

The Association for Opera in Canada Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Resource

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A note from Rebecca Cuddy, Indigenous Advisor

This is only the beginning...

When using the resources that I have provided here, please remember that they are nuanced and have different meanings to different members of the community. I am a Métis woman, an Indigenous opera singer and living that experience on Turtle Island. That being said I am not, by any means, an authority on any Nation including my own. What I provide here is my best description for those who are beginning to learn. It is a mix of summary from many sources, years of learning and my own opinion. As much as I wish I could provide you with all the tools you need, one person is not enough. Once you are finished here, I strongly suggest seeking further understanding through multiple sources. Seek to learn from the Indigenous perspective. Remember your capacity for creativity and understanding. I will provide what I can as a start. What you read here is not set in stone and it can and will likely change as I, and we, learn more as a society.

-Maarsii, Miigweth, Merci, Thank you - Rebecca


The Association for Opera in Canada Land Acknowledgement

The offices of the Association for Opera in Canada are located in Toronto, Ontario, also known as T'karonto which in Kanien'kéha (Mohawk Language) means, 'the place in the water where the trees are standing'. It is a privilege for us to work, live and play on the traditional lands of the Wendat 'People of the Island', the Anishinaabe 'Original People', Haudenosaunee 'People of the Longhouse' and the Mississaugas of the New Credit 'River of the north of many mouths'. Toronto is now an international hub, with many diverse people who call this place home. That being said, we recognize, support and celebrate the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land.

Furthermore, as we are a national company, we extend this gratitude to the many Nations across Turtle Island. We will not lose sight of the fact that land acknowledgements exist as a small step in the process towards truth and reconciliation. However, there cannot be reconciliation before there is truth. We recognize the historical and continued oppression of lands, cultures and the Indigenous Nations in Canada. We commit to continue learning, educating and healing with our kin. We believe in the strength of the arts to aid us in creating a better world for us all.

What is Land Acknowledgement?

Land Acknowledgement is a practice in which a public statement is made recognizing the traditional land owners – First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit – on whose territory the event is occurring. This statement further acknowledges that these distinct Nations still gather and enjoy these lands today. This practice is an exercise in respect and reciprocal relations with Indigenous Peoples, and understanding the complex history of Canada.



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada began in 2008 and was part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The TRC is intended to aid Canadians as they begin to understand the truth of what occurred within the residential school system. This is an attempt to foster lasting reconciliation across Canada.

Further Reading

Local Love: What are land acknowledgements and why do they matter?

<https://locallove.ca/>

<https://locallove.ca/issues/what-are-land-acknowledgements-and-why-do-they-matter/#.XzlaquhKg2w>

LocalLove.ca, a digital magazine powered by United Way Greater Toronto

Writing a Land Acknowledgement

In order for this practice to have meaning to both the people making the acknowledgement and the people being acknowledged it needs to come from a place of meaning, understanding and empathy. Go above and beyond the standard one found on government or institution websites and use artistry in crafting a message with substance.

Guidelines:

Nation Names

Learn the names of the Nations whose land you are enjoying.

'Correct' Spelling

Indigenous languages in Canada began as orally transmitted languages, and were later written, so there are sometimes multiple spellings for the same word. i.e. Ojibwa, Ojibway, Ojibwe.

Be sure you are using the correct form of the word, whether it is singular or plural. i.e. Anishinaabeg is the plural of Anishinaabe, Inuk is the singular of Inuit.

Seek guidance from the community in your area if you are unsure which spelling to use.

Grammar

When writing always capitalize Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and specific Nations like Cree, Ojibway, Stó:lō... Just as you would English, French, Spanish... as it is a sign of respect and understanding.

Pronunciation is Key

When acknowledging the land, it is important to pronounce the names of each Nation correctly. Take care and time to let the message sink in and be meaningful. This practice is only a first step in reciprocity and deserves space. Consult with the Indigenous community in your area for appropriate pronunciation.

