



Land Acknowledgement Brief

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Lhaq'temish Canoe Pullers. Photograph provided courtesy of Children of the Setting Sun Productions.

Understanding the Importance of Land Acknowledgements

To develop and implement the use of land acknowledgements within all levels of an organization is a foundational and operable step in building relationships with tribes, upholding tribal sovereignty, and recognizing the history of the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people of the United States (U.S.). Land acknowledgements support the continued efforts of tribes and allies of tribes to educate non-Natives on how to truly acknowledge the lived history of AI/AN people, uphold tribal sovereignty, and learn about the ways of life of the Indigenous communities of the U.S.

Within tribal communities, land acknowledgements (or rather, the acknowledgements of tribes) are not new occurrences. Land acknowledgements have been part of tribal history since time immemorial. At tribal events it is protocol for the speaker or emcee give a verbal thank you to the hosting tribe and explain the history and context of the land and the tribe where the event is taking place. For example, at tribal events in the North Sound region, it is common to hear an emcee state and acknowledge the ties that the Coast Salish tribes have to their ancestral homelands, the Salish Sea and other waterways.

A land acknowledgement is the first step in acknowledging, learning, and continuously teaching others about the true history and lived experiences of AI/AN communities. Land acknowledgements serve as an opportunity to learn about, and tell of, the historic and current resiliency and resistance that AI/AN people in this country have sustained despite being forced to face colonization and acts of genocide. Land acknowledgements are rooted in having respect for the Indigenous populations of the U.S. by calling attention the fact that AI/AN have lived through real experiences of colonization, genocide, and extreme land theft since 1492 until present. The vocalization of this history and the current acts of colonization, genocide, and land theft are often suppressed. Whereas, a land acknowledgement does the job of pulling all folks into current conversations around tribal presence instead of leaving tribal nations in a past tense conversation, which historically has been the case, perpetuating a tribal erasure rhetoric and the belief that AI/AN are relics of the past.

Settings for Land Acknowledgement Use

Within the office setting, the use of a land acknowledgement generally takes place as the opening for meetings, presentations, conferences, etc. Across the U.S. and Canada, land acknowledgements have also gained popularity as the start for sporting events, public/community events, and arts and music events.

In an effort to take some of the burden and work off of AI/AN communities in terms of constantly having to teach the true history of the U.S. and the Indigenous people of the land, land acknowledgements can and should be stated by both non-Natives and AI/AN alike. The work to advance equity and tribal learning needs to be done cohesively and collaboratively in order to have a lasting impact. Furthermore, the work to structuralize tribal learning, especially in a non-tribal organization, should always be done through the lens of perpetually upholding tribal sovereignty.

Step-by-Step Drafting and Implementation of a Land Acknowledgement

1. Identify the goal(s) that your organization seeks to achieve by implementing the use of a land acknowledgement. This can be done with all staff or on an individual level. For the purpose of remaining grounded in the work around land acknowledgements, it is important to identify and then continue to circle back to your goal(s) when developing a land acknowledgement with and for your organization.
2. Identify the tribe whose land your organization currently occupies. If you are already familiar with the tribes in your region, use your personal knowledge, or use this map to identify the tribe(s). <https://native-land.ca/>. Please note that Native people have migrated since time immemorial; overlap in land use between more than one tribe is common. It is appropriate to include one or more than one tribe in land acknowledgements, especially depending on the organization's setting, the populations that your organization serves or provide services for, and the physical location of your organization.
3. Review and utilize the [*Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement toolkit – How to build a Land Acknowledgement*](#) authored by the United States Department of Arts and Culture when drafting and implementing your organizational land acknowledgement.
4. Consult with your tribal liaison or equity team to ensure that the wording of your land acknowledgement meets the goal(s) that your organization seeks to achieve by implementing a land acknowledgement.
5. Always leave room for correction or adaptation when working on land acknowledgements. This work is a continued learning process.

Land Acknowledgement Implementation Examples

North Sound Accountable Community of Health:

At North Sound ACH, land acknowledgements are stated at the beginning of all staff meetings as well as at a number of our team meetings, board meetings, and subcommittee meetings. The North Sound ACH land acknowledgement was developed through the guidance of content experts on tribal policy implementation paired with the tools from the *Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement toolkit – How to build a Land Acknowledgement* by the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. The North Sound ACH land acknowledgement has also been vetted by the North Sound ACH Tribal Alignment Committee. The Tribal Alignment Committee provided edits and approved the policy and then made recommendations to the North Sound ACH Board for approval and acceptance for all open to the public meetings, which the North Sound ACH Board approved in August of 2018. After finalization, the land acknowledgement was vetted by internal staff including some who are content experts on tribal relations as well as tribal policy implementation. The land acknowledgment is embedded into North Sound ACH policy.

Currently, North Sound ACH's land acknowledgement reads as follows:

"We begin by acknowledging, with humility, that the land where we are today, is the territory of the People of the Salish Sea. Their presence is imbued in the waterways, shorelines, valleys and mountains of the traditional homelands of the Coast Salish People since time immemorial."

