

# **Our Reconciliation Journey**



**VOLUNTEER  
ALBERTA**

**2023**

## What is this document?

Volunteer Alberta (VA) strives to be an ally and good treaty partners on the journey toward Reconciliation and Indigenous resurgence. We have made commitments in our Land Affirmation and are taking active steps to fulfill our responsibilities and stay accountable to ourselves, our community, and our stakeholders. This document is one way to track our progress over time in a manner that allows for transparency and accountability.

As our society has been steeped in colonial and settler frameworks, it can be difficult to shift into new ways of being and doing. We hope that by sharing this document we can help organizations in the nonprofit/voluntary sector on their own journeys. As we reflect on the path we have traveled, may it act as a reminder that it is okay to stumble - as long as you are intentional about respect and accountability, these can lead to greater growth.

We invite you to connect with us if you have any questions or feedback, as the only path forward is together! If you are curious about other concrete steps we are taking to fulfill the commitments in our Land Affirmation, please reach out to us at [info@volunteeralberta.ab.ca](mailto:info@volunteeralberta.ab.ca) and we would be happy to have a conversation about where VA is in our Reconciliation journey.

Warmly,

The Volunteer Alberta Team

# Our journey started...

While not a new practice by any means, Land Acknowledgements became common practice in Canada after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its report in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Like many organizations, Volunteer Alberta had been using Land Acknowledgments for our external meetings as an act of Reconciliation, with our earliest written record of one from 2019.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2021, spurred by the recent discovery at the Kamloops residential school, the VA team met to discuss our commitments to Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. During this meeting, the team reviewed the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#) and the [Truth and Reconciliation Councils Calls to Action](#).

## **At the time, 4 of the Calls to Action were identified as having a clear and direct impact on the nonprofit sector:**

1. Be part of a national action plan to achieve the goals of the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People (#44)
2. Social justice and faith groups formally adopt and comply with the UN Declaration including engaging in ongoing public dialogue and action to support the UN Declaration (#48)
3. Federal Government to fund community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on Reconciliation and establish a national framework to share info and best practices (#66)
4. Anti-racism awareness and training programs in sports (#90)

### **Looking back...**

*We know that there are many calls to action which different organizations in the nonprofit/voluntary sector can help support. While VA cannot directly contribute to these, such as #5 & #12 that calls for culturally appropriate parenting and early childcare programs for Indigenous families, the work we do to nurture capability and strengthen pathways to volunteerism and civic engagement can help ensure Reconciliation is ongoing.*

<sup>1</sup> [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix

## Our team also developed a set of 11 actions and suggestions we aimed to embed into our work.

- 1 Authentically engage with Indigenous groups, with emphasis on challenging and avoiding top-down approaches.
- 2 Learn how to be better accomplices to action
- 3 Share resources and links with staff and our network
- 4 Engage in Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training
- 5 Embed anti-racism training into staff professional development
- 6 Having space to celebrate and welcome diversity
- 7 Develop a statement/stance on where we stand on EDI issues
- 8 Have conversations on how different groups “do” volunteerism
- 9 Explore intersections of decolonization and volunteerism and civic engagement
- 10 Look at how our policies and procedures may need to be updated
- 11 Include more inclusive language in programming - review programming to see what areas need to be expanded on

We started acting on our goals to achieve these 11 actions and suggestions by first looking inward and reflecting on our practices as an organization.

## Embracing Change: The Power of Taking That First Step

September 30, 2021 marked the first Truth and Reconciliation Day in Canada. While in Alberta it was not recognized as a statutory holiday, VA staff were given the opportunity to spend their work afternoon engaging in Indigenous educational material, including the [University of Alberta's Indigenous Canada Course](#).

In 2022 VA underwent leadership change, and over the course of that year, we started to explore different ways of doing and being. With that came an intentional shift into spaces of (un)learning, wellbeing, and experimentation.

[Read Our Land Affirmation](#)

In Spring 2022, we drafted our Land Affirmation, moving away from the term "Acknowledgment" based on our (un)learnings. We were intentional about doing research and personalizing it to reflect the work we not only do but hope to accomplish.

