

MuseumsForward

The use of land acknowledgments in small, local history museums in the Seattle area

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Abstract

Small, local history museums are typically founded on narratives of the achievements of white settler-colonizers, and historically rarely include discussion of the Indigenous history of their locations. Recently, many of these museums are deconstructing this narrative and integrating decolonization practices into their museums. The purpose of this research study was to investigate the ways in which small, local history museums in the Seattle area are using land acknowledgments in their day-to-day operations. Through a descriptive survey of 9 Seattle area museums, the researcher utilized interviews and questionnaires to investigate how museums develop and use these statements, and why they were motivated to use them. Findings show that most museums involved or collaborated with Indigenous individuals or communities in the development of the statements, that they operationalized these statements in various verbal and written formats, and that the common trends in museums' motivations were acknowledging Indigenous land, recognizing the impacts of colonization, and because they perceived it as a best practice. Because this study focused only on the museums' perspective on their use of land acknowledgments, implications suggest that both museum practice and further research on land acknowledgments could benefit from collaboration with the Indigenous communities being recognized in these statements.

Keywords

Decolonization; land acknowledgments; small museums

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Introduction

Today, Indigenous communities are alive and strong. They have survived centuries of colonial practices: genocide, the seizing of lands, and the suppression of their culture, language, and lifeways. Colonization is still happening, and it continues to harm Indigenous communities. Museums played, and continue to play, a role in harmful colonizing practices, including the collection of Indigenous remains and belongings, encouraging narratives of colonization as progress, and erasing or erroneously portraying Indigenous history (Lonetree, 2012). This has led to calls for museums and other such cultural institutions to implement decolonization practices. One decolonization initiative practiced in museums is land acknowledgments, which name the Indigenous communities whose land the institution stands on. It has become common practice, and sometimes policy, in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and among Indigenous Nations in the U.S. to open events with a land acknowledgment. However, this practice has been adopted by few non-Indigenous U.S. institutions (U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017).

Small, local history museums and historical societies often play a role in how locals and tourists view the history of that location; they are therefore in a position to impact the public awareness and understanding of the enduring relationship between Indigenous communities and the lands those museums occupy. While more and more museums are utilizing land acknowledgments, there is little research on how museums are developing these statements, the ways in which they operationalize those statements, or about museums' motivations for implementing this practice. This article describes a research study that investigated small, local museums in the Seattle area to understand how and why these museums are using land acknowledgments.

Museums and colonization

Museums played active roles in the processes of colonization, and many continue to justify the harmful practices of colonialism, past and present (Garcia, 2018; Lonetree, 2012; Smith, 2012; Vawda, 2019). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, academic practices like salvage anthropology, in which anthropologists began collecting and recording Indigenous Peoples belongings and practices because they believed 'authentic' Indigenous culture was disappearing (Lonetree, 2012, p.64; Smith, 2012, p.29), and the 'natural history approach,' in which Indigenous remains and cultural objects were interpreted as part of the wilderness alongside flora and fauna as 'specimens' (Lonetree, 2012, p.15; Smith, 2012, p.62) were reflected in museums interpretation. Indigenous Peoples were portrayed through the harmful

narrative of the 'disappearing Indian' and Indigenous remains and cultural objects were represented as a stage in the evolutionary process towards the more 'modern' and 'advanced' Euro-American society (Lonetree, 2012; Smith, 2012). These museum practices informed the wider public view of Indigenous communities, justifying the national narratives of colonization as progress (Anderson, 2019). By curating a public view that Indigenous culture was both disappearing and that it represented a previous and lesser stage of cultural evolution, museums were actively part of the colonial project that justified the taking of Indigenous lands and the destruction of Indigenous cultural practices.

Local history museums and historical societies

The creation of small, local history museums and historical societies started around the beginning of the twentieth century throughout the United States, and was motivated by local heritage and preservation efforts, which were usually funded by the personal contributions of locals (Whitley, 2007). The focus of these small museums was on the history of their immediate area, but because these museums were created, funded, and for post-colonial non-Indigenous communities, these museums' portrayal of history focused on the arrival of white, Euro-American settler-colonizers. Local history museums are places that are considered authentic and accurate sources of information, and therefore influence the understanding of the culture and history of an area for locals and tourists. As stated by Whitley (2007), "This position as preserver of national culture, producer of local heritage, and guardian of a society's cultural memory places the historical society museum in a position of great power" (p. 18). Small, local museums can therefore counter or affirm harmful colonial narratives through the presence or lack of meaningful discussion of Indigenous history and the enduring Indigenous communities connected to the local area.

