

INFORMATION BRIEF: Indigenous Matters

Last updated: December 2019

Perspective

This Brief was prepared by the OLA Indigenous Task Group and is intended to assist libraries in their reconciliation work, recognising that education is key to reconciliation.

It is also a resource to initiate indigenizing and decolonizing your library's collections, programs, services, and spaces; and may provide a starting point for your library to address Indigenous matters as they pertain to your service, delivery and daily life at work.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action

This brief is inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, and in particular the following Calls relating to education, language, and culture, in light of the view that all libraries support these initiatives in our communities:

- #14, which calls for federal responses to support Aboriginal languages as “a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society,” and the urgency around their preservation, revitalization, and strengthening, managed by Aboriginal people and communities;
- #62, which calls for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to “make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students;”
- #63, which calls for the Council of Ministers of Education to “maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools, sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history, building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect, and identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.”
- #64, which calls for governments that provide funding to denominational schools “to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices;”
- #93, which calls for “the federal government, in collaboration with the national Aboriginal organizations, to revise the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to reflect a more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including Calls to Action| 11 information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools.”

Public Libraries in Ontario involved in reconciliation work

- Brantford PL, County of Brant PL, Haldimand PL, Hamilton PL, and Norfolk Public Library have all entered into reciprocal borrowing agreements with Six Nations Public Library, providing partnerships each community to share with Six Nations community members
- Burlington Public Library staff engaged in a series of programs and training sessions called “Honouring the Truth.” As one of the outcomes from this initiative, each branch has a plaque indicating the First Nations on whose lands the branch is located.
- Halton Hills Public Library selected Drew Hayden Taylor’s *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* for their “One Book, One Halton Hills” initiative.
- London Public Library has hosted a multi-media, interactive art exhibit that engages visitors in a conversation around missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- Markham signed an agreement of Cultural Collaboration with the Eabametoong First Nation, which includes access to the library’s online system, management resources and mentoring opportunities.
- Midland Public Library started the “First Chapter Indigenous Book Club” in 2017, in collaboration with the local Friendship Centre, the Native Women’s Association, and Beausoleil First Nation.
- Niagara-on-the-lake PL has held a Moccasin Talk series, to advance reconciliation through examinations of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers.
- The Rainy River District Library Cooperative provides full public library access for all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students in the Rainy River District. Participating institutions include the Atikokan Public Library, Emo Public Library, and the Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre, the Northwest Catholic District School Board, the Rainy River District School Board and the Seven Generations Education Institute.
- Richmond Hill Public Library held a session of their Community Conversations series on the topic of Truth and Reconciliation.
- Sioux Lookout Public Library provides free memberships to residents of the Lac Seul First Nation.
- Thunder Bay Public Library is engaged in a decolonization process, including a ReMatrification project with Lakehead University, and a partnership with Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS) to create a Community Hub at the library, including an Elder in Residence and an Indigenous Knowledge Centre.
- On April 18, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board endorsed the [Strategies for Indigenous Initiatives](#) in principle, understanding that further community consultation was required. The Strategies represent TPL’s response to the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action, and serve to inform the direction of Indigenous Initiatives at TPL going forward. Ongoing community consultation is helping to confirm and where needed further shape the recommendations.
- The West Lincoln Public Library’s renovations to the Wellandport branch included an Indigenous Healing Garden.

Reconciliation at your library

First steps

- Do the work: educate yourself on the First Nation(s) in your area. Learn about your community and its history;
- Establish a partnership with that First Nation. Make connections and build a network;
- Connect with the First Nation Public Library located in or near your geographic location
- Connect first, with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) to find the friendship center in your neighbourhood; and,

Being an ally

- An ally is an active state, not a noun;
- An ally supports another person or group of people, particularly a person or group who has been traditionally marginalised;
- An ally disrupts oppressive conversations, spaces, and institutions, by educating others;
- An ally sits with, and challenges, his or her own discomfort;
- An ally supports other allies on their learning journeys. Within the Library community, consider adding your name to a mentor database to share your knowledge with others;
- Allies should not be self-designated, but designated by individuals within the group of people that they are supporting;
- An ally always acts with others, not in isolation, and does not seek the spotlight; and,
- Allies sometimes make mistakes, but they acknowledge them and learn from them.