We hired a Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) employee to curate and implement a research project that would help us understand how intersectionality shows up in our sector. The stories that were generously shared with them from Chinese and Indigenous communities introduced us to the concept of "Intersectional Healing." Their work inspired future prototypes that we hope to develop further as our journey continued

[Download the report](#)

Internally, we created a guide for "Good Practices for Indigenous Community-Based Research". As we develop our Research and Social Design portfolio, a new frontier in which we will focus on collaborative and participatory-action-based research, we hope that this document will help us create meaningful partnerships and ensure Indigenous communities are able to have their voices heard and reflected in the research.

We engaged GEDI Hub in a session on decolonizing work practices during our fall 2022 staff retreat to help us understand what practices we need to hospice, and which need help to flourish.

[Connect with GEDI Hub](#)

For the second National Truth and Reconciliation Day, in 2022, VA closed its offices to allow staff time to reflect and (un)learn, despite it not being officially recognized as a statutory holiday in Alberta.

**Meet our Staff  
and Board**

In fall 2022, VA conducted a Demographics survey of its Board and Staff. At this time 0% of the Board of Directors identified as Indigenous compared to the 33% who identified as "White". The Staff survey found only 9% identified as Indigenous with 54% of staff identifying as White.

During a fall Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group meeting, which includes external and internal members, we led a discussion on Indigenous Resurgence and the role VA may play in it. Because VA itself is not Indigenous-led, we spoke on how our role can only be to support rather than lead. In order to do so, it was agreed VA needed to do better in developing relationships and partnerships with Indigenous organizations.

Through the support of our HR contractor and the guidance of GEDI Hub, our team embarked on the start of our review of VA's policies and procedures in the beginning of 2023. We hope to enrich these with our (un)learnings and have them embody our values of well-being and inclusion, as well as shift away from the corporate/colonial mindset that frames most formal processes within organizations. One of these ways is to interpret our Leave Policy to also include Harvesting as we look to include cultural ceremonies and celebrations that have not otherwise been considered.

The VA team also began work on creating away to formalize and express our commitments to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice (IDEAS). There has been an internal focus on creating a culture of care and welcoming as we explore new ways to move away from the colonial frameworks we work within.

VA continues to encourage its Team to include Indigenous based topics into their professional development time. A notable session in May 2023 was led by the Community Development Learning Institute (CDLI) in Calgary called "Reflecting on the Land: Meaningful Land Acknowledgments". This was a space for community practitioners and nonprofit workers to come together to discuss their own experiences with Land Acknowledgments and how to grow them into more intentional practices. Another session held in August 2023 by pipikwan pehtakwan called "Culturally Appropriate Use of Language" helped us further develop our Marketing and Communications skills to understand how to appropriately communicate with, for, and about Indigenous Peoples.

**Connect with Community  
Development Learning Institute**

**Connect with pipikwan  
pehtakwan**

The last two years have been an important step in our (un)learning journey towards Reconciliation, but we know there is much more work to do ahead. While we have been focused on internal work primarily, as we seek to deepen our relationships across the Nonprofit/Voluntary sector we need to ensure that we also do so with Indigenous-led organizations and Nations within Alberta as well.

## **Navigating New Horizons: Embracing the Future Beyond the Journey**

As VA enters a new strategic phase in 2024, we are reevaluating our work. During our recent panel at our 2023 AGM (Radically Hopeful Futures: Cultivating Imaginations for Civic Engagement) we were introduced the concept of being good ancestral organizations. This concept, rooted in Indigenous ways of being and knowing, helped ground our Community Conversations which will guide us into our Strategic Dreaming sessions this fall. From here we hope to set our North Star for 2024-2026.

Until then, we are holding the following questions:

- What does it look to be allies/partners in Indigenous Resurgence and Reconciliation?
- How can we intentionally create partnerships with Indigenous-led organizations?
- How might we use civic engagement as a form of Reconciliation?
- How might we help support the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action within the Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector?
- What would it look like if VA joined a provincial or national action plan to achieve the UN Declaration of Rights on Indigenous People?