Decolonization in museums

In order to address the harmful role of museums in colonization, many museums have begun efforts to decolonize (Lonetree, 2012; Vawda, 2019). A primary recognition within those efforts is that colonization is still happening and still impacts academic research and museum practices (Smith, 2012). Smith discusses how she "identified research as a set of ideas, practices, and privileges that were embedded in imperial expansionism and colonization and institutionalized in academic disciplines, schools, curricula, universities, and power" (p. x). Decolonization involves digging up and exposing these embedded practices and addressing the harm created. As stated by Amy Lonetree,

“This decolonizing project involves more than moving museums away from being elitist temples of esoteric learning and even more than moving museums toward providing forums for community engagement. A decolonizing museum practice must be in service of speaking the hard truths of colonialism” (p. 6).

Fundamental to meaningful decolonization practices in museums are forming relationships and giving power, autonomy, and repatriating belongings and land to Indigenous communities harmed by and/or represented in museums and their collections (Lonetree, 2012; Steinman, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is important to note that many have questioned the effectiveness of decolonizing practices, including land acknowledgments, because these efforts can often become performative and/or create further harm (Auger, 2021; Kassim, 2017, 2017; Olsen, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Because of increased public expectation for institutions to be socially conscious, decolonization has in many cases become synonymous with generic efforts to demonstrate social responsibility and de-center whiteness, rather than a specific and intentional set of practices meant to confront colonialism and center Indigenous voices (Steinman, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that one way decolonization practices can fall short is when they focus only on generating awareness, and “allow conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land” (p. 19). Critical consciousness and awareness, therefore, are not considered enough to constitute meaningful decolonization practice. In addition, these efforts to decolonize often tokenize Indigenous collaborators, appropriate Indigenous work, and put the burden of decolonizing on Indigenous Peoples (Kassim, 2017). These critiques of decolonization demonstrate that implementing decolonizing practices is complicated and must be done with care and intention to not cause further harm.

Land acknowledgments

Land itself plays a central role in settler-colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The moral doctrine of manifest destiny justified the forced removal of Indigenous Peoples from their land and the subsequent occupation and theft of those lands (Smith, 2012; Steinman, 2016). Because of the relationship between land and colonization, something that is now widely recognized as a best practice in decolonization work is utilizing land acknowledgments (Garcia, 2018; NMAI, n.d.; Olsen, 2021; Spears, 2020; Steinman, 2016; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). Land acknowledgments began in traditions practiced by many Indigenous communities as a way to welcome others to the land or respect the land one was visiting (LSPIRG, n.d.; NMAI, n.d.; U.S.

Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). They have since been adapted and utilized by non-native institutions.

The definition of land acknowledgments used in the paper is drawn from multiple guides created to assist institutions in using these statements: **A Land Acknowledgment is a statement that recognizes the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands and recognizes their enduring relationship with their traditional lands and territories** (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; Native Governance Center, 2019; NMAI, n.d.; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). These guides identify that land acknowledgments can be used by the institution in everyday proceedings, such as large events or gatherings (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; Olsen, 2021; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017), institutional workshops (Spears, 2020), board meetings (Garcia, 2018), and also in written form, such as on websites or in email signatures (Garcia, 2018; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017).

One thing all these guides and resources on land acknowledgments have in common is that they emphasize that utilizing a land acknowledgment is not considered enough. They argue that land acknowledgments should be part of larger practices of recognition of and collaboration with Indigenous communities (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; Native Governance Center, 2019; NMAI, n.d.; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). However, because of colonization and the removal and relocation of many Indigenous Peoples, land attribution can be complicated (Olsen, 2021; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). This has, in some places, including Seattle, created contestations within and between those communities as to who should be recognized in a land acknowledgment (Archibald, 2016).

Study purpose

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the ways in which small, local history museums in the Seattle area are using land acknowledgments. The study was guided by three key research questions:

1. How are land acknowledgments developed in small, local, history museums in the Seattle area?
2. In what ways do small, local, history museums in the Seattle area operationalize their land acknowledgment?
3. Why do small, local, history museums in the Seattle area choose to utilize a land acknowledgment?