Land acknowledgements

- It is customary, today, to begin an event such as a library program, with a verbal recognition of the Indigenous territories on which we live and gather.
- Land acknowledgements have increased meaning if there is a relationship with the people and land you are acknowledging
- Do some research to find out about the First Nations in your area – ask someone from one of those communities how they would like you to support their community’s work through your statement.
- Be aware that different Nations have different protocols, for instance relating to smudging and gifts.
- Land acknowledgements can help invite your audience to learn more. They can also act as an act of disruption - a counterpoint to centuries of Indigenous erasure.
- Land acknowledgements are not a sombre prayer.
- All acknowledgements must be part of a conversation: they cannot be done in isolation from learning about local history and building relationships with neighbouring Nations.
- Be aware that there is an ongoing conversation around whether land acknowledgements can be meaningful or not, and whether they are simply token gestures that ring “hollow.” Hayden King, who wrote a very early land

acknowledgement for Ryerson University, now feels that “the territorial acknowledgement could become very superficial and also how it sort of fetishizes these actual tangible, concrete treaties. They're not metaphors — they're real institutions, and for us to write and recite a territorial acknowledgement that sort of obscures that fact, I think we do a disservice to that treaty and to those nations [...]. It's one thing to say, ‘Hey, we're on the territory of the Mississaugas or the Anishinaabek and the Haudenosaunee.’ It's another thing to say, ‘We're on the territory of the Anishinaabek and the Haudenosaunee and here's what that compels me to do.’ ” This perspective is something to consider when you are intending to use a land acknowledgement.

Collection development

- Start with weeding or an audit of your collection (GoodMinds.com will offer assistance with this process);
- Involve the community in a meaningful way. Any materials that are curated need to be relevant in your area;
- Work to decolonize your library's catalogue: consider access points such as subject headings, tags, lists, displays, and other promotional tools. For examples and further information, consult the Indigenous Knowledge Organization Subject Guide from UBC listed under the Resources below;
- Develop a collections policy (or a section of a more general policy) specifically related to Indigenous content in the collection; and,
- Consider hiring a paid, Indigenous liaison position.

Ontario Library Association initiatives of note:

- OLA's Indigenous Task Group
- Webpage on the OLA website about [First Nations Public Libraries in Ontario](#)
- OLA partnership with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)
- OLA benefits from having members from First Nation Public Libraries, and have waived fees for this reason. OLA Super Conference registration fees are waived for First Nation Public Library staff.
- Education Institute webinar fees are waived for all Ontario First Nations Public Libraries.
- The Spirit of Reconciliation Award, which, with funds from the OLA Mentoring Fund, sponsors three librarians from First Nations Public Libraries to attend Super Conference, covering travel and accommodations. At Super Conference, the recipient is partnered with a seasoned conference participant as a mentor for mutual learning and networking.
- An annual luncheon, hosted by the Indigenous Task Group at the OLA Super Conference, includes First Nations public librarians, speakers and presenters in the Indigenous Stream as well as other invited guests, and provides an opportunity for participants to network and share a meal together
- Support for OLA members in participating in Treaties Recognition Week, in partnership with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and OSLA.
- In partnership with SOLS and OLS-N, OLA sponsors the annual First Nation Public Librarians Spring Gathering
- OSLA participated in the 2017-2018 Ministry of Education revision of the History and Social Studies Curriculum for Grades 4-10 in light of Recommendations 62 and 63 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action report.

Terminology:

- **First Nations:** “This term was originally coined by Indigenous Peoples in the late 1970s, partly as an alternative to inappropriate terms such as *Native* and *Indian*, which were in common usage at the time [...]. The term has strong political connotations: it refers to separate nations that occupied territory before the arrival of Europeans. [...]. *First Nations* refers to a segment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. To use it in a context that describes all Indigenous Peoples in Canada, you need to say ‘First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis.’ ”
- **Indigenous:** “This term is gaining currency, replacing *Aboriginal* in many contexts (except, notably, Canada’s constitution) [...]. The term Indigenous Peoples is used to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada collectively, and also to refer to Indigenous Peoples worldwide collectively.”
- **Inuit / Inuk:** “*Inuit* is the term for the Indigenous People who traditionally inhabit the Arctic regions of what is now Canada, Greenland, and Siberia [...]. *Inuk* is a singular noun for an individual.”
- **Métis:** “This term has many contexts in Canada. People who self-identify as Métis do so for different reasons. In one of its meanings, *Métis* describes as Indigenous People who emerged during the fur trade from the intermarriage of people of European descent and people of Indigenous descent [...]. In another of its meanings, *Metis*, without the accent, is a way English-speaking people of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry might refer to themselves [...].”
- **Nation:** “This term has become widely accepted by Indigenous Peoples to describe separate Indigenous groups as political entities. It is an assertion that Indigenous Peoples meet the four criteria of nationhood under customary international law (as first set out in the Montevideo Convention of 1933), which are a permanent population, a definite occupied territory, a government, and the ability to enter into relations with other nations.”
- **Settler:** “This term is used to describe people whose ancestors migrated to Canada and who still benefit from ongoing colonialism. This could be also applied to “settlers of colour” but doesn’t apply when referring to people who are descendants of slaves, considering they did not come to this continent willingly. Keep in mind the various intersections of a person’s identity and how this translates into the types of privileges they are either afforded or withheld.”
- **Turtle Island:** “This is the name given to North America by some Indigenous Peoples, such as the Iroquois, Anishinaabeg, and other Northeastern nations. The term originates from their various creation stories.”

Resources:

- “#Next150 Challenge: On Whose Land?” Indian Horse Productions.
<https://next150.indianhorse.ca/challenges/on-whose-land>.
- “Are you planning to do a Land Acknowledgement?” American Indians in Children's Literature (AICL).
<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/search/label/Land%20Acknowledgements>.
- “Category: Social Justice Librarianship.” Alimb.ca. <https://www.alimb.ca/category/social-justice/>.
- “First Nation Public Library Week.” Ontario Library Service North. <http://fnplw.olsn.ca/>
- “First Nations Public Libraries in Ontario.” Ontario Library Association.
http://www.accessola.org/web/OLA/Issues_Advocacy/First_Nation_Public_Library_Issues.aspx.
- “GoodMinds.com: First Nations, Métis, Inuit Books.” Goodminds.com.
<http://goodminds.com/>.
- “Indigenous Ally Toolkit.” Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy.
https://gallery.mailchimp.com/86d28ccd43d44be0cfc11c71a1/files/102bf040-e221-4953-a9ef-9f0c5efc3458/Ally_email.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1IEu5PXeLAo7cCv4pPh4dYCuxMphfPYh-Y0zCVWtCrOAcXnSDsdQsTjcA.
- “Indigenous Canada Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).” University of Alberta / Coursera. <https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada>.
- “Indigenous Knowledge Organization.” University of British Columbia.
<https://guides.library.ubc.ca/c.php?g=307208&p=2049510>.
- “Kitchen Table Guide for Reconciliation Dialogue: For Individuals, Communities and Organizations.” Reconciliation Canada.
<http://reconciliationcanada.ca/resources/toolkits/>.
- “OLS-N Language Portal.” Ontario Library Service North. <http://fnlp.olsn.ca/>
- “Territory Acknowledgement.” NativeLand.ca. <https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>.
- “Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations.” Canadian Federation of Library Associations. http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/indigenous/trc_report/
- Allison-Cassin, Stacy, Camille Callison and Jessica Humphries. “National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance/Alliance nationale des connaissances et langues autochtones (NIKLA).”

<https://nationalindigenousknowledgeandlanguagealliance.home.blog/author/nationalindigenousknowledgeandlanguagealliance>

CFLA-FCAB's Indigenous Matters Committee's - Red Team - Joint Working Group on Classification and Subject Headings and the National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance (NIKLA). "CFLA and NIKLA Ontology."

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vSOKcm9HB-28iSqNN3sQd5hV7bMLMGpCeGL0dkQgyg2AiZAMWUF0sp98GyxlvLXYIWqSZ3nX_j_q4UN/pubhtml

King, Hayden. "I regret it": Hayden King on writing Ryerson University's territorial acknowledgement." CBC Radio.ca. <https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4973371>.

McKenzie, Mia. "No More Allies." Black Girl Dangerous. September 30, 2013. Website. <http://www.blackgirldangerous.com/2013/09/no-more-allies/>.

Robinson, Olivia. "Decolonizing the public library." Rabble.ca. <http://rabble.ca/news/2019/09/decolonizing-public-library>.

Robinson, Olivia. "The public library and Indigenous reconciliation." Rabble.ca. <http://rabble.ca/news/2019/09/public-library-and-indigenous-reconciliation>.