

Land Acknowledgment Guide

Law Society of Alberta

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Background

Purpose

This document is designed to provide you with an overview of the things you may consider and include when writing a land acknowledgment. The document is written with an audience of non-Indigenous people in mind. It is not intended to provide you with the “answer” or a perfect acknowledgment, but to guide you in making a personalized acknowledgment. Ultimately, the meaningfulness and value of your land acknowledgment will be determined by each individual. Acknowledging the traditional territories belonging to the Indigenous Peoples in the region, territory or province in which your institution, office, courthouse or event is located can be a small step towards meaningful reconciliation.

The purpose of doing a land acknowledgment is to further reconciliation and acknowledge that as a non-Indigenous person, you are considered a guest upon many Indigenous Peoples’ traditional lands. Land acknowledgments are traditional protocol used to give thanks and to pay respect to the peoples and the land for which you are a visitor upon. Land acknowledgments are one of many protocols followed by Indigenous Peoples. Protocols are the ways of interacting with Indigenous people in a manner which respects their traditional ways of being. Protocols go beyond simply manners or rules, as they represent a culture’s deeply held ethical system.¹

“Spanning generations, acknowledgement of the land is a traditional custom of Indigenous peoples when welcoming outsiders onto their land and into their homes. To build respectful relationships, acknowledging the land is an important part of reconciliation. It honours the authentic history of North America, its original people and tells the story of the creation of this country that has historically been missing.”

– The Calgary Foundation

The most meaningful land acknowledgments recognize that the acknowledgment itself is just the first of many steps towards reconciliation. Land acknowledgments are an element of building relationships, mutual recognition and respect with Indigenous Peoples.

Origins of Land Acknowledgments

Land acknowledgments have been used traditionally by many Indigenous groups since time immemorial. Traditional land acknowledgments are cultural and political tools used by sovereign Indigenous Nations to manage relations respectfully and peacefully with neighbouring sovereign Nations. Traditionally, they were used to give thanks and pay respects to the land of the people guests are visiting. There is no single or uniform traditional land acknowledgment. They vary Nation-to-Nation but imply responsibilities on both guest and host. Often, guests carefully consider their reasons to enter the territory of host, seek permission, and give gifts. Hosting comes with responsibilities that may include gifting, making speeches and feasting. Regardless of specific protocol, acknowledging another Nation’s territory is a way to honour hosts, show respect and foster good relationships.

¹ University of Alberta Library Subject Guides, “Indigenous Research – [“Indigenous Protocols”](#)”

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [Final Report](#) and [94 Calls to Action](#), land acknowledgments in non-Indigenous spaces delivered by non-Indigenous peoples became important gestures of reconciliation, to acknowledge that Indigenous sovereignty has existed in Canada since time immemorial.²

Planning Your Land Acknowledgment

Determine Who to Acknowledge

The Indigenous Peoples you acknowledge will vary depending on where you are located and the context for which you make your acknowledgment. Your acknowledgment should be specific to the region in which your event is taking place. The level of specificity you choose will vary depending on context. The preferred approach is to be as inclusive as possible. For example, if you are on Treaty 7 Territory, be sure to acknowledge all Nations and Indigenous communities that make Treaty 7 home and have lived on Treaty 7 since time immemorial. However, if your event is on Treaty 7 Territory but is virtually accessible to everyone in the province, it is good practice to acknowledge that.

Appendix C contains a series of links to maps and other resources describing the location of First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples, along with approximate treaty boundaries. In Alberta, the Alberta Teachers Association developed a [Treaty Map](#) of Alberta that you can use to determine which Numbered Treaty and Métis Nation of Alberta Region covers the city or town where you are gathering. Ensure to review the pronunciation guide in Appendix E for Indigenous Peoples in Alberta. If you are creating a land acknowledgment for other territories outside of Alberta, do not be afraid to ask for guidance on pronunciation.

What Role Do International Borders Play?

The border between Canada and the United States along the 49th Parallel is a relatively recent development. In Alberta, the Nations comprising the Blackfoot Confederacy were separated by the border. The Blackfoot Confederacy is comprised of the Piikani, Siksika and Kainai Nations in Southern Alberta and the Aamskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet Nation) in northern Montana. If you are conducting a land acknowledgment in Southern Alberta, you may see fit to include the Blackfeet Nation based on their pre-border territory. Including American Tribes that border the 49th Parallel or otherwise have historic territory in what is now Canada is logically consistent with the ruling of [R v Desautel, 2021 SCC 17](#). That ruling held that American Indigenous people who are descendants of or members of successor groups of Canadian Indigenous Peoples are entitled to the protections of Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. In other words, American Indigenous Peoples whose traditional territories include areas of Canada are considered "Aboriginal Peoples of Canada."