Methodology

This research study used a descriptive survey design to assess the development and use of land acknowledgments in small history museums in and around Seattle. Thirteen museums were identified and contacted. They were selected based on the following criteria: a) they had a physical location, b) they were located in Northwest Washington, c) they were a historical society museum, or a museum focused on the history of their local area, and d) the researcher could confirm through their website or by contacting the institution that they had a land acknowledgment prior to the beginning of the study. Of the thirteen that were contacted for the study, nine chose to participate.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires, tailored to three different audiences (see Appendix A for the research instruments). First, Executive Directors were contacted and asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was intended to collect top-down information from the Director about the official intention and procedure for using the land acknowledgment at the museum. Second, Directors were asked to forward the questionnaire to relevant staff, board members, and volunteers at their museum. The questionnaire for staff, board members, and volunteers was designed to investigate the various uses and intentions for the land acknowledgment in the museums' day-to-day operations. Third, the staff member who was the most knowledgeable about the creation of the museum's land acknowledgment was interviewed. Sometimes that was the Executive Director, and sometimes it was a different staff person. Interviews were designed to probe why the land acknowledgment was created, how it was created, and who was involved in the creation and why.

Because land acknowledgments can be a politically charged issue, the identity of museums in this study was kept anonymous.

Table 1: *Participating museums and data collected*

Museum	Interview completed	Questionnaire participants			Completed questionnaires
		Board	Staff	Volunteers	
A	Yes	2	0	4	6
B	Yes	8	0	3	11
C	Yes	5	0	1	6
D	Yes	3	3	2	8
E	Yes	1	0	0	1
F	Yes	6	2	1	9
G	Yes	5	0	0	5
H	Yes	2	1	3	6
I	Yes	0	1	0	1

The interviews and questionnaires were conducted and completed in February 2022. Because many COVID restrictions were still in place during the study, the interviews were conducted over Zoom and were recorded and transcribed using Zoom's caption function. The questionnaires were collected using Google Forms.

Results

1) How are land acknowledgments developed in small, local, history museums in the Seattle area?

Participants were asked in the interview and questionnaire to describe how the museum's land acknowledgment was developed. Results suggest that most of the museums sampled in this study took a collaborative approach, specifically working with one or more Indigenous individuals or organizations to develop their land acknowledgment.

Working with Indigenous individuals or organizations

Six of the nine museums in this study developed their land acknowledgment in collaboration with others. Five of them worked with an Indigenous individual or an individual affiliated with an Indigenous organization, and two of them worked directly with a tribal authority or organization and followed their requested process.

Indigenous advisors

Museums C, H, G, and I collaborated with an Indigenous individual or an individual affiliated with an Indigenous organization that worked with or represented the communities they were acknowledging. In the case of Museums C and H, the museum utilized the aid of an Indigenous board member in the development of the land acknowledgment. The interviewees from museums B and H said the development occurred before their time at the museum, but the President of Museum C recounted the initiation of the collaboration: "I said [to him], I can draft something, or we could have a committee draft something, but you know it will need your stamp of approval. You know, because we're talking about your land, your people, we want to make sure that we're truthful and respectful." She elaborated that the board member requested that the statement not be put forth as his statement: "And I said, of course not. But at least he can get us going. So [he] started us out, and then we just edited a few words."

Museums G and I reached out to individuals outside of the museum, and both received a recommended or example statement from the individuals they contacted that they then edited to suit their museum. As stated by the interviewee from museum G, “I tried to figure out, how do we start with this, and then...the archivist at the tribal community, I contacted her, and I said, ‘Do you have, like a sample statement that we could use?’ She had helped [another] museum develop theirs, and so we just took theirs and adjusted [it].” Museum I reached out to an individual at an Indigenous organization: “We have collaborated with them on multiple projects so there was a really simple process. It was within the same day from them giving it to us from us printing it and putting it in the lobby.” The Executive Director explained that they then created a shorter version that was meant to be more accessible and understandable to the general public, and that this adjusted version is the one generally utilized.

Tribal requests and recommendations

In the development of the land acknowledgments for Museums A and D, the tribes the museums worked with had preferences around how they wanted institutions to develop/use a land acknowledgment. The interviewee at Museum A explained, “We’ve done a lot of work with the tribe over the years,” and the museum chose to use a statement that was developed and approved by that tribe for external organizations to use without making any changes, as explained by the Executive Director:

“We just thought, what better way to underscore the land acknowledgment than just use exactly what was given to us without questions or without changes or amendments because it’s their land . . . it’s their statement that they worked on putting out.”

She also explained that when they were launching the museum website in 2020, they reached out to their contact at the tribe: “[The website] was a great impetus to put the land and argument front and center so at that point we did kind of double-check and make sure that it was still current and relevant and the one that we should be using.”

