

camh

Guidance for Honouring the Land and Ancestors Through  
**Land Acknowledgements**





*When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It's a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they're around us. As you all do.*

**Mary Lyons**, Elder, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe<sup>1</sup>



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## A note about the **process of the development of this guide**

A subcommittee of the CAMH Reconciliation Working Group was formed to develop a land acknowledgement guide after receiving numerous questions from across the organization about how to practice CAMH's official land acknowledgement. The subcommittee consisted of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, and included representation from CAMH Library, Public Affairs, First Impressions, the Adult Gender Identity Clinic and Shkaabe Makwa. Together we identified a series of practical questions we endeavored to answer, collected a list of resources to consult, took detailed notes and discussed our findings at length.

It is important to express that this was challenging work involving extensive dialogue and thoughtful debate. As was discovered in our research, opinions and practices around land acknowledgements vary greatly. Any direction provided in this guide that is not directly cited to a source was a decision reached by the subcommittee, and when consensus was not achieved, we followed the direction of Elder Diane Longboat, member of the Turtle Clan, Mohawk Nation at Six Nations Grand River Territory and a citizen of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, who also holds the role of Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives for Shkaabe Makwa. Her co-authors are grateful for her wisdom and guidance.

As part of our review process, feedback was solicited from Renee Linklater, Senior Director of Shkaabe Makwa, the full membership of the Reconciliation Working Group and the Aboriginal Caucus at CAMH.

The development and use of a land acknowledgement is in itself an act of reconciliation. We are all on a learning journey as we seek to acknowledge the past, take action in the present and contribute to a future of social justice and equity. As these changes are made and these actions are taken, there is a shift in consciousness and land acknowledgements become living statements. As we evolve, so will CAMH's commitments to offer more culturally safe services where racism has no place and reconciliation thrives. The collective commitment to reconciliation must be unwavering. Please join in this movement.

This document aims to provide guidance and not rules. As conversations and thinking about land acknowledgements continue to evolve, this guide will be continuously revisited.



## CAMH Land Acknowledgement

CAMH is situated on lands that have been occupied by First Nations for millennia; lands rich in civilizations with knowledge of medicine, architecture, technology, and extensive trade routes throughout the Americas. In 1860, the site of CAMH appeared in the Colonial Records Office of the British Crown as the council grounds of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, as they were known at the time.

Today, Toronto is covered by the Toronto Purchase, Treaty No. 13 of 1805 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Toronto is now home to a vast diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis who enrich this city.

CAMH is committed to reconciliation. We will honour the land through programs and places that reflect and respect its heritage. We will embrace the healing traditions of the Ancestors, and weave them into our caring practices. We will create new relationships and partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis and share the land and protect it for future generations.



*For Indigenous peoples land acknowledgements are not only to assert our sovereignty and treaty rights of today but it's also a way for all peoples to feel more connected to a place.*

**Selena Mills**, Cree French Canadian-Settler,  
Centre For Wise Practices in Indigenous Health, Women's College Hospital<sup>2</sup>



## Why acknowledge the land?

Oral stories and teachings about the Traditional Territories of Turtle Island are deeply connected to the relationships that many Indigenous peoples have with the land. This connection is grounded in respect, love, and humility, as to not position human beings as superior to all of creation, and teachings are often connected to the traditional naming of territories. What is this land saying to you? What gifts does the land share with you? What does the land teach you?<sup>3</sup>

For example, consider the meaning of Tsi tkaran:to–Tsi, denoting a place where things are permanently situated<sup>4</sup> and tkaranto “where there

are trees in the water”.<sup>5</sup> The reference is said to originate from Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat fishers<sup>6</sup>. A literal interpretation could bring to mind the tree rich shorelines of Lake Ontario. However, a deeper reflection might consider how the trees and water provided for the peoples of this territory.

This guide aims to encourage you to reflect beyond the words of a formal land acknowledgement—to make connections, consider what it means to exist in spaces and places with distinct histories, and consider our responsibilities to the land and reconciliation work.





*Honour the Land Acknowledgement as a vital component of your event.*

Suzanne Keptwo, Métis Artist and Educator<sup>7</sup>



## When and where should land acknowledgements take place?

Land acknowledgements should be delivered at the beginning of formal gatherings, either in-person or virtual, and especially when members of the public are invited. This could include a workshop, a guest speaker, or a recorded event. A land acknowledgement is not required at internal working meetings.

