



# **A guide to acknowledging First Peoples and traditional land:**

## **Land acknowledgements for staff and volunteers**

Indigenous Advisory Committee

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## Overview

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Do you host meetings, or are working with volunteers and committees who host meetings? This resource is for you! The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and to answer questions for Engineers Canada staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders for conducting land acknowledgements at the beginning of meetings, public events, and conferences.

This guideline will be your hub for understanding the value of conducting land acknowledgements, as well as tips, templates, and protocols for how to do a land acknowledgement at your meetings. It will be regularly updated by the Manager, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

## Explanation of Terms

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There are a few terms and phrases we use throughout this guide that may be useful in constructing and delivering a land acknowledgement. You can read our definitions and explanations for these terms below.

**Settler society:** Canada, as we know it today, was built on the lands of many Indigenous Nations and communities to form a settler society. Settler societies are established and maintained using many different strategies and mechanisms (including, but not limited to: genocide, forced assimilation, land dispossession, and resource exploitation), but ultimately, they create a system in which the people indigenous to the land are placed in a lower social status than those who come from other lands through strategic and violent means (see Resources section). By acknowledging the stewards of this land before colonialism, you are creating an opportunity for your audience to acknowledge a more complete and truthful history.

**Colonialism:** The practice and strategy of asserting domination over a territory through force. Colonization involves the process of political control, occupation by settlers, and economic/resource exploitation. The colonial project almost always results in a settler society.

**Indigenous Peoples:** We capitalize Indigenous Peoples as a proper noun when referring to the identities of people. In the context of this Land Acknowledgement Guide, Indigenous Peoples is the collective term for Métis, Inuit, and First Nations people who are within the borders of what we call Canada. This is not to say that the experiences of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations peoples are universal or monolithic. It is, however, a useful term in naming the universal treatment of these distinct and separate groups of people under colonization.

**indigenous peoples:** indigenous peoples can also be lower case when referring to a relationship to the land. This includes lands both within and that extend beyond the borders of what we call Canada. In almost every corner of the world, there are people indigenous to that land. However, this may not be a primary identifying feature of that group, and in these cases “indigenous” is an adjective, not a proper noun.

## What is a land acknowledgement?

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The land acknowledgements we hear today are based on an old tradition or protocol carried out by Indigenous communities in Canada. It is intended as a way for guests to show their respect for and pay homage to the Métis, Inuit, or First Nation communities with which they are visiting and engaging. Land acknowledgements can also be a responsibility. They implicate the speaker in the history of the land on which they work, live, and speak.

*“It recognizes the strength and wisdom of the place that has given rise to the people who are of that land and it invokes the spirit of that place to support your good intentions.”* (S. Calvez., R. Roberts, 2020)

## Why do we do land acknowledgements?

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Land acknowledgements are a practice, but they are also part of a larger process that we are undertaking, as individuals and as an organization, towards reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The reality is that Indigenous people are underrepresented within the engineering profession and at the majority of the meetings and events we attend, so we have to be careful to not appropriate the traditional land acknowledgement practice in an empty and disconnected way. Engineers Canada supports the practices of land acknowledgements in order to:

- Raise awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life, for ourselves and meeting participants.
- Inspire reflection and motivation to improve the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
- Acknowledge our personal position within the system of colonization.
- Recognize the ongoing history of colonialism and abuse of Indigenous communities, including the detrimental impacts that the engineering profession has had on Indigenous communities through discriminatory practices and disregard for Indigenous rights, traditions and knowledge; where decision-making that directly impacts Indigenous communities has ignored the rights of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of their own land; where there has been a lack of free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous communities with regards to development projects.
- Complement self reflection and cultural competency of staff and volunteers.

Land acknowledgements are not meant to:

- threaten or alienate non-Indigenous or Indigenous people
- speak for or represent Indigenous communities
- appropriate Indigenous ideas and knowledge
- be a performance of good intentions, without commitments and actions to facilitate meaningful change (see Resource section)
- be the only action we take towards truth and reconciliation (see Resource section)

## How do we do land acknowledgements?

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The aim is to practice land acknowledgements in a meaningful way. To achieve this goal we have linked this guide to the provision of Indigenous awareness training for staff (4 Seasons of Reconciliation 2020), as well as a resource list for further learning (see Resources section).

