

Honoring Native Land: A Guide to Indigenous Land & Territory Acknowledgment Statements



Maddie's Fund

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This presentation was written from a non-indigenous perspective

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All Land is Indigenous Land

When getting involved, one should ask themselves:

Does my interest stem from the fact that the issue will meet quotas or increase chances of any funding?

Does my involvement hijack the message and insert my own opinions or values instead of respecting those of the Indigenous communities?

Does my interest derive from the fact that the issue is currently “buzzing”?



Important Background Information

Important Terminology

Indigenous

- People with pre-existing sovereignty who were living together as a community prior to contact with settler populations
- The most inclusive term
- There are Indigenous peoples on every continent throughout the world

Indigenous Peoples

- A group of Indigenous peoples with a shared national identity (e.g., “Navajo” or “Sami”)
- Equivalent of saying “the American people”

Native American & American Indian

- Terms used to refer to peoples living within what is now the United States
- American Indian has a specific legal context

(UCLA Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, 2020)



Racial & Ethnic Identity

Race:

- Physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant
 - Aboriginal, African American or Black, Asian, European American or White, Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Ethnicity:

- Shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs
 - Latino or another ethnicity



“Indigenous Peoples are the experts of their own realities and histories.”

FACTS

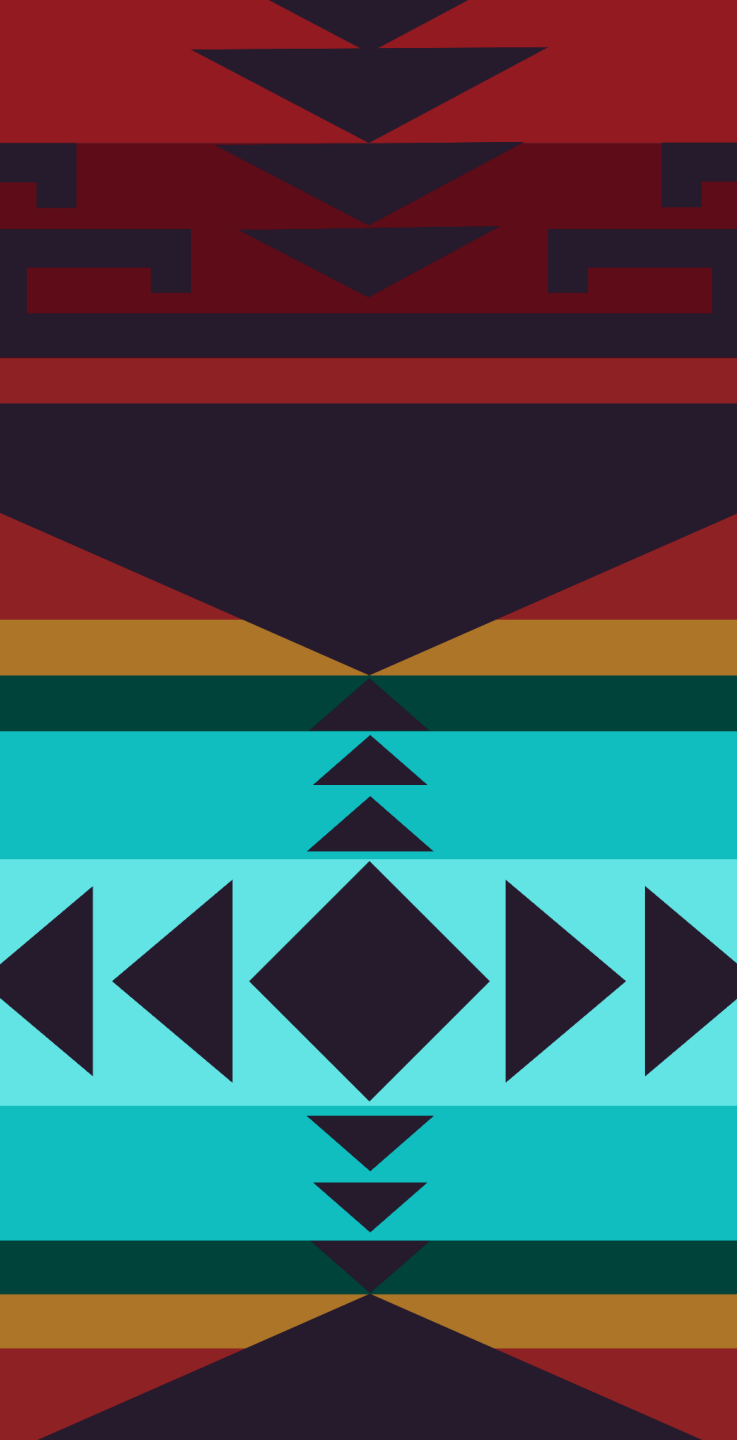
- August 9th = International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
- In May 2016, 567 tribal entities were federally recognized
- The number of Indigenous people in the U.S. between 2.5 and 6 million
- The *state* with the largest Native population = California
- The *place* with the largest Native population = New York City



