



GUIDE FOR REFERENCING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Draft: April 2022

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Purpose of Document

The purpose of this guide is to provide a reference to Archaeologists, Researchers, Historians and other professionals working within the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) industry and related fields. This guide is intended to facilitate the use of insightful, conscientious and respectful terminology and language when referencing Indigenous Peoples and Communities in professional reports and articles. The use of respectful terminology conveys an accurate representation of the integrity of indigenous peoples. ¹

This guide seeks to bring awareness to the contemporary, political and cultural context of particular terms. It also provides a list of preferred terms, as well as background, context, explanation and historical information to illustrate the rationale for recommendations.

This document is meant to encourage the Archaeological Professional to use terms and phrases that are mindful and considerate of the Communities they are discussing and discourages the use of terms that may be received as insensitive or racially charged. This guidance is not meant to replace the terminology used in State or Federal Law or other legal statutes, despite the disparaging nature of some of these terms.

This guidance document is intended to be a living document with consistent updates and revisions. This guide is to be a “work in progress” and will continue to be revised with later editions as contributions from interested parties are incorporated and the overall conversation expands.

Introduction

Language evolves over time to reflect the changing values and attitudes of a society. What can be considered appropriate terminology is continually changing as more voices are listened to and enter

¹ Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples*. Gregory Younging, Canada. 2018.

into a national conversation regarding not only Indigenous matters, but the discrimination and prejudice that disparaging labels and terms evoke. The labels that are used influence interpretation and understanding and can directly influence the perception of a community or group. Listening to the Nations and adopting the preferred terminology reduces the use of outdated, misunderstood and pejorative language in professional documents.

Existing Terminology

The labels *Indian*, *American Indian*, and *Native American* are those that refer to peoples in North and South America. North America, as a geographic concept, was created long after ethnic identities were well established and the role and status of Indigenous North Americans has continued to shift since the arrival and establishment of Europeans. In 1924, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, which refers to Indigenous Peoples as Indians, and imposed citizenship status for all Indigenous Peoples born within the territorial limits of the United States.² These identifiers and others commonly used in the historic record are largely Eurocentric, and are not reflective of the cultures of the Indigenous Communities.

The term Native American is considered by some Indigenous Communities as representing “counterfeit identities that are misleading, inaccurate, and used to control and subjugate their right to use tribal affiliation as a preeminent national identity.”³ For other Communities it is utilized, as it is preferred over Indian. Moreover some Communities do prefer the term Indian to more politically correct or contemporary terms. Across the United States there is no singular choice among the Indigenous Communities for a universal identifier as each Nation has its own preference. Terms such as Indigenous Communities, Native Nations or Nations may be better suited when addressing multiple communities, or when the preference of the particular community is not known.

The ideal identifier is that of the individual (name) or the known Nation (Seneca Nation of Indians, Onondaga Nation, Oneida Indian Nation, etc.). The challenges that arise when writing the archaeological context are three-fold: the tribal affiliation is unknown, the writer is trying to refer to Indigenous People as a whole, and the author is discussing more than one Nation. Throughout this guide the terms Indigenous Communities and Nations will be used.

² National Congress of American Indians (2020). Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction. Washington, D.C., February 2020

³ Michael Yellow Bird, What We Want to Be Called. *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 1-21 (21 pages). www.jstor.org/stable/1185964

The current dialogue about what Indigenous People want to be called continues to expand the understanding of the variety of labels that are preferred and those that should be avoided. In addition, the contextual approach used by many professionals in their writing suggests a lack of continuity in the archaeological record. The generalized archaeological contexts present the cultural and historic contexts of Indigenous Communities as ending with the arrival of the European settlers. While the purpose of this document is to address disparaging and misleading terminology, the similar effects created by written contexts cannot be overlooked.

Ultimately, professionals in the CRM field should be aware that language use is a concern for Indigenous Communities. With this in mind, research was completed to evaluate any existing guidelines produced by government departments, educational institutions, and other professional organizations to create a starting point for this guide. Reviewing agencies and Historic Preservation offices were contacted to evaluate any guidance documents.

Legal Statues

The legal terms *Indian Nation* or *Tribe* in New York refer to one of the following Nations or Tribes⁴: “Cayuga Nation, Oneida Nation of New York, Onondaga Nation, Poospatuck or Unkechauge Nation, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Seneca Nation of Indians, Shinnecock Indian Nation, Tonawanda Band of Seneca and Tuscarora Nation.”

