

Land Acknowledgment Learning Resource

Click through the hyperlinks for additional reading and resources.



All images are stills from *Ecologies of Acknowledgment*, 2019, Sarah Kanouse and Nicholas Brown

What are land acknowledgments?

Land acknowledgments are statements that name a location's Indigenous inhabitants and caretakers, promoting respect and recognition of those inhabitants and their immemorial, complex histories with the land we occupy. They are often read at the beginning of gatherings or posted permanently in communal spaces. As both gathering sites and educational spaces, Tufts University Art Galleries recognize the Indigenous past, present, and future of the land we are situated on. The Galleries' land acknowledgment-related work is part of a broad effort that many groups and institutions around the country and the world are undertaking.

Though land acknowledgments are not catch-all solutions for the violence of settler coloniality, they can prompt reflection on indigeneity and how settler coloniality is present in the fabric of our realities. Land acknowledgments can help us begin a long process of redefining our relationship with our Indigenous neighbors and strengthening our consideration and care for the land we reside on.

What is the university's relationship to land acknowledgments?

Tufts is one of many universities in the United States and around the world that is taking part in the land

Useful Terms

Indigeneity: Indigenous populations are communities that live within and have preexisting sovereignty over geographically distinct traditional habitats or ancestral territories, and who are the original or earliest-known inhabitants of an area, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied, or colonized the area more recently.

Settler colonialism: A type of colonialism in which the occupation of land and extraction of resources such as animals, plants, minerals, and labor is the primary aim. Occupation of settled land depends on the destruction and erasure of indigenous people by a state outside of the occupied land. Nations such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa are examples of settler colonial states.

Sovereignty: The authority of a state or group of people to govern themselves and have self-determination. The Indigenous Environmental Network [defines sovereignty](#) in two contexts: Tribal Sovereignty and Indigenous Sovereignty. Tribal Sovereignty is "the legal recognition in the United States of America law of the inherent sovereignty of American Indian Nations." Indigenous Sovereignty "consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters and all upon them. Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the nation-state does or does not do. It continues as long as the People that are a part of it continue."

Trust Relationship: A relationship in which a trustee protects and maintains property for a beneficiary, who holds equitable title of that property. The US government acts as trustee to federally allocated Indigenous land or reservations for the beneficiary: Indigenous inhabitants. This legal relationship with the US government was established in 1790 after the passage of the Indian Nonintercourse Act and establishes power with Congress to make all future land allocation determinations. Indigenous land beneficiaries and reservations are continually placed in positions of precarity, as land-granted sovereignty exists only as Congress so allows. Further history of "Indian Law" as dictated by the US Supreme Court can be found [here](#).

acknowledgment process. Hundreds of US universities owe at least part of their substantial endowments to the seizure and sale of Indigenous land via the Morrill Act in 1862. Though Tufts did not acquire land through this specific avenue, the adoption of land acknowledgments and the work surrounding them here and elsewhere is an essential step in exploring how American higher education is implicated in settler colonial projects.

Though this guide is meant to accompany the gallery-specific land acknowledgment, it is important to note that work on a [university-wide acknowledgment](#) began last year, following a student-led resolution and with [encouragement from faculty](#).

Key Questions

What is your relationship to the land occupied by Tufts' campuses? What experiences has the land granted you? How have you treated it in return?

What does a land acknowledgment achieve? What does it not achieve? What next steps do you envision for yourself or for the Tufts community?



Local Indigenous and Tribal Resources

Massachusetts Tribe: The Massachusetts are the descendants of the Neponset band of the tribe, who in the early 17th century were among the first to encounter English settler colonialists in what is now known as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Ancestral Massachusetts lands stretch from Salem to Plymouth and reach as far west as Worcester. Today, Massachusetts tribal governance is based in Ponkapoag, Massachusetts.

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe: Also known as the People of the First Light, the Mashpee Wampanoag have inhabited land from Provincetown to the Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years. After a decades-long struggle with federal courts to re-obtain legal right to their ancestral land, the Mashpee Wampanoag began to establish sovereign tribal territory for its 2,600 members in Mashpee and Taunton, Massachusetts, in 2015.

Nipmuc Nation: The Nipmuc, or “fresh water people,” reside on original homelands located in central Massachusetts, northwestern Rhode Island, and northeastern Connecticut. The Nipmuc’s ancestral homeland for its 600 members is the Hassanamisco Reservation in Grafton, Massachusetts.

General Resources

The Native Land database is a guide to Indigenous territories around the globe with links to tribe and community websites, language resources, and treaties. Information on local Indigenous communities, along with countless others, is available there.

The **Invasion of America** interactive map documents the seizure of Indigenous land by the US government from 1776 to 1887.

The US Department of Arts and Culture’s **Honor Native Land** site offers further context and resources for understanding and creating land acknowledgments.

What’s next?

It’s important for land acknowledgments to extend from one-time statements to long-term engagement with the land and the communities that live on it. Listed below are next steps you can take as you continue your learning.

Urge Massachusetts state legislators to change the state flag, ban Native mascots, and preserve Native heritage.

Explore the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda and keep up to date on their action items.

Donate your time or resources to the Native American Indian Center of Boston.

The resources above offer a few possible perspectives within wider conversations. Do you have other related resources or key questions that you think should be included in this guide? Please email **Liz Canter** with your suggested additions.

