

Acknowledging land, labor, and harm: a resource for local planning staff and consultants

Note to local planning staff and consultants:

The statutory obligations created by AB 686 highlight the importance of thoughtfully addressing fair housing issues in the Housing Element. While Housing Element updates have always required community engagement, a jurisdiction's approach to this outreach may shift due to the new requirements related to affirmatively furthering fair housing. Conversations around housing, race, and inclusion can be difficult for both staff and community members for many reasons. ABAG encourages local staff or consultants leading these conversations to think creatively about how to set an appropriate tone and context for this discussion, which will vary depending on the specific circumstances of that community.

One potential tool for setting this tone or providing context is beginning a conversation with an acknowledgement of the structural and historical causes of fair housing issues. This statement could be a land acknowledgement that recognizes the indigenous people who are the traditional stewards of the land where your jurisdiction is located. This statement could also include a labor acknowledgement that recognizes that the growth, development, and wealth of the United States would not have been possible without the labor of enslaved people from Africa, as well as other labor performed by people of color that is often unrecognized or overlooked. Additionally, this statement could acknowledge past harms caused by the planning profession that contemporary planning seeks to correct. Importantly, this type of statement is not the only tool for beginning difficult conversations with community members, and it may not be the most useful tool for all communities or situations.

HCD is not requiring that jurisdictions incorporate these statements in their Housing Element outreach, and ABAG is not recommending that all jurisdictions make these statements as part of community engagement. However, ABAG hopes to provide resources and support for those jurisdictions who are interested in using acknowledgements of land, labor, and/or harm as part of the community engagement process.

Below is a sample land, labor, and harm acknowledgement that staff and consultants can use as a resource. Like all resources delivered through the Regional Housing Technical Assistance program, this sample statement is intended as a starting point that staff can tailor and adapt to respond to local conditions. Those using this resource can copy and paste language from this PDF into their own statements as they see fit. Additionally, this type of statement is likely to be more effective if it is personalized by the person delivering it, which may require staff to examine their personal or institutional role in the issues being discussed.

If local staff would like additional support with customizing this statement for community engagement in their jurisdiction, they are welcome to contact Eli Kaplan at ekaplan@bayareametro.gov.

SAMPLE land, labor, and harm acknowledgment
Transcript of acknowledgement given at 7/13/21 Housing Element webinar

Before we dive into discussions of racial segregation and fair housing, I want to offer an acknowledgement of land, labor, and harm. The intent of this acknowledgement is to remind us that the issues we face in our work today are the consequence of systems rooted in colonialism and systemic racism, which remain current and ongoing.

I am speaking today from Chochenyo Ohlone land in Oakland. The Ohlone have stewarded this land for centuries, and they continue to work to reclaim their territory. I express gratitude to the indigenous nations who have cared for the land that the United States now occupies, and I want to acknowledge the genocide and continuous displacement of indigenous peoples throughout the history of this nation.

Commented [EK1]: Staff should research the original stewards of the land they are speaking from, and replace this text with the specific groups for that area. One helpful resource is this website: <https://native-land.ca/>

While Indigenous people were the first in this country to be enslaved and dispossessed of land and wealth, they are not the only ones. I also acknowledge that the wealth of this country was drawn violently from the unpaid, forced labor of enslaved people from the African continent.

Additionally, I acknowledge the harms engendered by the planning field. At times, land use regulations have resulted in the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens in our cities, such as the concentration of highways and heavy industry near communities of color. Planners also helped shape the urban renewal efforts of the 60s and 70s that destroyed Black neighborhoods across the country. The scars from this time are still evident across the Bay Area.

Though the Fair Housing Act was passed more than 50 years ago, our communities remain segregated and unequal. No one person or profession or city is to blame for the inequities in our region. But as planners, we must rethink our work to create a truly inclusive region where all can thrive.

I hope that this acknowledgement helps to center our work on the lives that it affects. The Housing Element that your cities will complete is more than just a bureaucratic document. Rather, it can lay the foundation to reshape an unequal status quo where one's race and neighborhood result in drastically different opportunities and life expectancies.

Commented [EK2]: Staff may want to change to "our city" or something similar

I also recognize the inherently difficult nature of the efforts we are taking to further fair housing. As a white person and as an urban planner, I personally struggle with what my own role can be in bringing about a more fair and inclusive society. The work to repair the harms I named is complex, and I hope we can all work together to meet our statutory obligations and, moreover, to encourage housing policy and land use planning that truly benefit everyone regardless of race, income, disability, or any other characteristic.

Commented [EK3]: Staff should make this personal to the identities they hold

With that backdrop, we can continue our discussion of affirmatively furthering fair housing.