



Constructing Land Acknowledgements in Kansas: A Toolkit for Educational Institutions From the Kansas Association for Native American Education

As more institutions of education in Kansas work to create culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments for their students and stakeholders, many leaders look to their Native American community members to construct a land acknowledgement. The land in what is now Kansas is part of the ancestral homeland of numerous Indigenous nations. Kansas was also once Indian territory, and many Native nations were forcibly moved to, or through, this state. Today, four federally recognized nations retain a reservation land-base in Kansas, and other nations still hold tracts of land in various places throughout the state. Therefore, doing a land acknowledgement in Kansas can be a complex undertaking. Additionally, there are legitimate criticisms that have been raised nation-wide about how land acknowledgement practices can be shallow, under-researched, and/or simply performative in nature, with little substantive action tied to Indigenous nations, communities, and peoples. **In light of these challenges, the Kansas Association for Native American Education (KANAE) developed this toolkit to help educators in Kansas construct their own land acknowledgements in a more accurate, appropriate, and responsible manner.** To that aim, a land acknowledgement should prioritize building relationships and a knowledge-base rather than simply creating a static statement. This toolkit, like the land acknowledgement you will create, is an evolving document that will likely be updated in the future as we all try to refine this relatively new practice in our institutions of education.

A note on terms: We recognize that broad terms like Indigenous, American Indian, and/or Native American, and specific tribal affiliations are used differently in every community, and there are ongoing debates about which terms should be prioritized.

Why a Land Acknowledgement?: Important Considerations Before Crafting a Land Acknowledgement

A land acknowledgement explores the history of the land you currently occupy and should be viewed as an educational toolkit to advance a more accurate understanding of Indigenous nations, communities, peoples, and places. As Haskell Indian Nations University professor Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi, Muscogee) explains, “*Indigenous peoples*...refers to peoples or nations who take their tribal identities as members of the human species from the landscapes and seascapes that gave them their unique tribal cultures.”¹ As implied here, the socio-cultural worldviews of Native peoples have always been inherently tied to the land, and land is therefore more than a commodity to be bought, sold, or exploited for resources. This is why Kaw Nation Vice Chairman James Pepper Henry has recently argued that land acknowledgements should in fact function as “people acknowledgements.”

¹ Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Fulcrum, 2009), 32.

Hence, as an educational toolkit, a land acknowledgement does more than denote past Indigenous presence. In our schools and educational systems today, Native peoples are often romanticized in our textbooks and curricula as existing only in the past.² However, Native peoples are still present—they are our students, staff, faculty, and community partners. They continue to thrive as learners despite ongoing colonialism and oppression.³ A land acknowledgement offers recognition, representation, and inclusion of current and past Indigenous populations.

In preparation for constructing a land acknowledgement, it is important to ask critical questions of your motivations, and what you and your institution are hoping to accomplish, such as:

- What are my/our personal goals in developing the land acknowledgement?
- What are the goals of my group/institution in creating a land acknowledgement?
- What do I need to learn or understand about our local history before composing a land acknowledgement?
- How do I go about educating myself on these topics, and not automatically place that burden on Native American community members?
- How will I go about educating my group/institution about what I have learned?
- Where will this land acknowledgement publicly reside?
- How will the land acknowledgement inform and improve our institutional culture through words and actions?

In the process of crafting a land acknowledgement, you will learn about the land we occupy as well as the historical and ongoing nature of colonization. By tying a land acknowledgement to actions, individuals and institutions demonstrate a larger commitment to support Indigenous peoples.

Four Essential Components for a Kansas Land Acknowledgement

When constructing a land acknowledgement in the state of Kansas, each place will have its own unique historical nuances to consider. We recommend the following four essential components that should be present in all land acknowledgements:

- 1. Acknowledge ancestral homelands:** The logical starting point for any land acknowledgement is to research which specific Native nations lived in a particular location upon the arrival of European and Euro-American settlers. To make this a more educational process, we suggest citing specific treaties and linking to relevant sources related to the forced removal of nations from your current location.

² Shear, S. B., Knowles, R. T., Soden, G. J., & Castro, A. J., “Manifesting Destiny: Re/Presentations of Indigenous Peoples in K-12 U.S. History Standards,” *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 43(1) (2015), 68–101; Shear, S., Cultural Genocide Masked as Education: U.S. History Textbooks’ Coverage of Indigenous Education Policies. In *Doing Race in Social Studies* (Information Age Publishing, 2015).

