

Guidelines for Acknowledging Indigenous Peoples at York University Events and Ceremonies

To honour and pay respect to our relationship with the Indigenous Peoples on whose lands York University campuses are situated, the university community is encouraged to make acknowledgements to the host Nations and their traditional lands at the beginning of ceremonies and events. These guidelines have been compiled by the Office of Institutional Events in collaboration with the AVP Indigenous Initiatives and in consultation with the Indigenous Council at York University.

General guidelines on acknowledgements at events and ceremonies

Acknowledgement of the traditional lands is typically made by the very first speaker at the beginning of a ceremony or event program (if subsequent speakers also wish to make this acknowledgement, this would be appropriate, but is not required).

If you are inviting a Knowledge Keeper, Elder or Indigenous Cultural Expert to speak at your event, they should be the first speaker after the MC calls people to attention and the land acknowledgement is made. The MC provides a brief introduction and the Elder is invited to speak. The purpose is to start in a good way by giving thanks, asking for guidance. It is about creating space for people to be in good relationship with the land and each other, to work well together to accomplish a shared goal in service of community well-being. It is about honouring relationship and responsibility. Expressions of gratitude and requests to remember those who need care and protection - ie our relatives human and non-human in need.

- That individual would be the very first speaker on the program (ahead of the MC, senior members of the university and any members of government). Each individual will have their own preference on what they would like to say to open the gathering.
- In the case of an Elder or Knowledge Keeper being invited as a featured speaker the introduction would be more detailed, the MC and a senior member of the university may speak first both welcoming and setting the context.
- If the traditional lands were not recognized by the first speaker, then the second speaker should include the acknowledgement at the beginning of their remarks.
- The Office of the AVP Indigenous Initiatives is to be notified when an Indigenous Cultural Expert, Knowledge Keeper or Elder is invited to the University. The AVPII will be the central place to hold information and inform communities on campus about visiting Elders, and Knowledge Keepers. The AVPII will share this information to members of Indigenous Council and post information on the IC Teams site.
- It would be appropriate to invite an Indigenous Cultural Expert, Knowledge Keeper or Elder to speak at an event if the event relates to impacting the land or has an Indigenous focus or other Indigenous speakers. The Office of the AVP Indigenous Initiatives can be consulted if you are unsure if it is an appropriate to invite an Indigenous Cultural Expert, Knowledge Keeper or Elder to your event.
- It is appropriate for a tobacco tie to be gifted to some Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous people who are invited to speak at events. This is a cultural protocol specific to some Indigenous

Nations. It is not appropriate to all Nations. Organizers are advised to investigate the appropriate protocols of the individual's Nation. If the gifting of tobacco is deemed appropriate it ought to be done privately prior to the speaking.

- Please see below about the honourarium that should be given to these leaders/teachers.

Land Acknowledgement

Land acknowledgements are not to meant to be a script. Speakers are invited to reflect on what reconciliation and decolonization mean to them and include that reflection following their land acknowledgement. Questions to consider when crafting a land acknowledge can include: *What is my relationship with the land and the Indigenous people whose land I live on? How does this affect me? How does it make me feel? What actions am I committed to moving forward?*

The Official York University Land Acknowledgement for our campuses in Toronto is below as a reference:

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

The Official York University Land Acknowledgement for the Markham campus is below as a reference:

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which its campuses are located. We acknowledge that our Markham Campus is situated upon traditional territories of the Anishinaabe Peoples and of the Haudenosaunee Peoples. These territories are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. The First Nations community in closest proximity to the City of Markham are the Chippewas of Georgina Island.

Pronunciation Guide

It is important to practice saying the names of the various peoples, nations and communities so that they can be delivered correctly. The phonetic pronunciations are below (blue – English and green - French):

Tkaronto - TAC-a-ron-toe Tac-a-ron-TOE

Anishinabek Nation - AH-nish-nah-bek Nation na-si-ON Ah-nish-i-nah-BEK

Chippewas - chip-i-waas ship-ay-WA

Haudenosaunee Confederacy - [Hoe-den-nah-sho-nee Confederacy](#)

[con-fayd-ayr-a-si ON](#) 'o-den-o-so-NEE

Huron-Wendat – [Huron-When-dat](#) 'ür-ON-when-DAT

Inuit -[In-you-it](#) In-ü-EET

Métis – [May-tee](#) may-TEE

Wampum – [Waam-pum](#) Waam-PUM

Land acknowledgements on event communications

Acknowledgement of the traditional lands could also be considered for event communications on invitations, programs, screens or other printed materials. Please carefully consider the placement of your acknowledgement. If you are uncertain or have any questions, please contact the Office of AVP Indigenous Initiatives.

Smudging

Smudging should only be done when and if an Indigenous person requests or initiates the ceremony.

Honourarium

When Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers are asked to attend events in person on campus the minimum honourarium is \$500. If they are asked to participate in a full day event payment would be \$1000. per day.

Please consult with [Finance](#) on the information required to process an honourarium.

Requesting an Elder to participate at an event or ceremony

The York University community recognizes the value and importance of Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the Indigenous and university communities. Elders have a unique position at York University, offering a variety of support to students and participate in different capacities throughout the university, including supporting special events through openings, and other cultural ceremonies.

Please note that currently York University does not have an Elder or a Traditional Knowledge Keeper on staff. Your faculty or department may have existing relationships with Elders or Knowledge Keepers outside of the program and we recommend reaching out to them first.

Please contact the Office of AVP Indigenous Initiatives (avpii@yorku.ca) if you require additional resources or suggestions on inviting an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or Cultural Expert to participate in your event.

How to recognize and celebrate the land, Indigenous honorees, and students at events

An Honour Song: is an offering to celebrate Indigenous achievements and is appropriate when the honoree, such as an hon doc recipient or a retiree, identify as Indigenous or for the opening of a new space or building. Remembering the significance of relationship when organizing an honour song, it is good practice to begin by asking someone who know the honouree.

A Welcome Song: is an appropriate offering when York is welcoming a dignitary to campus particularly if that person is Indigenous themselves or has done significant work in relationship with Indigenous people.

Graduates: recognizing the presence of Indigenous graduands within convocation ceremonies might include:

- Members from the Centre for Indigenous Student Services on stage to greet the grads
- Cedar trees on stage and gifted to the grads
- Ceremonies opening with an Honour Song or poem from an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or artist who has a relationship with the graduands and/or the Indigenous programs in LA&PS, Education, Law or Business.

Additional resources

- [Guide to Acknowledging First Nations Peoples and Traditional Territory](#). Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)

Offices that can provide you with advice

Office of AVP Indigenous Initiatives - avpii@yorku.ca

Office of Institutional Events - yuevent@yorku.ca