



Land Acknowledgement User Guide

NIRSA Board of Directors approved
February 9, 2021

NIRSA has adopted a practice of opening NIRSA endorsed events with a land acknowledgement. This document reflects an on-going conversation and process and thus will be reviewed regularly.

A land acknowledgement is an opportunity to recognize and respect the Indigenous Peoples of the area in which the event is happening, increase awareness of historical and ongoing colonization, and support larger truth-telling efforts about our collective history. In countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, it is commonplace to open public events, meetings, and even the school day by acknowledging the Indigenous people of the land. In the United States, the Department of Arts and Agriculture has called “on all artists, cultural workers, public officials, educators, administrators, community leaders, organizers, and engaged community members to open all public events and gatherings with acknowledgement of the traditional Native inhabitants of the land.”

The Okanagan Charter, an international call to action, speaks to the connection to land and the environment as a critical component of well-being. Connecting people to and engaging in activities outdoors is a significant component of collegiate recreation and has a proven positive effect on health and well-being. Additionally, The Wilderness Society has advocated for more complete storytelling of our public lands and states that “With shared understanding, shared lands have the power to connect us as individuals and as communities, now and for generations to come.”

Through a land acknowledgement, NIRSA has an opportunity to show respect and honor the truth about the land we temporarily occupy when facilitating education, engaging in recreational activities, and building new structures. Opening NIRSA endorsed events and gatherings with a land acknowledgement may be practiced with the steps below. Regional differences may result in regional adaptations.

Step 1

NIRSA HQ staff will identify and work with the appropriate entity/leadership to determine who is responsible for researching and presenting the land acknowledgement.

Example entities and leaders responsible for the land acknowledgement:

- Host Committee
- Planning Committee
- Regional leaders



Step 2

Identify the traditional inhabitants of the land where the gathering/event will be located.

Through your research or that of the host committee, you may discover an existing land acknowledgement that you can use. You can also ask if one already exists when conducting your research and reaching out to local/regional organizations.

Research can be conducted in multiple ways:

- Online research
 - US Department of Arts and Culture:
<http://www.usdac.us>
 - Native Land Digital:
<https://native-land.ca>
 - Maps of Native American Tribes in the United States:
<http://www.native-languages.org/states.htm>
- Native Governance Center:
<https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgement/>
- The Wilderness Society: Building a diverse conservation community
- Local Tribal Council
- Local College or University
- Canadian higher education institutions often reference the information from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (<http://nctr.ca/reports2.php>) as they consider the impact and importance of this practice. The information is good for any higher education institution to consider.
- Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory:
<https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>

Contacting local Native/Indigenous authorities to seek their input about the content of the acknowledgement is strongly recommended.

Step 3

Consider using a personalized version of one of the following acknowledgements in your welcome address at the beginning of the NIRSA event.

Land acknowledgements typically have language that is similar to the ones below, though local input should drive the final iteration you use.

NIRSA acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we are gathering. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to this land. We recognize their valuable contributions to our community to the global society.

We acknowledge the (NATIVE/INDIGENOUS TRIBE NAME) people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live and currently gather, and recognize our shared connection to the land, water, and air that we are using. We pay respect to the (NATIVE/INDIGENOUS TRIBE NAME), and their elders past, present, and emerging.

We are gathered on the traditional, unceded land of the (_____) peoples. I ask you to join me in acknowledging the (_____) community, their elders both past and present, as well as future generations. NIRSA also acknowledges that the land upon which this event is being held was founded upon exclusions and erasures of many Indigenous peoples. This acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.



NIRSA Headquarters Land Acknowledgement

NIRSA Headquarters resides on the ancestral land of the Ampinefu band of the Kalapuya people in Corvallis, Oregon.

We humbly offer our respects to the elders, past and present citizens, of the Kalapuya Peoples.

Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855, Kalapuya People were forcibly removed to reservations in Western Oregon.

Today, living descendants of these people are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians.

