

Acknowledging First Peoples and traditional land:

Land acknowledgements for staff and volunteers

Overview

Do you host meetings, or are working with volunteers and committees who host meetings? This resource is for you! The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and to answer questions for faculty, staff and educators across the country for conducting land acknowledgements at the beginning of meetings, public events, and conferences.

This guideline will be your hub for understanding the value of conducting land acknowledgements, as well as tips, templates, and protocols for how to do a land acknowledgement at your meetings. It is based on the online guide available through Engineers Canada's website, which is updated regularly by Engineers Canada.

What is a land acknowledgement?

The land acknowledgements we hear today are based on an old tradition or protocol carried out by Indigenous communities in Canada. It is intended 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.

"It recognizes the strength and wisdom of the place that has given rise to the people who are of that land and it invokes the spirit of that place to support your good intentions." (S. Calvez., R. Roberts, 2020)

Why do we do land acknowledgements?

Land acknowledgements are a practice, but they are also part of a larger process that we are undertaking, as individuals and as institutions, towards reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The reality is that Indigenous people are underrepresented within engineering education and the profession and at the majority of the meetings and events we attend, so we have to be careful to not appropriate the traditional land acknowledgement practice in an empty and disconnected way. The practice of land acknowledgements is intended to:

- Complement self reflection and cultural competency of staff and volunteers.
- Raise awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life, for ourselves and meeting participants.
- Recognize the history of colonialism and harms done by settlers to Indigenous communities, including to acknowledge the detrimental impacts that the engineering profession has had on Indigenous communities through discriminatory practices and disregard for Indigenous rights,

traditions and knowledge; where decision-making that directly impacts Indigenous communities has ignored the rights of Indigenous Peoples to be stewards of their own land; where there has been a lack of free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous communities with regards to natural resource projects.

- Acknowledge our presence on the land as visitors and as a part of colonial history.

Land acknowledgements are not meant to:

- threaten or alienate non-Indigenous or Indigenous people
- speak for or represent Indigenous communities
- appropriate Indigenous ideas and knowledge
- be the only action we take towards truth and reconciliation. (see Resource section)

How do we do land acknowledgements?

The aim is to practice land acknowledgements in a meaningful way. To achieve this goal, we encourage every institution to explore Indigenous awareness training for faculty and staff, as well as creating an Indigenous engagement plan.

Who are the First Peoples of this area?

Do your research to find out if the land you are gathering on is Treaty Territory (numbered treaties), Unceded Territory (not legally signed away to the Crown or to Canada), or part of Inuit and Métis homelands. Find the names of local First Nations communities who have lived there, and review the official formats we have provided for in-person and online meetings.

Pronunciation

There are hundreds of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups in Canada, and many territorial names and titles that settlers are not used to saying. Do not be afraid to ask questions and find out how to pronounce the local First Nation in your acknowledgement. If you are not sure how to pronounce a Nation's name, there are a number of ways to learn, including:

- Respectfully asking someone from that nation or from a local organization such as a Friendship Center or Indigenous Student Center.
- Check the nation's website; they may have a phonetic pronunciation on their "About" page, an audio-recording of their name, or videos that include people saying the nation's name.
- Call the nation after hours and listen to their answering machine recording.

Your positionality

Speaking from the heart about colonialism and your personal path on reconciliation is challenging. A first step is to speak to what you know: your own positionality, your settler background, your relationship (or lack thereof) with Indigenous people in Canada.

"By recognizing the intimate relationship between the place and people, you are demonstrating that you understand what is important and that you are trustworthy. To do this, you must use your own voice and provide the Land Acknowledgement from your heart." (S. Calvez., R. Roberts, 2020)

In-person meetings

OTTAWA: “As a visitor on this land, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe People. To do so recognizes Indigenous Peoples long-standing presence in this territory.

Further, this recognition and respect for Indigenous Peoples and their lands is a key towards reconciliation.

Thank you.”

Personalization

Making the land acknowledgement your own is the next step. Relate your experience and the meeting itself to the Indigenous people of the land. Here are some examples:

“As a settler myself, I am committed to... [describe your commitment to actively working against colonialism, towards reconciliation].”

“As a visitor on this land, coming from [describe your background], I strive to deepen my own understanding of the local Indigenous communities.... Reframe my responsibilities to land and community.”

“I come with respect for this land that I am on today, and for the people who have and do reside here.”

“The reason for our meeting today is to discuss a project that involves natural resources and directly impacts Indigenous communities. We acknowledge the need for meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities.”

“We acknowledge the contributions of [name Indigenous community] to the project/work we are involved in today.”

Online meetings and classes

Land acknowledgements need to be part of all gatherings, including virtual meetings and classes. Depending on the location of your participants, you may acknowledge all Indigenous groups, or research the First Peoples of the land you are on.

Here is the approved land acknowledgement you can use and personalize:

“I would like to begin by acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we are on today. While we meet today on a virtual platform, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the lands, which we each call home. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home.

Please join me in a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how we are and can each, in our own way, try to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration”

Written form

Email signatures can include a land acknowledgement. Here is an example:

