



Washington University in St. Louis

BROWN SCHOOL

Native Acknowledgment: A Best Practice for Using Spaces at the Brown School

In keeping with its commitment to advance social justice and equity, the Brown School endorses Native acknowledgment as a best practice for event organizers using space within the school.

What Is Native Acknowledgment?

A growing number of cultural and educational institutions in North America recognize that they are inadvertent beneficiaries of the forcible expulsion of Native peoples from traditional homelands. Many address this history and its lasting effects by opening public events with a Native acknowledgment. These brief statements commonly honor the land's indigenous inhabitants and recall their losses.

Why Native Acknowledgment?

The Brown School's endorsement of Native acknowledgement reflects our mission to advance social justice and our deep ties within Native communities.

Our work is rooted in recognizing historical injustices and pursuing effective remedies. The consequences of historical Indian removal events persist in well-documented health and socioeconomic outcomes, as well as in the benefits that have accrued to those who resettled the region after the expulsion of Native inhabitants. The Brown School has flourished on land taken from the Native peoples who called this region home. We bear an obligation to acknowledge this history, create a public awareness, and repair relationships with American Indian communities and the land.

The endorsement of acknowledgment is also motivated by the work of Native leaders within the school and by our deep ties within Native communities. Our Native faculty, staff, and students are leaders in their fields, have shaped the school's innovative curriculum, and were instrumental in bringing Native design principles into our current shared spaces; our Native students draw upon unique backgrounds and the Brown School's training to cultivate social change. The Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies is a hub for the recruitment and preparation of Native professionals as well as for several of the Brown School's research collaborations with Native partners.

How to Offer a Native Acknowledgment

Native acknowledgments are typically offered at the start of public events and need not come from Native speakers. Usually no longer than a sentence or two, the statement should reflect an understanding of the historical events that motivated it. The statement should not be rushed, but given with authenticity. Several sample statements are provided below and may be adapted as needed:

1. I would like to take this moment to recognize the sacrifice of the tribes that once lived and thrived here. We, the present stewards of the land they surrendered, honor them as we live, work, and study here at Washington University.
2. We begin by acknowledging that we gather today on the ancestral lands of Native peoples who were removed unjustly, and that we in this community are the beneficiaries of that removal. We honor the heritage of Native peoples and what they teach us about stewardship of the earth.
3. We would like to acknowledge that [organization name] is located on the traditional and ancestral territory of Native peoples. We thank them for their hospitality and support of our work.
4. We begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional homelands of Native people. We pay respect to elders both past and present, and we thank them for their hospitality.
5. We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the occupied territory of Native peoples.

If you have questions about offering a Native acknowledgment or seek assistance in identifying someone who can offer one at an event, please contact the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies (bcais@wustl.edu).