Treaty Territory or Unceded Land?

Understand the difference between treaty territory and unceded land (definitions below)

Ask for help

Seek guidance from the Indigenous community in your area. If you are writing an official land acknowledgement this is a must.

Sincerity

Find a way to connect to the message and make this a meaningful practice. If you are acknowledging the land before an event, remember why this practice is important and express why it is important to you. Get creative and explore this practice artistically. Land acknowledgement can mean so much or very little depending on the way it is presented.

To write an appropriate acknowledgement for your location it is important to remember that the land you are on was once home to one or many Nations. Our society today must seek to live in this understanding and share the land while still respecting the horrific violence the ancestors of these Nations experienced through residential schools, pass systems, potlach bans, Sixties Scoop and many more atrocities. Indigenous people in Canada still experience oppression, racism, police brutality and violence. Our job as Acknowledgers is to work with these Nations and protect the lands we now occupy together. The first step in writing a meaningful Land Acknowledgement is to understand whose land you are on. Having the names of the Nations and thanking them in a nonchalant statement before a production is not enough.

Questions to Reflect on for Further Research:

What are some of the cultural aspects of these Nations that make them unique and make this land and that Nation a beneficial pair?

Who is the current political leader of that Nation?

What is the Nation doing to protect their lands?

What are they asking of supporters and allies?

What can I do to show a genuine commitment to Indigenous communities?

TakingITGlobal's "Whose Land" App

This is an excellent resource for discovering whose land you are currently on. They even have videos with unique Land Acknowledgements from Indigenous people speaking on their Nations!

Just download the app and enter where you are in Canada and the U.S. This is an excellent resource to use when on opera tours where location changes day to day.

TakingITGlobal: <https://www.tigweb.org/>

Apple Store <https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/whose-land/id1350310353>

Android:

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=land.whose.app&hl=en_CA



Bead work and photography courtesy of Rebecca Cuddy

Canada's treaties: What is the difference between treaty territory, unceded territory, traditional territory and land claims?

Treaty Territory – Historic treaties were established beginning in 1701 between Indigenous people and The Crown (later the Canadian Government). Treaties were established in order for the European settlers to use and lay claims to the lands traditionally occupied by Indigenous Nations, and to define the rights of both parties. Treaty Territory in the context of land acknowledgements means that the land you are on is covered under one of the many treaties in existence, either historic or modern.

An example of treaty territory is Toronto/T'karonto which is covered under Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Sources:

Government of Canada: Treaties and agreements

<https://www.canada.ca/en.html>

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231>

City of Toronto: Land Acknowledgement

<https://www.toronto.ca/>

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/land-acknowledgement/>

Unceded Territory – To cede land (the act of cession) is the act of giving it up or surrendering authority and control over that land. In this way, Unceded Territory is land that has not been signed over to Canada through any treaties or agreements, and the Nation's Hereditary Chiefs have authority over the land.

An example of Unceded Territory is the Wet'suwet'en Nation in British Columbia, they have never signed treaties or sold their land to the Canadian Government.

Source:

The Canadian Encyclopedia: Treaties with Indigenous Peoples in Canada

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en>

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-treaties>

Traditional Territory – The lands that Indigenous Nations occupied and used for traditional purposes for thousands of years before British contact. It is important to note that British contact was not by any means the first settler contact with the land that became Canada. It was however the catalyst for colonization and the eventual formation of Canada as a country.

Source:

Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.: First Nation Protocol on Traditional Territory

<https://www.ictinc.ca/>

<https://www.ictinc.ca/first-nation-protocol-on-traditional-territory#:~:text=Traditional%20territory%20is%20as%20it,process%20or%20through%20modern%20treatis.>



Bead work and photography courtesy of Rebecca Cuddy

Land Claims – Treaties were signed with the understanding of mutual respect and co-existence between Indigenous Nations and the Crown. In order to access, purchase or take Indigenous land, treaties were written with specific obligations and responsibilities to the Indigenous Nations involved. Land claims are a dispute between Indigenous Nations and the Crown as pertains to their specific treaty rights, where the Crown is deemed to have failed to uphold their obligations. The federal government began negotiating land claims in 1973. Each land claim dispute is unique and specific. Land Claims are one of the many issues Indigenous people are facing in Canada today.

