Land Acknowledgements

Supplemental Material for IMYM Interest Group

June 2021

*The following material provides further support for people who attended the IMYM Interest Group session on Land Acknowledgements and others interested in beginning to develop a Land Acknowledgement statement.*

**What is the purpose of a Land Acknowledgement?**

“To acknowledge the traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, reaching beyond colonization and the establishment of European colonies, as well as its significance for the indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon this territory, and whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the land and its other inhabitants today.” *University of Alberta*

Land Acknowledgements need to start with an understanding of why land matters, particularly to Native Americans.

* Richard Nerysoo of Fort McPherson in Canada's Northwest Territories, told Canadian officials, *"being an Indian means saying the land is an old friend that your father knew, your grandfather knew -- your people have always known. If the land is destroyed, then we too are destroyed. If you people ever take our land, you will be taking our life."*
* “*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)
* “Land acknowledgments shouldn’t be grim. They should function as living celebrations of Indigenous communities. Ask yourself, “How am I leaving Indigenous people in a stronger, more empowered place because of this land acknowledgment?” Focus on the positivity of who Indigenous people are today.” Native Governance Center
* Here’s what Stephen Fasthorse, a Northern Arapaho elder, told Boulder friends: *“The Boulder area was the chosen place for the Arapaho people in a spiritual sense. Our ancestors had a spiritual quest to search for a certain place, and when they came here they knew they had found it. It was foretold to us by the higher being of life. The Creator has always led our people. Our hearts always yearn for our original homeland. We’ve never before been invited back to this area that we hold so dearly. It’s a heartfelt emotion for us. We hope we will continue to be welcomed in this place that we belong to.”*
* Another Northern Arapaho elder, William C’Hair, is one of the Arapaho language teachers for the tribe. He said that he hears some Arapaho people say they are worried that the Arapaho language will disappear. But, he said, *“our language cannot disappear. Here in the Boulder Valley, our language is embedded in the land. It is in the song of the birds, it is in the wind, in the rocks, in the trees. It ties us to this place forever.”*
* Land contributes to our sense of place, belonging to a place, the plants, the food we eat, the angle of the sun are all unique and inter-related. It shapes who we are and where we came from. Often, settlers to a new land sought out the land most like their home, The Scots went to southern New Zealand, Scandinavians to Minnesota. The Native Americans still feel connected to the land where they lived before being forcibly relocated.

**Why do we create Land Acknowledgements?**

* “To acknowledge the traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, reaching beyond colonization and the establishment of European colonies, as well as its significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon this territory, and whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the land and its other inhabitants today.” [*University of Alberta*](https://www.ualberta.ca/toolkit/communications/acknowledgment-of-traditional-territory)
* “Acknowledgment is a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people’s history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth.” [*U.S. Department of Arts and Culture*](https://usdac.us/nativeland/)
* “To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long-standing 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. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol.” [*lspirg.org/knowtheland*](http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland)
* The purpose of these statements is to show respect for indigenous peoples and recognize their enduring relationship to the land. Practicing acknowledgment can also raise awareness about histories that are often suppressed or forgotten.

**What are the steps to developing a Land Acknowledgement?**

* See the resource list at the end of this document for backup material and detailed information on the process.
* Gather information on the Native peoples who lived in the area in the past. Who were they? How did they live? Why did they leave? Where are they now? Which Native peoples are here today?
* Decide how broad you want the acknowledgement to be. Will you include others who may have been here against their will?
* Reflect on whether you have relationships with Native peoples. What is their perspective on the history? What do those relationships look like? What would right relationship with them look like? What steps do you commit to take toward that goal?
* Determine how you intend to use the acknowledgement and how it can shape your future steps. Will you post it in your meetinghouse, publish it in your newsletters, speak it during your meetings for business and other occasions?
* Develop a draft statement for consideration in your Meeting. Understand the process that works best for your Meeting. Should it go to a committee first? To the clerk? Give resources and background information.
* Allow time for seasoning and education. What forms can this take? Would Native people in your community like to contribute to this educational process? If so, how do you involve them? Is your community aware of the history and the current situation for the Indigenous people from your community? If not, how will you bring them to your level of understanding?