### Who are the First Peoples of this area?

Do your research to find out if the land you are gathering on is Treaty Territory (seized through the legal system), Unceded Territory (not seized through legal processes), or part of Inuit and Métis homelands. Find the names of local First Nations communities who have lived there, and review the official formats we have provided for in-person and online meetings.

### Pronunciation

There are hundreds of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups in Canada, and many territorial names and titles that non-Indigenous people are not used to saying. Do not be afraid to ask questions and find out how to pronounce the local First Nation in your acknowledgement. If you are not sure how to pronounce a Nation's name, there are a number of ways to learn, including:

- Respectfully asking someone from that nation or from a local organization such as a Friendship Center or Indigenous Student Center.
- Check the nation's website; they may have a phonetic pronunciation on their "About" page, an audio-recording of their name, or videos that include people saying the nation's name.
- Searching a Nation's name on social media is another way of finding videos with pronunciations.
- Call the nation after hours and listen to their answering machine recording.

### Your positionality

Speaking from the heart about colonialism and your personal path on reconciliation is challenging. A first step is to speak to what you know: your own positionality, your background, your relationship (or lack thereof) with Indigenous people in Canada. It is important to note that relationships to this land and those indigenous to this land are deeply personal and dependent on a plethora of variables, such as heritage and history. For example, recent refugees to Canada might have different feelings in relation to this land than those who have descended from enslaved people. People who are indigenous to other lands may have a different relationship than those whose families have been in Canada since Confederation. By reflecting on your own position in society, you become more aware of the responsibilities and opportunities you have in reconciliation (see Actionable Items).

*"By recognizing the intimate relationship between the place and people, you are demonstrating that you understand what is important and that you are trustworthy. To do this, you must use your own voice and provide the Land Acknowledgement from your heart." (S. Calvez., R. Roberts, 2020)*

### In-person meetings

OTTAWA: "As a visitor on this land, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Omámíwininiwag (Algonquin) Anishinaabeg people. To do so recognizes Indigenous Peoples' long-standing presence in this territory. Further, this recognition and respect for Indigenous Peoples and their lands is a key step towards reconciliation. Thank you."

## Personalization

Making the land acknowledgement your own is the next step. Relate your experience and the meeting itself to the Indigenous people of the land. Here are some examples:

- “As a non-Indigenous person myself, I am committed to... [describe your commitment to actively working against colonialism, towards reconciliation].”
- “As a visitor on this land, coming from [describe your background], I strive to deepen my own understanding of the local Indigenous communities.... I commit to reframing my responsibilities to land and community.”
- “I come with respect for this land that I am on today, and for the people who have and do reside here.”
- “The reason for our meeting today is to discuss a project that involves natural resources and directly impacts Indigenous communities. We acknowledge the need for meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities.”
- “We acknowledge the contributions of [name Indigenous community] to the project/work we are involved in today.”

## Take action

It is important to follow your land acknowledgement with actionable items. If you are giving a land acknowledgement, you may have access to a platform (however small or regional it may be). Use your platform to draw attention to Indigenous initiatives and movements, Indigenous-led projects, or explain tangible ways through which you will leverage your power and voice in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. For example:

“I am compelled to advocate for justice for Indigenous Peoples, which is why I call on the corporate sector to adopt recommendation 92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.”

## Online meetings

Land acknowledgements need to be part of all gatherings, including virtual meetings. Depending on the location of your participants, you may acknowledge all Indigenous groups, or research the First Peoples of the land you are on.

Here are examples of land acknowledgements you can reference and personalize:

- “I would like to begin by acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we are on today. While we meet today on a virtual platform, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the lands, which we each call home. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home.

Please join me in a moment of reflection to acknowledge the effect of residential schools and colonialism on Indigenous families and communities and to consider how we are and can each, in our own way, try to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.”

