

# Indigenous History Month

Commemoration guide

2026



**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion**  
**Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion**

[CCDI.ca](http://CCDI.ca)

## National Indigenous History Month – Commemoration guide

June is National Indigenous History Month in Canada, a time for all Canadians to recognize and honour our authentic history, Indigenous resilience, and the achievements and contributions of First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Inuit, and Métis Peoples across Turtle Island. This month also invites reflection on colonialism and its lasting impact on Indigenous Peoples, and the importance of advancing reconciliation.

For organizations, National Indigenous History Month presents an opportunity to evaluate the practices, policies, procedures, and culture of your organization through the lens of reconciliation. When done thoughtfully, recognizing National Indigenous History Month can be one step toward building culturally safe environments and strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities.

This guide aims to support organizations in commemorating National Indigenous History Month in meaningful ways. It provides practical ideas, considerations, and resources – prioritizing Indigenous voices, where possible – to help workplaces support employee learning, encourage reflection, and align their efforts with broader reconciliation and DEIA commitments.

[Learn more about National Indigenous History Month](#) from the Government of Canada.

*Note: A magnifying glass icon (🔍) indicates that a resource is available in the CCDI Knowledge Repository.*

*The information and resources below contain information that may be disturbing to some individuals, especially to Residential School Survivors. If you or someone you know needs support, please call the 24-Hour National Survivors Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419.*

*Additionally, the Hope for Wellness Help Line offers immediate help to all Indigenous Peoples across Canada. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it offers immediate support and crisis intervention. Call the toll-free Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or [connect to the online chat on their website](#).*

## Timeline of Indigenous achievements and milestones in Canada

This timeline highlights selected moments of historical significance that advanced Indigenous rights and sovereignty amidst significant oppression. Though not complete, it reflects the resilience and contributions of Indigenous Peoples across generations.

### Since time immemorial

Indigenous Peoples have lived on and cared for these lands that we now call Canada since time immemorial. Their histories, cultures, and contributions continue to shape communities, institutions, and relationships across the country.

### 1701 – [The Great Peace of Montreal](#)

A major diplomatic agreement between the French and 39 Indigenous Nations that established peace and cooperation.

### 1725-1779 – [Peace and Friendship Treaties](#)

The first formal treaties to be established with Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, the Peace and Friendship Treaties are historic agreements between the British Crown and the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot. These treaties refer directly to co-existence, mutual respect and non-interference between these Nations and the British Crown, and they established peace, regulated trade and affirmed hunting/fishing rights without ever surrendering or ceding land.

### 1763 – [The Royal Proclamation](#)

Signed by King George III, giving limited recognition of title to Indigenous communities and providing guidelines for negotiating treaties on a nation-to-nation basis. The Royal Proclamation also stated that Indigenous land could only be surrendered to the Crown.

### 1812-1815 – [Indigenous contributions to the War of 1812](#)

Indigenous Nations played a critical role in the war, forming strategic alliances and contributing knowledge of the land. More than 10,000 First Nations warriors from the Great Lakes region and the St. Lawrence Valley participated in nearly every major battle.

### 1869/1870 – [Red River Resistance and Manitoba Act](#)

The Métis of the Red River defended their land and cultural rights by negotiating and sending a list of rights to Ottawa, which would eventually become embedded in the Manitoba Act of

1870. This was a tense standoff regarding the lack of consultation of the sale of Rupertsland from the Hudson Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada.

### **1871-1921 – [Numbered Treaties 1-11](#)**

The numbered treaties were negotiated from 1871-1921 and make up the “Historic Treaties” along with the Peace & Neutrality Treaties (1701-1760), Upper Canada Land Surrenders (1781-1862), Robinson Treaties (1850), Douglas Treaties (1850-1854), and Williams Treaties (1923). The numbered treaty negotiations came out of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and were negotiated on a nation-to-nation relationship. The original spirit and intention of the treaty negotiations was a co-created and shared relationship. However, what became written in the treaties was not a true representation of the oral negotiations and many of these promises were unkept. These historic Treaties set the precedent for ongoing nation to nation relationships with the Crown as long as the “sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow”.

### **1885 – [North-West Resistance](#)**

Métis and allies assert their rights, governance, and way of life through this five-month resistance against the federal government in what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta.

