

STYLE GUIDE

NATIVE GOVERNANCE
CENTER

Last updated 02/2021



WHY A STYLE GUIDE?

FROM ELEMENTS OF INDIGENOUS STYLE

- “The goal of Indigenous style is to **show respect for Indigenous ways of being** in the world in the publishing process and on the page.”
- “The process of decolonizing language surrounding Indigenous peoples is not finished; terms, names, and styles continue to **evolve**.”
- “Indigenous style **overrules** other styles in cases of disagreement.”
- “Indigenous style uses capitals where conventional style does not. It is a deliberate decision that **redresses mainstream society’s history** of regarding Indigenous peoples as having no legitimate national identities; governmental, social, spiritual, or religious institutions; or collective rights.”

THIS STYLE GUIDE IS
SPECIFIC TO OUR
ORGANIZATION AND
EVER-EVOLVING.

STYLE GUIDE NAVIGATION

REFERENCES TO RACIAL,
ETHNIC, CULTURAL (AND
POLITICAL) GROUPS

OUR WORK

THE PEOPLE AND
NATIONS WE SERVE

OUR GEOGRAPHIC
SERVICE AREA

USING OUR NATIVE
LANGUAGES AND PLACE
NAMES

OTHER MISCELLANEOUS
TERMINOLOGY

INAPPROPRIATE
TERMINOLOGY

REFERENCES TO RACIAL, ETHNIC, CULTURAL (AND POLITICAL) GROUPS

- DO capitalize the **names of racial, ethnic, cultural (and for Native folks, political) identifiers**:
 - Capitalize *Black*.
 - Capitalize *Indigenous*, *Native*, and *American Indian*.
 - Capitalize other racial and ethnic identifiers, such as *Asian* and *Latinx*.
- DO capitalize *Indigenous* or *Native* when part of the phrase *non-Native* or *non-Indigenous*.
- DO NOT capitalize the word *white*.
- Use *Black*, *Indigenous*, *People of Color (BIPOC)* rather than *People of Color (POC)* if referring to a group that includes Black and/or Indigenous folks.
- Refer to individuals by their **individual racial/ethnic/cultural/political identifier**, rather than using *BIPOC*, whenever possible. Example, “Natalia is a Latinx small business owner,” rather than, “Natalia is a BIPOC small business owner.”

[Learn more: MPR Editor’s Note: Why we now capitalize Black but continue to lowercase white](#)

OUR WORK

- Our organization:
 - Refer to our organization as *Native Governance Center*, NOT *The Native Governance Center*.
 - Refer to our organization as *Native-led*, rather than *Native American-led*. For example, “Native Governance Center is a Native-led nonprofit organization.”
- Key principles:
 - We say *nation rebuilding* instead of *nation building* to honor the fact that Native nations have always been sovereign and had their own forms of government prior to colonization.
 - Do not capitalize the phrase *nation rebuilding*. If using the phrase *Native nation rebuilding*, do capitalize the word *Native* in the phrase. [Note: do capitalize the word *Nation* if it appears as part of a proper noun, such as in the case of the *Native Nation Rebuilders program*.]
 - Do NOT capitalize *sovereignty*, *self-determination*, or *self-governance*. DO capitalize *Treaty Right* or *Treaty Rights*.
- Our programming:
 - Refer to the *Rebuilders program* exactly as follows: *the Rebuilders program* or the *Native Nation Rebuilders program*. DO NOT pluralize the word *nation* here (a common error when writing out the program name).
 - Refer to both *participants in and graduates of the Rebuilders program* as *Rebuilders* or *Native Nation Rebuilders*.

THE PEOPLE AND NATIONS WE SERVE

- Native nations:
 - Refer to the nations we serve as *Native nations*. Use *Tribal nations* or *Tribes* in special circumstances, if necessary. (*We had a team discussion about this on 12/8/2020.*)
 - The term *nation* may also be used alone, once it's clear that we're talking about a Native nation. Example, "Deanna Standing Cloud (Red Lake Nation) is passionate about bringing people together. She strives to create ways for members of her nation to connect."
 - DO NOT capitalize *nation*, unless it's part of a specific nation's name.
 - When referring to *Native nations in our region*, please see the [list on our website](#). This list contains a mix of federally-recognized names and names we know that nations prefer. (*We discussed how to refer to the nations in our region at a team meeting on September 7, 2020.*)
 - When referring to Native nations outside of our region, use a nation's federally recognized name if you're unsure. You can access a list of federally-recognized Native nations [here](#).
- Other terminology related to Native nations and lands:
 - Capitalize the words *Tribe* and *Tribal*, regardless of whether they appear as part of a proper noun. Example: "The United States is home to 574 federally-recognized Tribes." Or, "Pearl Walker-Swaney is actively working to protect her Tribal homelands."
 - Relatedly, capitalize Tribal in the term *Tribal council*. When the term appears as part of a proper noun, capitalize both words (example: Red Lake Tribal Council).
 - Capitalize the term *Indian Country*.
 - DO NOT capitalize *reservation*, unless it's part of a specific reservation name or referring back to the name of a specific reservation. Example: "Wayne Ducheneaux II is from the Cheyenne River Reservation. When he was recently back home on the Reservation, he knocked down a wall and remediated some mold in his house."
 - **A note on the term reservation:** A reservation is not the same thing as a Native nation. A reservation refers to a Native nation's current land base as defined by the federal government. A Native nation is a sovereign political entity.
- Refer to the people we serve as: *Native people*, *Native*, or *Indigenous*. Use American Indian or Indian when requested by a particular interview subject or when quoting another work.

OUR GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AREA

- We refer to the three states in our region as **South Dakota, North Dakota, and Mni Sota Makoce**. *(We agreed on the usage of Mni Sota Makoce at a team meeting on August 4, 2020.)*
- States can also be abbreviated as **MN, ND, and SD** when needed to meet character limits (Twitter, grant applications, and more).
- When referring to Native nations in **our region**, say “the 23 Native nations that **share geography** with Mni Sota Makoce, North Dakota, and South Dakota.” The “shares geography language” can also be used when talking about other groups of Native nations. *(We agreed on this language usage at a team meeting on 9/1/2020.)*

USING OUR NATIVE LANGUAGES AND PLACE NAMES

- **Do not italicize words that appear in a Native language.** We ultimately want to normalize using our languages; italicization can result in an othering effect.
- When explaining the **meaning of words in Native languages**, put the Native language word first, followed by the English meaning in parentheses. Example: ogema (chief). Do not put the Native language word in parentheses.

OTHER MISCELLANEOUS TERMINOLOGY

Elements of Indigenous Style recommends capitalizing the following terms:

- Creator
- First Nations
- Métis
- Elder
- Sundance
- Sweat Lodge
- Traditional Knowledge

INAPPROPRIATE TERMINOLOGY

A note from *Elements of Indigenous Style*: “Although some terminology surrounding Indigenous peoples continues to evolve, **some terminology is clearly always not right.**”

The following is by no means an exhaustive list of problematic terminology. It serves as an example of the type of **language we should avoid as an organization.**

- Do not use the former name of the Washington football team. (It's a racial slur.)
- Do not refer to Native people as the United States' Native peoples or Native people of the United States. We don't want to imply that Native people are in any way owned by the United States.
- Do not use the word pipeline to refer to fundraising or projects in development. Christopher is working to develop a meaningful term that can be used for fundraising, for example.