

Managers' Meeting November 23, 2021

Land Acknowledgments: History and
Inclusivity





SCHC Land Acknowledgement

I would like to start by honouring the land that we are on, which has been the site of human activity since time immemorial. It is the traditional territories of the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River First Nations. Ontario is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements, and is home to many Indigenous Nations from across Turtle Island, including the Inuit and the Metis. These treaties and other agreements, including the One Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, are agreements to peaceably share and care for the land and its resources. Other Indigenous Nations, Europeans, and newcomers, were invited into this covenant in the spirit of respect, peace, and friendship. We are all treaty people. Many of us, have come here as settlers, immigrants, newcomers in this generation or generations past. We are mindful of broken covenants and we strive to make this right, with the land and with each other. I would also like to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. And so, I honour and pay tribute to the ancestors of African Origin and Descent.

The Origin Story

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) [source](#)

Treaty People and Our Responsibilities

When we say “We are all treaty people” we are acknowledging:

- The land we occupy is governed by a treaty.
- Where no treaty has been negotiated between Indigenous people and the Crown, the land is considered Aboriginal title
- Dates back to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and it’s interpretation by the Supreme Court of Canada

Treaties: Early Contact

- Treaties were a way to formalize peaceful co-existence between settlers and First Nations people.
- 1613: agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch known as Guswentah or the Two-Row Wampum Belt

“The Belt is made up of three rows of white beads and two rows of purple beads. The purple beads run parallel to each other and represent two vessels (one canoe and one ship) that travel down the same river without interference or influence. The white beads are to represent peace, friendship and mutual respect”

Source: <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/abed101/we-are-all-treaty-people/>



The Kaswenta

Other Indigenous Nations, Europeans, and newcomers, were invited into this covenant in the spirit of respect, peace, and friendship. We are all treaty people.

Treaties: Early Contact

- By signing treaties, British colonizers appeared to recognize the nationhood of First Nations, but they also expected Indigenous people to recognize the authority of the monarch and give up large tracts of land to Europeans for settlement.
- First Nations view of treaties was very different. They believed the British to uphold their decrees but were later angered and dismayed to discover the changes in records and had no intentions of giving up their land, a concept foreign to First Nations cultures.

Treaty Relations Today

In the first half of the 20th century, the Indian Act became increasingly repressive. It restricted Indigenous control over their own identity, their ways of governing their communities, structuring their own economies, political assembly, of legal redress, participation in ceremonial activities and many more aspects of life.

Treaty Relations Today

“We do not want the Indian Act retained because it is a good piece of legislation. It isn’t. It is discriminatory from start to finish. But it is a lever in our hands and an embarrassment to the government, as it should be. No just society...can long tolerate such a piece of legislation, but we would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender our sacred rights. Any time the government wants to honor it’s obligations to us we are more than ready to help devise a new Indian Legislation”.

Cree writer, political leader, lawyer Harold Cardinal in 1969.

Setting The Right Intentions

Before setting a land acknowledgement we need to reflect on the process;

Self-Reflection

- Why are we doing this?
- What is our end goal? (What do we hope listeners will do after the acknowledgement?)
- When will this have the largest impact? (Who is our audience? When do we do the acknowledgements?)

Understand the Background and History

- The particular Indigenous people to whom the land belongs too
- The history of the land and any related treaties
- Indigenous place names and language
- Correct pronunciation of the names of the Tribes, places and/or individuals we are including

Setting The Right Intentions

Using Appropriate Language

Not sugar coating the past. Recognizing the concerted colonial attempt at genocide, forced removal, stolen lands, and ethnic cleansing.

Using past, present and future tenses

Indigenous people are still here and thriving. Don't refer to them as relics of the past.

Land acknowledgements shouldn't be grim

A form of living celebrations of the resilience of Indigenous communities

Do's and Don'ts of Allyship

Do	Don't
Inspire others to take action to support Indigenous communities	Doing it out of guilt because everyone else is doing it
Build authentic relationships with Indigenous communities	Ask an Indigenous person to deliver an acknowledgement for the organization
Understand displacement and how it plays into land acknowledgement	Don't expect a specific formula for a perfect template of a land acknowledgement
Compensate Indigenous people for their emotional labor	Leave it at a verbal land acknowledgement without intentions to engage proactively with Indigenous communities
Support Indigenous organizations by donating your time and money	Use sugar-coating language
Support Indigenous-led grassroots change movements and campaigns. Encourage others to do so.	Avoid learning correct pronunciations of Indigenous names and places (ask for help, watch Youtube videos.)
Commit to truth and reconciliation	

Key Terms in Land Acknowledgements

Mississaugas of the Credit (Pronounced Miss-uh- sagas)

Anishnaabe (Pronounced Awe – Nish – Nah - Beck)

The Wendat (Pronounced When – Dat)

The Haudenosaunee (Pronounced Hoe – De – Nah – Show – Nee)

The Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant – An agreement between tribes

Unceded Territories - First Nations people never ceded or legally signed away their lands to the Crown or to Canada. A traditional territory is the geographic area identified by a First Nation as the land they and/or their ancestors traditionally occupied and used.

Indigenous Solidarity In Defense of Black Lives

“In this moment we lift up and center Black voices and the Black Lives Matter movement. This does not mean that police brutality inflicted upon Native communities is any less crucial to address. It does not mean that our struggles are any less important. In fact, standing in solidarity and supporting Black Lives Matter, addresses the root causes of that brutality- systemic racism and white supremacy. Dismantling these systems is the work we need to do together...We have been pitted against one another to serve racist and divisive interests. We reject this false division and embrace the collective struggle.”

- Indigenous Environmental Network

Takeaways

- Land Acknowledgements are incantations of living history of Indigenous peoples
- As treaty people, we honor the land we occupy with Indigenous values
- Setting the right intentions and acting on them
- Indigenous and Black liberation are profoundly linked
- Honor the lived experiences of those experiencing discrimination

Q&A