Land Claim disputes are a judicial process while the phrase 'Land Back' has its own meaning.

'Land Back' – You may hear Indigenous community members use this phrase or see them wearing it on various paraphernalia. At first glance this phrase might seem like Indigenous people are demanding they be given back the physical land, which was

taken by the Canadian government through various means. What is actually meant by this phrase is the sentiment that Indigenous people wish to have full sovereignty over the land that used to be in their charge; to care for it and to have the final say about what happens with it, which includes industrial development. This is not

about physical ownership but about moral and spiritual responsibility. This is the Indigenous viewpoint that we should continue collaborating, facilitating discussion and discouraging erasure of the past dismissals. For more information I suggest starting with these resources:

Further Reading:

4Rs Youth Movement: LAND BACK! What do we mean?

<http://4rsyouth.ca/>

<http://4rsyouth.ca/land-back-what-do-we-mean/>

Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper

<https://redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org/preface/>

Navigating Land Acknowledgements

Oftentimes, land acknowledgements can come across as rigid and unfeeling to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. There can be a lot of guilt felt on the part of the non-Indigenous audience and a feeling of insincerity or othering felt from the Indigenous side. Our job as Acknowledgers is to continue to explore ways in which to make this practice mutually engaging for everyone in attendance. Land acknowledgements are not meant to be a guilt trip. The intention is always to educate, remember and attempt steps in reconciliation with the Indigenous people of this country.

Below are sources that outline various views about land acknowledgements:

Vice: (Article) Indigenous Artists Tell Us What They Think About Land Acknowledgements

https://www.vice.com/en_ca

https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/j5yxbd/indigenous-artists-tell-us-what-they-think-about-land-acknowledgements

Baroness von Sketch: (Video) Land acknowledgement | Baroness von Sketch Show

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlGI7CI9nYo>

The Art of the Land Acknowledgement

As we move forward together as a society it is important to continue to express ourselves in our art. Our opera companies are some of the most artistically competent and innovative in the world. It is important we start viewing this part of the production process as artistic practice and continue to develop new and interesting ways in pursuing it. There is not only one 'right way' to do this work. We are all growing and learning together on this healing journey.

I encourage companies moving forward to consider land acknowledgement as an artistic practice to be considered and pursued as a part of the production as a whole. In what ways can we innovate and change the perspective of this practice? How can we use our art to tell this story?

Land Acknowledgement Resources by City

Before using this resource in creating your own land acknowledgement please keep in mind that territories are not defined by our society's city limits. Be sure to research whose land you are on before using any of the resources listed below. These are general land acknowledgements done by location of the opera hubs in Canada and they are the basic construction of a traditional land acknowledgement. I encourage much more creativity in order for this to be a meaningful practice.

I have provided pronunciation guidelines for the different Nations below; however, I recommend seeking guidance from your community directly and hearing how they pronounce their names and places. I am not an authority and there may be several correct ways to pronounce a name as there are often multiple dialects in the same language. Some of these pronunciations are my best approximation through much research.

Newfoundland

St. John's

We would like to respectfully acknowledge the territory in which we gather, as the ancestral home-lands of the Beothuk and the island of Newfoundland as the ancestral homelands of the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk. We would also like to recognize the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut and the Innu of Nitassinan, and their ancestors, as the original people of Labrador. We strive for respectful partnerships with all the peoples of this province as we search for collective healing and true reconciliation and honour this beautiful land together.

