



## **How to establish an evidence-based process to guide the naming or renaming of public spaces that acknowledge the contribution of past public personages.**

**Canadian Institute for Historical Education  
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### **Rationale for this Document**

This document is intended to assist governments, government agencies, municipalities, universities, school boards, and other similar bodies in undertaking naming and renaming processes to ensure an outcome that is fair, supported by the community and consistent with the historical record.

### **CIHE Recommendations for Naming or Renaming Policies**

All naming and renaming exercises involving historic figures (“subjects”) should be completed pursuant to a Naming or Renaming Policy. The Policy should:

- 1) Require the creation of a committee dedicated to the process; set out its composition, which should be representative of the community, and the process by which it will make its recommendation to the ultimate decision maker;
- 2) Require and provide for a comprehensive, transparent and principles-based process;
- 3) Require a stated and defined rationale for the naming. Example: The purpose of the naming is to acknowledge x as the first Canadian to distinguish herself or himself in a certain field or fields of endeavour;
- 4) Require an evidence-based examination of the subject including:
  - I. A review of the available source material relevant to the subject’s life and accomplishments both positive and negative
  - II. the involvement of those with relevant experience including, for example, knowledgeable historians or political scientists
  - III. an understanding of the limitations and potential biases in accounts of the relevant historical events
  - IV. an assessment of the social, economic and political environment of the subject’s time
  - V. an understanding of the context and circumstances that surrounded the decisions or accomplishments of the subject and how they should factor into a fair assessment of the subject, (e.g. were the actions of the subject heroic for their time? The subject will not be without blemishes: how much weight should be attached to them? If those blemishes were

the subject's prejudices, attitudes or actions, to what extent were they prevalent or unusual for their time?);

- 5) Prescribe the steps that should be taken to ensure community engagement in the decision-making including:
  - I. the creation of a list of all relevant community groups that should be invited to participate/comment on the proposed name
  - II. the creation of a community engagement plan (e.g. will input be obtained through surveys, town hall meetings or other open forums, interviews with individuals or selected groups, etc. and how will the engagement will be completed?)
  - III. public notice in advance of final recommendation with opportunity for the public comment;
- 6) Require broad communication of the report which sets out the findings of the process described above and a detailed rationale for the naming or renaming decision; and
- 7) Be regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

#### Background Commentary on the Complexity of the Decision-Making Process

- I. Arbitrary action in absence of a clear, transparent policy, whether it be taken by a government, municipal council, a university board of trustees or any similar body is unlikely to achieve a supportable result;
- II. Any decision taken in a naming or renaming process will result in some dissent and this simply underlines the importance of having and adhering to a comprehensive policy that includes an open and public consultation process;
- III. Experience in this often contentious area strongly suggests that while 'renaming' should take place in certain cases, it should be the exception and not the rule;
- IV. Reliance on credible, verifiable historical evidence is critical to any supportable naming/renaming policy;
- V. It is important that the process take into account the historical context surrounding, and the full record of the subject, given that no human being is perfect and none who has led a public life will be without a measure of responsibility for some less than fortunate outcomes;
- VI. The core Canadian value of fairness demands that any effort to judge someone of another time include an effort to understand the context of the time in which that person lived and worked.

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