Land Acknowledgement and Indigenous Metadata

In late 2021, the PCC Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ACDEI) was asked by the PCC Policy Committee (PoCo) to draft a land acknowledgment statement for use by the PCC. In investigating this request, ACDEI members found significant criticism of these statements, with the main concern being that these statements can be performative and used in place of initiating real change benefiting Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the PCC is a global organization, whose members include Indigenous people and settlers across a variety of geographic, institutional, and historical contexts, and whose activities take place on many different lands and virtual infrastructures. As such, no single land acknowledgement can represent the PCC’s relationships to Indigenous lands or peoples. A generic or “fill in the blank” land acknowledgement would be antithetical to the local reflection, contextualization, and action that these types of statements encourage.

ACDEI concluded instead that more education was needed for PoCo members to make an informed decision on the appropriateness of making a land acknowledgement statement. As a first step toward understanding the nature of the commitment such a statement would entail, PoCo members were pointed to various resources available online.

After further discussion at the PoCo January 12, 2023 meeting, PoCo requested that ACDEI compile a list of resources to aid PCC members in developing greater awareness of Indigenous peoples and an understanding of the issues involved in making land acknowledgement statements, as well as Indigenous issues within metadata contexts. These resources are listed below. This listing is not meant to be comprehensive nor exhaustive. We actively encourage members to seek out additional resources and welcome additions to this list.

Our listing starts off with the Native Land Digital Map as any initial step must begin with the knowledge of whose lands we are situated on. The resources that follow lead you to presentations, teaching modules, articles, and websites. However, none of these resources is a substitute for establishing relationships with Indigenous peoples themselves. We encourage the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships with local Indigenous peoples (including appropriate recognition of the significant demands on the time and energy of those within Indigenous communities).

Land Acknowledgement Resources

Native Land Digital Map
Map showing the traditional territories of Indigenous groups in North America, Australia, South Africa, and parts of South America. The map provides a glimpse into the complexity of Indigenous groups past and present, with a goal of sparking discussion about colonialism.

Beyond Land Acknowledgement Resources
List of 16 resources compiled by Adrienne Keene (Cherokee Nation) in 2021, with information about the Land Back movement and moving beyond symbolic or check-box acknowledgements.

What’s Wrong With Land Acknowledgments, and How to Make Them Better
2021 CBC News article by Ka’nhehsí:io Deer providing perspectives from multiple First Nations people on land acknowledgments, and how organizations can take action beyond those statements.

More than Words: A Guide to Land Acknowledgements
A tool created by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Western University to help guide people through reflections which can provide insight into writing better land acknowledgment statements.

Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples and Traditional Territory
A compilation of land acknowledgment statements created by the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

Land Acknowledgement and Beyond: Special Collections and Indigenous Community (part 1) (part 2)
2-part webinar hosted by the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries in 2021.

Land Acknowledgement Template for Personalization, Definitions, and Speaker Protocol
A 17-page document with a customizable template created in 2019 by the University of Alberta Library and Information Studies Students’ Association.

Are you Planning to do a Land Acknowledgement?
2019 blog post from Dr. Debbie Reese on the American Indians in Children’s Literature blog about whether and how to do a land acknowledgement.

So You Began Your Event with an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement. Now What?
2023 NPR broadcast/story on land acknowledgements and perspectives from Indigenous leaders and activists on the practice.

Transformative Territory Acknowledgement Guide
Guide from Len Pierre Consulting, with examples, guidelines and resources for developing more reflective and transformative territorial acknowledgements.
Indigenous Metadata Resources

Latin American and Indigenous Peoples of the Americas (LAIPA) SACO Funnel

SACO Funnel project that provides a mechanism for proposing the creation of new subject headings and the changing or updating of old subject headings relating to Latin America and to the experience of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Best Practices in Authority Work Relating to Indigenous Nations in the U.S.

2023 document from the LAIPA SACO Funnel, providing guidance to US-based settlers and other non-Indigenous people on authority work relating to Indigenous nations in the U.S., with an emphasis on sustained relationship building in ensuring library terminology respects Indigenous peoples’ autonomy in naming practices.

Global Indigenous Data Alliance (GIDA)

Organization of Indigenous researchers, data practitioners, and policy activists formed in 2019 to develop frameworks, tools, and processes to help guide the practice of Indigenous Data Sovereignty around the globe, including hosting the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance in multiple languages.

Local Contexts

A global initiative that supports Indigenous communities with tools that attribute cultural authority of heritage and data. Local Contexts provides a set of multilingual labels and notices to indicate conditions for access and use of both traditional knowledge in digital contexts, and biocultural collections and data.

Guidelines on Working with Indigenous Partners and Information

List of eight existing guidelines for visual resource workers, developed by Devon Murphy in 2019 as Getty Vocabulary Intern at the Getty Research Institute, such as the Society of American Archivists’ Protocols for Native American Archival Materials and the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums Digital Stewardship Curriculum.

Creating subject headings for Indigenous topics: a culturally respectful guide

2023 document by Richard Sapon-White, Pamela Louderback, and Sara Levinson, designed to facilitate the work of catalogers creating subject headings for Indigenous topics.

National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance nationale des connaissances et des langues autochtones (NIKLA-ANCLA)

A Canadian Indigenous (First Nations, Métis & Inuit) alliance to bring together cross-disciplinary professionals, para-professionals, Indigenous knowledge keepers and Indigenous grass-roots community and organizations to address matters of importance around Indigenous ways of knowing, knowledges, language and cultural memory/heritage. Their metadata-related initiatives include the First Nations, Métis, Inuit Indigenous Ontology (FNMIIO), and the Respectful Terminology project.

Indigenous Subject Headings at the Greater Victoria Public Library

(.pdf download) Ongoing project to replace Library of Congress and Canadian subject headings related to Indigenous peoples with locally developed interim Indigenous subject headings using more current terminology.

Xwi7xwa Library. Indigenous Knowledge Organization

Overview of the library’s use of a locally developed classification scheme and subject heading system to organize material in its collection with links to additional resources.

Lau Lau Ka 'Ike

Hawaiian Language Controlled Vocabulary and Metadata. The project included collaborative work on a new vocabulary which can be searched at Ulukau.org.

Implementing Reparative Description for Indigenous Collections

An hour-long 2021 webinar hosted by the Society of American Archivists, Native American Archives Section. Panelists defined reparative description, described its practice and limitations, and shared information about efforts in multiple institutions, including the Menominee Tribal Archives and the National Museum of the American Indian Culture Thesaurus.

Collaboratory for Indigenous Data Governance

A group that develops research, policy, and practice innovations for Indigenous data sovereignty.