In U.S. Federal Law the terms Indian or American Indian refer generally to the Indigenous Peoples of the continent at the time of European colonization, within the boundaries of Federally Recognized Tribes. Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians refer to peoples indigenous to those specific regions. In the context of Federal Law, the terms Tribe or Band designate a group Indigenous People of the same or similar heritage united in a community under one leadership or government and inhabiting a particular territory.⁵ There are 574 Federally Recognized Nations, and over 60 State Recognized Nations, with many other Indigenous Communities that are not officially recognized by the Federal Government.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) currently interacts with thirteen (13) Federally recognized Nations and one (1) State recognized Nation. The following are Federally Recognized Nations: Cayuga Nation, Delaware Nation, Delaware Tribe of Indians, Oneida Indian Nation, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Onondaga Nation, Seneca Cayuga Nation of Oklahoma, Seneca Nation of Indians, Shinnecock Nation, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Stockbridge-

⁴ Laws of New York, The New York State Senate. Chapter 26 (Indian) Article 2(General Provisions).

⁵ American Indian Law, Legal Information Institute. [1www.law.cornell.edu/wex/american_indian_law](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/american_indian_law)

Munsee Community, Tonawanda Seneca Nation and the Tuscarora Nation. In addition, there is one Nation recognized by New York State, the Unkechaug Indian Nation on Long Island.

Given the diversity of preferences among the Nations and its role as a state agency, OPRHP is unable to identify a standardized lexicon. Acknowledging the diversity of the Nations is an essential aspect of this document. As this guide continues to expand, the intention is that it will reflect the diversity and identity of the Tribal Nations that are affiliated with areas in New York State as well as other ancestral communities.⁶ A list of these Communities is included in this document (p. 8).

Consultations with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Elders and Community leaders in New York are ongoing. This document has been developed based on research and informal conversations with members of the Indigenous Communities. Comments, input and feedback from the Indigenous Communities' representatives has been incorporated into this document. Periodic and consistent revisions are expected as additional input is received.

Limitations

This guide does not address the longstanding and understood labels that describe the archaeological record in North America. A term such as *Archaic* can be considered derogatory in that it promotes the idea of communities being primitive. Authors of professional documents should be conscientious of the negative influence of these labels and should refrain from using them to refer to members of Indigenous Communities (i.e., Archaic people).

In a Historic Context there should be recognition that an archaeologically-defined temporal sequence may not coincide with that used by the Indigenous Nations. Archaeological terms like Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian are a way to divide time and should be treated as such.

In addition, these time frames are Eurocentric in nature (i.e., Contact Period) and cause a division in the continuity of the Indigenous Communities contributions to the historical record or their own ontology. These archaeological time divisions should be examined and reframed to better incorporate a contemporary approach to describing the archaeological record. This type of change would require significant research and input from the Indigenous and Archaeological Communities alike. While a worthy undertaking, this is beyond the scope of this document.

⁶ The boundaries of States do not reflect the boundaries of lands belonging to Ancestral or Indigenous Communities.

This guide is not intended to create a universal lexicon for archaeological reporting and professional writings, but is meant to raise the awareness of the pejorative influence of certain and problematic words and, to the extent possible, identify the preferences of individual Nations in order to guide authors toward more respectful and less Eurocentric language.

This document does not highlight the derogatory and demeaning terms used to describe members of the Indigenous Communities as the racist and insulting nature of these terms is generally recognized throughout the archaeological community.

Stylistic Considerations

The following are general stylistic considerations that should become the standard in report writing.

- Indigenous Communities, Indigenous People or Nations should always be capitalized.
- Capitalize proper names when referring to a specific Nation or Community.
- Use the formal name of a specific Indigenous Community or Nation when it is known (i.e., Oneida Indian Nation, Delaware Nation).
- Avoid referring to present day Indigenous Communities in the past tense.
- Use citation standards when including previous written work that involves inappropriate terminology.

Appropriate Terminology List

In its initial meeting, the Nomenclature Committee discussed what words or phrases could be substituted for contact, prehistoric, or pre-contact as these terms were increasingly viewed as problematic by Indigenous Communities and archaeologists alike. It was apparent additional research was warranted to determine if others had recognized the issue as well and if they had offered viable substitutes. Members of the Committee including Beth Selig, Carol Weed, and Kate Whalen completed on-line research into the topic, focusing on State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices. Joe Stahlman, assisted the committee by providing additional resources.

A comprehensive EXCEL-based Workbook was created. It contains three tabbed tables named WordAlternates, Links, and RefsCited. The Workbook can be accessed at nysarchaeology.org.

