



HeritageBC



[heritagebc.ca](http://heritagebc.ca)

## Setting the Bar

A GUIDE TO ACHIEVE NEW STANDARDS FOR RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE HERITAGE SECTOR

### 2 Acknowledging Land and People

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## Acknowledging Land and People

**ACTION:** Reflecting on the places where we reside and work and respecting all peoples and their experiences, prepare and implement a land acknowledgement so that your organization recognizes Indigenous traditions and ties to the land. This will help build understanding about our relationships and responsibilities to the Indigenous people and lands where we live and work.

The origin of the land acknowledgement can be found in Nation-to-Nation tradition and protocol that has been used as a way “for guests to show their respect for and pay homage to the indigenous community with which they are visiting and engaging with.” (source: A Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples and Traditional Land)

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s final report, offering a land acknowledgement became a more common way to show respect and to recognize “the ties the descendants of those First Peoples have to the land - its importance to their culture, ceremonies, and traditions.” (source: First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory) Making territorial acknowledgments should be part of the ongoing process of learning the histories of the Indigenous people and lands where you live and work.

When offering a land acknowledgement, you recognize Indigenous peoples’ relationship with the land that spans millennia. You pay respect to their ancestors, their culture, ceremonies, traditions and their ties to the land.

Land acknowledgements can falter because the statements lack appropriate intention in their delivery. When done well and spoken from the heart with the context in mind, an acknowledgement of land and people can be a meaningful step along the path of recognition.

Following are some suggestions to help you prepare a statement. Keep in mind, there is no one way to prepare a land acknowledgement and there is no single format. The harder work is in the self-reflection – understanding your organization’s values, recognizing the stories that stretch over millennia, acknowledging a long history of suppression and struggles, and considering the respectful relationship you wish to establish.

- Include staff, volunteers and directors in the development of a statement so that, as an organization, it is understood why the statement is being developed and when and how it should be used. Land acknowledgements are important, but they cannot be offered with sincerity without understanding your intentions and why it is important to your organization and to Indigenous relationships.
- Seek advice from more than one credible source. Elders are very important

members Indigenous communities who have earned the right to pass on knowledge, advice and guidance issues affecting their communities and nations.

- Don't rely upon outdated, colonial names for Indigenous people. Learn the preferred names and spellings of the specific Nations whose lands you are on. Indigenous communities have resources (websites, videos, publications, events, and other learning resources) to share and explain their cultural ties and continuity on their lands, which can help deepen understanding of the people and lands. Often the local Nations will also have information about protocols, including their preferred ways of referring to themselves (as opposed to Anglicized and colonial names) and how to acknowledge territory.
- Learn about the territory or territories on which you work and reside. Territories can be expansive and can include reserves. Without understanding extent of these territories, you may not understand a communities' connections to place. Visit <https://native-land.ca/> and <https://www.whose.land/en/> and <https://maps.fpcc.ca/> to explore territorial maps and download the Whose Land app. As well, visit the websites of Indigenous Nations, Friendship Centres and other organizations to learn about the people who have a long and significant history with the land.
- In BC, connections to the land can be complicated with overlapping territories and areas of shared interest. But this is not a reason to avoid a land



acknowledgement statement. In fact, this can be an opportunity for a heritage organization to show leadership and to illustrate heritage represents all people. Nevertheless, the development of your statement with respect to the conditions that are specific to your area needs to be well considered, informed and thorough.

- In most cases in BC, we recognize the land as unceded and the inclusion of Indigenous place names are becoming more common.
- A land acknowledgement can function as a living celebration of Indigenous communities and relationships, and appreciation for the rich history and culture of the lands where we live and work.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions and find out how to pronounce the Indigenous words. Respectfully ask someone from the Nation or from a local organization, such as a Friendship Centre or Indigenous Student Centre. Visit the Nation's website or call the Nation after hours and listen to the recorded message. Language speakers from communities can often help your organization get comfortable with pronunciation and spellings. Internet searches will often result in phonetic spellings and sound recordings. Look for language apps (such as [firstvoices.com](http://firstvoices.com)). Keep in mind that it is disrespectful to oversimplify simply because words are difficult to say or spell.
- Never underestimate the hidden meanings of your words. Be sure to involve and take direction from Indigenous staff in this work, or respectfully ask an Indigenous colleague if they are comfortable reviewing your statement before you make it public.
- Take time and give the process the 'space' it needs. Build it into your agenda and time schedules.
- Land acknowledgements can go beyond the recognition of traditional territory to include specific actions and commitments.

Before approving your statement, respectfully ask someone to review the statement before it is made public. Ideally, you have been working with Indigenous people, as part of the ongoing work of learning about the lands you are on, who are in paid positions and decision-making roles.

When your statement is finished and approved, you can use it at the beginning of in-person and online meetings, place it on your website and email signature, and add it to reports, signage and brochures. Provide instruction and direction to everyone in your organization by updating your communication policy.

Keep in mind – a single statement is not a 'one size fits all' solution and so it should be adapted to suit the situation and the people with whom you are interacting, and it needs to be part of ongoing reconciliation work. For larger events, it's appropriate

to contact the local First Nation(s) for a welcome. Each Nation has their own protocol process and can advise on how to have an Elder or other community member attend your event and welcome people to their lands. Don't make a request at the last minute.

Always provide an honorarium (minimum \$200 is recommended), and a gift is also fine in addition. Check with the Nation's protocol if possible before determining an amount for honoraria and gifts. When there are community members from the local territories at your events it's appropriate to ask them if they are comfortable providing a welcome, and it's ideal if you can provide them a gift and honoraria as well

One final thought: reconciliation with Indigenous People is a long journey and you will learn a lot. With new knowledge and experience, review your acknowledgment statement once a year to make sure it continues to reflect the values and relationships to which you aspire.

**“As we are people of oral traditions what we hear is important and never forgotten. When names are mispronounced or incorrect this is what will carry through the entire event. With a good start the rest of the standards will flow nicely.”**

INDIGENOUS ADVISOR TO SETTING THE BAR





### Examples of Land Acknowledgement Statements

The lands we reside on as a country hold the stories and song of Indigenous Peoples from time immemorial. **Against the Grain Theatre**

As an organization of provincial scope, Heritage BC recognizes that its members, and the local history and heritage they seek to preserve, occupy the lands and territories of B.C.'s Indigenous peoples. Heritage BC asks its members to reflect on the places where they reside and work, and to respect the diversity of cultures and experiences that form the richness of our provincial heritage. **Heritage BC**

The Heritage Branch acknowledges it carries out its work on the traditional territories of Indigenous nations throughout British Columbia. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, descendants and custodians of these lands. We honour the knowledge keepers and the continuing relationships with Indigenous peoples in BC that develop through our work together. The Heritage Branch is grateful to the Lkwungen-speaking people, today known as the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations, on whose traditional territories we operate our main offices. **Heritage Branch**

The BC Museums Association (BCMA) office is located on the traditional, unceded lands of the Lekwungen peoples (Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations). We respect past, present, and future Indigenous stewards and recognize that we are uninvited guests on this territory. As a reflection of the provincial scope of our membership and organization, we recognize that our affiliates occupy the ceded, unceded, and sovereign territories of Nations across what is referred to as British Columbia. **BC Museums Association**



Sources:

[Activism Skills: Land and Territory Acknowledgement](#)

[A Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples and Traditional Land](#)

[First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory](#)

[A Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory](#)

[Indigenous Land Acknowledgement \(Native Governance Center\)](#)

[Want to learn whose Indigenous land you're on? There's an app for that \(CBC\)](#)

[6 steps to writing and sharing a land acknowledgement](#)

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