***and we invite you to  
join us as the work  
continues.***

We invite you to connect with us if you have any questions or feedback, as the only path forward is together! If you are curious about other concrete steps we are taking to fulfill the commitments in our Land Affirmation, please reach out to us at [info@volunteeralberta.ab.ca](mailto:info@volunteeralberta.ab.ca) and we would be happy to have a conversation about where VA is in our Reconciliation journey.

# APPENDIX

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & AFFIRMATIONS

One of the most visible ways to track an organizations journey through Reconciliation, Land Acknowledgments and Affirmations can be a way to affirm Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We also know it can easily become a performative action - without intention and meaningful connection it can often just become a line of business to check off at a meeting.

As VA has begun to deeply consider the notion of (un)learning, we have opened ourselves to new ways to consider how we express our connections to the land and its people. Whether through formal research or casual teachings in the community, we hope to continue to grow our collective wisdom. In this appendix we will share how our Land Acknowledgments and Affirmations have changed over time as a way to reflect on the teachings and (un)learnings we have gathered.

### LESSONS LEARNED: BRINGING PERSONAL REFLECTIONS TO LAND AFFIRMATIONS

At Volunteer Alberta, a recent practice the team adopted is to start our internal meetings with personalized Land Affirmations - instead of reciting a script, we offer something that reminded us to our own connections to the land and our own Reconciliation journey.

This practice encourages us to make Land Affirmations an active and intentional act, rather than a potentially passive and performative one.

While this more informal form of Land Affirmations is harder to track over time, some conversations that have been brought up include:

- Exploring [Indigenous names of local areas](#)
- The history of [National Parks and Indigenous Rights](#)
- [The Australian "Welcome to Country" Ritual](#)
- Local historical stories, like the history of the [Papachase Cree First Nation](#) or the [Edmonton River Lots](#)
- A [blog post](#) exploring the seasons written by a Board Member



## General

Volunteer Alberta respectfully acknowledges the traditional territories of the Indigenous people of this land to recognize their original and continuing connection to the land and their role as its traditional owners and custodians. Whether we are newcomers, Indigenous peoples or descendants of settlers on this land, we have a role in understanding and upholding treaty. We are all treaty people.

### LESSONS LEARNED: INTENTIONALITY IN OUR VOICES

In 2019, we had many different versions of our Land Acknowledgement, a result of the provincial scope of VA. As can be seen in the Edmonton-specific versions though, there was not a standardized voice. This led to some being shorter and lacking details, which could be viewed as a way to quickly complete them rather than intentionally considering the words used. For example, the General version used the phrase "owners" to describe Indigenous Peoples relationship to the land - which could be viewed as a very settler-framed mindset.

### Edmonton-Specific Variations

#### #1

Volunteer Alberta respectfully acknowledges that we are situated on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of First Nations and Métis people.

#### #2

Volunteer Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

#### #3

Volunteer Alberta respectfully acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Metis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/ Saulteaux/ Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.

### Calgary Specific

Volunteer Alberta respectfully acknowledges the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

## LESSONS LEARNED: VIRTUAL SPACES

This was one of our first documented Land Acknowledgments within a virtual meeting space. Because of the rise in virtual spaces, increased by the pandemic, it allowed us to reconsider having hyper-local acknowledgments, especially as the work we do extends to all communities within Alberta.

While not reflected in this specific version, one of the benefits of virtual Land Affirmations is the ability to share resources and connect in a more interactive way.

## RESOURCES

[Native Land Digital](#) is a way to foster conversations about the history of colonialism, Indigenous ways of knowing, and settler-Indigenous relations, through educational resources such as their “Map and Territory Acknowledgement Guide”. It allows users to enter in an address or scroll a map to see relevant territories, language regions, or Treaty Lands, as well as links to learn more about the specific Nations and languages of those areas.