A Discussion on Language

Just as your word choice when writing briefs, memos and arguments is critical, so too is your word choice when writing your land acknowledgment. Using certain language can negate the

² The Advocates' Society, The Indigenous Bar Association & The Law Society of Ontario, "[Guide for Lawyers Working with Indigenous Peoples – 1st Supplement](#)" (2022) at 8.

message and intent of your land acknowledgment. Avoid that risk by carefully considering your word choice. The following are some things to consider.

- **Pronunciation.** If you are going to use Indigenous language in your acknowledgment, it is important to learn how to pronounce Indigenous names and words correctly.

“I’d like to acknowledge what happens when you stumble over our nations, our names — when Indigenous language falls carelessly out of the mouth, shatters upon the ground — is heard as a certain kind of acknowledgment too.”

- Dylan Robinson³

If you need help with pronunciation, you have options:

- Call the Nation after hours and listen to the answering machine.
 - Call the Nation during hours and find out if they can suggest someone you can **employ** as a language coach for yourself or your institution.
 - Visit the Nation’s museum or information centre (if applicable).
 - Find your local Aboriginal Friendship Centre.
 - See Appendix E for a pronunciation guide for First Nations in Alberta.
 - Remember that you’re human and mistakes may happen. If you are struggling with pronunciation, you can acknowledge this in your land acknowledgment and try your best.
 - Invite community members to correct any mispronunciations after the presentation/event, then heed this information for your next land acknowledgment.
- **Active Voice.** Indigenous Peoples are active members of the community, therefore, use active voice and present tense when referring to them.
 - **Tone.** Land acknowledgments are not eulogies; they should look to the future with both eyes towards developing and fostering mutually respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples.
 - **Possessive Voice.** Avoid using possessive voice, instead name the Nations you are acknowledging.
 - **Custodians.** Consider the meanings of “custodian” and “steward.” Land acknowledgments often refer to Indigenous Peoples as the original custodians/stewards of the land, as if to suggest that they were simply temporary caretakers of the land. Consider avoiding these terms in your acknowledgment. Consider using “original inhabitants,” or “original Peoples” of this land.
 - **Unceded territory and treaties.** You may have heard some land acknowledgments that refer to ‘unceded’ territories. These acknowledgments are highlighting the fact that the Indigenous inhabitants of the land never entered a land cessation treaty with the Government of Canada or its predecessors. When you hear a land acknowledgment

³ “Rethinking the Practice and Performance of Indigenous Land Acknowledgment” as quoted in The Advocates’ Society et al “1st Supplement”, *supra* note 4 at 16.

highlighting a treaty (be it a numbered treaty or one of the other historic treaties, like the Peace and Friendship Treaties), you might assume that the land is ceded.

Many of the early treaties had nothing to do with land cessation and were concerned with forming military alliances or ensuring Indigenous neutrality in the various European wars that spilled into North America. The goal of other treaties was, from the British perspective, explicitly for the relevant Indigenous nations to cede their rights and ownership of the land to the British Crown. However, in many cases, that goal was only understood by the British.

Often, the Indigenous signatories to cessation treaties had a very different conception of land ownership to that of the Europeans. In other cases, the translators present for the negotiations did not speak the language(s) or dialect(s) of the signatories. Even if the Indigenous signatories understood the consequences and rights and responsibilities of the treaties they entered, few, if any treaties were adhered to by the Crown. Therefore, the fact that a treaty covers a given area does not necessarily imply that that land is 'ceded.' This can be a complicated aspect of land acknowledgments and it will not be necessary to address this issue in each acknowledgment, but you should do some research on whether the territory is subject to a treaty for the purpose of your acknowledgment, and if not, you should note that it is unceded territory and the names of the Nations who traditionally resided on that territory.

Write Your Land Acknowledgment

You can use the sample land acknowledgments included in Appendix A as a starting point, but you are strongly encouraged to personalize your land acknowledgment in some way.

You may want to explore your connection to the land. Consider what your personal experience with the land is but also consider your family history and connection to the land. For instance:

- What does it mean to you to live, work and play on this land?
- Have you started a family here?
- Do you use the lands for vacations?
- Do you know the traditional names of the places you visit?

