



Labor Acknowledgements

September is the month to commemorate Labor Day, so this month's issue of Multicultural Moments will highlight Labor Acknowledgements, including a definition, purpose, and examples.

Understanding Labor Acknowledgements. Alongside the land acknowledgments that have become common practice in recent years, many institutions have taken the additional step of creating labor acknowledgments. This section will define labor acknowledgments and their purpose.

- **What is a Labor Acknowledgement?** A Labor Acknowledgment "formally addresses the human costs associated with the economic development of a particular geographic region within the United States, with specific emphasis on the role and contributions of enslaved and exploited Black people..." (see [Labor Acknowledgements - Land & Labor Acknowledgements - Guides at Worcester Polytechnic Institute](#))
- **Purpose of Labor Acknowledgements** According to Dr. Terah Stewart, professor in the School of Education at Iowa State University, labor acknowledgments can be ceremonial but also an educational tool. Stewart incorporates a labor acknowledgment into his syllabus so that he and his students can be "accountable for centering labor in our knowledge co-construction and framing of class content and topics." To learn more about his work, see [On Labor Acknowledgements and Honoring the Sacrifice of Black Americans](#).
- **Extending the Work of Labor Acknowledgements.** Creating a labor acknowledgment takes work and collaboration. Similar to land acknowledgments, labor acknowledgments are not an end goal. Hear ideas for how to extend the work of labor acknowledgments on the Student Affairs NOW episode, [From Labor Acknowledgements to Labor Commitments](#). Some ideas include seeing land acknowledgments as not just historical but current, addressing issues of low and unequal pay, conducting business with companies that support fair labor practices, and acknowledging the work of people who labor at your institutions.

Examples of Labor Acknowledgements. Similar to Land Acknowledgements, Labor Acknowledgements come in many forms. Here are a few examples from different institutions.

- Solid Ground, a Seattle-based organization that addresses housing and poverty, has a Labor Agreement that acknowledges the long-term impact of slavery and the benefits of slavery, even for modern institutions. You can read the organization's full [Labor Acknowledgement](#) statement.
- In the video, [Labor Acknowledgement in Advance of Black History Month](#), lawyer and co-founder of Sustainable Brooklyn, Whitney McGuire, shares a personalized labor acknowledgment that addresses both past and current, particularly referencing the labor and environmental injustices in the fashion industry.
- The Historic New Orleans Collection, a museum and research center dedicated to preserving the history and culture of the region, crafted an [Enslaved Labor Acknowledgement](#) that recognizes that most of the objects in the collection "were either made by enslaved people of African or Native

American ancestry or purchased with money made through the brutal system of enslaved labor were created by enslaved people of African descent or Native American ancestry."

- Colleges and universities also have adopted the practice of both land and labor acknowledgments. Here are two examples from local institutions that include labor acknowledgments:
 - George Washington University's Labor Acknowledgement was adapted from the work of Dr. Stewart, mentioned above. The statement acknowledges "that much of what we know of the United States & GW today, including its culture, economic growth, and development, has been made possible by the labor of enslaved Africans, their descendants, and their ascendants who suffered the horror of the transatlantic trafficking of their people, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and other harms that continue today." Read the full [Land & Labor Acknowledgement](#) statement.
 - James Madison University's Labor Acknowledgement was written by faculty who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in collaboration with Faculty Center leadership. The statement opens with, "We invite you to recognize the written histories of the Shenandoah Valley, the city of Harrisonburg, and our university's namesake, James Madison, as fractured" and closes with, "We commit to dismantling racism in spaces of our work. We invite you to work beside us to create change." To read the full statement, see [Indigenous Land and Enslaved Peoples Acknowledgement](#).

May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.

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