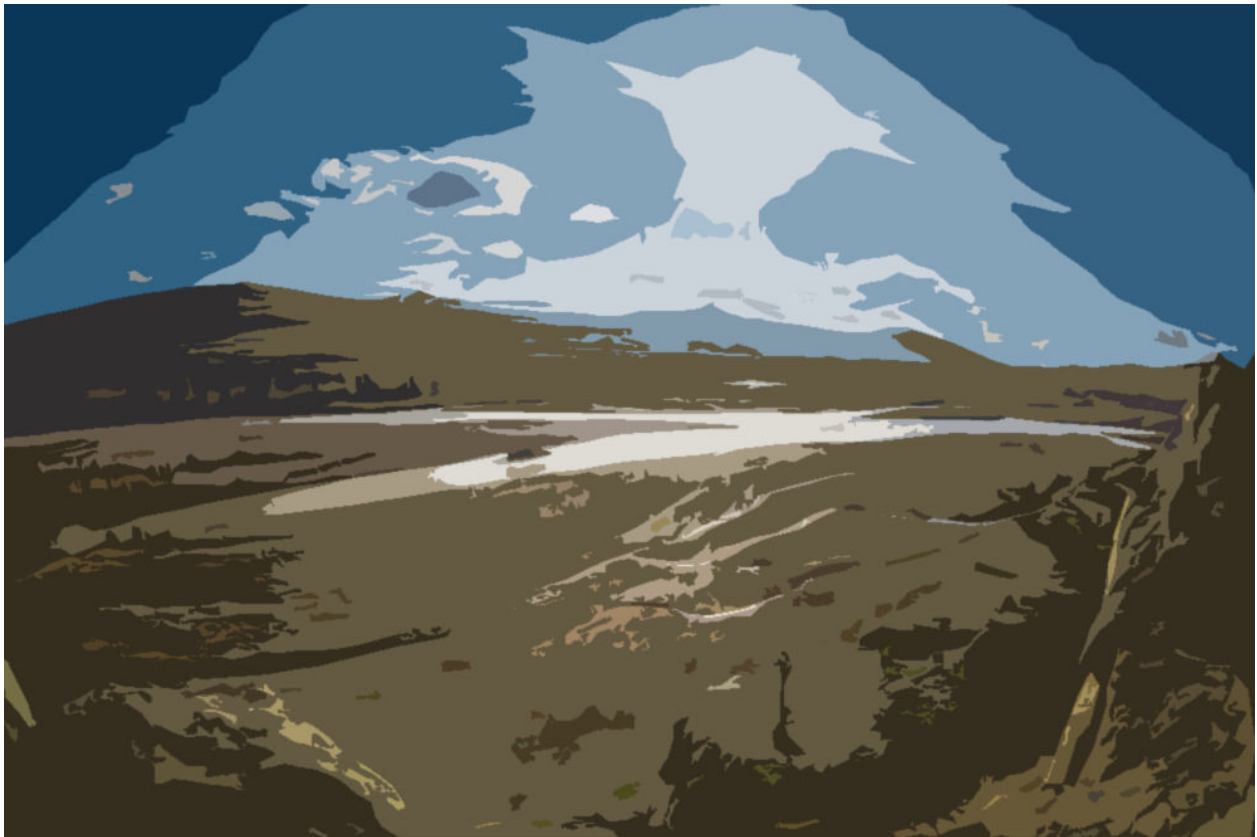


Building Indigenous Relationships

Land Acknowledgements



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
WHAT IS A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT?.....	3
THE HOW, WHEN AND WHERE OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
Meetings and Events.....	4
Virtual Meetings.....	4
Liturgical Celebrations.....	4
CREATING AN INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	5
Key Components of a Land Acknowledgement.....	5
EXAMPLES OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS.....	7
RESOURCE LIST.....	8

INTRODUCTION

We must recognize that for Indigenous Peoples, “land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values” (Pope Francis).