**How are Land Acknowledgements used?**

* Often they are a first step toward dialog and developing relationships.
* They can increase knowledge and awareness of the history of the area.
* They are used to inform our support, in other ways, of Native people.
* Ideally, land acknowledgments express the intention to go forward toward right relationship.
* “Moving beyond territorial acknowledgments means asking hard questions about what needs to be done once we’re ‘aware of Indigenous presence’. It requires that we remain uncomfortable, and it means making concrete, disruptive change. How can you be in good relationship with Indigenous peoples, with non-human beings, with the land and water?” *Canadian Friends Service Committee*
* Example from Boulder Friends Meeting. As part of accepting the draft Land Acknowledgment, the Meeting agreed to the following actions:
  + Post the Acknowledgement on the wall of the Meeting house
  + Post in front of the Meeting house so that neighbors are made aware of the Acknowledgement. (Meet city requirements regarding signage.)
  + Print in the **Miscellan**y (the Meeting’s newsletter) a few times a year.
  + Read before announcements a few times a year.
  + Offer free use of our facility to Native organizations, following the process defined by our Building and Grounds Committee.
  + Continue to support organizations connected to the past and current native inhabitants of the Boulder Valley.
  + Continue our exploration of the past events and current activities of the Arapaho and other Native people. Share what we learn broadly with the Meeting.
  + Keep working toward right relationship.

**What are potential pitfalls in the process?**

* Care needs to be taken so that the Acknowledgement is not an empty gesture to “honor” Native people. It should not be done as a token or just to check a box.
* Consider whether the way the Acknowledgement is used turns it into a “creed” or “ritual,” and if it does, is that the intention. If that isn’t the intention, modify the use appropriately.
* There may be an interest in expanding the document to include harm done to other peoples. Doing so is very complex in every regard – the history is different, the next steps are different, the process could be stalled due to this expansion. Consider whether this process creates a model that can be used to separately reflect and act upon those concerns.

**Examples of Land Acknowledgements**

**Quaker Meeting Land Acknowledgements**

* “**Fort Collins Friends Meeting** acknowledges, with respect, that the land we are on today is the traditional ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute Nations and peoples. This was also a site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous other Native tribes. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it. As these words of acknowledgement are heard, the ties Nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed. We recognize that the founding of the Fort Collins community, including the land our Meeting House is built upon, came at a dire cost to Native Nations and peoples, including the cost of many lives, loss of ancestral homes, and separation from traditional sources of spiritual and physical nourishment and strength.”
* **Boulder Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends** acknowledges that we live and worship on land where Indigenous Peoples have lived for more than 13,000 years. Chief Nawath (Left Hand) and his band of Arapaho were living in the Boulder Valley under the terms of the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie when gold was discovered in 1858. The Arapaho were forced out of the area, contrary to the terms of the treaty, and a fort was built to protect the booming towns of Boulder and Valmont. In 1864, volunteer militiamen mustered at Boulder’s Fort Chambers and joined U.S. Colonel John Chivington’s forces in carrying out the Sand Creek Massacre. More than 200 Arapaho and Cheyenne people, including Chief Nawath, were killed.

“We lament this history of land theft, betrayal, murder, and displacement, knowing that we have become its beneficiaries. We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples’ enduring love for this land and the valuable contributions they make to our community today. We seek ways to build relationships with them now based on truth, respect, justice, and our shared humanity.”

* **Winnipeg Meeting, Canada: (**This one acknowledges not only the land beneath the meetinghouse, but also the Indigenous lands that are the source of water and electricity for the meetinghouse):

“Our meeting space is located in Winnipeg, which lies at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, a focal point of routes travelled by Indigenous people for thousands of years. Winnipeg is within Treaty No. 1 territory, traditional lands of the Anishinabe, Cree, and Dakota, and the heart of the Metis Nation’s Manitoba Metis Community. Our water comes from Treaty 3 area, from the shores of Shoal Lake First Nations 39 and 40. The electricity powering our Meeting space comes from generating stations on rivers in Treaty Areas 1, 3, and 5. Terms of the Northern Flood Agreement with five Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba remain unfulfilled. “

* **Visalia Meeting, CA:** (This Land Acknowledgement is designed like a Quaker marriage certificate, with signatures of meeting members and attenders below the statement).