NIRSA Historical Land Acknowledgement

NIRSA (formally the NIA) was founded in 1950 at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana

NIRSA would like to acknowledge the indigenous history of New Orleans, where our association was founded, and recognize the traditional territory of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana. We pay respect to them and their elders past, present, and emerging.

Specific Examples of Land Acknowledgement Statements

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We acknowledge that Mohawk College is situated on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations, within the lands protected by the Dish with One Spoon wampum agreement, and is home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island.

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I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Waukesha, Wisconsin, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Peoria, Potawatomi, Myaamia, and Sioux People.

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We acknowledge the Tutelo/Monacan people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live and recognize their continuing connection to the land, water, and air that Virginia Tech consumes. We pay respect to the Tutelo/Monacan Nations, and to their elders past, present, and emerging

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We gather here today on Turtle Island, the Indigenous term for the North American continent.

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We are convening on the ancestral land of the Paskestikweya (Pist-ka-tanh-wah) people in Baltimore City. We humbly offer our respects to the elders, past and present citizens, of the Cedarville Band of the Piscataway Conoy, the Piscataway Indian Nation, and the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, all Algonquian (Al- Gon-Qwe-An) Peoples.

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We have come together today on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. The word Chesapeake is also an Algonquian word named after a nation of people who once lived near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, in an area now called Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Step 4

Delivery of the acknowledgement

- The acknowledgement should occur at the beginning of the event during the welcome or another appropriate opening.
- Practice the acknowledgement and proper pronunciation of names. It is very important to deliver the acknowledgement concisely and using the correct terms.
- Practice and be authentic in your delivery.
- Set the proper tone for the acknowledgement by placing the acknowledgement in the context of the surroundings.
- Consider sharing on social media channels with #HonorNativeLand, other relevant recognitions, or # the name of the native land you are on.
- Work to identify the proper terminology used for the area – indigenous, native American, first peoples, first nation, aboriginal, native peoples, traditional inhabitants, etc.
- If you have a budget, consider setting money aside to pay people for their time if you ask them to participate in your land acknowledgement or another similar ceremony.
- For gatherings/events with multiple meetings/sessions consider telling more of the story behind the initial acknowledgement. For example, the name of a tribe may be tied to the natural resources of the land.

Applicable NIRSA Events

Championship Series

- All NIRSA National Championships will share a Land Acknowledgement during the Event Welcome (if there is one) or during the announcements of the Final Championships.
- NIRSA will recommend that Regional Championships also share a Land Acknowledgement.

Professional Development Events

- NIRSA Annual Conference and other NIRSA signature events will share a Land Acknowledgement during the event welcome/opening at minimum.
- NIRSA will recommend that Regional Conferences and NIRSA collaborative events also share a Land Acknowledgement.

Virtual Conferences

- Host presenters may acknowledge the multiple lands of where they are calling in from. Or may use the land acknowledgement statement for NIRSA headquarters. Invite participants to consider the lands they are calling in from.



Future Considerations

We recommend considering implementing standard practice or

How often should an acknowledgement take place?

- At opening sessions only
- Educational session introductions
- Board of Director meetings and/or retreats
- Headquarter staff gatherings

Compensating experts or contributors

- The additional budget line for gatherings and events

Identify other ways to integrate and additional practices

- Include land acknowledgement in an Email signature
- NIRSA publications include a map of the land, peoples, and further learning. For example, a conference program includes a page that shows the native lands of where the event is being hosted inclusive of links or resources for participants to learn more.
- Ask a subject matter expert to review this guide, update, and compensate fairly.
- Identify a keynote speaker or reserve educational sessions at local/regional/national events about this topic.
- Incorporate a progressive land acknowledgement at major events with multiple session blocks. For example, at the start of a conference, the land acknowledgement would be accompanied by a short story or history of the land and peoples. At the start of each major session block, information about a different part of the larger story is shared. Thus creating a deeper understanding of where the event is being hosted.