Museum D had a preexisting relationship with the Cultural Affairs Office of the Tribe they were working with and leveraged that relationship in the development of their land acknowledgment: “We did an exhibit in 2016 in conjunction with the Tribe...and as a result of that exhibit and work we began working with the Cultural Affairs people at the tribe.” The interviewee explained that they contacted the office when they began the process of developing a land acknowledgment:

“The Cultural Affairs Office doesn’t want to write land acknowledgments for groups or for individuals, they want us to write them and then submitted to them for suggestions and you know and make sure the language meets what they’re looking for, and so we did that.”

Working on their own

While most museums collaborated with a member of a tribal community, a staff member of a tribal organization, or a tribal government to create their land acknowledgments, two museums (E and F) conducted their own online research to develop their statements. At museum E, the interviewee explained that she had noticed East Coast museums she was familiar with using land acknowledgments and shared this with the museum President, who then asked her to write a statement. She developed the statement from her own research, as she explained: “So, then, I wrote a land acknowledgment statement using some of the wording that I had seen from the East Coast museums’ land acknowledgment statements, as well as what 4Culture uses in their acknowledgment statement.”

The interviewee at Museum F explained that the development of the statement was driven by a staff member:

“We had a new public engagement coordinator, who was just really interested in putting that in place. [She] got the ball rolling, and I think she did a lot of research to see what other organizations had done. So kind of after she started with a draft that she had pulled together from several sources, we just spent some time kind of wordsmithing it.”

She also indicated in the interview her intent to revisit and edit the statement: “It’s definitely not perfect. I think we put it in place thinking, ‘Okay we’re going to revisit this, so we didn’t work with the Duwamish on it at that point.’”

Formalized statements vs. integrated acknowledgment

In all cases but one, the museum initiated the process of developing a land acknowledgment. The outlier was Museum B, which did not formally develop a statement. Rather, a tribal elder reached out to the museum to discuss how the Duwamish were talked about there, eventually joined the board, and led an effort to acknowledge the land within various museum practices. This was the only museum that defined land acknowledgment outside of a ‘land acknowledgment statement,’ which is explored further in the discussion section.

2) In what ways do small, local, history museums in the Seattle area operationalize their land acknowledgment, internally and externally?

Study participants were given a list of common ways in which land acknowledgments are operationalized and asked to indicate which of those were used at their museum. Table 2 shows the various ways in which museums reported using their land acknowledgment.

Table 2: *How museums reported using their land acknowledgments (N=9)*

Uses of land acknowledgment	TOTAL
Read at public programs/events	8
Shared verbally with people who visit the museum	5
Posted on the museum's website	5
Read at board meetings	5
Physically posted on site	4
Read at meetings with community partners	4
Read as part of educational programming	4
Read at staff meetings	3
Included in grant applications	3
Included in publications/newsletters	2
Assist other organizations in developing their own	2
Shared by tribal member affiliated with museum	1
NA (still developing)	1

The most common use of land acknowledgments was to read them at the beginning of gatherings, including public programs and events, board and staff meetings, and meetings with community partners. The only museum that did not report regular use of their land acknowledgment as part of gatherings said it is still working on finalizing its statement and has not started using it regularly or developed an official use policy: "I'm trying to use it anytime I do a presentation, we used it at our annual meeting, but it's really new and so it's not into our culture yet."

Another common use expressed by museums was posting a written statement where it was publicly accessible, for example, on their website or physically in the museum where guests can view the statement. Locations where the statements were physically posted included in the lobby, on the entrance door, or in an exhibit. One

museum also reported that they have shared their written statement with other museums to assist them in developing their own statement: “Sometimes other organizations seek to formulate their own land acknowledgment and we show them our own.”

Participants also expressed the use of the land acknowledgment in interactions between individuals within the museums, though none specified if this was independently motivated or motivated by museum training or policy. For example, a volunteer wrote in the questionnaire, “I try to always bear in mind the importance of the ideas highlighted in the land acknowledgment when visitors who have questions about the Duwamish approach me.” A member of the Duwamish Tribe who responded to the questionnaire from Museum B also shared a list of the ways they have been involved in acknowledging the land and Indigenous history at their museum:

“As a member of the Duwamish Tribe, I have been asked to open public events with a statement that the Duwamish were the first people. I have voluntarily helped a local college with their land acknowledgment statement on their website. I have hosted showing of films telling about the first people in the area. I share a drum and hat I made as a member of the Duwamish Tribe at the museum.”

Museums were also asked in the questionnaire if the museum had expectations for how the land acknowledgment was worded or stated when used. Four selected, “Yes, people know they need to use the acknowledgment with this exact wording;” three selected, “Sort of, people generally use the acknowledgment with this exact wording;” and one selected, “No, people are free to edit the acknowledgment in ways that work for them.”

