

TOOL: PERSONALIZING TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Office of Equity and Inclusive Communities and Teaching & Learning Commons

Overview

Often, territorial or Treaty acknowledgements can seem performative and ingenuine in nature. Many institutions and organizations have developed acknowledgements that are applied in almost every circumstance related to internal and external engagement. It is our intention to avoid these monotonous demonstrations, and we would highly encourage participants of Treaty or territory acknowledgments do so from a place of genuine respect, understanding, and obligation; to the territories that have been traditionally and contemporarily occupied by a variety of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit since time immemorial. Today, we all now share these lands and territories, so it is important to understand that we are all Treaty people, each of us obligated to the true spiritual intent of our Treaty territories.

Reflective Pause

Reflect on your current experiences as it relates to this topic.

Consider what you are looking forward to learning more of, or hope to be able to do more of, as you work towards developing anti-racist practices.

Goals

1. Understand why personalizing territorial acknowledgements can be more genuine.
2. Create your own personalized territorial acknowledgement.

How-to Guide

In order to reflect the spirit of the Treaties, and to create safe, meaningful and trusting spaces, we believe that every effort be made to personalize your statement to better reflect individual obligations to Treaty lands and territories, to avoid the performative nature that can arise with generic acknowledgements. A meaningful acknowledgement must come from the heart of the individual, and it requires a conscious effort to reflect on the ways in which we have all individually benefitted from the territories and lands we visit or occupy. This is the true spirit and intent of Treaty, and it requires that we all consider what it means to be Treaty people and partners. We also recognize, and emphasize, that territorial acknowledgements are not a new practice and represent an “old tradition,” whereby visitors to new territories “demonstrate and pay homage to the First Nations people you are engaging.” (Land Acknowledgement, 2023)

As a starting place, you should refer to KPU’s [Territorial Acknowledgment](#) procedures, but you should also attempt to personalize your statement to demonstrate your courage and humility, as well as recognizing the harms and injustices caused by settler, and ongoing, colonization.

Acknowledging the land is crucial, but it can lose its significance if it becomes routine. It’s essential to connect both your heart and mind to this practice to ensure it remains meaningful.

When contemplating a First Nations territorial acknowledgement, it’s important to engage in thoughtful reflection. Here are some good questions to consider:

- 1. Clarify the purpose of the territorial acknowledgement in the work you are doing on the day of.**

- Why are we making this acknowledgement of the local First Nation communities?
- What do we hope to achieve through this acknowledgement?

- 2. Understanding the Land:**

- What is the history of the land we are acknowledging in the Greater Vancouver area?
- Who are the First Nations peoples traditionally associated with this territory?

- 3. Personal Connection:**

- What does this land mean to me personally?
- How do I relate to the First Nation communities connected to this land?

- 4. Respect and Responsibility:**

- How can we ensure that our acknowledgment is respectful and meaningful to the local First Nation communities?
- What responsibilities do we have towards the First Nations communities and the land?

- 5. Action Beyond Words:**

- What actions can we take to support First Nations rights and local communities beyond this acknowledgment?
- How can we integrate First Nations, Metis & Inuit perspectives into our work or organization?

6. Ongoing Learning:

- How can we continue to educate ourselves about First Nations, Metis and Inuit histories and cultures?
- What resources or partnerships can we seek to deepen our understanding?

7. Community Engagement:

- How can we involve First Nations, Metis and Inuit voices in our acknowledgment process?
- Are there local First Nations, Metis and Inuit leaders or communities we can consult for guidance?

Reflecting on these questions can help ensure that the acknowledgment is not just a formality and tokenistic, but a step towards building respectful relationships and fostering understanding.

As an example of what a more personal acknowledgment can look like, please refer to the following:

“As a settler on Amiskwaciwâskahikan colonially known as Edmonton, I acknowledge my absolute privilege of being able to live and make a living on stolen land through the active colonial displacement and genocide of Indigenous peoples by settlers. This is a land that is continually experiencing the effects of systemic, colonial, and intergenerational damages from those who came to this land and those who now call this land their home” (J. Legaspi, personal communication, May 5, 2023).

“Please note that there are no explicit guidelines or directions for how to achieve a perfect Land Acknowledgement, there is only heart, truth, acceptance and openness when you are delivering it to others.” (Land Acknowledgements, 2023)

Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Territorial Acknowledgement Procedure

“We at Kwantlen Polytechnic University respectfully acknowledge that we work, live, and study in a region that overlaps with the unceded, traditional, and ancestral lands of the xwməθkwəy̓ə m (Musqueam), q̓i c̓ə ỳ (Katzie), SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), sc̓ə wəθən (Tsawwassen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), Kwikwetlem, and the lands of the q̓w̓ ɑ :n̓ ̓ ń (Kwantlen) First Nation, which gifted its name to this university.

In the cause of reconciliation, we recognize our commitment to address and reduce the ongoing systemic colonialism, oppression, and racism that Indigenous Peoples continue to experience.”

Proudly sharing the name of the Kwantlen First Nation, the word ‘Kwantlen’ means Tireless Runner, and is reflected in the university’s motto: “through tireless effort, knowledge, and understanding.” The representation of a wolf and salmon in KPU’s Coat of Arms, was created by former KPU Fine

Arts student, Brandon Gabriel, nephew of the hereditary Chief of the Kwantlen People, Chief Marilyn Gabriel.

In 2015, KPU appointed its first Elder in Residence, Lekeyten of the Kwantlen First Nation. In his role, Lekeyten supports Indigenous students on their educational journey sharing knowledge, traditions, teachings, and promoting an understanding and respect for Indigenous perspectives, cultures, and values.

Further underscoring the respect and interconnectedness of the university and the First Nation, KPU's Chancellor and President, and Vice Chancellor, have both been given the title and responsibility of Sí:yá:m (Leader) by the Chief of the Kwantlen First Nation.

Reflective Action Point

Reflect on your learning as you approach the end of this tool.

What changes to your practice do you hope to implement?

How can this tool support your anti-racist practice?

Instructor Resources

Video Blogs: “[Finding Your Personal Land Acknowledgement](#).” – The University of Saskatchewan resources shares five video blogs including, Why, Worldviews and Positionality, Historical Perspectives on Treaties and the Metis Homeland, and Building your Own.

Website: “[Traditional Territories](#)” – KPU LibGuide. Housed under Indigenous Studies, this page provides assistance and additional resources related to territorial acknowledgements (as well as specific to each of the territories of the seven First Nations that KPU resides on).

PressBook: “[Indigenous Information Literacy](#)” – This open text outlines “best principles for working with Indigenous print and oral sources in academic research,” but also provides additional context and information for territorial acknowledgements.

Website: “[xé?el̓ KPU Pathway to Systemic Transformation](#)” – This site outlines the pathway KPU is taking towards systemic transformation and contains numerous resources related to supporting reconciliation. In particular are audio pronunciations, activities, and additional resources.

Guidance: [Sheridan College's Inclusive Language Guide “Tip Sheet”](#) on Indigenous peoples, provides a wealth of guidance and information on appropriate and inclusive language and terminology related to Indigenous peoples.

References

- Kwantlen Polytechnic University. (2024). [Territorial Acknowledgement](https://www.kpu.ca/about/territorial-acknowledgement). <https://www.kpu.ca/about/territorial-acknowledgement>
- University of Saskatchewan. (2023, May 5). [Land Acknowledgement](https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous_voices/land-acknowledgements/). https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenous_voices/land-acknowledgements/

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