What is a Land Acknowledgment Statement (LAS)?

What is a LAS?

- It is a statement that recognizes the Indigenous peoples dispossessed from the homelands and territories upon which an institution was built and currently occupies and operates in.
- A land acknowledgment statement is optional
- An Indigenous Land or Territorial Acknowledgment can be unfamiliar, but it is a standard protocol within Indigenous communities within the United States.
 - It is a standard practice in Australia and Canada



Why is a Land Acknowledgment Statement (LAS) Important?

Why is a LAS Important?



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- The teaching of U.S. history has left out many voices & difficult truths to create an idealized nationalistic identity.
- While many Indigenous nations have treaties with the United States government that designate land ownership, most only have rights to occupy.
- The settler colonial states continue to struggle to recognize inherent indigenous sovereignty and respect for homelands.

(Garcia, 2018)

Why is a LAS Important? Continued

- A simple, powerful way of showing respect
- Step toward correcting the stories and practices
- Acknowledgment is a critical public intervention, a necessary step toward honoring Native communities (U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, n.d.)
- Central to cultural identity & worldview
 - Standing Rock, Dakota Access Pipeline, & the shrinking of the Bears Ears National Monument (Garcia, 2018)

Why is a LAS Important? Continued

“When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It’s a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they’re around us. As you all do” – Mary Lyons (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

“It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation” – Northwestern University


A decorative vertical band on the left side of the slide featuring a complex geometric pattern. The pattern consists of various shapes including triangles, diamonds, and zig-zags in a color palette of dark red, maroon, dark purple, teal, and light blue. The design is symmetrical and layered, creating a rich, textured appearance.

Steps/Tips for Writing Land Acknowledgment Statements

- **Step 1:** What's the Purpose?
- **Step 2:** Ground Your Mindset in Honesty, Positivity, & Respect
- **Step 3:** Research
- **Step 4:** Focus on Past, Present, & Future
 - Templates
- **Step 5:** Check Your Statement

Step 1

Start with self-reflection and consider the purpose:



Evaluate
the
Purpose

- Why am I doing this and acknowledgement?
- What is my end goal?
- When will I have the largest impact?
- Who is the intended audience?

Evaluate the Purpose Continued

- Land acknowledgments should elevate and empower by highlighting their presence in your local history & vocalizing their current land rights
- It should acknowledge the complexity of colonialism, identity, and the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their homes and history.
- When writing an acknowledgment, make sure it is genuine, honest, and most of all, **EMPOWERING**

Be aware that acknowledgments can be misused. [Listen](#) to this short interview to hear about someone who wishes he could re-write his university's land acknowledgment and the advice he gives to others.

Step 2

Ground Your Mindset in Honesty, Positivity, & Respect

How do you make sure that your land acknowledgment empowers Indigenous peoples?

- **Honesty** in a land acknowledgment means talking with and writing the truth.
- **Positivity** means looking forward and focusing on how to empower Indigenous peoples today.
- Write a land acknowledgment that **respects** others and their beliefs.



Do Your Research

Step 3

In order to write a land acknowledgment:

- Establish how far in the past you would like to acknowledge
- Does acknowledging the land rights of an indigenous civilization that was here 700 years ago make sense to your statement? How about 200 years ago?
- Learning the context and history of different Indigenous civilizations can help you determine how far in the past you want to acknowledge

Do Your Research Continued

Learn about active Indigenous peoples currently in your area

- Who has current rights to your land?

Research any treaties & policies that affect indigenous rights in your area, active and inactive

- Some areas have active treaties with Indigenous populations
- These treaties have likely been fulfilled by the original signers and silenced within a historical context
- These can also give you ideas on how to empower current groups in your area

(Benduski, 2020)

Focus on Past, Present, & Future

Step 4

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- | | |
|------|--|
| Past | Start with the past and acknowledge those who have come before and the hardship they may have faced |
|------|--|
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- | | |
|---------|--|
| Present | Then, write about the present : who still have claim to this land |
|---------|--|
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- | | |
|--------|--|
| Future | Lastly, include an action that you can do in the future to continue to empower Indigenous peoples |
|--------|--|
-

Focus on Past, Present, & Future Continued

Consider whether you are in a privileged space.

The more privileged space, the more capacity you can empower the Indigenous peoples whose land you stand on.


Templates

Acknowledgments:

- Today I would like to acknowledge the following people whose land we are on today _____. I would like to acknowledge their ancestors _____ who lived in _____ areas and were _____ (ex: removed from here).
- I live on the traditional lands of _____. (Sentence describing why they no longer live here i.e. were removed by colonialism). _____ have rights to these lands even today. _____ sits on the original homelands of _____.

Add an **Action** to Empower:

- Today we commit to _____ to support _____.
- I plan to support _____ initiative to aid the current generation of _____.
- As someone on this land, I am obliged to _____.



What land are you on?

- Text your city or zip code to +1(907)312-5085
- [Native Land Digital](#) is an app to help map Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages (a Canadian non-profit)
- Pronunciation [Guide](#)

