



**Molecular and Cellular
Biology - Equity, Diversity,
and Inclusion Committee**

A Short Guide to Creating a Land Acknowledgment

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Preface

Land acknowledgments can act as a small gesture to provide appreciation for those who are currently and have historically called Turtle Island home. When crafted with care, knowledge, mutual understanding, and respect, land acknowledgments can call attention to the effects of colonialism, both past and present, and begin the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The research carried out at the University of Guelph is done on Indigenous land and as such has benefited from Canada's colonial past. Moreover, scientific fields still bear the impact of numerous systemic issues facing marginalized peoples ([Deb Roy, 2018](#)). As we acknowledge the contributions of our mentors, family, and friends in our scientific pursuits we should also confront the role of colonialism and acknowledge the land, air, and water that are used to sustain our work. As such, it is respectful to include a land acknowledgment when presenting scientific findings, including but not limited to graduate theses, conference presentations, and scientific publications.

As mentioned, a land acknowledgment should be created with care, knowledge, mutual understanding, and respect. Using a scripted or fill-in-the-blank land acknowledgement prepared by someone else can facilitate a superficial sense of allyship, as the user typically lacks the essential understanding required to respectfully acknowledge the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and their land. Esteemed and impactful land acknowledgements require intentional efforts by the writer and presenter to begin the process of reconciliation. Moreover, land acknowledgements are not universal statements and must be targeted towards a specific geographic area in which research was performed or a presentation is being given. Some collaborations may require the incorporation of multiple land acknowledgements if work is conducted in multiple locations. As such, this document will outline resources required to construct a land acknowledgement through thoughtful reflection and is targeted for students, staff, faculty, and visitors of the University of Guelph.

The guiding philosophies of this document can be captured by the following few quotes,

"It is important for people to do their own searching and learning. It is especially important to find a way of connecting with the past and present in ways that are personally meaningful and powerful."

- [Jennifer Matsunaga](#)

"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?"

- [âpihtawikosisân](#)

These quotes also highlight that including a land acknowledgement upon presentation of scientific work is not sufficient to meet the needs of reconciliation alone. With good intentions, it is hoped that the exercise of building a personal land acknowledgement builds the knowledge and confidence required to enact reconciliation and change via allyship with Indigenous peoples.

Important Historical Context

Indeed, land acknowledgements are rich with historical context. The unique cultures, traditions, and stories of many First Nations and Inuit peoples have existed long before colonization. For this reason, it is important to explore the history of the specific First Nations and Inuit groups from Indigenous perspectives. Many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit groups describe their unique culture and history through online resources, including websites and blogs. These can be important tools to understanding local Indigenous groups and can make your land acknowledgement more meaningful.

Specifically, the University of Guelph main campus resides on land which historically belongs to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishinabewaki Nation, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The following list provides links to more information about these respective First Nations:

1. [Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation](#)
2. [Anishinabewaki Nation](#)
3. [Attiwonderonk](#)
4. [Haudenosaunee Confederacy](#)

Understanding the history of the land also requires an understanding of the treaties signed between First Nations, Metis, and Inuit groups and European colonizers. Throughout colonization, treaties were signed as an agreement between two nations, despite the myth that the treaties resigned Indigenous peoples from the land.

“Historically, treaties were not purchase agreements where Indigenous nations were offered compensation in exchange for the surrender of their lands. Instead, they were nation-to-nation agreements that established the terms for how sovereign entities would coexist peacefully while sharing the land.”

-Taylor MacLean

It is also important to note that the written treaties alone cannot capture the full agreement between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Details of oral and visual negotiations have been lost in documented settler history, although these details remain prudent Indigenous knowledge.

“To understand the *true* consensus arrived at by both parties, it’s important to look at all the ways in which treaties were recorded. Indigenous nations documented political alliances through symbolic representations: beaded wampum belts that grounded the principles of the agreement using the precision and clarity of visual symbols. For many treaties, there are also oral histories and written records of oral negotiations that give further insight into what was being promised.”

-Taylor MacLean



Figure 1: Two Row Wampum belt (<https://www.onondaganation.org>).

The land included in the Between the Lakes Treaty Number 3 encompasses the University of Guelph main campus. Information and historical context of this treaty can be found on the [Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation's website](#).