“In Witness and Friendship, we respectfully acknowledge the Wukchumni People as the traditional caretakers of this land, and honor their elders of the past and present, and their emerging youth.”

**College and University Land Acknowledgements**

* “**Northwestern** is a community of learners situated within a network of historical and contemporary relationships with Native American tribes, communities, parents, students, and alumni. It is also in close proximity to an urban Native American community in Chicago and near several tribes in the Midwest. The Northwestern campus sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa as well as the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes and is still home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.

It is within Northwestern's responsibility as an academic institution to disseminate knowledge about Native peoples and the institution's history with them. Consistent with the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion, Northwestern works towards building relationships with Native American communities through academic pursuits, partnerships, historical recognitions, community service and enrollment efforts.”

Northwestern University: <https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html>

* **“Colorado College** is located within the unceded territory of the Ute Peoples. The earliest documented peoples also include the Apache, Arapaho, Comanche, and Cheyenne. An extended list of tribes with a legacy of occupation in Colorado is included here:[**Colorado Tribal Acknowledgement List**](https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/indigenous-community/Colorado%20Tribal%20Acknowledgement%20List.pdf)**.”**

<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/indigenous-community/land-acknowledgement.html>

* **“Colorado State University** acknowledges, with respect, that the land we are on today is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples. This was also a site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous other Native tribes. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, the ties Nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed.

CSU is founded as a land-grant institution, and we accept that our mission must encompass access to education and inclusion. And, significantly, that our founding came at a dire cost to Native Nations and peoples whose land this University was built upon. This acknowledgment is the education and inclusion we must practice in recognizing our institutional history, responsibility, and commitment.”

<https://landacknowledgment.colostate.edu/>

* **Goshen College**: “We want to acknowledge that we gather as Goshen College on the traditional land of the Potawatomi and Miami Peoples past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.”

https://www.goshen.edu/about/diversity/land-acknowledgement/

**Resource List**

The following links provide detailed information about Land Acknowledgements:

* US Department of Art and Culture provides a detailed Guide and call to Acknowledgement [#HonorNativeLand — U.S. Department of Arts and Culture (usdac.us)](https://usdac.us/nativeland)
* Native Governance Center has a site to support developing a Land Acknowledgement: [A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment - Native Governance Center](https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/)
* Teen vogue has a short document explaining acknowledgements <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained>
* Laurier Students’ Public Interest Research Group- detailed explanation of why and how to create a Land Acknowledgement [KNOW THE LAND — Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group (lspirg.org)](http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland)
* Voluntary Land Taxes as a way to move beyond acknowledgement: [Voluntary Land Taxes - Native Governance Center](https://nativegov.org/voluntary-land-taxes/)
* Learn about the connection of Native people to the land: Braiding Sweetgrass, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Maps of territories and treaties:

Be attentive to the dates on the maps. Many tribes were in different locations prior to 1492 and then moved based on the movement of settlers and the introduction of horses. Tribes were often relocated many times in the 1600’s, 1700’s and 1800’s, creating new conflict or alliances between tribes and settlers. It is a complex thread to follow. The string of treaties, nearly all broken, is the simplest element.

* [Treaty Boundaries and Cessions - Native American Spaces: Cartographic Resources at the Library of Congress - Research Guides at Library of Congress (loc.gov)](https://guides.loc.gov/native-american-spaces/cartographic-resources/treaties)
* [The Map Of Native American Tribes You've Never Seen Before : Code Switch : NPR](https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/06/24/323665644/the-map-of-native-american-tribes-youve-never-seen-before)
* <https://native-land.ca> – shows tribes, languages, treaties around much of the world