3) Why do small, local, history museums in the Seattle area choose to utilize a land acknowledgment?

In both the interview and the questionnaire, participants were asked an open-ended question about the museum’s intention/motivation for using a land acknowledgment. Each museum shared a wide variety of reasons they utilize a land acknowledgment, and below is a discussion of four common trends in the responses.

Connection between Indigenous Peoples and land

The most commonly stated motivation for developing a land acknowledgment was that the museums wanted to acknowledge that

their institution was located on Indigenous land. Eight museums identified this motive, and seven museums additionally or alternatively stated that doing so was a way to honor the First Peoples of the land the museum was on. For example, a questionnaire respondent from Museum A said, “The Museum is recognizing that we are on land previously settled on by the Suquamish Tribe. This is out of respect and to honor them.”

At three museums an individual further specified that sharing a land acknowledgment was a way to emphasize the survivance of Indigenous communities and their continued stewardship over the land. For example, a participant from Museum F wrote in the questionnaire, “To inform Museum guests of the continued existence and importance of the Duwamish in our history and in modern times . . . and to acknowledge the importance of the Duwamish’s continued stewardship of their ancestral lands.”

Impacts of colonization

Another theme in the motivations for utilizing a land acknowledgment was to recognize the harm caused by colonization. Five museums mentioned this motivation in a more generalized way: “To address past wrongdoings on the part of white settlers.” Six museums further specified that the land acknowledgment was meant to recognize the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral homelands: “We live on land that was taken from native Peoples by force [and] given to white pioneers. We need to recognize the trauma and unjust position we find ourselves in.” Museums also elaborated that an impact of colonization was a focus on white colonial narratives at museums, and land acknowledgments could counter these narratives, as elucidated in this questionnaire response: “To acknowledge the history of those who came before white settlers, which is often the focus of small local history museums.” Taking this one step further, two museum interviewees also mentioned that the land acknowledgment was a way to begin to take ownership and work to remedy harm caused by museums as a result of this narrative, as exemplified in this statement: “I think that for me, why an acknowledgment is important is addressing generally what has happened to that land on which we live. . . then also more specifically for museums, what is the role museums have played in perpetuating all of these various forms of harm.”

Building and maintaining relationships

A common thread in the motivation for developing and using a land acknowledgment was the museum's relationship with Indigenous communities. For example, the interviewee from Museum G emphasized the importance of building relationships with their Indigenous communities: "Well, part of it was, you know, this growing relationship with the Duwamish tribal community...it was just kind of a continuation of that relationship that we already had in place."

Common or best practice

An additional trend in the data was the perception that land acknowledgments were a common or best practice in museums and other cultural institutions. Six museums mentioned this motivation, although it was expressed in different ways. One expression of this was the perception of land acknowledgments being connected to moral or social justice initiatives. For example, a participant wrote in the questionnaire that land acknowledgments are "the right thing to do." An interviewee stated, "We had to implement it and so that's what we did . . . we're very passionate about social justice heritage inclusion diversity and so that is basically the foundation of what we do." Two other interviewees acknowledged that land acknowledgments are a common practice in other museums, with one participant expressing the perception that this is something museums 'should' be doing: "I had originally noticed that a museum that I had interned at on the east coast had one on their website...I was like, 'Oh, if you have one, we should probably definitely have one.'" The other interviewee expressed that they already had a familiarity with land acknowledgment use in Canada: "I had done a lot of work in the 90s and early 2000s on Vancouver Island and so had been exposed to land acknowledgments and sort of introducing meetings with an acknowledgment of Native People, First Peoples, in Canada."

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how and why small, local history museums in and around Seattle are using land acknowledgments. The results demonstrate three key findings. First, as a general trend, small history museums in Seattle involved or collaborated with Indigenous individuals or communities in the development of their land acknowledgment. There is a variety of literature created by Indigenous communities and individuals that is

meant to be used by museums or other cultural institutions for creating and using land acknowledgments, and in all these guides there is the assertion that a land acknowledgment is not sufficient in terms of the work museums need to put into decolonizing their institutions and supporting Indigenous communities (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; Native Governance Center, 2019; NMAI, n.d.; Olsen, 2021; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). One thing all these guides for land acknowledgment use emphasize is that these statements should be part of a larger practice of recognition of and collaboration with Indigenous communities. The results of this study largely confirm this call to action.