Acknowledging Indigenous land offers a glimpse into a dark colonial history that has permanently erased Indigenous culture and harmed Indigenous peoples. Numerous atrocities committed by colonialism and European colonizers have been recently brought to light, and it remains essential that settler allies continue to pressure the governing bodies to reconcile past actions. The inhumane erasure attempted against Indigenous children in residential schools and the ongoing violence against Indigenous women highlight that the impact of colonialism remains a current issue, despite the myth that these events have ceased. Links to key references on these events are included in the Further Resources section below.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established to inform all Canadians about the Residential School system operated in Canada. The commission documented the experiences of survivors, their families, communities, and others personally affected by the Residential School system. On their purpose, the commission said:

“The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] hopes to guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect.”

-The Truth and Reconciliation Commission ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#))

The commission published a final report in 2015 with 94 calls to action and can be found at:

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report](#)

Building a Land Acknowledgement

There is no formula to building the perfect land acknowledgment because there is no such thing as a perfect land acknowledgment. It can take many different forms from statements, to stories, to videos, and so much more. What matters most is that the acknowledgment is respectful, meaningful, informative, and conveys a message congruent with truth and reconciliation.

Using Proper Language

Using proper and preferred language in a land acknowledgment is critical to conveying respect for all Indigenous people. Differences exist between the preferred terms used to reference specific groups of Indigenous people within Canada, the United States, and globally. An overview of the proper language to use in a land acknowledgment and beyond as outlined by the University of Guelph can be found at:

[University of Guelph Indigenous Terminology Guide](#)

[University of Guelph Inclusive Language Guide](#)

Statement of Acknowledgement

The following example was retrieved from the [City of Guelph website](#):

As we gather, we are reminded that Guelph is situated on treaty land that is steeped in rich indigenous history and home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis people today. As a City we have a responsibility for the stewardship of the land on which we live and work. Today we acknowledge the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation of the Anishinaabek Peoples on whose traditional territory we are meeting. We acknowledge the extensive impact of colonialism on the Indigenous peoples of Canada and call for action to support First Nations.

Explanation of Statement

1. The first sentence provides the context that the history does not start at the point of European contact. It begins long before and includes the Anishinaabe, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee and Métis peoples, and continues to the present day.
2. The second sentence refers to the role and responsibility of the City as present day steward of our public lands and natural resources.
3. The third sentence recognizes that today the people of Guelph reside on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation of the Anishinaabek Peoples, from whom this land was purchased by the British in 1784, as Upper Canada Treaty No. 3, 1792.
4. The fourth sentence expresses that land acknowledgements alone do not achieve reconciliation and that further action is required. It would also be appropriate to include a call to action for your audience in this sentence, so your land acknowledgment extends beyond just the moment you write or say it.

Additional examples can be found on the University of Guelph website [University of Guelph website](#).

Land Acknowledgements for Additional Geographic Regions

Indeed, land acknowledgments are not universal statements, and are instead targeted to a very specific region. This is because Canada is like a quilt of different Indigenous groups, languages, and treaties all with unique histories, stories, and traditions.

Developing land acknowledgements can be a daunting task. However, [Native Land](http://www.native-land.ca) is an essential resource to quickly identify First Nations, Métis, and Inuit lands, languages, and treaties from a specific geographic region. As demonstrated in Figure 2, [Native Land](http://www.native-land.ca) is an excellent resource to identify the history of the land on which university campuses reside and can act as a starting point to gather information required to write an insightful land acknowledgement. This should not be the only resource consulted when creating a land acknowledgement and should be used as a starting point for further research.