³ Sabzalian, L., *Indigenous Children’s Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019).

On the western plains of Kansas, this can be a complicated endeavor since many Native peoples used those lands at various times for their buffalo hunts. Since we do not always have sources that offer specific clarity for every location, we suggest that, in addition to relevant treaties and specific details, remember to remain inclusive in your acknowledgements and indicate potential overlaps in the traditional territories of the Indigenous nations from your area. It might be necessary to simply discuss this complexity in the actual text of the acknowledgement.

To identify and recognize the ancestral homelands on which you currently reside, you will find treaties, maps, and websites in the resources section below. We suggest also incorporating the websites of the Native nations that you acknowledge, and hyperlinking when possible. Along with showing that these nations still exist, these tribal websites often have important educational resources related to history, cultures, languages, and government.

Keywords to help represent this component: *ancestral homelands, ancestral lands, original inhabitants*

- 2. Acknowledge the Native nations that were forcibly resettled to your area (if applicable):** After identifying ancestral homelands, it is also important to determine if any Native nations were forcibly resettled in your area. Some areas of Kansas may not have been home to emigrant communities, so this may not apply to all specific locations. However, in the eastern half of Kansas, many Native nations spent decades in Kansas, before they were often forcibly removed, again, to Oklahoma. In this complex history, some Indigenous nations were also merged or legally dissolved during their time in Kansas. We suggest citing specific treaties, and including relevant sources related to these removals. To determine the Native nations that may have temporarily lived in the region, there are several treaties, acts of Congress, maps, and websites in the resources section that will help address this essential component of your land acknowledgement.

Keywords to help represent this component: *treaties, historic reservation, forced removal, forced resettlement*

- 3. Acknowledge local Native nations and peoples are still in Kansas:** While Kansas is not part of their ancestral homelands, there are four federally recognized nations that have reservation land bases in Kansas today: the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation; the Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas; the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska; and the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska. These nations were forcibly removed to Kansas in the nineteenth century and remain here. Some of these nations have relatives that are also federally recognized in other parts of the U.S.

Many Indigenous peoples reside in Kansas today outside of the four federally recognized tribal nations. Some Indigenous peoples and their families never left Kansas. Some Indigenous peoples were compelled to take allotments (individually owned

pieces of land tied to U.S. land dispossession efforts) in order to avoid further removals. During the federal boarding school era, many Indigenous children were relocated to Haskell Institute, as well. Today, this institution has been reclaimed as Haskell Indian Nations University, which attracts students of diverse tribal affiliations from across the country, including Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. Additionally, due to federal relocation programs, thousands of Indigenous peoples relocated to Kansas cities beginning in the World War II era. In the twentieth and twenty-first century, many Indigenous peoples, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians moved to Kansas for a variety of reasons. Currently, the school districts with the largest number of Indigenous students in Kansas are Wichita and Lawrence, however Indigenous peoples live throughout Kansas in almost every school district.

Allow this information to inform your land acknowledgement, especially in terms of understanding that there are likely Native students attending your institution. For communities near the four federally recognized nations still in Kansas, consider how your institution could engage in institutional relationship-building with these nations from a starting point of mutual respect. Through such relationships, educational institutions can learn how an Indigenous nation would prefer to be acknowledged in public statements. This is why we encourage any land acknowledgement to be paired with substantive action items, which are discussed below.

- 4. Turn acknowledgements into actions:** All land acknowledgements should include action steps. This toolkit challenges you to go beyond a simple statement and instead engage with and respond to Native peoples. Such action steps include:
- Engage in listening sessions with your Native students, families, nations, and communities, and generate strategic action plans as a result.
 - Create programs and pathways that respond to the unique cultural needs of Native nations and peoples.
 - Build mutually beneficial partnerships with Native nations and institutions and/or create positions that allow your institution to do so.
 - Examine and reflect on your school data with a focus on Native students in your institution.
 - Hire Native faculty and staff.
 - Create or provide scholarships for Native students.
 - Create infrastructure for Indigenous culture and language coursework.
 - Create Indigenous studies units, courses, etc.
 - Host and/or attend professional development opportunities which help individuals learn from, and with, Indigenous communities.
 - Create opportunities for mentorship and networking specific to Native students, staff, and faculty in your area.