The majority of the museums in this study created their land acknowledgments in collaboration with Indigenous communities, and these collaborations were often the result of a pre-existing relationship or previous collaboration with a group or individual within that community. While two museums in this study did not actively collaborate with the respective community in the process of creating their land acknowledgment statements, one of those museums still discussed other collaborations their museum had worked on with Indigenous community members. In general, therefore, the results demonstrate a trend in land acknowledgment statements being developed within the recommendations of these guides, as a part of ongoing collaboration. Ultimately, however, the values emphasized in these guides are generalized and cannot represent the specific opinions or perspectives of the Indigenous communities upon whose lands these museums stand; consultations with these communities would be needed to ascertain their expectations or opinions about the development and use of land acknowledgments by the museums in this research.

Second, study results suggest that small history museums operationalize their land acknowledgments in a variety of internal and external practices, and in various verbal and written formats. The most common use of land acknowledgments was as a spoken statement at the beginning of events, meetings, and gatherings, which is in line with the most commonly described use of land acknowledgments in the literature (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; Olsen, 2021; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). This included specific uses mentioned in the literature, such as in educational programming or workshops (Spears, 2020), and at board meetings (Garcia, 2018). Museums also used written statements as encouraged in some of the guides (Garcia, 2018; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017) such

as being posted on the website or physically on the museum site, or included in museum publications, newsletters, and grant applications.

The results also demonstrated uses that were not summarized in the literature, namely use in interactions between museum staff/volunteers and visitors. These responses seemed to describe how this use of the land acknowledgment was more informal and meant to educate guests on the Indigenous history of the museum's location in conversation, rather than as an acknowledgment used to introduce an event or identify the land as the other oral and written uses are. This is especially interesting to consider in relation to the development and use of land acknowledgment as described by Museum B. The interviewee for Museum B explained that their museum does not have a formalized land acknowledgment statement but described instead how with the involvement of a Tribal Elder on the board acknowledging the land in some capacity became a part of everything the museum does. As stated by the Executive Director in the interview, "So while we don't have a specific land acknowledgment that we use, every person talks about Duwamish existence." The definition of a land acknowledgment used in this paper is: **A Land Acknowledgment is a statement that recognizes the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands and recognizes their enduring relationship with their traditional lands and territories** (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; NMAI, n.d.; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). This definition doubles as a purpose statement for land acknowledgments, and while not a formalized 'statement,' Museum B's practice of talking about Duwamish existence past and present in their community fulfills the purpose of a land acknowledgment as defined in this paper and throughout the sources used to form that definition. This has interesting implications on the scope and sampling methods of this paper, which selected museums by asking if they had self-identified as having a land acknowledgment. It is interesting to consider if some museums that were contacted may have been acknowledging Indigenous land and Peoples, but not with a "formalized statement" and so did not identify themselves as qualifying for this study.

Finally, the results demonstrated that the participating museums are motivated to use land acknowledgments to acknowledge that their museum is on Indigenous land, to recognize the impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples, and because land acknowledgments are recognized as a best practice. These trends are in line with the purpose of land acknowledgments as articulated in the literature (Garcia, 2018; LSPIRG, n.d.; NMAI, n.d.; Spears, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017). The primary trend in museum intent for using a land

acknowledgment was to recognize the connection between Indigenous Peoples and the land, and/or to recognize the area's First Peoples. These responses directly relate to recognizing the 'enduring relationship of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional lands and territories.' The second most prominent trend in museum intentions was to recognize the impacts of colonization, in which museums often discussed wanted to address the harm caused by white settlers and the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands, responses connect this trend in the data to 'the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands.' This trend also included motives surrounding addressing and correcting the erasure of Indigenous Peoples in the historical narrative, which connects the results again to recognizing the enduring relationship of Indigenous Peoples to their lands. Two interviewees also discussed the harmful role museums played in colonization, connecting the motivation for the use of a land acknowledgment specifically to addressing the colonial and cultural role of museums in the erasure and historical harm. Two different interviewees also recognized and discussed how their statements, or the development of their statements, have been impacted by political events like the creation and almost immediate revocation of the Duwamish Tribes Federal Recognition status, and the political stance (or lack thereof) of the museums throughout those events. This demonstrates that museums are still impacted by and actively part of the ongoing political ramifications of colonization past and present, and as exemplified in this study, some are aware of their connection to these ongoing consequences.

The results of this study suggest an awareness that using a land acknowledgment is common in museums or is "the right thing to do, which supports the frequent observation in the literature that land acknowledgments are becoming common or "trendy" (Auger, 2021; Olsen, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Vowel, 2016). Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that often these practices can signal the institution is being socially responsible without involving the deep changes required for meaningful decolonization. The results above only demonstrated that there is an understanding in some museums that land acknowledgments are a 'best practice;' further research in collaboration with the Indigenous Peoples whose lands and histories these museums interact with would be needed to understand what those communities think about these land acknowledgments, about the museums' intentions for using them, and the impact of land acknowledgments on institutional practice.

