

# Oregon Library Association: Inviting Indigenous Voices into Libraries



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# From Land Acknowledgment to Statement of Accountability

*“It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation.” –*

**Northwestern University**



The screenshot shows the Native Governance Center website. The main heading is "BEYOND LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT: A GUIDE" with a sub-heading "SEPTEMBER 21, 2021". Below the heading is a photograph of a group of people at a protest or event, holding signs that say "WATER IS LIFE" and "WATER IS SWEET". The text below the photo reads: "Native Governance Center held an event on moving beyond land acknowledgment on August 25, 2021. The event featured Nikki Pitre (Center for Native American Youth), Joye Braun (Indigenous Environmental Network), President Robert Larsen (Lower Sioux Indian Community), and Michelle Vassel and David Cobb (Wiyot Honor Tax). This guide is based on content contributed during our event; we are grateful to our presenters for sharing their wisdom with us." At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a section titled "WHAT IS INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT?".



## LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON INDIAN SERVICES

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### Land Acknowledgment Guidance Document

Land acknowledgments have become common practice over the past few years, frequently occurring at the commencement of meetings, conferences, or symposia, as well as preface or post-script to written documents. The reasons for offering a land acknowledgment vary, but one can assume that they are offered with the best of intentions. Well-intentioned or not, it is necessary to recognize that land acknowledgements may not have their desired effect.

The response or reaction to land acknowledgements varies among Tribes and among tribal members. Some view land acknowledgements as an “important first step.” Conversely, some have said that land acknowledgements have become so commonplace that they are merely performative. At their worst, land acknowledgements can be viewed as condescending and, in fact, simply adding to or perpetuating the trauma associated with the doctrine and implementation of Manifest Destiny. (Of course, when meeting on lands that are currently, formally recognized as Tribal lands (e.g. reservation lands), a land acknowledgement may not only be considerate and appropriate, but also necessary). Recognizing that there are many delicate considerations that accompany a land acknowledgment, agencies have sought guidance on proper wording and process.

The relatively recent movement to provide a land acknowledgment may be fueled by an apparent reckoning that history, as taught in the average classroom, is incomplete or one-sided at best. On one hand, a land acknowledgement can serve to advance this reckoning by acting as a reminder to some while also introducing this notion to others. On the other hand, a land acknowledgement can seem incomplete and, consequently, insulting. For example, in offering a land acknowledgement, the proponent recognizes that modern day society exists on lands that previously belonged to the indigenous peoples of the area. The proponent may (or may not) also acknowledge that these lands were taken by force, with brutal consequences to the indigenous peoples. Yet, while these facts are acknowledged, no reparations are offered or suggested. So, what purpose did the acknowledgment serve? At best, it offered an opportunity to educate. At worst, it is nothing more than a salve for the speaker and audience. Although it can serve as a form of apology, an apology can be seen as entirely hollow when it does nothing to make amends for the prior wrong.

# Why integrate Indigenous perspectives into all of our shared systems?

- ▶ Because Western ideals and worldview are killing the planet, us and our collective future
- ▶ They are the operating manual for THIS place we call home
- ▶ They are missing in practically all of mainstream American life
- ▶ Because it's the ethical thing to do, to at least serve your Native constituency
- ▶ To restore balance to the land by working with the people who feel accountable to it
- ▶ For our shared future, not just Native futures (but isn't it high time to be thinking about Native futures?)



# Why are people so ill informed about Native Americans?



## Missing information/Mis-information

- Scarce statistical findings (“something else”)
- Mis-informed K-12 education/educators
- Stereotypes (all Natives are the same)
- Museum narratives (Indians only in the past)
- Mascots (“we’re honoring you dude”)
- Festival culture (“I love the Native Americans”)
- Entitlement (“Hey, they lost the war”)
- Blatant racism (“They don’t deserve to be included”)
- No Native-informed/created pop-culture references

# Common pitfalls when serving Native people

- Fear of doing something wrong
- Questionable motives
- Settler fragility
- Tokenism/box checking
- Expect Native people to do all the hard work
- Not ready/haven't done internal work
- Expect Native people to work for free because it “benefits” them
- Develop plan and THEN ask folks to consult
- White savior or “charity” vs. allyship



## Moving toward better representation: Today's agenda will help you!

- *Listen*
- Bring an attitude of *humility*
- *Consider* (maybe for the first time) that you are a guest in Indigenous lands
- Be *curious* how including Indigenous perspectives might improve your professional as well as personal lives—in addition to Native futures