Land acknowledgements are a traditional practice shared among Indigenous Peoples to recognize the Indigenous land and territory they are visiting. Today, a land acknowledgement is a powerful way to recognize and honour the Indigenous Peoples who have been stewards of the land since time immemorial. It is a practice that acknowledges the traditional territory upon which an event or gathering takes place.

To create an adequate Indigenous land acknowledgement, it is essential to research and understand the specific Indigenous nations or communities that historically and presently inhabit the area. It involves identifying the traditional territories, languages and cultures of the Indigenous Peoples connected to the land. This guide provides background and information on land acknowledgements that may be helpful to councils at all levels in planning their meetings, events and celebrations, as well as for educational purposes.

WHAT IS A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT?

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. It is a small yet powerful statement.

Why Are Land Acknowledgements Necessary?

Delivering a land acknowledgement demonstrates how an individual or group identifies the traditional territories they reside upon while also showing gratitude to Indigenous Peoples. It also recognizes colonialism’s history and the need for change in modern society. In other words, these acknowledgements are a necessary part of the reconciliation process that is evolving throughout the country.

What Does the Acknowledgement Mean to Non-Indigenous Communities?

Land acknowledgement is the first step in the reconciliation process. It increases the visibility of silenced populations—creating inclusive and safe spaces—and teaches others about Indigenous land rights and local history. It certainly is not everything, but it is a necessary first step—the beginning of a learning process.

For people who want to take steps to reconciliation, the acknowledgement should prompt more questions about who the people listed in the acknowledgement are and how settlers possessed their land.

THE HOW, WHEN AND WHERE OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land acknowledgements should be created and delivered only by non-Indigenous people and given independent of the presence of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous person could be invited to do a traditional welcome for the gathering. A land acknowledgement recognizes the traditional territory and the Indigenous Peoples who have a historical connection to that land with gratitude, while a traditional welcome is a gesture of respect and hospitality to those who are visiting the territory.

Meetings and Events

Land acknowledgement statements are usually shared orally at the start of in-person and virtual meetings or events held on land that was originally inhabited by or belongs to Indigenous Peoples. They are given after an opening prayer.

Virtual Meetings

Land acknowledgements for virtual meetings can be based on the location of the meeting chairperson, or each participant can recognize the land acknowledgement from their respective locations, if feasible.

Liturgical Celebrations

Many land acknowledgements are recognized as forms of political speech. While this form has its place, it is not suitable for Catholic liturgy, where the language is uniquely focused on the praise of Almighty God. A church is a sacred space solemnly consecrated for the worship of God. Therefore, the acknowledgement must be a theological rather than a political statement. In this context, the church's theology of creation aligns with Indigenous respect for the land as a gift from the Creator—acknowledging God as the giver of this gift is itself an act of praise (Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton).

Recognizing that there are diverse approaches across Canada regarding when and where land acknowledgements are made from a liturgical perspective, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops recommends that League councils consult with the local ordinary for guidance on practices appropriate for his diocese when planning land acknowledgements for liturgical celebrations.

When it is appropriate to offer a land acknowledgement in a Catholic church or at a liturgical celebration hosted by a Catholic institution or organization such as the League, a formulation similar to that from the [Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton](#) could be used:

We acknowledge that [Treaty N. or the unceded] territory, on which we stand, is the ancestral traditional land of Indigenous Peoples and is a common home for all, in virtue of the gracious gift of God, our Creator.

CREATING AN INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

What do the terms traditional, ancestral cultural and unceded mean?

- “Traditional” refers to how land was historically used or occupied by Indigenous Peoples, while “cultural” pertains to the general customs and beliefs of a specific group of people.
- “Ancestral” recognizes that land is handed down from generation to generation
- “Unceded” recognizes the land was not turned over to the Crown by a treaty or other agreement.

Key Components of a Land Acknowledgement

The following guiding statements are modified from the Native Governance Center’s “A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment.”