It should be recognized that this study focused on the museums' voice and elucidates only the self-reported actions and intentions of these institutions and the individuals involved in them. Limitations of this study's methodology in relation to gathering data from the museum perspective include that COVID emergency procedures have impacted museum operations, business hours, and staffing. This could have impacted the number of museums that were willing to participate, the number of staff and volunteers available to complete questionnaires, and the amount of time and intention given to the development and use of the land acknowledgment. An additional limitation of this study is that the results and discussion shared above can only speak to museums' perspectives on their land acknowledgements. This study, therefore, does not provide any insight into the impacts that these museums' land acknowledgments have on the communities with which these museums interact. These findings, and their limitations, have implications for museum practitioners and further research on this topic.

Implications

The results discussed above contribute to the literature on land acknowledgments and their role in small local museums. Most museums described their process of developing land acknowledgments as a collaborative process that involved Indigenous individuals or organizations. They described their uses of the land acknowledgment as including written and verbal iterations shared both internally and externally, and they described their motivations for developing a land acknowledgment in ways that aligned with practices in the field. These results, however, are limited in that they describe only the perspective of individuals who work within the museums studied here, and only museums within the Seattle area. Further research could investigate the use of land acknowledgments in other locations and other types of museums. In addition, this study described the museums' perspectives on how and why they use land acknowledgments, but it did not describe external opinions on the development, use, or motivations of museums' land acknowledgments, or the impacts of the use of these acknowledgments. Additionally, this research had a regional focus, but did not interrogate the impact of specific regional culture or politics on the museums that participated in the study, or how this might have impacted or been related to their land acknowledgment practices.

Because this study only focused on museums' perspectives of land acknowledgment, research on and from the perspective of the

Indigenous Peoples whose land these museums recognized is needed to gain a full understanding of this practice in Seattle. To be in line with best practices as described in the literature, this research would need to be framed within Indigenous methodologies developed in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples (Lonetree, 2012; Secaira, 2019; Smith, 2012). Further research could also consider the impacts of land acknowledgments on museum visitors. This research could investigate if visitors are aware of the museum's land acknowledgment, what opinions they have about the land acknowledgments, and in collaboration with local Indigenous communities, if these impacts are in line with any goals or desires those communities may have for the impact of these statements. In addition, further research could more deeply interrogate the impact of the surrounding communities and regional culture on museums and how and why they choose to use land acknowledgments. This research could examine local politics, including that of white settler institutions and that of the Indigenous communities with connections to the lands these museums are on. This could provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the impacts and relation of colonization in the area and the museums' uses of decolonizing practices like land acknowledgments.

It could be possible that a better tool for addressing the research questions above is internal museum evaluation. Because these museums are rooted in their individual communities, museum evaluation could help museums understand how their own specific uses of their land acknowledgments are impacting their visitors. By forming relationships and working in collaboration with Indigenous communities whose land the museums are acknowledging, museums could put these evaluations and findings into context and understand if the impact of their land acknowledgments is in line with the Indigenous communities' goals for those statements.

Within Seattle, the results of this paper have a few implications for museum practice. The results demonstrate that most land acknowledgments have been developed in collaboration with local Indigenous communities, and in most cases, this collaboration came from a pre-existing relationship. This could model for some institutions ways that they could begin to build relationships and work towards developing their own land acknowledgment. The results also showed that some of these communities have communicated specific parameters for the development of the statements, which could encourage museums to reach out to the governments of the Indigenous communities they wish to acknowledge to inquire about similar preferences or requests. The results of this paper could also

inform museums in Seattle about trends in this practice in their area. The examples of different applications, both verbal and written, could provide models and ideas for museums as to how they might utilize their own land acknowledgment statements.

The results are, however, once again limited in what they can model for museum practice. These results represent only the museums' perspective on the development, use, and intentions of these statements; notably absent in this paper is the voice of Indigenous Peoples on any of these processes. Museum practice going forward would still require the institutions to seek out and honor the perspective of Indigenous Peoples when developing land acknowledgments (Auger, 2021; Garcia, 2018; Olsen, 2021), as stated by Polly Olsen, Director of DEAI & Decolonization and Tribal Liaison at Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, "I encourage you to take on this deeply important work in a way that is authentic and meaningful to your organization, and done in consultation with tribes and Indigenous communities" (2021).

