



Additions to Reserve



A Pocket Guide for First Nations

Disclaimer: This pocket guide provides a general overview of the Additions to Reserve (ATR) process and outlines standard practices. It is intended for informational purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal advice.

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Introduction

This pocket guide is designed to assist First Nations in navigating the Additions to Reserve (ATR) 2016 Policy. Whether your community is considering an Addition to Reserve for housing, economic development, or cultural purposes, this guide provides a broad overview and the steps needed to help you get started, stay organized, and confidently move forward.

Focusing on First Nation priorities and self-determination, this tool is a quick reference that empowers Lands Staff and Leadership to manage ATRs effectively from idea to completion.



Did You Know?

Canada has been adding land to reserves for over a century. However, the formal Additions to Reserve Policy wasn't introduced until 1972. It was updated in 2001, 2016, and most recently again in 2024, with the Minister approving nine interim changes being made to the policy and potential for more significant changes to come with hopes of better supporting First Nation priorities, self-determination, and reconciliation. The Resources at Your Fingertips section contains a copy of the latest Additions to Reserve Policy.

What is an ATR?

An Addition to Reserve is land added to a First Nation's Reserve land base under the 2016 Additions to Reserve (ATR) Policy. Reserve lands are lands held by Canada for the use and benefit of First Nations.

The process for a First Nation adding land to an existing reserve or establishing a new one is known as an Addition to Reserve (ATR) or Reserve Creation (RC). This expansion can take place adjacent to the current reserve (contiguous) or more removed from the reserve (non-contiguous) and can occur in both rural and urban areas.

Navigating the ATR Process

- Understanding your community's objective for an ATR:
 - Legal obligation
 - Community interest
 - Tribunal decisions
- Understanding the 4 phases of navigating an ATR:
 - Phase 1 - Initiation
 - Phase 2 - Assessment and Review
 - Phase 3 - Proposal Completion
 - Phase 4 - Approval

What is an ATR?

- Understand the key procedural steps and the roles of key players in the ATR process. Gaining this knowledge helps your team:
 - Make informed decisions
 - Advocate effectively for your community's land interests



Did You Know?

You don't have to navigate an ATR alone — training from NALMA, OALA, and other Regional Lands Associations (RLAs) can help clarify the policy process and equip your community with the confidence and tools to move forward with purpose.

Know the Path: 12 ATR Steps Made Simple

1

Understand the Policy Framework – Learn the 2016 ATR policy and its categories. *Know the Rules, Own the Vision – Understand the ATR policy like it's your blueprint.*

2

Identify Your Community Goals – Clarify why the land addition matters to your Nation. *Land for a Purpose – Know why you want the land!*

3

Build Community Readiness – Ready, Set, Plan! – Gauge your readiness with a checklist. *No gaps, no guessing.*

4

Organize Community Consultation – Talk it out - Engage Elders, members, youth, and staff early. *Their voices shape the land's future.*

5

Select and Assess the Land – Ensure suitability, access, zoning, and alignment with community goals. *Pick Your Place – Choose the land that serves your community's vision.*

6

Pass a Band Council Resolution – Clearly outline support for the ATR proposal. *Back It with a Resolution– Your Band Council's support should be clear and formal.*

Know the Path: 12 ATR Steps Made Simple

7

Build Your ATR Team – Include legal, technical, and community representatives. *Assemble the A-Team – Bring in your lands lead, legal guide, and technical brainpower.*

8

Gather and Prepare Documentation – Collect everything from maps to meeting notes. *Paper Trail Power– Gather every document, map, letter, and agreement like gold.*

9

Submit the ATR Proposal – Package the materials and send to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). *Send It In – Submit your ATR package to ISC and confirm they've received it.*

10

Participate in Review and Due Diligence – Be ready to respond to questions or gaps. *Follow Up Like a Pro – Review, respond, repeat. Be ready for ISC questions.*

11

Finalize Legal and Administrative Steps – Complete land transfers and registration. *Make It Legal– Finalize transfers, registrations, and agreements. Wrap it clean.*

12

Celebrate and Plan for Use –You did it! Now plan for how the land will live and thrive.

Build Your Team, Build Your Momentum

- Start building your ATR Team early in the process.
- Connect with counterparts at Indigenous Services Canada and any other stakeholders such as Provincial Governments and Municipalities.
- Include a lawyer on your team, preferably one with ATR experience.
- Divide tasks among the team to ensure coordinated efforts.
- A strong team ensures:
 - Project Management
 - Tasks are managed effectively
 - Timelines are met
 - Community interests are represented at every stage
 - A shared vision from start to finish



Did You Know?

Having a strong ATR Team from the start can prevent delays later. Building your ATR Team isn't just about efficiency; it's about empowerment. Having the right people in place from the beginning helps your community take control of the process, anticipate challenges, and speak with one voice. (See Resources at your Fingertips Section for Key Player Fact Sheet)

Common Pitfalls and How to Prevent Them

1. Incomplete or Delayed Documentation

Pitfall: Missing key documents (e.g., Band Council Resolution, land title information, environmental assessments) or delays in gathering them.

