



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT GUIDE



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A Land Acknowledgment is a formal statement that recognizes the unique and enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. - Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group, Ontario, Canada

Land Acknowledgements are a reminder that every major city, town, and municipality benefits from the dispossession of Indigenous land and people. It is a formal recognition of that brutal, violent, and painful reality and history. It's a tiny first step in truth, healing, and reconciliation. A land acknowledgment isn't just a statement; it's an ACTION.

Acknowledgment by itself is a small gesture. It becomes meaningful when coupled with authentic relationships and informed action. But this beginning can be an opening to greater public consciousness of Native sovereignty and cultural rights, a step toward equitable relationship and reconciliation.

## WHY WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE LAND

Land acknowledgment is a traditional custom that dates back centuries in many Native nations and communities. In 2019 at the National Education Association Representative Assembly, delegates passed New Business Item 64 which stated, "At the beginning of ALL NEA convening's, NEA will acknowledge the native people of whom the lands originated from."

Current efforts to acknowledge land are designed to:

- Offer recognition and respect
- Counter the "doctrine of discovery" with the true story of the people who were already here.
- Create a broader public awareness of the history that has led to this moment.
- Begin to repair relationships with Native communities and with the land.
- Support larger truth-telling and reconciliation efforts.
- Remind people that colonization is an ongoing process, with Native lands still occupied due to deceptive and broken treaties and practices of eminent domain and other mechanisms intended to benefit the government or corporate America.
- Inspire ongoing action and relationships.

## HOW TO ACKNOWLEDGE

### 1 STEP ONE: IDENTIFY/RESEARCH

The first step is identifying the traditional inhabitants of the lands on which you're situated. This task may be complicated by multiple and contested histories of settlement, resettlement, and recognition. Many places are now home to Native people who have called that land home from time immemorial and also to those relocated from elsewhere. The goal of acknowledgment is recognizing and uplifting, not hurting or causing further division. So it is important to proceed with care, doing good research before making statements of acknowledgment. [Native Land Digital](#) is one of the more comprehensive sites to start your research on Indigenous Lands. In many cases, it is possible to reach out to the specific tribal government of the lands you inhabit. The tribal government office, which includes the elected leadership of the tribe, is a good place to start a conversation about how and what the tribe would like acknowledged in your statement.

In addition to consulting local Native individuals and organizations, the National Congress of American Indians publication, "[Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction](#)" seeks to provide a basic overview of the history and underlying principles of tribal governance. This guide provides the information necessary for members of the public at large to understand and engage effectively with contemporary Indian Nations.

## 2 STEP TWO: ARTICULATE

Once you've identified the group or groups who should be recognized, formulate the statement of acknowledgment you'll share at the beginning of public gatherings. There is no exact script for this. Craft yours after considering several levels of detail you might introduce.

The truth is complicated. Beneath the contemporary surface of any site in the United States, there are histories that have been erased, overlooked, contested and forgotten, all ways to support ideas like "manifest destiny" which justified the conquest of Native lands.

**Use appropriate language.** Don't sugarcoat the past. Use terms like genocide, ethnic cleansing, stolen land, and forced removal to reflect actions taken by colonizers.

**Use past, present, and future tenses.** Indigenous people are still here, and they're thriving. Don't treat them as a relic of the past.

Finally, your land acknowledgment is NOT a static statement. It should be organic and change over time as your relationships and understanding of the history of colonization deepen. It is an action.

## 3 STEP THREE: DELIVER

Once you've identified whom to name and practiced your statement (**including pronunciation of names**), offer your acknowledgment. If in the process of learning about acknowledgment you've built relationships with members of Native communities, consider inviting them to give a welcome before yours. There's a danger that a practice like this becomes just another piece of protocol, delivered flatly and falling on deaf ears.

Acknowledgment should not be approached as a set of obligatory words to rush through. These words should be offered with respect, grounded in authentic reflection, presence, and awareness. Consider your own place in the story of colonization and of undoing its legacy.

Statements of acknowledgment don't have to be confined to spoken words. Some artists, scholars, activists, and others have begun to include acknowledgment in email signatures or on websites.

### Additional tips and factors to consider:

- **Don't ask an Indigenous person to deliver a "welcome" statement for your organization.**
- **Build real, authentic relationships with Indigenous people.**
- **Compensate Indigenous people for their emotional labor.** If you do plan to reach out to an Indigenous person or community for help, compensate them fairly. Too often, Indigenous people are asked to perform emotional labor for free.
- **Understand displacement and how that plays into land acknowledgment.**
- **There are many types of land acknowledgments.** Don't expect to find a specific formula or template. Land acknowledgments that come from Indigenous people vs. non-Indigenous people look different, too.

### Take action:

- **Land acknowledgment alone is not enough.** It's merely a starting point. Ask yourself: How do I plan to take action to support Indigenous communities? Some examples of ways to take action:
  - Support Indigenous organizations by donating your time and/or money.
  - Support Indigenous-led grassroots change movements and campaigns. Encourage others to do so.
  - Continue researching and educating yourself on Indigenous issues.
  - Commit to incorporating more Indigenous content by Indigenous people in our curriculum and classroom.
  - Invite elders and tribal members into your classroom to provide information about the people and lands you inhabit.
  - Commit to posting Honor Native Land posters in your school and classroom. Several options are free and formatted for print [HERE](#).
  - Commit to completing the NEA "Native Education" micro-credential stack, created in partnership with the National Indian Education Association. This micro-credential stack includes the impact of federal policy on American Indian/Alaska. <https://nea.certificationbank.com/NEA/CandidatePortal/CategoryDetail.aspx?Stack=NIEA>