



MAINE SUMMER CAMPS INDIGENOUS APPROPRIATION ASSESSMENT

Revised December 18, 2023

With Gratitude: Many thanks to Penobscot and Wabanaki Leadership for starting this conversation with Maine Summer Camps and setting us on a path of learning and reconciliation. Thanks to those who reviewed our drafts and provided feedback to help us create a useful and meaningful tool for self-reflection. This Assessment is also inspired by work done at The YMCA of The Seven Council Fires and Camp Fire Organization. This is a living document which will be updated as we continue to learn and evolve.

How to Approach the Assessment Process: This is intended to help camps examine their ethos with an openness to experiencing the camp’s symbols and practices from other perspectives. We hope you will undertake this process not as a checklist, but as an opportunity to thoughtfully observe, discuss, consider, and take action.

Please approach each question looking broadly at as many aspects of your culture that could apply. A self-assessment encourages thought and dialogue, some of which might cause discomfort. Initially, like so much in life, this may raise more questions than answers. It might leave you thinking, “I just want someone to tell me what to do!” If the MSC Board’s experience is a guide, it’s OK for this to take a while, and you may find that you wish to acquire more knowledge and understanding. Throughout the document and on our MSC webpage, we have listed some relevant resources to assist you in further discovery of Native American history, culture, and peoples.

To help you with this Assessment, here is a short, easy-to-understand definition of cultural appropriation: Cultural appropriation refers to the use of names, objects, or elements of a non-dominant culture in a way that reinforces stereotypes or contributes to oppression and doesn't respect their original meaning or give credit to their source.

This Assessment is intended to be a first step. It will likely require ongoing efforts to ensure that the messages and patterns of behavior that people perceive from your camp’s culture are inclusive and truly represent your camp’s values.

SETTING THE STAGE

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
What led you to engage in this Indigenous Appropriation Assessment?				

How do you hope every camper and staff member feels while they are attending your camp, no matter what their cultural or ethnic background?				
How are you feeling as you begin this process? What factors are in play that shape your thoughts and feelings?				
How do your alumni and current families influence your approach to this work?				

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Resources: Here are some live links to interactive maps that may help you with land history:

[Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land](#)

[Acknowledging the Land — Maine-Wabanaki REACH](#)

[Honoring Original Indigenous Inhabitants: Land Acknowledgment](#)

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
Has administration at your camp ever reflected on its culture and traditions or engaged in a cultural audit of any kind?				

<p>What ties, if any, does your camp's name have to Indigenous People or other cultures?</p>				
<p>How long has your camp been in operation?</p>				
<p>Many camps' descriptions of their histories start when the camp was founded. What is the history of your camp property before it was a camp?</p>				
<p>What Indigenous Peoples inhabited the land your camp is on before colonization?</p>				
<p>Are there currently any Indigenous People living geographically close to your camp? If so, to what Tribal Nation do they belong?</p>				
<p>What is the origin of your camp's logo? Is it representative of a different culture? If so, which one?</p>				

FACILITIES

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
Do you have themes for your camp building names? Are any themes/names representative of a different culture? What are they?				
What areas of your camp are named after Indigenous Tribes or other cultures?				
Are there any iconographic figures representative of a different culture on your campus like a “totem pole,” “teepee,” or “wigwam”? Please consider the context of these objects.				
What current or past awards or plaques are named after or contain Indigenous themes?				

Resource: Linked here is the [Summary of the American Psychological Association’s Resolution Recommending Retirement of American Indian Mascots](#). This document addresses the harm done to young people through racial stereotyping and inaccurate racial portrayals.

CAMP PROGRAMS

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
<p>What camp songs, chants or creeds have a connection to or refer to Indigenous People or ways of life?</p>				
<p>What camp traditions are based on real or imagined Indigenous culture? (e.g., use of a talking stick)</p>				
<p>Does your camp have any special ceremonies derived from Indigenous cultures? (e.g., Council Fire)</p>				
<p>Does your camp use any Indigenous ceremonial regalia, costumes, or props? When, where, why are these used?</p>				
<p>Does your camp ever divide into “tribes”?</p>				
<p>Does your camp conduct any activities that are named using culturally</p>				

insensitive names? (e.g., “The Apache Relay” or “Indian Wrestling”)				
Does your camp use language or “nicknames” derived from Indigenous cultures? (e.g., Chief)				
Do staff use language or idioms that perpetuate stereotypes? (e.g., “let’s pow-wow,” “Indian style,” “Low man on the totem pole,” or “off the reservation”)				
Are drums or musical instruments used to mimic Indigenous People’s culture for camp programs?				
Are any of your program activities derived from Indigenous or other cultures, e.g., creating a dreamcatcher or rain stick in crafts? How are these programs presented?				

Resources:

Here is a [TedTalk](#) in which Maulian Dana, Ambassador for the Penobscot Nation, articulates in a very personal way the harm of misappropriating Native American symbols and language.

EDUCATION

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
How are staff and campers made aware of cultural appropriation?				
How are other key stakeholders made aware of cultural appropriation?				
Is it clear to whom a member of your community should go if they feel culturally isolated, intimidated, or that an offensive act has occurred? Is there a response system in place?				
Do you offer educational opportunities during the summer for staff to learn about Indigenous Peoples and Cultures in Maine? And for campers?				
Do campers and staff take trips out of camp? Do you offer educational opportunities for staff and campers to				

learn about Indigenous Peoples represented in the area they travel to?				
Do you offer educational opportunities during the off season for campers, staff or parents?				
Have you considered identifying a cultural advisor?				

REFLECTIONS — Things to consider as you work through your review.

Question	What has been done/discussed?	What needs to be considered?	What action(s) need to happen?	Unsure/support needed
What parts of this Assessment brought up difficult feelings for you? What are those feelings?				
<p>This process may have inspired you to look more deeply into some traditions or practices.</p> <p>A. What are the core intentions behind those practices, and what are they designed to do for your community?</p>				

<p>B. How can you work to retain your core intentions while also removing culturally offensive or appropriated practices?</p> <p>C. How can you use any necessary changes as a tool for learning and building empathy and understanding in your community?</p>				
<p>Have you looked at your camp's digital footprint for inappropriate cultural appropriation? (A good rule: If you are unsure about posting something on the internet, it is probably an activity to refrain from until you learn more.)</p>				

This tool provides a process of learning and understanding, and we're grateful that you have begun to consider these questions. No one has all the answers; be patient and open as you and your camp change over time. This "living" document will develop as we — and our camps — continue to learn and evolve. **Originally published by Maine Summer Camps in March 27, 2023 — this version was updated December 8, 2023. ACA made slight adaptations to suit a national audience on December 18, 2023.**