Solutions:

- Use a checklist early on and engage in work planning with ISC (like the ATR Readiness Checklist).
- Assign a team member to track document progress.
- Seek technical assistance or templates from ISC or regional organizations such as NALMA and OALA.

2. Limited Community Engagement

Pitfall: Insufficient communication with community members may lead to misunderstandings, lack of support, or disputes.

Solutions:

- Schedule regular community meetings and information sessions.
- Use surveys or social media for broader outreach.
- Include Elders and youth to build a shared vision and intergenerational support.

Common Pitfalls and How to Prevent Them

3. Undefined or Unaligned Land Use Goals

Pitfall: Advancing a parcel of land without a clear purpose or inconsistent with the community's long-term goals.

Solutions:

- Align ATR with community plans, such as land use or economic development strategies, CCP's and LUP's.
- Develop a clear land use vision and document it as part of the submission.

4. Understanding the Policy Framework

Pitfall: Confusion between the different ATR categories or steps in the process.

Solutions:

- Review the ATR Policy thoroughly.
- Attend training sessions or webinars from NALMA or OALA.
- Partner with experienced technicians or advisors.
- Connect with your ISC ATR Negotiation Officer.

Common Pitfalls and How to Prevent Them

5. Municipal or Provincial Opposition

Pitfall: Lack of support or delays due to misunderstandings or unresolved concerns with municipalities or provinces.

Solutions:

- Initiate early, respectful engagement with local governments.
- Provide information packages that clarify the ATR's benefits.
- Draft Municipal Services Agreements or letters of support early in the process.

6. Lack of Internal Capacity

Pitfall: Limited staff, knowledge, or time to manage the ATR process.

Solutions:

- Create an ATR working group or committee.
- For Ontario First Nations, you can access support through the OALA ATR Direct Support Program.
- Partner with regional tribal councils, land associations, or legal experts.

Common Pitfalls and How to Prevent Them

7. Delays in Federal Review and Legal Processes

Pitfall: Once submitted, ATR proposals can stall due to due diligence, legal reviews, or seasonal issues.

Solutions:

- Maintain regular communication with ISC to track progress.
- Submit complete, well-organized proposals to avoid back-and-forth.
- Be prepared to follow up on outstanding items or clarifications quickly.

8. Overlooking Land Conditions (e.g., Contamination or Encumbrances)

Pitfall: Land proposed for reserve status may have environmental, legal, or infrastructure challenges.

Solutions:

- Conduct Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments early.
- Review land titles and resolve encumbrances or liens. Conduct a Title search early in the process.
- Consult engineers or land planners if infrastructure upgrades are needed.



Did You Know?

Navigating an Addition to Reserve resembles constructing a canoe; if you overlook essential steps or neglect important components, you may float initially, but not for long. With adequate preparation and a capable crew, you'll smoothly progress toward your land goals.

Resources at Your Fingertips

Behind every strong Additions to Reserve Proposal is a network of tools and allies ready to help. From checklists and sample resolutions to expert advisors and regional contacts, knowing where to look turns confusion into confidence and vision into action.

The Ontario Aboriginal Lands Association (OALA) and the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association (NALMA) offer tailored support, training, and technical guidance to help First Nations navigate the ATR process with confidence. Whether it's interpreting policy, drafting proposals, or accessing templates and maps, OALA and NALMA are trusted partners in turning land goals into reserve realities.

For example, the Pre-Planning Guide is your map, and the Readiness Checklist is your compass. Together, they help you avoid roadblocks and build momentum before the real paperwork begins.



Did You Know?

Many First Nations skip steps simply because they didn't know support was available. From expert resolutions to expert advisors, the tools are often closer than you think, sometimes just a phone call away. **Scan the QR code or visit oala-on.ca for a complete list of templates, tools and resources that OALA has to offer.**



Your Community, Your Vision

This section is meant to spark reflection and dialogue about the deeper meaning of land in your Nation's story. Use the guiding questions to begin shaping a vision rooted in culture, values, and long-term goals.

You are encouraged to reflect on these questions on a separate piece of paper, in a group setting, or as part of a larger planning session. This can bring clarity to your community's goals and strengthen the foundation of your Addition to Reserve process.

- Are there teachings, stories, or ceremonies tied to this land?
- How can this land be used to teach our youth about who they are and where they come from?
- What community values should shape how we use and protect this land?
- What kind of economic opportunity can this land support in line with our values.
- Who do we need to bring to the table to help support this vision (e.g. Local municipalities, service providers)?
- What responsibility do we have to protect and care for this land?



Did You Know?

A shared vision isn't just a planning tool; it's a promise. When community members participate in shaping land use, the result is more meaningful, more sustainable, and more likely to stand the test of time.



ONTARIO ABORIGINAL
LANDS ASSOCIATION



OALA Additions to Reserve (ATR) Unit

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For more ATR related information, please
visit our website at oala-on.ca.