Consider what you and the audience of the event can do to further reconciliation and build meaningful, mutual relationships with Indigenous Peoples. You could consider including a [Call to Action](#). For example:

- Is an Indigenous person or people doing important work in the community you can highlight? For example, an Elder or Knowledge Keeper who has had a particular impact on you.
- Are there any Indigenous artists or authors, non-profit organizations, or events in your area that you support and want to highlight?

For reconciliation to be meaningful, land acknowledgments should be the first step in an ongoing process of reconciliation. As you create your acknowledgment, consider what else you might do to contribute to reconciliation. What actions are you taking toward reconciliation? You could include some discussion of this in your acknowledgment to demonstrate your commitment to reconciliation beyond the acknowledgment. This tends to strengthen the acknowledgment as

actions speak louder than words. Ongoing steps may include but are not limited to furthering your education about Indigenous history and issues, donating to Indigenous non-profits, engaging in positive action or supporting Indigenous-owned businesses.

There is no requirement to include all or any of the above ideas. They are meant as suggestions and brainstorming aids. At the end of the day, the acknowledgment you deliver will be your acknowledgment, so use your discretion to determine what to include. The thoughtfulness and creativity you bring to your work will help you write a meaningful land acknowledgment.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find further help or guidance?

If you need help with your acknowledgment there are many resources available. Consider the resources linked in the Appendices to this guide. They provide a great deal of information and themselves contain significant additional resources that can help inform your acknowledgment. Search the websites of local First Nations. The websites often have pronunciation guides and historical information. Some First Nations have museums and information centres where you can learn about the Nation and its history.

You can also seek to build authentic relationships with Indigenous people. If the person or people you approach are willing to help, be open to their critique, and thank them for their time.

Why can't you just give me a script?

The simple answer to this question is that land acknowledgments are geographically dependent. If your meeting is in Edmonton, your script will not be the same as someone meeting in Medicine Hat. Some examples of land acknowledgments will be provided. They are not intended to be used as scripts, but as starting points from which you can develop your personal acknowledgment.

If your institution requires that a specific land acknowledgment be used, use it. There is nothing inherently wrong with using or reading from a script. However, be thoughtful as scripts risk becoming sterile announcements lacking in meaning. Well received land acknowledgments are personal; they take effort. The speaker shares their connection with the land and what it means to them to be in this place.

What value does a land acknowledgment provide? To whom?

As noted above, a land acknowledgment should be the first step towards reconciliation. The value they provide depends on the effort and intent the speaker puts into it. The best land acknowledgments include calls to action that seek to motivate their audiences. These calls to action can be anything from encouraging the audience to donate to an Indigenous organization or non-profit, support an Indigenous-owned business or further the audience's education of Indigenous history.

Land acknowledgments can remind the speaker and audience of the contributions Indigenous people have made and continue to make.

This is hard and uncomfortable; can I avoid making it personal?

We recognize that delivering a land acknowledgment is not easy. As part of the process, you will learn about the Indigenous Peoples you want to acknowledge. That learning process may raise uncomfortable truths.

Using personal language indicates your investment and responsibility for the acknowledgment and the reconciliation work that should follow an acknowledgment.

What if I make a mistake?

As noted above, a land acknowledgment should be the first step towards reconciliation. Try to approach the process of developing your land acknowledgment as part of a learning process that requires humility, openness, vulnerability and self-reflection. Just as you make mistakes learning anything else, you may make mistakes in your land acknowledgment. Be open to feedback and critique. Recognize when you have made a mistake and learn from it. Remember, land acknowledgments aim to foster a mutual relationship with Indigenous Peoples. They are as much about you as they are about Indigenous Peoples.

Who should share the land acknowledgment?

Where possible, it is a best practice to have the highest ranking, non-Indigenous person of the organization share the land acknowledgment in order to show strong support from leadership. However, there are cases where it is appropriate for others to share the acknowledgment, particularly at internal events and as learning opportunities. It is not appropriate to ask an Indigenous person to share the land acknowledgment, as that would be counter-intuitive to the purpose behind the practice and tokenizing.

Attachments

Appendix A: Sample Land Acknowledgments

Treaty 6

Basic Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and taken care of them since time immemorial. We are on Treaty 6 Territory, as well as, the historical regional homeland of the Métis, which includes the North Saskatchewan River Territory, the Lesser Slave Lake Territory, and the Lower Athabasca Territory. We acknowledge and respect the histories, languages, and diverse cultures of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit and are grateful for their contributions that continue to enrich our communities.

