

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  
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Land Acknowledgements appear to be growing in interest among businesses, nonprofits, churches, and individuals. Land acknowledgements are exactly that: an acknowledgement that the land on which one lives, or works, or worships was once occupied by people whose ancestors lived there for millennia. Land Acknowledgements can be found on websites, programs, and documents. They can be read aloud at the beginning of public events such as meetings, performances, worship services, and sporting events.

The effort to compose and publicize a Land Acknowledgement varies widely. Done quickly with little effort it might entail simply putting a postal code into an internet search. There are sites which will immediately offer a list of tribes that live (d) in your present location. For some this might be sufficient. But I suggest that such a statement may (appropriately) be seen as an empty gesture, or worse simple “political correctness”. As such it only contributes to the dishonesty that Native people have experienced already.

Some Land Acknowledgements offer more than a tribal name. They might say something about how the land changed hands. Some might say honestly that the change involved violence and brutality.

Composing an honest and meaningful Land Acknowledgement involves a good deal of effort. Done well it can be a first step in acknowledging, learning and continuously teaching about the true history of a place.

When done carefully, those composing such a statement approach the work with an open heart, with a willingness to learn some hard truths. One must be willing to learn a different history, learn that familiar buildings, agencies, schools, and sports venues bear the name of the perpetrators of the worst racism and violence. Where I live in California much of the development dates back to the

Gold Rush era, and before that the Spanish occupation. If, as we hope will happen, our churches and agencies want to have a Land Acknowledgement, then a fair amount of humility will be required.

When done carefully, those composing such a statement take the sometimes-frightening step of reaching out to the local Indigenous community and listening to their description of how the reservations and rancherias were established and how the land was taken and about the toll that such violence and treatment has taken and continues to take. They are willing to hear about the present-day struggles to uphold tribal sovereignty.

When done carefully, the composition of a Land Acknowledgement is a collaborative effort between natives and non-natives. It will take more time to produce as is often the case when we try to listen to each other and not dictate what it is we want the finished product to look like.

When done carefully, a Land Acknowledgement provides a way to learn about, and appreciate, the resilience of Indigenous people who have endured colonialism and land theft and who are not relics of the past.

A well-crafted Land Acknowledgement can be a vehicle for education, truth-telling, deep listening, and relationship building. It can lead to some soul searching, a questioning of “how it’s always been”. It can open up avenues for repentance and partnership (particularly around justice).

For all of these reasons, I believe it is worth the effort.