

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### MAKING MEANINGFUL EXPRESSIONS OF RECOGNITION

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Session Notes



#### What is a land acknowledgement

- Land acknowledgements started because Indigenous people would begin an event with a prayer and in those prayers they would acknowledge the land. In the process of reconciliation and decolonization, land acknowledgements have been taken up more broadly.
- Land acknowledgements honour the Indigenous people who lived here historically and presently
  - o It is important to ensure that Land acknowledgements are not treated as a recognition only of history – you are speaking both about past and present
  - o *Land Acknowledgements need to refer to the past but be grounded in the present* (i.e. treaties are current living documents – these are not historical artifacts).
- Land acknowledgements acknowledge that we are visitors on this land and we are fortunate to be here: land acknowledgements may, for this reason, incorporate sentiments of gratitude.

#### Why write a land acknowledgement?

- As white settlers it may be difficult to write these acknowledgements. The purpose is to show gratitude for the land and this is a really important part of the acknowledgement for settlers.
- We need to acknowledge those who came before us, who lived here since time in memorial.
- *It is important to have individuals from outside of Indigenous groups engage in the process of land acknowledgements as, when it is done thoughtfully, it is a moment where we as individuals can be part of and contribute to reconciliation.*

#### Variations in the land acknowledgements:

- When Indigenous Elders or Indigenous individuals do a land acknowledgement, they may include variations and refer to the Creator, and they may also make these more personal than they would be for a settler/immigrant on the land.

#### How to make these meaningful and avoid tokenistic gestures of acknowledgement

- Have conversations with your family members about the land acknowledgment – *have a good understanding of how and when your family came to live on this land*. You can incorporate this briefly in your acknowledgement to make it more personal and meaningful to you.
- Ensure that you respect the sacred nature of the land acknowledgements. The treaties are considered sacred living documents and the acknowledgment of these should not be rote / read from paper / done neglectfully.
- Do you know the people of your region? If not, take time to get to know the people of your region.
- When you do the acknowledgement, you need to *centre the Indigenous people*.

## Advice:

- It is okay to be proud of your ancestors who also lived on this land and preface it with a contextualizing statement while ensuring you are centering your acknowledgement on Indigenous groups.
- When feeling discomfort in doing a land acknowledgement – do not neglect those feelings of discomfort. *It is okay to feel uncomfortable doing a land acknowledgement.* The land acknowledgement needs to come from the heart and from a place of knowledge (after you have done the work obtaining that knowledge and having your discomfort present in your acknowledgement is fine).
- Do research to be well informed about who has lived on the territory for which you are doing a land acknowledgement.

## Where to start - Writing your personal Land Acknowledgment:

- Start with self-reflection – why am I doing this?
  - o Am I doing it for my own part in reconciliation,
  - o Am I sharing my own journey in truth and reconciliation, and/or
  - o What is the end goal – is it to create or foster discussion?
- Consider impact and timing:
  - o You can do a land acknowledgement at the beginning of a session or at the end.
- Do your homework.
  - o Know well the Indigenous groups who have and continue to live on the land,
  - o You need to be aware of the history of the land and the treaties, and
  - o Consider places, names and languages – know their territory – where they were in relation to you – know how to pronounce the names properly, and know the languages that were spoken in these places.
- Use appropriate language:
  - o “mother earth” “caretakers” “stewards”
  - o This is a sacred duty we do in acknowledging the land; so, we should use the appropriate language that reflects this.
- Consider what your personal relationship is to the land
  - o “I am a ...” newcomer/immigrant/settler/mixed background
- Acknowledge what people do on this land
  - o Hunt/trap/fish/educate/protect etc.
  - o Bring in the human element and remind those present that we are all part of this community.
- Talk to others about your land acknowledgements:
  - o Get people’s advice on whether you are being too personal, too formal, too minimal etc.