Extended Land Acknowledgment

We are grateful to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting. Treaty 6 was entered into in 1876. For almost 150 years, we have been living, working, and growing on this land that is the ancestral and traditional territory of the Cree, the Nakoda Sioux, the Dene, the Saulteaux, as well as the Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We acknowledge this land is also within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland which includes the North Saskatchewan River Territory, the Lesser Slave Lake Territory, and the Lower Athabasca Territory. We acknowledge the Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders, both past and present, and are grateful for their contributions that helped keep this land beautiful. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation.

Treaty 7

Basic Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and taken care of them since time immemorial. We are on Treaty 7 Territory, as well as, the historical regional homeland of the Métis, which includes the Battle River Territory. We acknowledge and respect the histories, languages, and diverse cultures of the First Nations, Métis, and all First Peoples that have taken care of this land. We are grateful for their contributions that continue to enrich our communities.

Extended Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and taken care of them since time immemorial. (Name/Organization) is situated on Treaty 7 Territory – the traditional and ancestral territory of Siksikaitsitapi – the Blackfoot Confederacy, which includes the Kainai Nation, Piikani Nation, Amskapi Piikani, and the Siksika Nation. Treaty 7 is also home to the Tsuut'ina Nation, the Stoney Nakoda, and is within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland known as the Battle River Territory. We acknowledge and give gratitude to the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We acknowledge the Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders, both

past and present, and are grateful for their contributions that helped keep this land beautiful. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation.

Treaty 8

Basic Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and taken care of them since time immemorial. We are on Treaty 8 Territory, as well as, the historical regional homeland of the Métis, which includes the Peace River Territory, the Lesser Slave Lake Territory, and the Lower Athabasca Territory. We acknowledge and respect the histories, languages, and diverse cultures of the First Nations, Métis, and all First Peoples that have taken care of this land. We are grateful for their contributions that continue to enrich our communities.

Extended Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and taken care of them since time immemorial. We are on Treaty 8 Territory, which has been in existence for over 120 years and includes over 41 First Nations which span across Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. It is also the historical Northwest Métis Homeland, namely, the Peace River Territory, the Lesser Slave Lake Territory, and the Lower Athabasca Territory. We acknowledge and give gratitude to the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We acknowledge the Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders, both past and present, and are grateful for their contributions that helped keep this land beautiful. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation.

Alberta Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the traditional lands and territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on these lands and have taken care of them since time immemorial. What became known as the Province of Alberta in 1905, is also the traditional and ancestral home to many Indigenous Peoples and for that we are honoured to have shared this land with them since Treaties 6, 7, and 8 were entered into. Alberta is also the historical Northwest Métis Homeland – which includes five Territories. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

Appendix B: General Information Regarding Land Acknowledgments

The Advocates' Society, The Indigenous Bar Association & The Law Society of Ontario, "[*Guide for Lawyers Working with Indigenous Peoples – 1st Supplement*](#)" (2022)

- Chapter 1: Land Acknowledgments will be of primary concern for those writing a land acknowledgment, but all of the content is useful for all lawyers.
- The many resources cited in Chapter 1 provides many useful resources and perspectives on land acknowledgments, their value and ability to further reconciliation.

Canadian Association of University Teachers, "[*Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territories*](#)"

- This resource provides examples of land acknowledgments used by higher education institutions nation-wide.

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education, "[*Starting from the Heart: Going Beyond a Land Acknowledgment*](#)" (2019)

National Association of Friendship Centres, "[*Find a Friendship Centre Interactive Map*](#)" (2021)

- Friendship Centres are civil society community hubs that provide culturally appropriate services for Indigenous People living in urban centres

University of Saskatchewan Teaching and Learning, "[*Land Acknowledgements: A reflection 5 years after the TRC Report*](#)" (2020)

Appendix C: National, Provincial and Territorial Maps

These resources include national, provincial and regional maps that show the approximate boundaries of treaties (if applicable) and the locations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis settlements. You can refer to these maps when determining which groups to acknowledge. Maps of other provinces are included for those traveling out of Alberta for their event or meeting.

You can also refer to the [Whose Land](#) website for updated information on the Treaty and closest Community that you are located on. Choose “Territories by City” then find your location. Click on the marker and see whose traditional land you are on.