- **Offsite or virtual gatherings:** The organization's official land acknowledgement should be used, and additional notes specific to the gathering location or place where the person delivering the acknowledgement is located may be included.
- **Series of gatherings** (for example, a course or multi-day conference): The land acknowledgement should be highlighted at the beginning of the first

session, establishing the land and historical context as foundational to the rest of the sessions.<sup>8</sup>

- **Written documents:** Land acknowledgements should also be included at the beginning of major written documents accessible to the public, such as annual reports, course materials and Board of Trustee meeting materials.
- **Honour the intention:** When preparing for a large event or gathering, a land acknowledgement must be present on the agenda. Inviting someone to deliver the land acknowledgement should not be a last-minute task or an ask that falls on Indigenous staff members.<sup>9</sup>



### Tips

- For a series of meetings that take place over a longer period of time, open each meeting by introducing new information about the land, such as a map, facts about a local body of water or a teaching that has been shared by the First Peoples of the land being visited.<sup>10</sup>
- If asked to self-introduce as a participant, share what territory or treaty you are positioned in. If you are unsure of the traditional territories in which you are situated, consider connecting with local communities or visiting some of the resources shared within this guide.
- If you are able to do so, include informal discussions about land and positionality in internal meetings.
- Consider including a brief land acknowledgement as part of your email signature. Here is one example: *"CAMH is situated on lands that have been occupied by First Nations for millennia; lands rich in civilizations with knowledge of medicine, architecture, technology and extensive trade routes throughout the Americas. The site of CAMH appears in colonial records as the council grounds of the Mississaugas of the New Credit (as their name in 1860), today known as the Mississaugas of the Credit."*



*Indigenous people know where we belong. We know where we come from. And it's the people that don't really know that [where Indigenous people come from] whose responsibility it is to acknowledge that history, acknowledge those practices.*

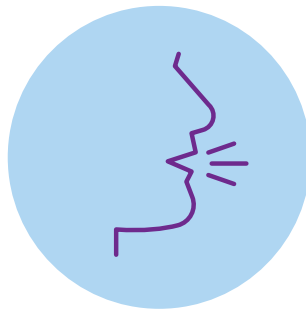
Amy Desjarlais, Wabishka Kakaki Zhaawshko Shkeezhgokwe,  
Knowledge Keeper, York University<sup>11</sup>



## Who should deliver the land acknowledgement and how?

The person delivering the land acknowledgement should be a non-Indigenous host of the gathering.<sup>12</sup> They should use the organization's official land acknowledgement as a representative of that organization, but also do their own research and reflect on their place in the ongoing history of that land, their unique relationship to that land and their responsibilities to the original keepers of the land.<sup>13</sup>

The person giving the land acknowledgement should learn the appropriate pronunciations ahead of delivering the land acknowledgement.<sup>14</sup> There are numerous resources available online to determine proper pronunciations. Connecting with local communities and language speakers can also aid in pronunciations from differing dialects depending on where you are located.



### Tips

- After reading your organization's official land acknowledgement, include personal reflections and commitments. For example, the person giving the land acknowledgement might choose to situate themselves as a settler and describe what that means to them.





*The way in which territorial acknowledgements are delivered must matter. Are they formulaic recitations that barely penetrate the consciousness of the speaker and those listening? Are they something that must be ‘gotten through’ before the meeting or speech can begin? Can we escape dilution through repetition?*

Chelsea Vowel, Métis writer and legal scholar, Treaty 6<sup>15</sup>



## How should you prepare to deliver a land acknowledgement?

Spend time reflecting on the responsibility Settler-Canadians and non-Indigenous people have in acknowledging, respecting, and reconciling relationships with Indigenous peoples and territories of Turtle Island. Explore the potential privileges or opportunities that have been granted to you as a visitor to this land. What has this space and land provided you with and what is your reciprocal relationship to this land? What is your relationship to the history of settler-colonialism? How do you currently benefit from this legacy and existing colonial systems in our society? This reflective space could be challenging to navigate on your own. Checking in with trusted supports can help as you journey through this space. This work will allow your delivery of a land acknowledgement to not simply be a checked box, but have a deeper personal connection to your own life journey.<sup>16</sup>

Consider the following:

### Self-locating or speaking to your positionality

- Protocols surrounding self-introductions differ among cultures and worldviews. Self-introductions related to land acknowledgements

are not meant to be competitive, hierarchical, or individualistic, but can focus on honouring who you are, the peoples and places who have made this journey possible for you. This practice communicates to your audience how you have come to live, work, and play on the land on which you currently reside, and the gifts that you hope to bring into the gathering space.<sup>17</sup> Doing this also strengthens your own experience of acknowledging the land.

- Examining your positionality means to reflect on the different parts of your identity and how these affect how you move through and experience the world. Did your family emigrate? Were your ancestors displaced?<sup>18</sup> Are you a person of colour or 2SLGBTQ+? Do you have a disability? Are you in a position of authority? Consider that identities have multiple intersections.<sup>19</sup>

**Note:** Many people have complex relationships with aspects of their identities or do not have access to details of their family histories. Be compassionate with yourself and others about what you/they choose to share.