This list is not exhaustive and represents potential starting points. A land acknowledgement and an action plan should be tailored to local contexts – especially based upon local Native stakeholders’ needs.

KANAE commends you for engaging in the important work of making your community more inclusive for Native peoples.

Key considerations regarding language and word choice:

- **Ancestral homelands:** In the context of a land acknowledgement, the term “ancestral homeland” acknowledges the original Indigenous peoples who called a place their home. Homelands included numerous permanent towns, temporary residences, meeting grounds, burial and sacred sites, and broader hunting grounds through which Native peoples lived and moved as they engaged in hunting, trading, and diplomacy throughout the year. As an example, the Kanza, Osage, and Pawnee (among others) have ancestral homelands in Kansas. Additionally, the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanches (among others) used the western plains as their hunting grounds for seasonal bison hunts.
- **Historic reservation:** Some nations whose ancestral homelands included Kansas were also confined to a reservation within the state. There were also many nations, such as the Shawnee and Ottawa (among others), who were not Indigenous to Kansas but were moved through this state, and these nations had reservation land and made their homes, often for decades, in Kansas.
- **Contemporary reservation:** A reservation land base held by a federally recognized tribe in Kansas today.
- **Colonialism:** Colonialism refers to the process by which an external power intrudes into the territory of an Indigenous population and seizes control of land and resources. This often includes taking over some or all political and economic power, paired with occupying land. In colonial contexts, as well as being physically under attack, Indigenous populations are often forced to assimilate into the linguistic, religious, and cultural practices (foodways, agricultural practices, educational practices, manners of dress and behavior, gender roles, and more) that those in power deem most desirable. To put it plainly, colonists enter someone else's land, seize it, and then demand that the original inhabitants adopt their lifeways and abandon the traditional practices and beliefs that, often, they have held for thousands of years. Today, the sort of forced assimilation that goes along with colonialism is often discussed as attempted cultural genocide.
- **Settler colonialism:** Settler colonialism is a form of colonization in which, rather than just seizing power and forcing Indigenous populations to work for and act like them, the colonists also settle on the land they seize with the goal of supplanting Indigenous peoples and nations. It has been argued, then, that the goal of settler colonialism is to make the story of conquest disappear, so that, eventually, the invaders are

seen as “native” to the land. This can be seen in the U.S. in classic stories of the west, where the invading settler population has consistently been portrayed as under attack by “hostile Indians,” implying that settlers were not invaders, but the rightful owners of land. Federal, state, territorial, and local governments collaborate in a settler colonial effort to replace Indigenous populations with settlers. Kansas’s celebration of the Santa Fe Trail, for example, erases long-established Indigenous inter-continental trade networks and commerce. It also erases the realities of settler colonialism, the role of governments in Indigenous dispossession, non-Native overhunting, and environmental degradation involved in the massive influx of settlers. This is settler colonial erasure where histories of settlement are celebrated and Indigenous peoples, nations, and histories are erased or vilified.

- **Treaties:** A treaty is a nation-to-nation compact or agreement. The U.S. tradition (inherited from British colonization in North America) implied Indigenous sovereignty by engaging with Indigenous nations as relative sovereigns, similar to treaties with foreign nations. However, over time, U.S. treaties with Indigenous peoples increasingly involved coercion and deception in order to achieve settler colonial goals. In 1871 the U.S. federal government discontinued treaties with Indigenous nations and instead used (and continues to use) acts of Congress to legislate Indian policy. Today, tribal, state, local, and federal governments continue to negotiate legal agreements related to Indian policy.
- **Sovereignty:** Sovereignty is the political authority of a nation to govern themselves. This includes holding power over their own lands and over their own ways of governing their nations. Importantly, Indigenous nations had sovereignty before the land that currently comprises the United States was colonized. Thus, sovereignty is not something “given” to Native nations, but something inherent in their status as independent nations.
- **Nation/Tribe:** These words are used interchangeably in the U.S. Constitution, which recognizes that Indigenous tribes are separate nations with their own land bases, languages, and political sovereignty. Federally recognized Indigenous nations in the U.S. today retain sovereignty and work through their national governments to enact and expand their sovereignty. The U.S. Supreme Court has defined federally recognized tribes/Indigenous nations as “domestic dependent nations” existing within the U.S. legal and constitutional system. Some states have “state-recognized” Indigenous nations/tribes. And still other nations are not recognized by the federal or state governments.

