TO: APA California Board of Directors

FROM: Miroo Desai

DATE: September 24, 2021

SUBJECT: Adoption of Policy on Land Acknowledgement & Corresponding Amendments to the Bylaws and Conference Planning Handbook

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

(1) That the Board adopt a stand-alone land acknowledgement policy by which Native American tribes are recognized as traditional stewards of the land. This policy will require State- and Section-initiated and/or sponsored events (webinars, conference sessions and other events) to begin with a land acknowledgement that acknowledges the stewardship of the tribes where the activities are being held.

(2) That the Board adopt changes to the APA California Chapter Bylaws and the APA Conference Handbook that will be triggered by adoption of (1) above.

**BACKGROUND:**

California has the second highest number of Native American population (those who identify themselves as American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) per Census categories). However, with their population standing at 328,112 it constitutes less than 1 per cent of state population.[[1]](#footnote-0) California is home to about 200 tribes and had the 18 original treaties with California tribes been honored by the state and federal government, the tribes would possess over 7.5 million acres of land. Today, California tribes collectively possess about 7 percent of their unratified treaty territory.[[2]](#footnote-1)

As a professional organization that fundamentally centers land and the use of land in its practice, APA California should encourage planners to think about what it means to be living and practicing their professions on occupied land. A land acknowledgment is a formal statement that recognizes and respects indigenous people as stewards of land and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional lands. A land acknowledgment is an expression of gratitude to those whose homelands we reside on and recognition of the original people who exclusively managed these lands prior to the arrival of settlers and colonizers. A land acknowledgement also provides a learning opportunity for those who may have never heard the names of the tribes that have and continue to live on the land that we all are standing on. California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center states that “acknowledging the land is a transformative act that works to undo the intentional erasure of indigenous peoples as the first step in decolonizing land relations.” It is critical to understand that these land acknowledgments are not about placing blame but are the first step towards building a more inclusive future so that indigenous peoples’ voices, lives, and history are not erased.

The practice of land acknowledgment is a small gesture and needs to go beyond that to preclude tokenism. For an organization such as APA California one way to do this is for us to educate ourselves and our membership on how indigenous communities are impacted and/or ignored in our planning practices in a thoughtful and responsible way. One way to do that is to intentionally seek out 2-3 conference sessions at each State conference and allow one by-right session that focuses on indigenous communities. The VP Diversity and Equity would work with conference organizers to develop at least one session on issues directly related to native American people in much the same way as they are responsible for organizing the Diversity Summit at the conference. By doing this APA California will affirm our responsibility to amplify indigenous voices and promote better understanding and public consciousness of Native sovereignty, history, and land use struggles.

To facilitate members to develop land acknowledgement statements attached is a “Guide to Land Acknowledgement” that can be posted on the State APA website and distributed as needed. It is anticipated that this Guide will be updated as needed.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

None.

**SUGGESTED NEW STAND-ALONE LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT POLICY:**

The APA California Chapter Board recognizes Native American tribes as traditional stewards of the land. State- and Section-initiated and/or sponsored events (webinars, conference sessions and other events) shall begin with a land acknowledgement that acknowledges the stewardship of the tribes where the activities are being held.

**OTHER INFORMATION (SEE ATTACHMENTS):**

1. Guide to Land Acknowledgement

2. Proposed Changes to the APA California Chapter Bylaws

3. Proposed Changes to the APA Conference Handbook

1. Source: CDC – Tribal Health (<https://www.cdc.gov/tribal/tribes-organizations-health/tribes/state-population.html>) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Source: CA Legislature Assembly Bill 1968, January 21, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)