## 2020 AGM Version

I would like to begin our AGM by acknowledging the Traditional Territory on which we are gathered today, a welcoming place for peoples from around the world. While we are meeting virtually today, we recognize that Volunteer Alberta is located in what is now Edmonton, in Treaty Six Territory, part of the Métis homeland and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. I would like to acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose footsteps have marked this territory for centuries such as: Cree, Saulteaux, Niisitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, and Nakota Sioux.

As we are a province-wide organization I also want to recognize the Indigenous peoples whose traditional territories fall within Treaty 8 and Treaty 7, and all Métis peoples. We acknowledge the traditional territories of the Indigenous people of this land to recognize their original and continuing connection to the land and their role as its traditional owners and custodians. Whether we are newcomers, Indigenous peoples or descendants of settlers on this land, we have a role in understanding and upholding treaty. We are all treaty people.

## LESSONS LEARNED: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS VS AFFIRMATIONS

In June 2022, we actively worked on developing a Land Affirmation. We moved away from the term "acknowledgment" as it may imply that these statements can be denied, but they can't: these ARE the traditional, ancestral, and current day homes of many Indigenous Nations. One of the leads on this project suggested adding a meaningful quote from a book they shared which addresses the frequent shortcomings that many organization make with not doing more than just a Land Acknowledgement.

### 2022 Land Affirmation

Volunteer Alberta's main office is situated on Treaty 6 Territory, specifically, amiskwaciwâskahikan (ᐱᐢᐴᓂᐴᓂᐸᓂᐴᓂᐸᐴᓂᐸ) as it was referred to by the plains Cree peoples among other Indigenous names, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Our staff, board, and our work reach across Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and we affirm that the land we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory, as well as present-day homes of many Nations, including the Blackfoot Confederacy - Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika - the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and the Métis People of Alberta, which includes the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta. Since time immemorial, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples have cared for these lands, and they continue to do so today. We encourage you to visit Native Land to learn more about the land and its Nations where you live, work, and play.

Volunteer Alberta identifies and affirms the historical and current relationships of these Nations to the land as an act of Reconciliation and with the awareness that acknowledging, recognizing, or affirming these facts is a small step and not enough. Quoting Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, *Sharing Breath* (2018):

"This recognition of land theft, while important, is discursive and thus remains limited. Indeed, our determination, as [mostly] non-Indigenous inhabitants of ... Turtle Island, to respect treaty relationships and acknowledge settler responsibility for the historical appropriation of Indigenous land is inescapably compromised, given that, in Canada, land can evidently be stolen and not returned provided you admit to wrongdoing, say you're sorry, speak solemnly about the need for Reconciliation, and continue to make promises that, in fact, have never materialized."

Volunteer Alberta is committed to reflecting on, critiquing, and changing our ways of knowing, being, and doing in order to start concretely contributing to Indigenous resurgence in ways we have not yet done.

The Volunteer Alberta Team  
June 2022



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend a special thank you to our partners who have supported the work that is reflected in this document. We are grateful for the continued partnerships in creating positive change which allow us to embark on this Reconciliation journey.

Thank you to the Government of Alberta for supporting our work through the Enhanced Capacity Advancement Program (ECAP), which creates the space for our team to actively develop tools and resources, and hold discussions and reflections to evolve our strategic and equitable operational practices

Thank you for Suncor Energy Foundation for the support of our Intersectionality Project which gave us the foundation for our (un)learnings and space to explore these concepts.

Thank you for the Government of Canada and the Canada Summer Job wage subsidies which enabled us to employ summer students who enlivened the conversation and brought new ideas to the table.

Thank you to GEDI Hub, the Community Development Learning Institute, and our extended Member Network for helping to guide us and offering ways for us to collectively grow, (un)learn, and reflect.

Published by:  
Volunteer Alberta  
Suite 609, Empire Building  
10080 Jasper Ave  
Edmonton (amiskwaciwâskahikan), Alberta T5J 1V9  
Phone: (780) 482.3300