This land acknowledgement is read out loud by a staff member or meeting participant who volunteers to read it at the beginning of the meeting or presentation. At North Sound ACH, reading land acknowledgements has become second nature prior to meetings and presentations. North Sound ACH staff members are comfortable enough with land acknowledgements and the history behind the importance of land acknowledgements every staff member can and has read the statement out loud. The comfort with stating a land acknowledgement out loud and in front of an all staff meeting has come from repetition, practice, and trial and error.

After the land acknowledgement is stated, North Sound ACH continues with the rest of the agenda and the work that needs to take place at that particular meeting or presentation. The stating of a land acknowledgement goes with the understanding that North Sound ACH and our staff are guests on tribal lands. North Sound ACH recognizes the persisting resiliency that tribal nations and AI/AN people have sustained in order to continue to be land stewards and survive on their traditional homelands.

Washington State Health Care Authority – Tribal Affairs:

North Sound ACH was given permission to include a land acknowledgement statement that the Washington State Health Care Authority – Tribal Affairs office (HCA) uses, within this brief. Currently, HCA's land acknowledgement reads as follows:

"Welcome to the Health Care Authority. We start today with a land acknowledgement. We are meeting physically in Olympia, on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people, specifically the Nisqually and Squaxin Island peoples. Olympia and the South Puget Sound region are covered by the Treaty of Medicine Creek, signed under duress in 1854. The employees of the State of Washington here in the room and participating by webinar are guided by the Centennial Accord and chapter 43.376 RCW – respecting and affirming tribal sovereignty and working with our tribal governments throughout the state in government-to-government partnership."

The HCA states this land acknowledgement statement at the beginning of the standing meetings such as the ACH Tribal Liaisons' webinar. This is an example of how land acknowledgement statements can vary in wording and delivery. The HCA states physical location, the specific people/tribal nations of the traditional territory, the treaty covering their location, and the purpose of stating this specific land acknowledgement: to honor, respect and uphold tribal sovereignty and government-to-government partnerships.

Actionable Next Steps Beyond Land Acknowledgements -- Tribal Alignment and Tribal Partnerships Strategies

The development and implementation of land acknowledgements is an important initial step that organizations can take in acknowledging the true history of the U.S. and the resiliency of AI/AN populations despite historic and current extreme disparities in AI/AN communities. Although land acknowledgements are a significant move towards equity and tribal learning for organizations who are at the start of implementing equity and tribal learning into policy and practice, there are actionable implementation strategies for organizations that are already well into work around equity and tribal learning which will reinforce the organizations stance on supporting tribal nations and strengthening relationships with tribes in a substantial and lasting way. Below are examples of how organizations can go beyond land acknowledgements to further the advancement of tribal learning and tribal sovereignty into day-to-day policy and practice, in an impactful and meaningful way for AI/AN communities.

- Develop and hire a tribal liaison position at your organization.
- Contract, partner, and build collaborations with tribal programs, tribal organizations, and tribal non-profits.
- Allocate and hold board positions and voting privileges for as many tribal representatives as there are tribes in your local region.
- Attend tribal events to support tribal nations and AI/AN vendors.
- Contract with independent content experts for trainings on topics such as:
 - Cultural sensitivity.
 - Tribal sovereignty.
 - Data sovereignty.
 - Tribal Health Systems.
 - Indian Health Services.
 - Traditional mental health and wellness initiatives.
 - Tribal economics.
 - Regional history and current determinants of tribal nation(s).
 - Tribal social development.
 - Tribal resources.
 - Tribal youth involvement (ways to allocate space for tribal students for internships).

Please note these examples are just a few strategies that have direct ties to upholding treaties, tribal sovereignty, and tribal self-determination. These examples are not to serve as a comprehensive list of all of the ways to further tribal learning, and does not represent a final end goal of tribal learning. Rather, these examples are to detail for non-tribal partners some ways in which successful, meaningful, and lasting relationships between tribal nations and non-tribal organizations have taken shape. Upholding tribal sovereignty is a journey and a continuous process of actively including sovereign tribal nations and tribal members in decisions making and relationships building between tribal nations and any non-tribal organization. If your organization is interested in learning more about these actionable next steps beyond land acknowledgements,

please contact North Sound ACH for more details or with any questions your organization has around these tactics.

Conclusion

The operationalization of a land acknowledgement statement is a foundational starting point in emphasizing the sovereignty as well as the historical and current standing of tribal nations in the U.S.

Additionally, land acknowledgements are one step in the direction of telling the true history between tribal nations and the U.S. government—a history that is generally not taught, detailed, or analyzed outside of tribal relations. The colonization, attempted genocide, and extreme land theft of AI/AN populations occurring between 1492 until present has a direct tie and relation to the extreme health disparities and social determinants of health that impact AI/AN populations today.

A land acknowledgement is one way that an organization can express their eagerness to learn more about the tribes in the North Sound region and to build or strengthen relationships with the eight tribes that North Sound ACH partners with.