Certain words and phrases immediately stood out in the various sources. Below is a list of the terms that commonly appeared in the sources, their definition as “accepted” by the source, and any alternative term offered in the source. This list contains the “top hits” and we urge the reader to look at the comprehensive Workbook and perhaps even more importantly, the original references as well. This table has been presented as a single page so that it may be easily printed for use.

SUGGESTED TERMINOLOGY FOR ARCHEOLOGICAL REPORTING

Original Term(s)	Description (Source)	Alternative Terms Suggested in Source
Analyze, analysis	(ASM, Respectful Terminology)	Document, documentation
Artifact	“evidence, usually an object, of human activities” (Alaska Office of History)	Object, cultural material
Camp	As preferred by the Tonawanda Seneca Nation	Habitation site
Collect (bone or funerary object)	(ASM, Respectful Terminology)	Gather (ancestral or cultural remains)
Discover	"the act of something being discovered" (ASM, Respectful Terminology)	Encounter, expose, disturb
Discovered	when term used like “Columbus Discovered America” (Appropriate Terminology March 2004)	Occupation, invasion, colonization
Historic property	“a prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion on the NRHP.” (Alaska Office of History and Archaeology using Section 106 definition)	cultural property
Indian Nations	“refers to the Native American entities recognized by the federal and state governments. Consultation with Indian Nations is conducted government to government and under the purview of the lead agency.” (NYC LPC Guidelines, App A)	No substitute suggested
Iroquois	In New York State, Haudenosaunee is the designation most commonly used by the Six Nations to refer to themselves (Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee 2002)	Haudenosaunee
Native Americans	“America is the European name for the continent” (d’Errico 2012)	Indigenous Communities, Nations
Past Peoples (Archaic/paleolithic peoples)	As preferred by the Stockbridge Munsee Community	ancestors of [name of Nation]
Precontact	“This term generally refers to the period before the existence of supplementary records, primarily written records, maps, drawings, etc.” (NH, Standards and Guidelines March 2018)	No substitute suggested
Prehistoric (as in Prehistoric sites)	“of or pertaining to the time or a period prior to recorded history” (Idaho State Historic Preservation Office Guidelines 2015)	Precontact, Indigenous
Protohistoric	“a transitional period between pre-contact and postcontact between indigenous and non-indigenous populations” (Alaska Office of History and Archaeology 2018-2023)	Use known dates or date ranges
Remove, excavate, exhume	(ASM, Respectful Terminology)	Recover (ancestral remains, individuals)

New York Archaeological Council Nomenclature Committee

This guide reflects the New York Archaeological Council's Nomenclature Committee's good faith effort to create a document that addresses the language and terminology often used by the archaeological community that is disrespectful to Indigenous Communities.

The New York Archaeological Council's Nomenclature Committee members include Beth Selig (M.A., RPA), the committee chairperson, Allison McGovern (Ph.D., RPA), Linda Stone, (MA, RPA), David Witt (Ph.D., RPA), Kate Whalen (Ph.D., RPA), and Carol S. Weed (M.A., RPA). Joe Stahlman (Ph.D.,) Director of Seneca Nation's Seneca-Iroquois National Museum has provided the Committee with insight and guidance in the development of this document.

Other contributors or commenters include members of the New York Archaeological Council, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, the Tonawanda Seneca Nation and the New York State OPRHP.

This document has been distributed to the representatives of the thirteen (13) Federally recognized Nations, the Unkechaug Indian Nation, Montaukett Nation and the New York Archaeological Council executive board for consideration, comment and contributions. Input and comments from these and other Native Nations received to date have been incorporated into this current draft.

NYAC Nomenclature Committee Future Projects

This Committee recognizes that the terminology change, as described, is a very small step in shifting the overall manner in which professional archaeologists' reference Indigenous Communities. The Committee intends to continue to work to develop guidance to address the errors in written background contexts that appear in professional reports, and the lack of respect when addressing members of the Nations in professional and agency correspondence. The committee intends to continue to share these initiatives with the Nations and the SHPOs and looks forward to continued contributions from the Indigenous Communities and the state agencies.

Federal and State Recognized Nations For New York State

Federally Recognized

Cayuga Nation

Delaware Nation

Delaware Tribe of Indians

Oneida Indian Nation

Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin

Onondaga Nation

Seneca Cayuga Nation of Oklahoma

Seneca Nation of Indians

Shinnecock Nation

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Stockbridge-Munsee Community

Tonawanda Seneca Nation

Tuscarora Nation

State Recognized

Unkechaug Indian Nation

Other Indigenous Communities in New York State

Ramapough Lenape Nation

Montaukett Indian Nation

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