



American Planning Association
California Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

TO: APA California Board of Directors and Section Board Members

FROM: Ashley Atkinson, President and Miroo Desai, VP Diversity and Equity

DATE: October 19, 2021

SUBJECT: Implementation of Policy on Land Acknowledgement

At its October meeting, APA California's Board of Directors adopted a land acknowledgment policy by which Native American tribes are recognized as traditional stewards of the land in which our members live and practice our profession. California has the second highest indigenous population and is home to about 200 tribes. This new policy will require Chapter- and Section-initiated or -sponsored events to begin with a statement that acknowledges the stewardship of the tribes where the activities are being held.

As an organization that fundamentally centers land and the use of land in its practice, APA California encourages planners to think about what it means to be living and working on occupied land. A land acknowledgment recognizes and respects indigenous people as stewards and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional lands. It also provides a learning opportunity for those who may have never heard the names of the tribes that continue to live on the land we all are standing on.

Land acknowledgments are not about placing blame but are a first step toward building a more inclusive future so that indigenous peoples' voices, lives, and histories are not erased. APA California will seek to continuously educate our leadership and membership in a thoughtful and responsible way on how indigenous communities are impacted or ignored in our planning practices. As an example, our annual conference will now feature at least one by right session on issues directly impacting indigenous peoples related to indigenous populations. 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 in our planning practice.

The Attached Guide below provides a step-by-step guide on how to go about implementing this policy. The policy is in effect immediately, but we hope that starting 2022 land acknowledgments become a standard way of starting APA events in California.

For any questions, please contact Miroo Desai at diversity@apacalifornia.org

Attachment:

Guide to Land Acknowledgement



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Guide to Land Acknowledgment APA California

1. What is Land Acknowledgment?

A land acknowledgment is a formal statement, a public recognition of the unique relationship that the indigenous people have as stewards of land and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional lands.

2. Why do we do Land Acknowledgment?

A land acknowledgment is an expression of gratitude to those whose homelands we reside on and is a recognition of the original people who exclusively managed these lands prior to the arrival of settlers and colonizers. It is also a way to counter the “doctrine of discovery” with the true story of the people who were already there. It is a simple and powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting practices that erase indigenous people’s history and culture. It is recognizing that true change can only occur in the context of truthfulness and transparency.

3. When do we do Land Acknowledgement

Land acknowledgments are done at the opening of a public gathering or event (in-person or virtual). This is typically done by the first person to speak at the event.

4. How do we compose a Land Acknowledgment statement

Step 1: Identify the tribal group or groups to be recognized.

Two sources are provided below.

(i) CA Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) manages a list of Tribes that the state identifies as having ancestral lands in CA.

They host a [digital atlas](#) which maps tribal ancestral lands . They can also provide a list of Tribes and their contact information for defined project areas

(ii) Native Land Digital, a non-profit organization also hosts a website which provides a map that is searchable by address: <https://native-land.ca/>

Step 2: Compose Statement

There is no exact or correct script. It could be a simple statement that acknowledges those on whose land the gathering is taking place; or it could include refer to reciprocal relationship with land; or it could also make mention of occupied, unceded territory in which the event is occurring.

Examples:**For In-person Events:**

“My name is [XX] and I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional and ancestral land of the _____ People.”

For Webinars:

“My name is [XX] and I would like to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking from [Name of City/County] which is the traditional land of the _____ People”:

Longer Statement Examples:

“My name is XX and I would like to begin by acknowledging that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the _____ People, and pay my respect to elders both past and present”; or

I want to respectfully acknowledge the _____ People, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations”; or

“We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the occupied/unceded seized territory of the _____ People.”; or

“I respectfully acknowledge that [Name of City/County] is on the traditional land of the _____ People”; and the connections of indigenous peoples to this land continue today. We have a responsibility to honor these connections and as these words of acknowledgement are spoken and heard we strive to understand our place within the past, present and future of these indigenous lands by reflecting on our relationships with human and other-than-human relatives with whom it is shared.”

Step 3: Deliver the Statement

There is a danger that a practice like this becomes a part of standard protocol that may get delivered flatly and without mindfulness. The statement should not be rushed and should be offered with respect, rooted in authentic reflection and awareness. Please also take the time to learn the correct pronunciation of names.

5. What is our Responsibility?

Land acknowledgement alone is not enough. You also need to take action to support indigenous organizations and communities, support indigenous-led grassroots movements. Act by being accountable to indigenous communities by supporting their causes, aligning oneself with their struggle and, speaking up when something problematic is being said.

APA California beginning 2022 will provide at least one by-right session at the annual conference on issues impacting indigenous communities so that our members get better educated.

Educating oneself is an ongoing responsibility that we all have.

6. Any Questions/Comments

For any questions or comments please contact VP Diversity and Equity at diversity@apacalifornia.org

7. Resources

[Why Land Acknowledgments Matter](#)

[Allyship](#)

[Settler Fragility: Why Settler Privilege Is So Hard to Talk About](#), by Dina Gilio-Whitaker, 2018

[Launching the California Freedom Council](#), Red Nation, September 17, 2020

Reading Lists by:

Red Nation: [Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Indigenous Liberation](#)

Capilano University Library: [Indigenous History, Activism and Health](#)

Northern Illinois University: [Gathering of Nations: Native American History, Identity and Activism.](#)

Open Education Database (OEDb): [20 Native American Authors You Need to Read.](#)

Sources: This Guide was derived from the following documents:

(1) Land Acknowledgement: You're on California Indian Land, Now What? Acknowledging Relationships to Space and Place, California Indian Culture and Sovereign Center.

(2) Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment, US Department of Arts and Culture.

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