*When you step outside your door each day to interact in the natural world, do you consider who may have walked this land before you and who will walk this land after you are gone? Do you acknowledge your personal relationship to the land? Do you think about how the land supports your health and well-being, and that of your family, community and all non-human entities within the web of life? It is through these relationships to land that we come to understand that everyone has a role to play in taking caring [sic] of the land. Being an environmental steward is everyone's responsibility. How we honour the land and maintain its health so that it can nurture future generations is up to each of us.*

Elementary Teachers' Foundation of Ontario (ETFO) <sup>23</sup>



### Making connections to the here and now

- Be mindful of the current context in which many Indigenous peoples live. If there are particular issues, stories or experiences arising at the time in which a land acknowledgement is being delivered, consider acknowledging that current context. Doing this will give attendees even more to reflect upon, while also being respectful of present-day situations that peoples, families, nations, and communities continue to navigate.<sup>20</sup>
- Connect the land acknowledgement to the content and objectives of your gathering. By doing this you make consideration of the land and its history part of the conversation, rather than an add-on. This can also serve as a call to action, reminding your attendees that the work you are doing together can contribute to reconciliation.

**Practice!** You will feel more comfortable addressing a group if you have practiced out loud in advance. Pay particular attention to the pronunciation of place, nation, and group names. You may find it helpful to write the pronunciation out phonetically in your personal notes.



### Tips

- Be humble in your approach. Accept that you will likely make mistakes along the way and practice receiving feedback. It is natural to be anxious before delivering an important statement in front of others or be afraid of making a mistake. Do not let such feelings stop you from accepting this opportunity. Remember that allyship involves taking risks.<sup>22</sup>



*A territorial acknowledgement is not an endpoint in the journey of reconciliation. Actions create conditions for true reconciliation and create a foundation for restoring, renewing or developing a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples.*

Elementary Teachers' Foundation of Ontario (ETFO) <sup>24</sup>



## How should local land acknowledgements be developed?

Learn about the location you're situated in. Seek out credible information about the history of that land prior to colonization. Understand whether there are treaties related to that land or if it is unceded. After researching, connect with local Indigenous communities to gain advice on how they would like their land to be described. The removal of words or shortening of acknowledgements may be disrespectful or an inaccurate representation. Review the final land acknowledgement with the local First Nation community, Historic Métis Community or Settlement, and/or Inuit region. Depending on the territory or area, there may be more than one community to consult with, such as Political Territorial Organizations, or other regional or national representative bodies.

Land acknowledgements are not only about history, so be sure to acknowledge the people who currently reside on and take care of that land. Include a reconciliation commitment to the Traditional Knowledge Keepers of that land and the Indigenous peoples who currently reside there. Consider consulting with the local First Nation communities, Historic Metis Communities or Settlements, and/or Inuit regions about a reconciliation commitment to ensure it is meaningful to them.

Appropriate funding should be allocated to ensure thorough research, planning, and preparation of the land acknowledgement.<sup>25</sup> It is imperative to appropriately compensate Indigenous peoples and communities who guide this learning journey, as

the time, energy, and emotional labour associated with this process is often disregarded. Inquire about local protocols as many communities and Nations have set guidelines.<sup>26</sup>

