

How to make an 'Owned by Communities' declaration



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Introduction

In Australia, Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, may welcome visitors to their Country. Where this has not been arranged, the Government commonly asks organisers to begin events with a statement¹ such as the following:

"The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and acknowledges their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present."

Whitmore & Carlson (2022) discuss a similar statement from Canada's university sector², while Tao et al (2024) considers its utilisation in publications³. In the UK, the idea can be broadened to acknowledge the rights of every community that has experienced marginalisation and exclusion, admit that our own experience of privilege limits our ability to see clearly, and to seek a community that offers respect and opportunity to all. This paper documents the search for a pre-existing declaration of this kind and an attempt to craft something suitable.

Whilst gathering ideas from a variety of individuals, we note that participatory approaches should be used to avoid reproducing the very challenges we are trying to face. Colonial practices continue when powerholders assume the right to speak on behalf of others or issue a pre-written script.

Proposal #1

Positionality statements and post-colonial acknowledgements in research, evaluation and knowledge sharing⁴.

We recognise and reflect on the ongoing impacts of colonialism, particularly on British society and culture. The historical legacy of white supremacist imperialism has lasting effects on communities, systemic inequalities and us⁵. We advocate for challenge to dominant narratives and encourage critical re-examinations of ourselves and history, particularly from perspectives of marginalised communities.

British and global North colonialism had a profound impact on the UK, shaping its cultural landscape, political structures, and social norms, and structuring injustices particularly upon those of African, Asian, and Caribbean descent as well as working classes of all ethnicities, and intersections of age, disability, sexuality and gender. This post-colonial acknowledgement acknowledges this historical legacy and its ongoing influence on power imbalances and the oppression and underservicing of marginalised groups in health and social care, education, housing and the criminal punishment system.

By embracing cultural and structural humility, we continue to platform their voices, centre them in decision-making, and collaborate and reflect with them in services use and social justice.

This generic statement could include a sentence that acknowledges the significance of the specific locale where the community work is being done, e.g.

'Here in Liverpool, the city played a significant role in the British Empire, particularly through its maritime trade and the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. The city's wealth was heavily reliant on its port, which became a major hub for the movement of people, goods, and enslaved Africans to the Americas.'

Where the work relates to a specific marginalised group, this could take the place of the above declaration about locale, as in the following example regarding services for people with learning disabilities:

The entrenched individualism of enlightenment thinking has contributed to the consistent devaluation and silencing of family members.

Next steps

Invite the NDTi Anti-racism group meeting to contribute, recognising that the focus is on all kinds of exclusion, including race, as well as intersectional aspects.

How this paper is being written

The investigation that generated this paper is driven by simple curiosity. The work is unfunded and is conducted as a piece of citizen science rather than under the control of any organisation. It can be shared by anybody, with anybody. Accountability is achieved by following the *How to write in public* framework⁶. I am grateful to the people⁷ who have contributed to this evolving resource. Please send me your suggestions for further improvements.

¹ [Acknowledgement of Country | Indigenous](#)

² Corrie Whitmore & Erik Carlson (2024) Making Land Acknowledgements in the University Setting Meaningful and Appropriate, *College Teaching*, 72:1, 9-14, DOI: 10.1080/87567555.2022.2070720

³ Tao BK, Bondok M, Ing EB. The case for Indigenous land acknowledgments in scholarly publishing. *The Lancet*. 2024 Apr 20;403(10436):1538-9. [The case for Indigenous land acknowledgments in scholarly publishing - The Lancet](#).

⁴ Initial version drafted by Michael Cole, amended by the author.

⁵ The legacy of colonialism is not something we can neatly identify, abhor and thoroughly excise from our work. Rather, even our best attempts to act for justice may be thwarted by the legacy that remains inside all of us.

⁶ Bates P (2023) [How to write in public](#). We need to consider the title of this paper, which borrows from the First Nations the idea of owners of the land. While First Nations were indeed the traditional owners of their lands within the country of Australia, this is different for some marginalised communities who may be unable to point to a time when they had a fair share of the community's assets. Furthermore, the 'owned by communities' tag may accurately reflect our ambition for society but may not indicate where intellectual property is held for a piece of creative work.

⁷ The following persons were contacted, requesting comment, but have not yet responded: Clenton Farquharson. Responses were received with thanks from Michael Cole. All remaining errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of the author. The information is provided in good faith and so readers engage with the contents at their own risk and undertake not to hold the author liable for any injury, loss, or damage arising through reading or acting on its contents.