Beothuk – beh-AOH-thuhk – /be' ò:thək/

Mi'kmaq – MEE-ge-mah – /'mi:gmax/ –

Inuit – IH-noo-eet – /'Inuit/

(Place) Nunatsiavut – noo-NAT-seh-AH-voot – / nū: ' natse,a: , vüt /

(Place) NunatuKavut- noo-NAT-oo-KAH-voot – / nʊ'na : tʊ,kɑ : vʊt

Innu of the Nitassinan – EE-noo (of the) ni-TA-si-nan – / ' i : nʊ (of the) nɪ'ta : sl,nɑ : n

Quebec

Montreal

We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Nations.

Kanien'keha:ka – ka-nya-keh-HA-ga – / kanjɑke'ha : ga/

Ontario

Toronto

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Wendat, the Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Métis, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Wendat – WHEN-dat – / ' wɛndat/

Anishnaabeg – – ani-shi-NAH-beg – /'anɪʃɪ,nɑ : beg/

Haudenosaunee – hoe-de-no-SHOW-nee – / ' hoʊdənoʊ ' ʃoʊni/

Métis – may-TEE – / me ' tis /

Mississaugas – mis-si-SAH-gahs – /'mɪsɪs,a:gas/

Land Acknowledgement Example

Local Love: (Video) Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of T'karonto

<https://locallove.ca/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voXySM-knRc>

LocalLove.ca, a digital magazine powered by United Way Greater Toronto

Further Reading

Local Love: Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of T'karonto

<https://locallove.ca/>

<https://locallove.ca/issues/land-acknowledgements-uncovering-an-oral-history-of-tkaronto/#.XzlaH-hKg2w>

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Manitoba

Winnipeg

We would like to acknowledge that we are in Treaty 1 territory and that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Anshinaabeg – ani-shi-NAH-beg – /'anɪʃɪ, nɑː beg /

Cree – kree – /kri/

Oji-Cree – OH-jee-kree – / 'ɔdʒɪkri/

Dakota – dah-KOH-tah – /da 'kɔtɑ/

Dene – DEH-nay – / 'dɛne/

Métis – may-TEE – / me 'tis /

Saskatchewan

Regina

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territory and the traditional territory of the Cree and Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Métis.

Cree – kree – /kri/

Saulteaux – SOH-toh – / 'soʊtoʊ/

Assiniboine – ah-SIN-ih-boh-in – /a 'sɪnɪbɔɪn/

Métis – may-TEE – / me 'tis /

Saskatoon

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty 6 territory, the traditional territory of Cree Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Cree – kree – /kri/

Métis – may-TEE – / me ' tis /

Alberta

Edmonton

We wish to acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty 6 territory and a traditional meeting ground and home for many Indigenous Peoples, including Cree, Saulteaux, Niisitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, and Nakota Sioux.

Cree – kree – /kri/

Saulteaux – SOH-toh – / ' soustou /

Niisitapi – nit-SIT-tah-pee – /nlt'sltapi/

Métis – may-TEE – /me ' tis/

Nakota Sioux – nah-KOH-tah SOO – /na ' ko : ta su : /

Calgary

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearpaw, and Wesley First Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

Niitsitapi – nit-SIT-tah-pee – /nlt'sltapi/

Siksika – seeg-see-KAH – /si : ksi : ' ka/

Piikuni – pee-KAH-nee – /pi ' ga : ni/

Kainai – ga-ai-NAH – /ga'e : na/

Tsuut'ina – soo-TEN-na – / su ' tena

Nakoda – na-KO-da – /na'ko : da/

Chiniki – chin-ik-EE – /tʃɪnɪ ' ki/

Pronunciation Video

Reserves surrounding Calgary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6WKkZEOOPw>

Land Acknowledgement Example

Calgary Foundation – Land Acknowledgement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7relrOFY-4Y>

British Columbia

Vancouver

We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl'íl̓wətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