## Should Land Acknowledgements be blunt?

- Truth can be powerful but it can be devastating.
- There is great joy and happiness too – you can incorporate both. This is personal choice. You can do an acknowledgement or you can add to it by inciting reaction “I acknowledge we have a very difficult past with genocide and racism”....
- *The blunt and the difficult past needs to be also balanced against the joy and happiness.*

- Consider how you can open discussion in this process.

### **Living Celebrations of Indigenous Communications**

- This can be a more positive approach where you can consider how your role in this act of reconciliation can leave Indigenous individuals in a stronger position.
- To do this you *focus on what Indigenous individuals and communities continue to do in keeping Indigenous cultures and traditions vibrant.*

### **What not to do:**

- *Do not ask an Indigenous person to do a land acknowledgement for you* – you need to do this work for yourself (or at least look to other sources and use those as samples in developing your own).

### **Compensation**

- *You need to ensure that Indigenous persons are being properly compensated when they do something for you. This is important.*
- What gift to give people?
  - o A nice card or a gift is welcome for Metis people.
  - o There are processes and for some the appropriate gift is sweetgrass or tobacco.
  - o The tobacco is usually a good idea as it is used in the smudge process where you are seen to be giving back to the earth.
- It is important when you give a gift to give an appropriate gift: ensure that you ethically source your tobacco or sweetgrass.

### **Understand Displacement**

- *You need to understand the displacement that has happened for Indigenous people* – this is the origin of the traumas in Indigenous communities.
- When you are talking to Indigenous people and doing these land acknowledgements have this displacement at the top of your mind.

### **Consider how the land acknowledgment resonates for you and incorporate that in your approach:**

- Consider your position in relation to displacement, to relations with the land, to history.

### **Take Action**

- You cannot only do a land acknowledgment – do more – take action.
- Find out what is going on in your community, amplify, and attend.
- Show up to events in the library and local communities.
- Commit to returning the land.
  - o The treaties were signed but broken.
  - o Things were agreed to which were not kept.
  - o Acknowledge that this is unceded territory (you can include this statement in your acknowledgement).

## **Discussion:**

**Q:** Is it okay to refer to Turtle Island in your acknowledgement?

**A:** If you feel comfortable using it you can. It is, in some cases, considered more appropriate for those out east, but it is a perspective of the earth being Turtle Island and it is related to Indigenous perspectives of the earth.

**Q:** What is your perspective on the corporate land acknowledgement versus the individual land acknowledgement?

**A:** if you are required to use the acknowledgement approved by the corporation you exist within, you can use it and you should add your own part after / below to make it more individualized.

**Q:** Can you become too personal in your land acknowledgement which ends up de-centering the Indigenous people from the land acknowledgement?

**A:** It can get too personal if it is a settler being too personal about this. You can say when your family came and what they did when they came and then return to the Indigenous focus and note that they were here for time in memorial / prior 10,000 years etc.

**Q:** Should you bring in broader land acknowledgements beyond the local?

**A:** You should focus on the local almost always. When you know it is a broader (e.g. province wide event) you can bring in broader acknowledgement (e.g. treaty 6 for Alberta), but it is usually best to stick with the details for the land you are currently inhabiting in land acknowledgements.

**Q:** Should you include it with your email signature?

**A:** It should be personal and not a box being checked. It does depend on the culture of your work. If everyone is doing it there should be a discussion about whether this is something we need to be doing or if it is tokenistic. At the same time, you need to be cognizant of the implications of leaving this off of your signature.

- Go to your elders and see what they have to say. If they are part of your organization and already being compensated by it – ask them for their input

**Q:** Should you do a land acknowledgement in every class or in every session in a conference? How often does it need to be done (considering the difficulty of it becoming rote and less meaningful)?

**A:** This is something to consider. It would be better to do it less frequently where you can consider that in a reasonable and meaningful way.

**Q:** How do I speak about myself when I have a complex relationship with this place that does not take away from the acknowledgement but also paces me within and on the land.

**A:** You can admit this struggle and note the complex nature of your place on this land. You can say “I struggle with my place on this land and in the history of...”. Be authentic: it is about you and who you are as a person and in relation to the land and those who live here.