Canada

Government of Canada, “[Maps of Treaty-Making in Canada](#)”

Government of Canada, “[Modern Treaties](#)”

Alberta

Government of Canada, “[Map of First Nations in Alberta](#)”

Alberta Teachers’ Association, “[Acknowledging Land and People Treaty Map](#)” (2019)

Otipemisiwak Métis Government, “[Districts](#)”

- The five Territories of the Métis Nation within Alberta were subdivided into Districts in 2023 to allow for more effective and localized representation

British Columbia

Government of Canada, “[Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia](#)”

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Office of the Treaty Commissioner, “[Treaty Boundaries, Location of First Nations, and Treaty Sites in Saskatchewan](#)”

Manitoba

Government of Canada, “[First Nations and Treaty Areas in Manitoba](#)”

Ontario

Government of Ontario, “[Map of Ontario treaties and reserves](#)”

Quebec

Government of Canada, “[Indigenous communities in Quebec](#)”

Atlantic Canada Historic Treaties Map

Government of Canada, “[Maps of Indigenous peoples in Atlantic region](#)”

Yukon

Government of Canada, “[First Nations in Yukon Region](#)”

Northwest Territories

Government of Canada, “[Maps of Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories region](#)”

Inuit Nunangat (Inuit Homeland)

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “[Inuit Nunangat Map](#)”

- Inuit Nunangat includes parts of Nunavut, Northern Quebec, Northern Labrador and the Northwest Territories

Appendix D: Alberta First Nations and Métis Nation Contact Information

Treaty 6

[Alexander First Nation](#)

[Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation](#)

[Beaver Lake Cree Nation](#)

[Cold Lake First Nations](#)

[Enoch Cree Nation](#)

[Ermineskin Cree Nation](#)

[Frog Lake First Nation](#)

[Heart Lake First Nation](#)

[Kehewin First Nation](#)

[Louis Bull Tribe](#)

[Michel First Nation](#)

[Montana First Nation](#)

[O'Chiese First Nation](#)

[Onion Lake Cree Nation](#)

[Papaschase First Nation](#)

[Paul First Nation](#)

[Saddle Lake Cree Nation](#)

[Samson Cree First Nation](#)

[Sunchild First Nation](#)

[Whitefish Lake First Nation \(Goodfish\)](#)

Treaty 7

[Kainai Nation \(Blood Tribe\)](#)

[Piikani Nation](#)

[Siksika Nation](#)

[Stoney Nakoda Nations \(including
Bears paw First Nation, Chiniki First Nation,
Wesley and
Goodstoney First Nation\)](#)

[Tsuu T'ina Nation](#)

Treaty 8

[Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation](#)

[Beaver First Nation](#)

[Bigstone Cree Nation](#)

[Chipewyan Prairie First Nation](#)

[Dene Tha' First Nation](#)

[Driftpile First Nation](#)

[Duncan's First Nation](#)

[Fort McKay First Nation](#)

[Fort McMurray First Nation](#)

[Horse Lake First Nation](#)

[Kapawe'no First Nation](#)

[Little Red River Cree Nation](#)

[Loon River First Nation](#)

[Lubicon Lake Nation](#)

[Mikisew Cree Nation](#)

[Peerless Trout Lake First Nation](#)

[Sawridge First Nation](#)

[Smith's Landing First Nation](#)

[Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation](#)

[Sucker Creek First Nation](#)

[Swan River First Nation](#)

[Tallcree First Nation](#)

[Whitefish Lake First Nation \(Atikameg\)](#)

[Woodland Cree First Nation](#)

Métis Nations of Alberta (MNA)

[Métis Nation of Alberta](#)

Appendix E: Alberta Pronunciation Guide

Treaty 6

Dene is pronounced “Den-nay”

Saulteaux is pronounced “So-toh”

Nakoda Sioux is pronounced “Na-ko-ta Soo”

Treaty 7

Kainai is pronounced “Gah-nah”

Piikani is pronounced “Beh-gun-ee”

Siksika is pronounced “Sik-sik-ah”

Tsuut’ina is pronounced “Soo-tin-ah”

Métis is pronounced “May-tee”

Treaty 8

Dene is pronounced “Den-nay”

Alberta

Kainai is pronounced “Gigh-nigh”

Piikani is pronounced “Be-gun-nee”

Siksika is pronounced “Sik-sik-ah”

Dene is pronounced “Den-nay”

Sauteaux is pronounced “So-toh”

Nakota Sioux is pronounced “Na-ko-ta Soo”

Tsuu T’ina is pronounced “Soo-tin-ah”