Salish – SAY-lish – /'se:llʃ/

Xʷməθkʷəy'əm – MUS-kwee-um – /xʷməθkʷəj'əm/

Skwxwú7mesh – skwuh-HO-mish – /skwə'hɔ:mɛʃ/

Səl'íl̓wətaʔ/Selilwitulh – tSLAY-wa-tooth – /'tsle:watuθ/

Pronunciation Video

How To Say Skwxwú7mesh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yknmoz9PZRU>

Victoria

We acknowledge and respect the Lekwungen-speaking Peoples on whose traditional territories we gather, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSANEC peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Lekwungen – luh-KWUNG-yen /lək'wəŋən/

Songhees – song-GEEZ – /sɔŋ'gi:z/

Esquimalt – es-KWAI-malt – /ɛ'skwaɪmɔ:lt/

WSANEC – wh-SAY-nuch – /xʷ'senətʃ/

Sources:

Canadian Association of University Teachers. Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory. Accessed on the web 20.08.2020

<https://www.caut.ca/>

<https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>

First-Nations.info. Pronunciation Guide to First Nations in British Columbia. Accessed on the web 18.08.2020

<https://www.first-nations.info/>

<https://www.first-nations.info/pronunciation-guide-nations-british-columbia.html>

Gov.bc.ca. A Guide to the Pronunciation of Indigenous Communities and Organizations in BC. Accessed on the web 18.08.2020

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/home>

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/a_guide_to_pronunciation_of_bc_first_nations_-_oct_29_2018.pdf

Bannock + Butter. PRONUNCIATION GUIDE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN BC. Accessed on the web 18.08.2020

<https://bannockandbutter.tumblr.com/>

<https://bannockandbutter.tumblr.com/post/31780109220/pronunciation-guide-for-indigenous-communities-in>

Engaging with Indigenous Communities and Artists

Indigenous knowledge is a valuable resource and, due to political and societal shifts, it is becoming more in demand in many sectors. In order to demonstrate a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship, Indigenous people must be compensated fairly for their time and knowledge, and the emotional labour that may accompany working on certain stories and productions.

Indigenous performers should be hired outside of Indigenous story-telling. Opera companies should actively seek to balance and diversify their artist rosters by giving equal casting opportunity to Black, Indigenous and people of colour. Many BIPOC artists are highly trained in the world's top institutions and this should not be overlooked due to prejudiced ideas about race.

Avoid Pan-Indigenous outlooks and understand the differences between First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Pan-Indigenous is the concept that all Indigenous people are the same and have the same views, culture and racial attributes. It stems from the use of the term 'Indigenous' as an umbrella term for all of the Nations in Canada and can lead to misconceptions about distinct cultures. If a production identifies a distinct culture, the entire creative team must have a significant understanding of that culture and the ways it differs from others. This same attitude should be taken when engaging with Black communities and other people of colour.



Bead work and photography courtesy of Rebecca Cuddy

Understand that Indigenous people in Canada do not all look the same, and skin colour varies from white to dark brown and everything in between. Afro-Indigenous people have an equally valid experience and should not be dismissed.

Hollywood and mainstream media leads society to believe that Indigenous people have a certain 'look', which can lead to ill-advised decisions when casting for Indigenous content. Cast Indigenous performers for their talent and expertise, not with this antiquated understanding of what they are 'supposed' to look like.

There are protocols and correct practices that should be followed when pursuing an Indigenous production that begin before rehearsal day one. Seek guidance from the appropriate Indigenous leadership on how to respectfully engage Indigenous artists. Remember that it is no longer an acceptable practice to produce art about Indigenous people without the consent, participation and approval of Indigenous people, i.e. 'No Art About Us Without Us'.

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The links and sources listed throughout this resource are not associated with the Association for Opera in Canada in any way and do not endorse us. These links are provided in this resource to properly site useful information found within the sites and for the convenience of readers who wish.