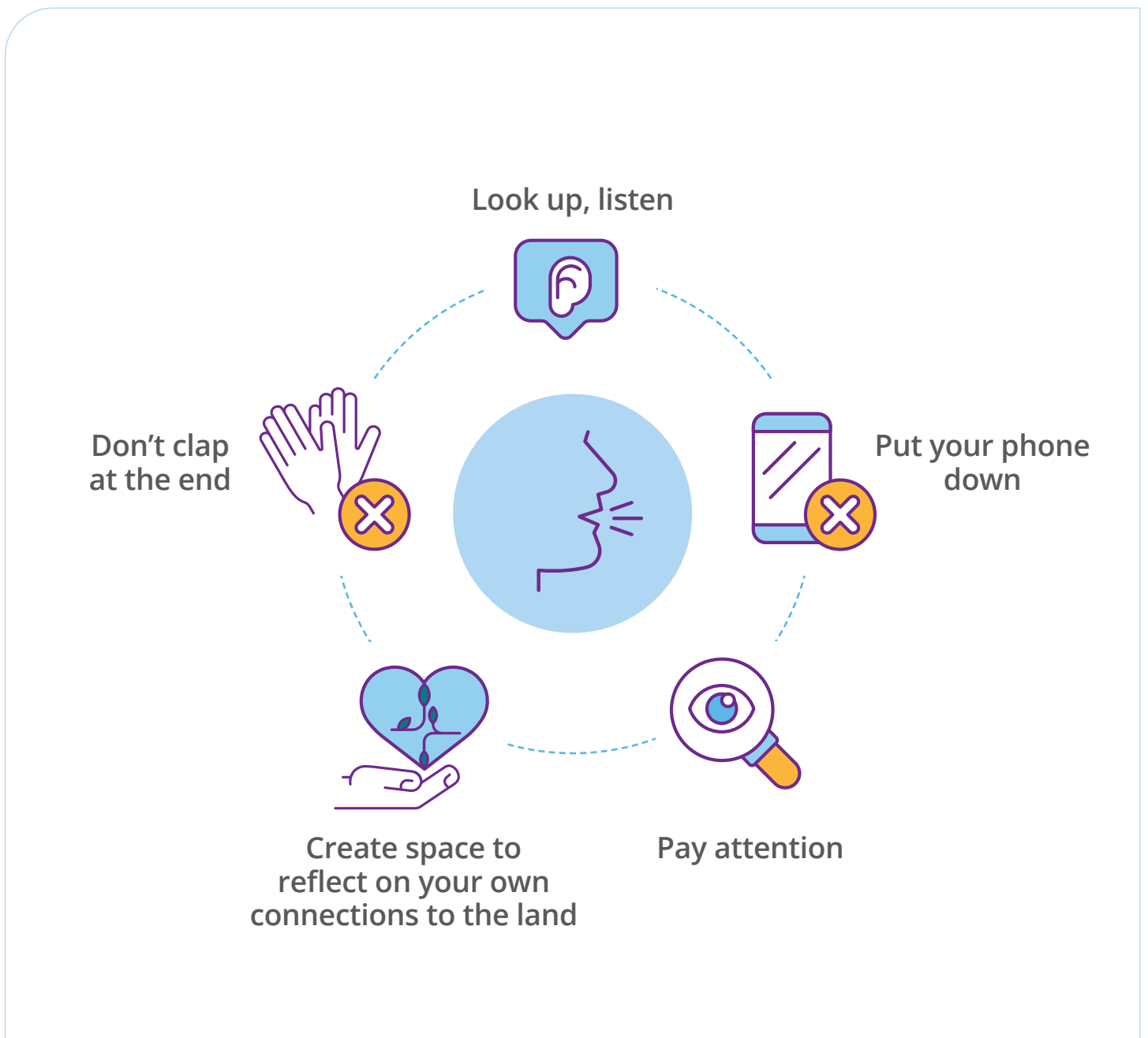
Suggested resources for seeking out information about the history of the community and the land:

- Reach out to the appropriate administrative departments of the local First Nation, being mindful that different communities may have specific protocols around engagement or partnerships. Consider making long lasting relationships that exceed the immediate ask.
- [Native Land](#) is an online interactive map that can be a starting place for identifying traditional territories and languages as well as treaties.
- This [Government of Canada website](#) includes maps with information about First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, lands and treaties, agreements and claims across Canada.
- [Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#)
- [The Indigenous History of Tkaronto](#), Research Guide from University of Toronto Libraries
- [Land acknowledgements: Uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto](#)

**Note:** We encourage you to read many sources and engage in discussions from different perspectives, not relying on one single source.



## How should an audience receive a **Land Acknowledgement**





## Endnotes

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- <sup>15</sup> Âpihtawikosisân. (2016, September 23). Beyond territorial acknowledgements. <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>
- <sup>16</sup> Allan, B., Perreault, A., Chenoweth, J., Biin, D., Hobenshield, S., Ormiston, T., Hardman, S. A., Lacerte, L., Wright, L. & Wilson, J. (2018). Pulling together: A guide for teachers and instructors. Victoria, BC: BCcampus. <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationinstructors/>; Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). (2021). Guide to acknowledging First Peoples & traditional territory. <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>
- <sup>17</sup> Keptwo, 2021
- <sup>18</sup> Morgan, A. (2019, March 12). Black people in Canada are not settlers. Ricochet. <https://ricochet.media/en/2538/black-people-in-canada-are-not-settlers>



- <sup>19</sup> Simon Fraser University (SFU) Library. (2022). Positionality statement and land acknowledgement workshop. <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/indigenous-initiatives/icrc/land-acknowledgement-workshop#positionality>; Library and Information Studies Students' Association (LISSA). (2019). LISSA land acknowledgement, template for personalization, definitions, and speaker protocol. Education & Research Archive. <https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-ypab-8s28>
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- <sup>21</sup> SFU Library, 2022; LISSA, 2019
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