### **1919 – [Fred Loft forms League of Indians of Canada](#)**

Mohawk War Veteran Fred Loft (Onondayoh) founded the League of Indians of Canada in December of 1918 after returning from WW1. Needing a political voice for Indigenous people in Canada, he attempted to gather a national following – despite political gathering being illegal under the Indian Act, lack of funding, and the Department of Indian Affairs monitoring him. At his own expense and through some donations, he gathered Indigenous individuals from across Canada to form the first League of Indians. The league eventually would go on to form the basis for the Assembly of First Nations after a few transformations.

### **1960 – [First Nations gain the right to vote federally without losing status](#)**

A significant step toward political inclusion, allowing First Nations people to participate in federal elections without being forced to give up their identity. It is important to remember that First Nations in some provinces would not gain the right to vote provincially until the late 1960s.

### **1970 - [Citizens Plus and the Red Paper](#)**

In response to the introduction of the assimilatory White Paper document of 1969 which attempted to eliminate distinct legal status and end Federal responsibility for Indigenous Peoples, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta responded with “Citizen’s Plus” or the “Red Paper”. This document rejected the forced assimilation of Indigenous Peoples and advocated against the termination of treaty rights. “Citizens Plus” represents that Indigenous peoples should have the same rights as Canadians, but should also have land rights, treaty rights and Aboriginal rights respected and protected.

### **1973 – [The Calder case](#)**

This landmark Supreme Court decision recognizes Indigenous title exists in Canadian law, affirming Indigenous land rights and preparing for modern treaty negotiations.

### **1982 – [Recognition in the Constitution Act, 1982](#)**

Section 35 formally recognizes and affirms existing Indigenous rights, including Treaty Rights, which are distinct and constitutionally protected rights that exist outside of the Indian Act. This marked a major milestone in the legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Canada – recognition that was fought for by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and groups through demonstrations held across Canada.

### **1996 – [Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#)**

In 1990, after the Oka Crisis, the reality of the harm Indigenous Peoples were experiencing became international news and forced the government to resolve the conflict peacefully. It also led to the creation of the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) in 1991. This was a Canadian federal inquiry mandated to investigate and overhaul the relationship between Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) and the Canadian government. In 1996 it released a 4,000-page final report with 440 recommendations – Most of the 440 recommendations were not implemented and there has been very little policy change from the government.

### **2008 – [Establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)**

In 1995, Nora Bernard launched a class-action lawsuit – the largest lawsuit in Canadian history – that ultimately led to the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Facing thousands of claims and growing legal pressure, the government chose settlement over prolonged litigation. A key outcome was the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2008, informed by the earlier work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

The goal of the TRC was to reveal the Truth and ongoing legacy of residential schools and guide a collective process of healing and reconciliation. The three commissioners who made this work possible were the Honourable Senator Murray Sinclair (Peguis First Nation, Manitoba), Marie Wilson (award-winning journalist, Ontario), and Dr. Wilton Littlechild (Ermineskin Cree Nation, Alberta). Murray, Wilton, and Marie met with 6,750 Survivors over 6 years. They released an interim report in 2012 ([They Came for the Children](#)), and the [final report](#) was released in 2015 including the [94 'Calls to Action'](#). They also established the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) at that time, which is housed at the University of Manitoba.

### **2008 - [Apology to former students of the Residential School System](#)**

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issues a formal apology in the House of Commons to former students of the Residential School System.

### **2016 – [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)**

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was a Canadian public inquiry from 2016 to 2019 that studied the crisis of [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women](#). While this was a critical step toward addressing the disproportionate levels of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, responses to trafficking remain [underfunded and inconsistent](#) across sectors and regions since the final report was released in 2019.

### **2019 – [Passage of the Indigenous Languages Act](#)**

The [Indigenous Languages Act](#) (S.C. 2019, c. 23), formerly known as Bill C-91, was passed in 2019, creating the [Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages](#). The Commission “promotes and champions Indigenous languages and supports the efforts of Indigenous Peoples across Canada to reclaim, revitalize, maintain, and strengthen their languages”.

