

# Indigenous Learning

## Territorial Acknowledgement



### Ancestral diplomacy

Territorial acknowledgement is rooted in an ancient Indigenous diplomatic custom. When an Indigenous person came to be on the territory of another Nation, even if only passing through, they would announce their presence by saying something like, "I acknowledge that I am on the traditional territory of X Nation." It was a way of saying: "I acknowledge that you are the Nation responsible for preserving this territory and I come in peace."

### Today

In these times of reconciliation, the custom has been revived for meetings of a more or less official nature to acknowledge the Indigenous Nation or Nations that occupy the territory where the meeting is taking place.

**"Acknowledging territory shows recognition of and respect for Aboriginal Peoples. It is recognition of their presence, both in the past and the present. Recognition and respect are essential elements of establishing healthy, reciprocal relations. These relationships are key to reconciliation..."<sup>1</sup>**

Whatever the situation, making a respectful territorial acknowledgement at the start of an activity is essential to reconciliation.

### Wording

The wording depends on whether the territory is First Nations, Métis or Inuit land. It is also important to know whether or not a modern territorial agreement or treaty exists.

### Among Métis

When you are on Métis Nation territory, simply refer to territory and not to traditional territory.

### Among Inuit

The tradition of acknowledging territory does not exist among Inuit. However, Inuit Nunangat (where Inuit live) is not a large homogeneous block, but comprises four separate regions:

- Nunavut
- Nunatsiavut (Labrador)
- Nunavik (Quebec)
- Inuvialuit (Northwest Territories and Yukon)

### Among First Nations

There are hundreds of First Nations in Canada. Always check on which traditional territory you find yourself.

### Whether or not a modern treaty or territorial agreement is in place

The wording of the territorial acknowledgement changes depending on whether there exists a modern territorial agreement or treaty (traditional territory) or not (unceded traditional territory) between the Nation and Canada.

### What is a border?

The borders of colonial states often created artificial divisions within traditional territories. For example, Mohawk territory overlaps Quebec, Ontario and the United States.

### Potential overlap

Several Indigenous Nations may occupy the same territory, in which case, you must name them all. For example, in Vancouver, the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Tsawwassen Nations agree that their traditional territories overlap each other.

### Some examples

#### Winnipeg – First Nations (modern territorial agreement or treaty) and Métis

"I wish to acknowledge that we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory, traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, OjjiCree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation."

#### National Capital – First Nations (without a modern territorial agreement or treaty)

"I wish to acknowledge that the lands on which we are gathered are part of the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinaabeg People."

### Resources

No standard wording applies to all territories. There is no "one size fits all."

Several municipalities, provinces and territories have worked with their Indigenous partners to codify an appropriate wording.

Learn about the protocols that you should follow prior to your visit.

Ask an Indigenous Elder from the region to help you with the wording.

Please refer to the following resources:

- [Guide to Acknowledging](#) First Peoples and Traditional Territory
- [Native Land](#) website
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada Map Room
- [First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory](#)
- [Government of Quebec](#) Maps of Amerindian and Inuit Communities
- [Whose Land – Territories by Land](#)

<sup>1</sup>Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples and Traditional Territory