Appendix A: Indigenous Nations with Historical and Contemporary Connections to Kansas Territories: [Link Here](#) for a complete list *(there are additional nations with more nuanced histories in Kansas than the obvious ones listed below)*

- Nations Indigenous to Kansas:
 - Kaw (Kanza) Nation: <https://kawnation.com/>
 - Osage Nation: <https://www.osageculture.com/> and <https://www.osagenationnsn.gov/>
 - Pawnee Nation: <https://pawneenation.org/>
 - Otoe-Missouria: <https://www.omtribe.org/>
 - Kiowa Tribe: <https://kiowatribe.org/>
 - Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes: <https://cheyenneandarapaho-nsn.gov/>
 - Comanche Nation: <https://comanchenation.com/>
 - Wichita and Affiliated Tribes: <https://wichitatribe.com/history/in-the-beginning-1540-1750.aspx>
- Nations Forcibly Moved Through Kansas:
 - Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma: <https://www.shawnee-nsn.gov/>
 - Wyandotte Nation: <https://wyandotte-nation.org/>
 - Miami Tribe of Oklahoma: <https://www.miamination.com/>
 - Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma (confederation of Kaskaskia, Peoria, Piankashaw and Wea Indians united into a single tribe in 1854): <https://peoriatribes.com/>
 - Cherokee Nation: <https://www.cherokee.org/>
 - Quapaw Tribe: <https://www.quapawtribe.com/>
- Federally Recognized Nations Currently Residing in Kansas:
 - Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation: <https://www.pbpindiantribe.com/>
 - Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska: <https://iowatribeofkansasandnebraska.com/>
 - Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas: <https://www.ktik-nsn.gov/>
 - Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska: <https://www.sacandfoxks.com/>

Appendix B: First Americans Museum Land Acknowledgement Guide (Compliments of James Pepper Henry, Kaw Nation and Director of the First Americans Museum): [Link Here](#)

Appendix C: Treaties

- Oklahoma State University Libraries, Treaty Database
 - <https://treaties.okstate.edu/treaties/>
- Oklahoma State University Libraries, Digital Collections has digitized Charles J. Kappler, Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties. Volume 2 (Treaties) will likely be the most useful for land acknowledgement work.
 - <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers>
- National Archives resources on American Indian Treaties: <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/treaties>

Appendix D: Examples of Land Acknowledgements and Resources:

- Emory University: <https://www.emory.edu/home/explore/history/land-acknowledgement/index.html>
 - A relevant story about Emory's Land Acknowledgement: https://news.emory.edu/stories/2021/04/er_task_force_untold_stories_disenfranchised_populations/campus.html
- University of Kansas: TBA in to match new land acknowledgement standards articulated in this toolkit.
- Kansas State University (to be updated in near future to match new land acknowledgement standards articulated in this toolkit): <https://www.k-state.edu/diversity/about/landacknowledge.html>
- Illuminative Land Acknowledgement Guide: <https://illuminative.org/resources/>
- Beyond Land Acknowledgement Series: <https://nativegov.org/news/beyond-land-acknowledgment-series/>

Appendix E: Other Resources/Links:

- Invasion of American Map: <https://usq.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=eb6ca76e008543a89349ff2517db47e6>
- Land grab universities database, discussing land-grant universities: <https://www.landgrabu.org/>
- Native Land: an app to help map Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages: <https://native-land.ca/>
- Whose Land: Treaties and Agreements: <https://www.whose.land/en/>
- <https://delawaretribe.org/services-and-programs/historic-preservation/removal-history-of-the-delaware-tribe/>
- K-State's Chapman Center for Rural Studies Annotated Kanza Treaties: <https://www.k-state.edu/history/chapman/kansaslandtreaties/index.html>
- For a broad background and overview on Sovereignty of Native Nations, See: NCAI, "Tribal Nations and the United States," <https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>
- For a broad background and overview on American Indian Education in the U.S., See: "Native Nations and American Schools," <https://www.niea.org/native-education-101-1>
- How to be an Indigenous Ally: https://www.segalcentre.org/common/sitemedia/201819_Shows/ENG_AllyToolkit.pdf

Appendix F: Relevant Print Sources for Further Reading (in progress)