### **2021 – [Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)**

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), with 144 countries signing on. Notably, four countries did not sign at the time; Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. In

2016, Canada finally endorsed UNDRIP without qualification and committed to its full and effective implementation, and in 2021 it came into effect, officially affirming Indigenous rights, including self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent, and committing to addressing ongoing injustices and racism.

### **Ongoing – Indigenous leadership, innovation, and cultural revitalization**

Across Canada, Indigenous Peoples continue to lead in areas like governance, environmental stewardship, business, education, and the arts. Language revitalization, cultural resurgence, and land-based practices are thriving, reflecting strength, resilience, and innovation.

Learn about Indigenous trailblazers [past](#) and [present](#).

## Learning more about Indigenous history in Canada

Unlearning Eurocentric histories and learning about Indigenous history is an important part of understanding Canada as it currently exists. Engaging with Indigenous history helps build awareness of the diversity of First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Inuit, and Métis experiences, while also supporting a more complete and accurate understanding of the past and present. This learning is a key component of advancing reconciliation, as it encourages reflection, respect, and informed action.

For workplaces, supporting ongoing learning can support more inclusive environments, strengthen relationships, and ensure that efforts related to reconciliation and diversity, equity, and inclusion are grounded in knowledge.

Below are a few websites to explore:

- [Assembly of First Nations](#) - Information on First Nations history, governance, and current priorities.
- [Canadian Museum of History](#) - Exhibits and educational content on Indigenous histories and cultures.
- [Indigenous Canada](#) - A free course from the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.
- [Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada](#) - Interactive maps and articles exploring Indigenous histories, cultures, and communities.
- [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami](#) - Resources and information about Inuit history, culture, and policy priorities.
- [Métis National Council](#) - Information on Métis history, rights, and nationhood.
- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) - Educational resources, reports, and historical records, including materials related to residential schools.
- [Weaving Knowledges](#) - Short summaries of past or on-going environmental research and monitoring programs that weave Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science.

## Commemorating National Indigenous History Month

The following considerations can help guide organizations in planning and delivering thoughtful commemoration activities.

### **Avoid performative or one-time gestures**

While activities during National Indigenous History Month can be a valuable starting point, they are most impactful when connected to ongoing learning and longer-term commitments.

Organizations are encouraged to:

- Approach the month as part of a broader, continuous effort.
- Build on existing initiatives rather than starting and stopping each year.
- Focus on depth and quality of engagement over quantity of activities.

### **Recognize the diversity of Indigenous Peoples**

First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Inuit, and Métis Peoples are distinct, with diverse cultures, languages, histories, and governance systems. A one-size-fits-all or “pan-Indigenous” approach can unintentionally oversimplify or erase these differences. Remember to:

- Highlight distinctions between First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.
  - [The Indigenous Peoples of Canada](#), Destination Indigenous
- Be mindful of regional and community-specific contexts.
- Avoid generalized language or assumptions.

### **Use respectful terminology**

Using accurate and respectful terminology supports understanding and demonstrates care.

Organizations should:

- Use specific language (First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Inuit, Métis, or specific Nations or communities) where appropriate.
- Avoid outdated or inappropriate terms.
- Recognize that terminology may evolve over time and remain open to learning.
  - [Culturally Appropriate Language Guide](#), Indigenous Primary Health Care Council
  - [Indigenous Peoples Terminology: Guidelines for Usage](#), Indigenous Corporate Training
  - [Indigenous Inclusion Language](#), Special Olympics

- [Glossary of DEIA terms](#), Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
- [2SLGBTQI Terms and Definitions](#), Egale

### **Centre Indigenous voices and perspectives**

Prioritize resources, speakers, and perspectives from Indigenous individuals and communities wherever possible. This may include:

- Sharing books, films, or articles created by Indigenous authors and creators.
  - CCDI's educational guides include books, film and television, and podcasts. See [Educational resources on National Indigenous History Month](#) and [Educational resources on Indigenous inclusion](#).
  - Find Indigenous-created media from the [National Film Board of Canada – Indigenous Cinema](#), and [APTN \(Aboriginal Peoples TV Network\)](#)
- Inviting Indigenous speakers or facilitators to lead learning sessions.
  - See the [International Indigenous Speakers Bureau](#), the [Speakers Bureau of Canada](#), and the [National Speakers Bureau](#) for lists of Indigenous speakers.
- Amplifying Indigenous perspectives rather than speaking on behalf of them.

