

Respectful Terms and References

Language evolves and preferences vary across Nations, communities and individuals. When possible, use the specific Nation or community name a person uses for themselves, listen to individual preferences and avoid assuming one term applies to everyone.

Term	Working definition and usage note
Band Council	The elected governing body of a First Nation band established under the federal Indian Act. Composed of an elected Chief and councilors, it acts as a local municipal government responsible for administering community affairs, including housing, education, infrastructure, and band-specific bylaws.
Colonialism	Colonialism is the process of establishing foreign control over a territory and its original inhabitants. In Canada, this specifically refers to settler colonialism—where outsiders migrated to North America with the intent of permanently displacing Indigenous populations, extracting resources, and imposing European laws, religions, and cultural values.
Elder	In Indigenous cultures, an Elder is not defined by age, but by community recognition. They are respected Knowledge Keepers who have earned their status through wisdom, life experience, and a deep understanding of traditional teachings. They serve as spiritual leaders, mentors, and the vital link between the past, present, and future.
Enfranchisement	A former policy under the <i>Indian Act</i> in which a First Nations person lost their legal Indian Status and band membership, either voluntarily or involuntarily, in exchange for full Canadian citizenship rights. The policy was abolished in 1985.
First Nations	Unlike Métis and Inuit, most First Nations hold reserve lands. Members of a First Nation may live both on and off these reserves.
FNIM	First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
FNIMU	First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous.
Indian	A term still used on government forms to identify First nations people. Some Indigenous people still refer to themselves as Indians but it is inappropriate for others to use the term.
Indian Act	A controversial Canadian federal law, first passed in 1876, that governs most aspects of Indigenous life. It dictates who is legally recognized as a "Status Indian," manages reserve lands and communal funds, and defines the structure of local First Nations governments
Inuit	The name they use for themselves refers to the related groups of Indigenous people living across the Arctic and subarctic regions of Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and Siberia.

Jordan's Principle	A child-first principle that ensures First Nations children receive the public health, social, and educational services they need without delays caused by disputes over which government should pay. The government first contacted provides the service immediately and resolves funding issues afterward. It applies to eligible First Nations children living both on and off reserve.
Knowledge Keeper Knowledge Holder or Knowledge Sharer	Is an individual within a community who is entrusted to preserve, protect, and pass down cultural wisdom, history, language, and spiritual teachings
Métis	Descendants of both Indigenous peoples and European settlers (mainly French and Scottish) who developed their own distinct culture, language, and communities, especially in western and central Canada.
Native	A historical term once commonly used to describe Indigenous peoples in Canada. Today, it is generally considered outdated and should be avoided unless it is part of an official name, historical document, legal terminology, or an individual chooses to self-identify with it. "Indigenous" or the specific Nation (e.g., Cree, Haida, Mi'kmaq) is preferred.
Non-Status Indian	A First Nations person who identifies with a First Nation or band but is not registered under the <i>Indian Act</i> and therefore is not legally recognized as a Status Indian or entitled to the rights and benefits associated with Indian Status.
OCAP principles	Principles—which stand for Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession—are a set of standards for First Nations information governance in Canada. Established by the Assembly of First Nations in 1998, they assert a First Nation's right to self-determination and data sovereignty over their cultural knowledge, records, and research data.
Off reserve	Refers to First Nations people who live outside reserve lands. The term may also describe services, organizations, or programs intended for First Nations people living outside their reserve communities.
On reserve	Refers to First Nations people who live on reserve lands recognized under the <i>Indian Act</i> . It may also describe programs, services, or governance that operate within reserve communities.
Reconciliation	The ongoing process of building respectful relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians by acknowledging historical and ongoing harms caused by colonialism, recognizing Indigenous rights, and working toward justice, healing, and equitable partnerships.

Reserve Indian Reserve and Rez	A tract of land set aside by the federal government for the use and benefit of a First Nation. The Crown holds legal title to the land, while the First Nation has recognized rights to occupy and govern it. "Rez" is an informal term commonly used by some Indigenous people when referring to a reserve.
Settler	A person whose ancestors or family permanently settled on Indigenous lands during or after colonization and who benefits, directly or indirectly, from the social, political, and legal systems established through settler colonialism. In Canada, the term commonly refers to non-Indigenous people whose families immigrated to the country.
Settler colonialism	A form of colonialism in which settlers permanently occupy Indigenous lands, establish their own political and legal systems, and seek to replace or displace Indigenous peoples and their governance. In Canada, settler colonialism continues to shape laws, institutions, and relationships with Indigenous peoples today.
Status Indian	Refers to a First Nations person who is registered under the federal Indian Act . These individuals are listed on the Indian Register and are eligible for specific rights, government programs, and treaty benefits.
UNDRIP	Stands for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is an international human rights instrument that outlines the minimum global standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples
Urban Indigenous	Refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who live in cities, towns, or other urban areas rather than on reserves, settlements, or traditional communities.

Terminology References

[Community Living BC Glossary of Indigenous Terms](#)

[Library and Archives Canada Indigenous Terminology Guide](#)