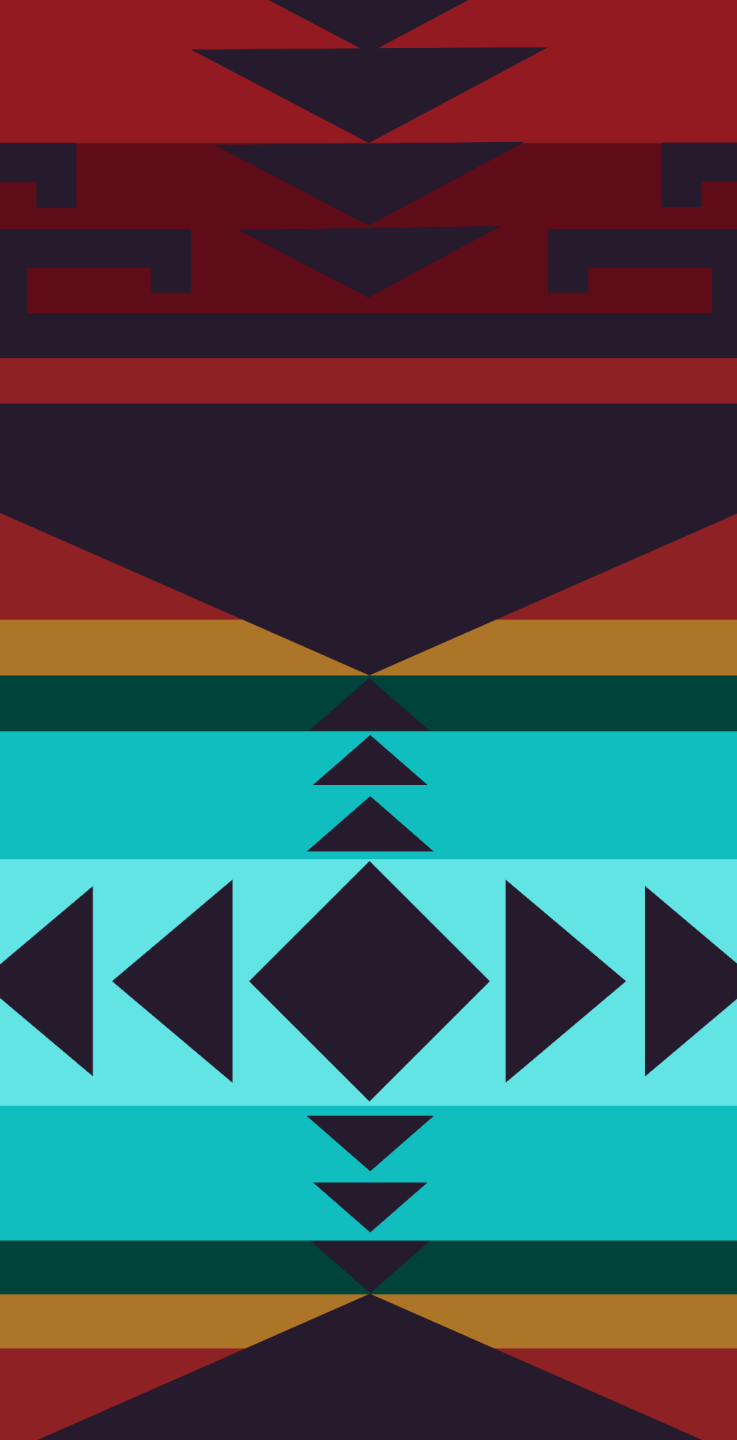
Step 5

Check Your Statement

Go through the following questions to ensure that your statement is sensitive, respectful, & empowers Indigenous peoples

(Benduski, 2020)

- ☐ Have I put at least an hour of research into my land acknowledgment?
- ☐ Do I know enough about the Indigenous people I am speaking about?
- ☐ Did I make sure I am not missing any tribes?
- ☐ Am I honest and open about the history of the Indigenous peoples I am acknowledging?
- ☐ Am I acknowledging their pain?
- ☐ Am I also acknowledging a positive future?
- ☐ Did I acknowledge the past?
- ☐ The present?
- ☐ The future?
- ☐ Did I identify any treaties that were signed in the past and/or are currently in effect?
- ☐ Did I include an action statement that demonstrates the future actions I will do to commit to empowering indigenous peoples?



Taking Action

The Do's

Listen

to the experts

Ask

what you can do

Build

relationships based on mutual
consent & trust

Research

to learn more about the history

Continue

to support & act in meaningful
ways

The Don'ts: What Not to Say

- “The indigenous culture” Terms that are not okay for you to say:
- “Can you and your people forgive my people for what we did?”
- “Our indigenous peoples”
- Indian
 - Savage
 - Half-breed
 - Red skins
 - Eskimo
 - Squaw

(Benduski, 2020)





“Being a good ally is about risking your voice to elevate others.”

Final Thoughts

At the end of the day, remember, starting somewhere is better than not trying at all. We need to share in Indigenous people's discomfort. They've been uncomfortable for so long.

“We have to try. Starting out with good intentions and a good heart is what matters most.” – Dr. Kate Beane (Flandreau Santee Dakota and Muskogee Creek)

(Native Governance Center, 2019)

Selected Resources

Guides and resources made by Native Nations

- [Children of the Setting Sun Productions](#): a native-run organization out of Bellingham, WA
- Native Land [Resource Page](#)
- Native Governance Center [Resources](#): creates accessible, introductory-level resources on a variety of topics related to sovereignty, governance, and nation rebuilding
- Native American and Indigenous Peoples [FAQs](#)
- [Going beyond land acknowledgment](#): Creating an action plan



Selected Resources Continued

Videos

- #HonorNativeLand [Video](#)
- Territorial Acknowledgements: [Going Beyond the Script](#)

More Examples of Acknowledgments:

- [Duwamish Tribe](#): Made by a local organization
- [Northwestern University](#) land acknowledgment, Chicago, IL
- [Resource Generation](#): Land Reparations & Indigenous Solidarity Toolkit

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