### **Be mindful of capacity and lived experience**

Indigenous employees should not be expected to lead, educate, or represent all Indigenous perspectives unless they choose to and are supported or compensated appropriately. This kind of additional, invisible, and uncompensated work placed on employees coming from equity-seeking groups is called [cultural taxation](#). Organizations should:

- Avoid placing undue responsibility on Indigenous staff.
- Ensure participation is voluntary and supported.
- Provide space for learning without requiring personal disclosure or emotional labour.

### **Approach with humility and openness**

Learning about Indigenous history and reconciliation is an ongoing process, and it's okay to not have all the answers. What is important is a willingness to listen, learn, and improve. Leaders can model this approach and encourage openness to new perspectives, respectful dialogue and reflection, and a commitment to continued learning beyond the month.

Thoughtful commemoration involves approaching the work with respect, intention, and a commitment to learning and growth over time.

## Activity: Acknowledging the history of the land

Land acknowledgements are increasingly common in workplaces across Canada. When done thoughtfully, they can be a way to recognize Indigenous Peoples and their relationship to the land, and a way to reflect on your own relationship to the land and actions you can take to advance reconciliation. This activity aims to help build understanding and support more reflective and informed approaches.

### What Is a land acknowledgement?

A land acknowledgement is a statement that recognizes the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on and cared for the land since time immemorial, and who continue to do so today. It is a way to:

- Recognize the ongoing presence and rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Acknowledge the history of the land and its original stewards.
- Situate ourselves and our work in relation to that history.

A land acknowledgement is not:

- A script to recite without understanding.
- A substitute for meaningful action or reconciliation efforts.
- A one-time statement used only for special occasions.

Without reflection or follow-through, acknowledgements can become routine or performative. The goal is to approach them with intention and tie them to action.

### Creating a meaningful land acknowledgement

Encourage participants (individually or in small groups) to draft or reflect on a land acknowledgement using the steps below.

1. Consider your why.
  - a. Ask yourself why you are doing this land acknowledgement.
  - b. What is your end goal? How do you want to make listeners feel? What do you want listeners to do?
2. [Learn about the land you are on.](#)
  - Identify the Indigenous Nations connected to your location.
  - Understand whether the land is covered by treaty, and which one.
  - Is the land ceded or unceded?

- Learn about the history and presence of local communities.
- 3. Reflect on your connection.
  - Consider your role, your organization, and your relationship to the land.
  - How do you spend your time on this land?
  - What history does your family have with the land?
  - Do you know the traditional names of the places you visit?
- 4. Commit to further acts of reconciliation.
  - Remember that a land acknowledgement is a starting point.
  - How do you plan to take action to support Indigenous communities?
  - What actions can you take to protect and care for the land?

### **Unceded territory**

Lands that Indigenous Peoples never surrendered or legally signed away to the Crown or to Canada.

This includes large parts of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and P.E.I., almost all of British Columbia and a large part of eastern Ontario and Quebec, including Ottawa.

[Glossary of DEIA terms](#), CCDI

### **Language considerations**

- Use appropriate identifying terms like First Nations, Status and Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit, and specific Nations and communities where appropriate. Avoid using “Indigenous” as a catch-all if distinctions are relevant.
- Don’t be afraid to use terms like colonization, settler, settler colonialism, assimilation, genocide, and stolen land. These terms reflect the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- Use past, present, and future tenses. Land acknowledgements should not position Indigenous people only as remnants of the past.
- If you are going to be speaking your acknowledgement out loud, ensure you can correctly pronounce any Indigenous language or names. The [Law Society of Alberta](#) has some excellent suggestions for ways to learn (see page 6).
- Land acknowledgements should be meaningful but appropriate to the setting. Ensure they fit naturally into the context rather than feeling like a separate or disconnected script. Consider creating different versions for different contexts.

## Other helpful resources

- 🔍 [A guide to acknowledging First Peoples and traditional land: Land acknowledgements for staff and volunteers](#), Engineers Canada
- 🔍 [A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment](#), Native Governance Center
- 🔍 [Land Acknowledgement Guidelines](#), Tamarack Institute
- 🔍 [Territory Acknowledgements – Information Booklet](#), First Nations Health Authority