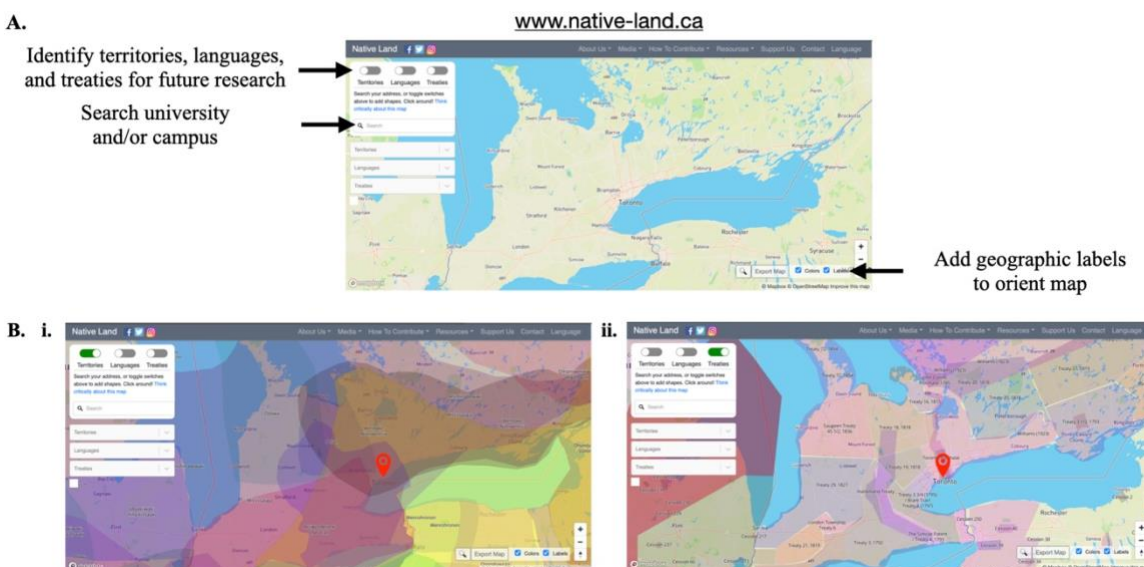


Figure 2: Example display of native-land.ca. (A) Users can search for specific universities and/or campus and use toggle switches to identify territories, languages, and treaties for future research to develop a land acknowledgement. (B) Example search for University of Toronto St. George Campus, identifying territorial ties to the Wendake-Nionwentsio, Mississauga, Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinabewaki, and Haudenosaunee First Nations and Treaty No. 13.

For example, a search for University of Toronto St. George campus identifies territorial ties to the Wendake-Nionwentsio, Mississauga, Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinabewaki, Haudenosaunee First Nations, and Treaty No. 13 (Figure 2). Embedded links in the [Native Land](http://www.native-land.ca) website quickly identify credible websites to learn more about the territories and First Nations in which they belong to. In addition, the [Ontario website](http://www.ontario.ca) has summarized and reviewed information specific to each treaty and offers an excellent starting point to learn and reflect on the colonial impact of specific areas. It is also imperative to research the First Nations, Métis, and/or, Inuit groups mentioned by Native Lands to find their websites and resources for further information. Notably, [Native Land](http://www.native-land.ca) harbors worldwide information across all continents.

To continue the process of reconciliation it is essential to develop an understanding of the past and present impact of settler-colonialism on the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Expanding Upon Traditional Land Acknowledgements

“It's one thing to say, ‘Hey, we're on the territory of the Mississaugas or the Anishinaabek and the Haudenosaunee.’ It's another thing to say, ‘We're on the territory of the Anishinaabek and the Haudenosaunee and here's what that compels me to do.’”

- [Hayden King](#)

Land acknowledgements have long been criticized for their performative nature. It has been suggested that the best land acknowledgements include personal connections and reflections upon (i) personal benefit from settler-colonial systems, (ii) drawing attention to nearby movements and/or struggles of Indigenous peoples, (iii) describes future actions for the presenter and others to commit to Indigenous justice. Indeed, more thoughtful land acknowledgements can make a large impact when used to preface large presentations, such as formal presentations of research.

Confronting settler privileges is an uncomfortable experience for many. Education and reflection on the attempted Indigenous erasure are essential to creating a welcoming and respectful environment where Indigenous peoples and settlers can peacefully interact with each other and Turtle Island. Although, this new era of land acknowledgements commits settlers to continuous education of the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples both now and in the past, and will begin widespread reconciliation.

Further Resources

Writing a land acknowledgement opens numerous avenues of reflection and education. To continue to develop allyship with Indigenous peoples and begin reconciliation, it is essential to learn Indigenous history through an Indigenous perspective.

If you would like to research further, some essential resources include:

1. [Calls to Action, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)
2. [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
3. [The residential school system by Erin Hanson](#)
4. [6 Common Myths about Treaties in Canada by Taylor MacLean](#)
5. [Infringements of Treaty terms and lands by the Six Nations of the Grand River](#)

Fostering relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers is essential to preserve Indigenous culture and reconcile permanent colonial erasure. Moving beyond land acknowledgements requires permanent, albeit disruptive, change. However, the education and reflection required to create a personal land acknowledgement is crucial to begin repairing relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers.

Feedback

This is a living document meant to be updated on an annual basis to grow and change as views and opinions on generating land acknowledgements evolve. The authors welcome and encourage feedback to make this guide as inclusive and respectful as possible. If you wish to provide feedback, have questions, or have any suggestions for improvement, please feel free to contact us through the anonymous MCB EDI Dropbox (<https://www.uoguelph.ca/mcb/content/webform/edi-dropbox>) or email the MCB EDI committee directly at mcb_edi@uoguelph.ca.

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