Ultimately, this research provides insight into the "state of affairs" of the development use of land acknowledgments from the perspective of small, local museums in Seattle, and further work to be done in relation to the effectiveness or impacts of these statements as elements of decolonizing practices in museums will require further collaboration with and support of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on the lands of Seattle since time immemorial.

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Research Instruments*Questionnaire for Executive Directors*

I am studying land acknowledgments in small local history museums in the PNW. The purpose of my study is to understand the development and use of land acknowledgments in these museums, and how people involved in the museum use that land acknowledgment. Completing the survey should take about 5 minutes. By submitting this questionnaire, you consent to your answers being used in my study. If you don't know the answer to a question, just enter: "NA"

1. What is the name of your museum?
2. What is your museum's land acknowledgment?
3. Were you involved in the development of your museum's land acknowledgment? Yes/No/Other
4. Did the museum work with local Tribes/Nations to develop the land acknowledgement? Yes/No/Unsure – If yes, could you list the names of the communities you worked with?
5. How long did it take for your land acknowledgement to be developed, from start to finish?
6. Does the museum have a policy about using this land acknowledgement word-for-word? [Multiple choice options]
 - a. Yes, people know they need to use the acknowledgement with this exact wording.
 - b. Sort of, people generally use the acknowledgement with this exact wording.
 - c. No, people are free to edit the acknowledgement in ways that work for them.
 - d. Other:
7. In what situations does the land acknowledgment show up in your museum's work? Check all that apply. [Multiple-choice options]
 - a. It's on our website
 - b. It's visible to visitors when they enter the museum
 - c. It's visible to visitors at some point during their museum visit
 - d. It's read at the start of our staff meetings
 - e. It's read at the start of our board meetings
 - f. It's read at the start of our meetings with community partners
 - g. It's read at the start of our public programs/events
 - h. It's part of our staff email signatures
 - i. It's on our press releases
 - j. It's in our grant applications

- k. Other – please specify
- 8. If the land acknowledgment is posted physically in your museum, could you describe where?
- 9. Have you ever gotten feedback from anyone on your land acknowledgement? Yes/No/Unsure. If yes, describe that feedback.

Interview Guide

I am studying land acknowledgments in small local history museums in the PNW. The purpose of my study is to understand the development and use of land acknowledgments in these museums, and how people involved in the museum use that land acknowledgment.

The interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes. The goal of this interview is to get more in-depth perspective on the development and intention behind the land acknowledgment. I want to emphasize that participating in this interview is totally voluntary, and you can stop anytime you want. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

1. First, I was wondering if you could open this meeting with your museum's land acknowledgment?
2. What was the museum's intent or reasoning for having a land acknowledgment?
3. What was the process for the creation of the land acknowledgment?
 - a. Who was involved in the creation and why?
4. Do you think the development of the land acknowledgment has impacted other museum practices?
 - a. If so, what practices, and how?
5. Are there other practices in the museum that you feel are related to the land acknowledgment?
 - a. Could you elaborate on how you think these practices are related?
6. Is there anything else about the LA that you would like to share?

Questionnaire for board/staff/volunteers

I am studying land acknowledgments in small local history museums in the PNW. The purpose of my study is to understand the development and use of land acknowledgments in these museums, and how people involved in the museum use that land acknowledgment. Completing the survey should take about 5-10 minutes. By submitting this questionnaire, you consent to your answers being used in my study.

1. What is the name of the museum where you work/volunteer?
2. Check the box that describes your involvement in the museum:
 - a. Staff
 - b. Volunteer
 - c. Board member
3. Does your museum have a land acknowledgement?
 - a. Yes/No/Unsure
 - b. If no or unsure, skip to the end of the questionnaire and submit the form.
4. What is your museum's land acknowledgment?
5. Have you used the land acknowledgment as part of your work?
 - a. If yes, list 1-5 situations in which you have given or used the land acknowledgment as part of your work
 - b. If no, why?
6. Have you observed the land acknowledgment in use by other staff/volunteers at the museum?
 - a. If yes, list 1-5 situations in which you have given seen other staff/volunteers use this land acknowledgment
 - b. If no, why?
7. Do you know why your museum has a land acknowledgment?
 - a. If so, could you summarize the reasoning below?
8. Were you involved in the development of your museum's land acknowledgment?
 - a. If yes, how were you involved?
9. Do you know how the land acknowledgment was developed?
 - a. If so, could you summarize the process here?
10. Is the land acknowledgment posted physically in your museum?
 - a. If so, could you describe where?
11. Have you ever gotten feedback from anyone on your land acknowledgment?
 - a. Yes/No/Unsure. If yes, describe that feedback.