Resources

U.S. Department of Arts and Culture

The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture gives the public the tools to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of the land now known as the United States of America in a simple yet powerful way. The act of acknowledgement is an honoring of the truths lived by AI/AN since time immemorial. Acknowledgement is the first step in highlighting the presence and resiliency of the Indigenous and original inhabitants of this land mass. Unfortunately, for many people outside of the AI/AN communities, land acknowledgements would be the first real world acknowledgement of Indigenous people in the present place in history.

U.S. Department of Arts and Culture – Background and information; video included.

<https://usdac.us/nativeland>

A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement toolkit – How to build a Land Acknowledgement

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_CAYH4WUfQXTXo3MjZHRC00ajg/view

#HonorNativeLand Signs and Posters – These posters can be downloaded, printed, and the blank section can be filled out to identify the original tribal nation or local tribe that are the stewards of the land that your organization sits on. The posters can then be displayed around organizations and offices to even further acknowledgement.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BxfMWv7dZAv0YXIYR3ZPTVkdHM>

Children of the Setting Sun Productions

Children of the Setting Sun Productions (CSSP) is a Native owned and operated 501(c)(3) located in Bellingham, Washington within 5 miles of the Lummi Nation. CSSP is an Access and Equity Partner of North Sound ACH with common goals of providing and furthering a tribal education learning series for North Sound ACH Partners and staff with a specific focus on Coast Salish tribes and the North Sound region. CSSP is a very useful resource for anyone looking for tribal expertise in the development of a land acknowledgement. CSSP has volunteered to provide support to any North Sound ACH Partners who are looking for more guidance during the development or implementation of a land acknowledgement. Please contact CSSP if your organization is interested in vetting your land acknowledgement through CSSP or have any questions regarding tribal learning.

Website: <https://settingsunproductions.org>

Email: dhillaire@settingsunproductions.org

Native Land Map

The Native Land map can be utilized to identify the names and specific regions of native land that your organization is built on. The Native Lands map is a useful tool to get accurate Indigenous names of place locations around the world. It is important to note there may be overlap of land use by two or more tribes. This means that depending on where your organization is located, your organization could be sitting on the site of two or more traditional native lands. An example of

how dual land use implemented into a written or vocal land acknowledgement is detailed in the North Sound ACH land acknowledgement example under the “Land Acknowledgement Implementation Examples” heading and section of this brief. The Native Lands map site is updated regularly to ensure the most accurate information and listing of Indigenous names. <https://native-land.ca/>

Washington State Health Care Authority – Tribal Affairs

HCA, tribes, and Indian health care providers (IHCPs) partner on the Healthier Washington Medicaid Transformation.

<https://www.hca.wa.gov/about-hca/tribal-affairs/medicaid-transformation>

Regional Tribal Resources

Disclaimer: In this section of the brief, the traditional names of the eight tribal nations that are part of North Sound ACH have been included and written in the Xwlemi Chosen, Lushootseed, or Lhéchalosem dialects as an attempt to acknowledge the original, Indigenous names and languages of The Peoples of the North Sound territory. North Sound ACH wants to acknowledge that the use of Xwlemi Chosen, Lushootseed, and Lhéchalosem languages does not represent or intend to represent the official or legal language of any tribal nations. But rather, acknowledge that the revitalization and continued learning of tribal languages is an ongoing work in progress within tribal communities and for tribal communities.

North Sound ACH wants to acknowledge the groundwork of and use of tribal nation resources:

- Lummi Nation Sche’lang’én Department website: http://www.lummi-nsn.org/DotOrg_Old/website/dept_pages/culture/Language.shtml
- Lashootseed – The Language of Puget Sound website: <https://tulaliplushootseed.com/places/>
- Nooksack Cultural Resources Department website: <https://nooksacktribe.org/departments/cultural-resources/>

North Sound ACH wishes to thank the tribal nations for the sharing their vast knowledge on the Xwlemi Chosen, Lushootseed, and Lhéchalosem languages and for providing North Sound ACH staff with the opportunity to learn more about the traditional languages of the North Sound region.

Please send us corrections if you find errors and we will change it promptly. To learn about definitive languages, please contact the nations in question.

Lhaq’temish (Lummi Nation) Website: <https://www.lummi-nsn.gov>

Noxsá7aq (Nooksack Indian Tribe) Website: <https://nooksacktribe.org>

Xws7ámesh (Samish Indian Nation) Website: <https://www.samishtribe.nsn.us>

Saʔkʷbixʷ-saʔkʷəbixʷ (Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe) Website: <http://www.sauk-suiattle.com>

Stuləgʷ abš (Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians) Website: <https://www.stillaguamish.com>

Swədubš (Swinomish Indian Tribal Community) Website: <http://www.swinomish-nsn.gov>

Dxʷlilap (Tulalip Tribes) Website: <https://www.tulaliptribes-nsn.gov>

Dxʷʔaha (Upper Skagit Tribe) No official tribal website available. A link with information on Upper Skagit Tribe can be found on the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board website: <http://www.npaihb.org/member-tribes/upper-skagit-tribe/>