Start with self-reflection. Before starting work on a land acknowledgement statement, reflect on the process:

- Why am I doing this land acknowledgement? If the hope is to inspire others to take action to support Indigenous Peoples, you’re on the right track. If your land acknowledgement is being done out of guilt or to conform with expectations, more self-reflection is in order.
- What is my end goal? What do you hope listeners will do after hearing the acknowledgement?

Do your homework. Put in the time necessary to research the following topics:

- The Indigenous people to whom the land belongs.
- The history of the land and any related treaties.
- Talk to Indigenous people from surrounding communities about the land and the territory.
- Use correct pronunciation and capitalization for the names of nations, communities and individuals. Search the Internet for guides for a specific Indigenous community or tribe, or refer to the *Walking Together With Indigenous Catholic Women* resource on the national [website](#) for links to Indigenous language dictionaries.
- What existing relationships are there with Indigenous communities?
- Names of living Indigenous people from these communities.

Use appropriate language—When preparing land acknowledgements, it is essential to recognise truth telling and to maintain language that promotes understanding and unity. Although terms such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, stolen land and forced removal may appear in some land acknowledgements, they are not required for land acknowledgements used by The Catholic Women’s League of Canada. Please refer to page seven for examples of land acknowledgements.

When referring to Indigenous Peoples, the term “Indigenous” is recommended over “Indian” or “Aboriginal.” The term “Indian” is associated with colonial history and is primarily used in legal or historical contexts. “Aboriginal,” while previously more common, has become less preferred compared to Indigenous, though it continues to appear in some legal and policy documents. The term “Indigenous” is widely recognized for its inclusivity and its reflection of self-identified connections between Indigenous Peoples, their communities and their ancestral lands.

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. Land acknowledgements shouldn’t be grim—they should function as living celebrations of Indigenous communities.

*Meaningful land acknowledgements inspire others to support
Indigenous peoples and communities.*

Ask yourself, “How am I leaving Indigenous Peoples in a stronger, more empowered place because of this land acknowledgement?” Focus on the positivity of who Indigenous People are today.

The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s](#) report and recommendations provide a concise and clear factual history and human narrative of the cultural genocide and other genocides that were and still are experienced by Indigenous communities. It is a way to recognize the history of colonialism in the very place a group is gathering.

Algonquin College offers the following guidance for delivering a land acknowledgement: “Delivering a land acknowledgement must be respectful. Go beyond simply reading a script. Share from the heart. Share what it means to you when recognizing the land we are standing on” and how you are fulfilling your responsibilities as a person occupying that land. “Advance your journey toward reconciliation.”

- When land acknowledgements are overly scripted or sound impersonal, they may seem like a formality. To make a land acknowledgement more personal, it is recommended to express a relationship and include a photograph or artwork related to the land, creation or relationship. For example, display Turtle Mountain as named by Indigenous Peoples on a screen when giving a land acknowledgement before a presentation or event.
- There are many good ways to share a land acknowledgement but do not expect to find one specific formula or template that will always work.
- Remember, delivering a land acknowledgement should always be done with clear and thoughtful intention, not just to fulfill a “checkbox” for political correctness.
- Land acknowledgements bring Indigenous voices into a historical narrative that previously erased them, and they are a first step in recognizing and honouring the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land.

A Note about Inuit Nunangat: There are specific protocols for opening a meeting among Inuit that may differ by location. It is advisable to consult with the host community regarding ceremonial practices, which may include an opening prayer, a *qudliq* ceremony (lighting of a traditional oil lamp), or opening remarks or storytelling by an Elder.

*When giving a land acknowledgement, share something with the guests or audience to
reflect on during the event or celebration.*

EXAMPLES OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS

The following examples, quoted or adapted from the references in the Resource List, illustrate how land acknowledgements can be developed for various contexts. It is recommended to review the resources to develop a land acknowledgement that aligns with the specific needs of your council and event.

Example of a basic format.

We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and ceded or unceded territory of _____ Nation(s). We recognize and deeply respect the enduring relationships that Indigenous nations have with this land, which has existed since time immemorial.