- “Feminuity was founded on land that is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and is home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

As a remote team, we encourage our team members, clients, and partners to reflect on colonialism’s enduring legacy and engage in reconciliation meaningfully. We encourage everyone to visit Whose Land and access the Indigenous Ally Toolkit by Dakota Swiftwolfe.”

## Written form

**Email signatures** can include a land acknowledgement. Here is an example:

- “The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs, and research stations are primarily located on the traditional territory of Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, and Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe nations; lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and homeland of the Métis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems, and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations.”

**Websites** can include land acknowledgements in the ‘Contact Us’ page:

- “The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) acknowledges it is located on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.”

Other ways to acknowledge the First Peoples of the land you are located on include publications, reports, and any other formal documents. Consider the physical space that you occupy, whether an office or facility, and explore ways you can ensure all visitors to your workplace are able to identify what traditional territory and land you are located on. For example, place a written land acknowledgement on a plaque in your lobby or common area.

## Important considerations

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Know your audience: are there Indigenous people attending and participating in your meeting? They may have a perspective on the best way to acknowledge the territory, so consult with them. Doing a land acknowledgment at the beginning of a meeting does not mean we are done! The work that non-Indigenous organizations and individuals need to do towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a long-term journey, specific to each individual, and is constantly evolving for our organization.

## Additional Resources

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### Land Acknowledgements

Teaching and Learning

S. Calvez, R. Roberts, University of Saskatchewan

2020

[https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous\\_voices/land-acknowledgements/module.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous_voices/land-acknowledgements/module.php)

### Land acknowledgement

Baroness von Sketch Show

October 14, 2019

<https://youtu.be/xlG17C19nYo>

### Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory

Canadian Association of University Teachers

<https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>

### Are you planning to do a Land Acknowledgement?

Debbie Reese for American Indians in Children's Literature

March 9, 2019

<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2019/03/are-you-planning-to-do-land.html>

### 'I regret it': Hayden King on writing Ryerson University's territorial acknowledgement

Unreserved, CBC

January 20, 2019

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/redrawing-the-lines-1.4973363/i-regret-it-hayden-king-on-writing-ryerson-university-s-territorial-acknowledgement-1.4973371>

### How an acknowledgement of 'unceded Algonquin territory' became ubiquitous

Ottawa Citizen

January 9, 2019

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/how-an-acknowledgment-of-unceded-algonquin-territory-became-ubiquitous/>

### Territory Acknowledgement Panel Talk

Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, University of British Columbia

October 18, 2016

<https://youtu.be/lzqe2fh4Zdc>

### Making Coast Salish Territorial Acknowledgements Matter

Coast Salish Cultural Network

November 25, 2016

<https://youtu.be/-Tei5tGoQ4s>

### Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements

Chelsea Vowel

September 23, 2016

<http://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>



## **What is the significance of acknowledging the Indigenous land we stand on?**

Ramna Shahzad, CBC

July 15, 2017

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/territorial-acknowledgements-indigenous-1.4175136>

## **Know the Land: Territories Campaign**

Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group (LSPiRG)

<http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland/>

## **Gabriel Dumont Institute- Métis Culture**

<https://gdins.org/metis-culture/>

## **4 Seasons of Reconciliation Education**

<https://www.reconciliationeducation.ca/>

## **A Guide to Pronunciation of B.C. First Nations**

Government of British Columbia

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/a\\_guide\\_to\\_pronunciation\\_of\\_bc\\_first\\_nations\\_-\\_oct\\_29\\_2018.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/a_guide_to_pronunciation_of_bc_first_nations_-_oct_29_2018.pdf)

## **Indigenous Corporate Training INC.**

<https://www.ictinc.ca/free-ebooks>

## **Who is a Settler, According to Indigenous and Black Scholars**

Ashleigh-Rae Thomas, Vice

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/gyajj4/who-is-a-settler-according-to-indigenous-and-black-scholars>

## **Turtle Island**

Amanda Robinson, The Canadian Encyclopedia

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>

## **Settler Colonialism**

Global Social Theory

<https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/settler-colonialism/>