



## HONOR NATIVE LAND: A GUIDE AND CALL TO ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We call on all individuals and organizations to open all public events and gatherings with acknowledgment of the traditional Native inhabitants of the land.

For more than five hundred years, Native communities across the Americas have demonstrated resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land, culture, and each other. They remain at the forefront of movements to protect Mother Earth and the life the earth sustains. Today, corporate greed and federal policy push agendas to extract wealth from the earth, degrading sacred land in blatant disregard of treaty rights. Acknowledgment is a critical public intervention, a necessary step toward honoring Native communities and enacting the much larger project of decolonization and reconciliation. We call on all artists, cultural workers, public officials, educators, administrators, community leaders, organizers, and engaged community members to open all public events and gatherings with acknowledgment of the traditional Native inhabitants of the land.

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. Join us in adopting, calling for, and spreading this practice. Naming is an exercise in power. Who gets the right to name or be named? Whose stories are honored in a name? Whose are erased? Acknowledgment of traditional land is a public statement of the name of the traditional Native inhabitants of a place. It honors their historic relationship with the land. 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

### WHY INTRODUCE THE PRACTICE OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT?

- 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 government or corporate America.
- Take a cue from Indigenous protocols, opening up spaces with reverence and respect.
- Inspire ongoing action and relationships.

### HOW TO ACKNOWLEDGE

Below are suggested steps to acknowledging traditional land at the opening of a public gathering or event. The best way to root this practice in a local context is through dialogue with local Native groups. Not yet having those relationships doesn't mean you can't begin.

#### STEP ONE: IDENTIFY

The first step is identifying the traditional inhabitants of the lands you're on. 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.

Here are some places you can look online:

- Wikipedia entries on many cities document some history of Indigenous inhabitation. Be sure to crosscheck what you find there with other sources.

- This map of Native Land is one of the more comprehensive maps available: <https://native-land.ca/>
- The Native Languages site offers breakdown by state, with contact information for local tribes: <http://www.native-languages.org/>

In addition to consulting local Native individuals and organizations, you can check to see if there are resources at local universities and colleges, especially those with American Indian/Native/Indigenous Studies centers, programs, and/or departments. If multiple tribal groups claim belonging to the land, consider not naming one particular group or naming all of them. Ideally, this decision should be made through dialogue with local Native elders and culture bearers, respecting their wishes about how they desire to be named.

## **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. At its simplest, an acknowledgment could look like this:

**"We acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the \_\_\_\_\_ People."**

Beginning with just this simple sentence would be a meaningful intervention in most U.S. gathering spaces. From there, there are many other elements to bring into acknowledgment: Often, statements specifically honor elders:

**"I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the \_\_\_\_\_ People, and pay my respect to elders both past and present."**

Some allude to the caring, reciprocal relationship with land:

**"I want to respectfully acknowledge the \_\_\_\_\_ People, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations."**

Acknowledgments may also make explicit mention of the occupied, unceded nature of the territory in which a gathering is taking place:

**"We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the occupied/unceded/seized territory of the \_\_\_\_\_ People."**

**"I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in \_\_\_\_\_, the ancestral and unceded territory of the \_\_\_\_\_ People."**

## **STEP THREE: DELIVER**

Once you've identified whom to name and practiced your statement (including pronunciation of names), offer your acknowledgment as the first element of a welcome to the next public gathering or event that you host. 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. How many times have you spaced out as the flight attendant goes through emergency procedures? Or failed to silence your cell phone even though that was requested at the beginning of a show?

Acknowledgment should be approached not as a set of obligatory words to rush through. These words should be offered with respect, grounded in authentic reflection, presence, and awareness. As you step up to offer acknowledgment, breathe in awareness of both the present and of the histories that connect you with the people you are naming. Consider your own place in the story of colonization and of undoing its legacy. At your next gathering, try acknowledgment out, see how it feels, observe how or if it shifts the room. Over time, through practice, you'll learn more about what it means and what it opens up for you and others.

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. Consider using social media to amplify your acknowledgment. For example, post an image or a story of an event where your acknowledgment was offered, tagging it #HonorNativeLand to inspire others.

Any space, three-dimensional or digital, presents an opportunity to surface buried truths and lift up Native sovereignty, priming our collective culture for deeper truth and reconciliation efforts.