We honour the histories, languages and cultures of all First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our communities. We are committed to learning from Indigenous perspectives and supporting meaningful reconciliation.

Example of an expanded format.

We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and ceded/unceded territory of _____ Nation(s). We recognize and deeply respect the enduring relationships that Indigenous nations have with this land, which has existed since time immemorial.

As settlers of diverse ancestry and heritage, we acknowledge that we have benefited from colonialism and policies of expulsion and assimilation that have harmed Indigenous Peoples, and we recognize the ongoing impacts of these histories. We honour the resilience and leadership of Indigenous communities. With respect and gratitude, we commit to listening, learning and supporting efforts that promote justice, reconciliation and the development of meaningful relationships.

Example of a format for virtual meetings that cross regions, provinces and territories.

We celebrate and acknowledge Indigenous heritage, including the ancestral lands located today in _____ (host province or community) located on the traditional territory of the _____ Nation(s). We respectfully acknowledge that we live and work on the traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, and we honour the ancestry, heritage and gifts of Indigenous Peoples and give thanks to them.

Example of a format for opening an event in which a First Nations host or Elder has welcomed you.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Elder _____ of the _____ Nation for graciously welcoming us to the traditional ceded/unceded territories of the _____ Nation(s).

Example of an expanded format for opening an event in which a First Nations host or Elder has welcomed you.

We are privileged to be able to gather on these lands today and are grateful to Elder _____ for opening our event in a good way to guide our work today in the spirit of reconciliation and undoing ongoing colonial processes in our own lives and communities.

RESOURCE LIST

- Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology. Land Acknowledgement.
www.algonquincollege.com/tri/land-acknowledgement/.
- Athabasca University. "Indigenous Peoples Language." www.athabascau.ca, 12 Aug. 2024,
www.athabascau.ca/brand/editorial-guidelines/indigenous-peoples-language.html.
- Benduski, Martha. "Five Steps to Writing a Land Acknowledgement." *Care about Climate*, 26 Nov. 2020, www.careaboutclimate.org/blog/five-steps-to-writing-a-land-acknowledgement.
- CAEDM. "Treaty Land Acknowledgements in Churches and at Liturgical Events—CAEDM." 16 June 2021, <https://caedm.ca/2021/06/16/treaty-land-acknowledgments-in-churches-and-at-liturgical-events/>.
- Canada. "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." 12 Dec. 2024, www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525.
- Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Question of Land Acknowledgements in Prayer Services and Sacred Liturgies. Letter, 11 Mar. 2024.
- "Capitalization and Formatting of Indigenous Terms - Province of British Columbia." [Gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca), 8 May 2025, www.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/service-experience-digital-delivery/web-content-development-guides/web-style-guide/writing-guide-for-indigenous-content/capitalization-and-formatting-of-indigenous-terms
- Francis. "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home." *The Holy See*, Vatican.va, 2015,
www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
- "Land Acknowledgement Template." Climbing Escalade Canada, www.climbingcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CEC-Land-Acknowledgement-Template.pdf.
- Gwaii, Haida. "Information Booklet Territory Acknowledgements." First Nations Health Authority, www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Territory-Acknowledgements-Information-Booklet.pdf.
- Huguenin, Mitchell. "How to Do a Land Acknowledgement—Teaching & Learning—Trent University." 3 May 2021, www.trentu.ca/teaching/how-do-land-acknowledgment.
- Imagine Canada. "Land Acknowledgement." 2024, www.imaginecanada.ca/en/who-we-are/land-acknowledgment.
- Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. Guidebook to Indigenous Protocol. 2019,
<https://saskmath.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Guide-to-Indigenous-Protocol.pdf>.
- "NativeLand.ca." Native Land Digital, 2024, <https://native-land.ca/>.
- The Decolonial Atlas. "Search Results for 'Canada'—the Decolonial Atlas." 7 Oct. 2021,
www.decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/?s=canada.
- Toronto Metropolitan University. "Acknowledging the Land."
www.torontomu.ca/indigenous/resources/acknowledging-the-land/.