII and on-Island personnel, and aircraft operations, participants must be able to communicate effectively in English.

Artist Selection

Final artist selection will take place within 8 weeks of the Part 2 closing date.

The first ranked applicant will be invited to participate in the program. If they cannot, the second ranked applicant will be contacted, and so on.

- A registration fee of $250 will be required from the **selected artists**. This fee will be reimbursed when the residency is completed, or if the artist withdraws with at least three months notice prior to the residency start date.

- If the residency becomes open because of withdrawal, a second candidate will be invited to take up the opportunity.
- Selected artists must complete or hold a recent CRC background check (<2yrs)

For more information please contact artsresidency@sableislandinstitute.org or 902-266-4436.