

# UVM Extension

## Guidance for Collecting Demographic Data

[May 2022]

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## Background and Rationale

UVM Extension uses the demographic data it collects to advance access, accountability, equity, and justice in the programs and services it offers, with the goal of empowering our program participants. UVM Extension is also obligated by federal funding requirements to collect race, ethnicity, and gender data and to use it to inform changes to programming to reach representative populations. Extension also collects additional information from participants to understand how various identities affect people's experiences with Extension programming.

As of May 2022, additional guidance on collecting and reporting demographic data is in development at UVM (with an anticipated release for fall 2022). We have incorporated some of that draft guidance into this document and will continue to do so as necessary and as guidance evolves.

Goals:

- **Collect** data in functional, inclusive, respectful, and representative ways.
- Develop/maintain **data storage systems and processes** that are secure, protect privacy and confidentiality, and give individuals a say in the level of disclosure they provide.
- **Use** data to improve programs.
- **Use** data in the service of empowerment, accountability, equity, and justice.

## Data Collection and Storage Considerations

UVM-approved software systems (e.g., survey and registration systems) (i.e., [Qualtrics](#) and [Elevate](#)) have been reviewed for the quality of their data security measures. Though UVM recommends use of these systems, it is possible for additional platforms to be approved for use (via [ETS New Technology Review](#) process). For example, programs may have software systems unique to them (i.e., 4HOnline) or systems better suited to the task. When collected on paper, documents with personally identifiable information should be kept in a locked place. UVM record retention policies can help determine for how long data or information must be kept:

[https://www.uvm.edu/compliance/compliance/record\\_retention\\_schedule](https://www.uvm.edu/compliance/compliance/record_retention_schedule)

Questions to consider when deciding what data collection tool to use:

- What is the purpose of collecting the data? Registration for an event? Application for a program? Exit survey? Follow-up survey? Different kinds of questions may be appropriate and relevant at different stages.
- Does the program need to reach a specific population?
- How will personally identifiable information be protected? Who will have access to the data?
- What mechanisms will you incorporate to allow individuals to opt in or opt out?
- What data does the program need to evaluate whether it is making progress? What program decisions will be informed by the data?

Additional considerations:

- When collecting Race, Ethnicity, and Gender (REG) data, it is important to disclose:
  - UVM Extension practices to protect confidentiality.
  - UVM Extension practices related to reporting data.
  - That individuals have a choice in whether they answer the questions.

- The purpose of collecting REG data and intent to use data to support (rather than harm) underserved/marginalized communities.
- It is often helpful to use open-ended/multi-select options.
- How will personally identifiable information be protected? Who will have access to the data?

## Guidance

The following section includes our recommended language for collecting demographic data in different contexts (on registration forms, in evaluations, or verbally). This guidance includes how to ask the questions, which single- or multiple-choice options should be used, and what language should accompany the questions so that participants understand why they are being asked for this data. Any text in quotes is meant to be used by you.

### What we expect you to collect

- Required: race, ethnicity, and gender identity
- Optional: pronouns, year of birth, veteran status, tribal status
- Possible: income, educational status, open-ended questions related to other aspects of identity

## Introducing Demographic Questions

*Our materials should explain why we are asking the questions and that answering these questions is optional.*

### Recommended “why we ask” language

“Why we ask about you:

Extension is committed to serving people with diverse identities in safe and supportive environments with content that is meaningful and relevant to you and the experiences you bring with you to our programs. We ask for demographic information to help us learn a little bit about you so that we can shape our educational content and strategy, and to assess our progress toward UVM Extension’s [program/project] diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

**Responses to these questions remain confidential and the following questions are optional.”**

### Sample privacy/use statement

“[Program] does not share information with those unaffiliated to the work that could personally identify participants. We do aggregate responses to better understand [our audience], to demonstrate outcomes to funders and partners, and to help assess our own progress towards supporting [goal].”

### Sample opt in/opt out statement

“The following questions are optional. We use the information to help us track our progress toward [our goal].”

## Alternatives

Another way of framing these questions is to adapt the standard language Qualtrics suggests for demographic questions within DEI surveys:

“In order to truly understand the experiences of different [participants/clients/volunteers/stakeholders] who engage with [UVM/Extension/specific

program], we want to understand the diverse ways that different [participants/clients/volunteers/stakeholders] identify. These demographics enable us to understand the experiences of diverse groups as they [participate/ volunteer in] in our programs. This data will never be used to identify an individual, but only reviewed in aggregate to understand experiences of people who identify with the same factors.”

### Race, Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Extension collects data on race and ethnicity to ensure we are meeting our federal civil rights requirements. Racial and ethnic categories are social constructs and change over time. The U.S. federal categories for race and ethnicity are limited and we recognize that they do not reflect a comprehensive range of racial and ethnic identities; in fact, some people from different parts of the world may identify more with their country of origin over a race or ethnicity. USDA-NIFA requires that ethnicity and race are captured as distinct categories, so it is preferable to capture this data in ways that make it easy to meet this requirement.

**Below are three recommended options for collecting this data. At a minimum, please use Option 1. For a more inclusive approach, consider using Option 3.**

### Race and Ethnicity Descriptions

You may find the following descriptions useful and consider including them in your form, if space allows:

- American Indian or Alaska Native: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including (for example) Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or Pacific Islands.
- White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
  
- Hispanic or Latino: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

### Option 1: Federal categories with race and ethnicity split out

The recommended question language is:

“With which of the following racial groups do you identify? [multiple-choice question]

*Please choose all that apply.*

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American

- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe"

“Do you identify as Hispanic/Latino? [single-choice question]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say”

#### Option 2: Federal categories with race and ethnicity combined

Another option is to aggregate the race and ethnicity categories into one question and allow people to select all that apply. This data can be disaggregated at a later point for reporting purposes. When this is done, racial and ethnic categories should be arranged alphabetically, and “Non-Hispanic / Latino” should be omitted.

The recommended question language is:

“With which of the following racial or ethnic groups do you identify? [multiple-choice question]

*Please choose all that apply.*

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic / Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe"

#### Option 3: More inclusive categories

The recommended question language is:

“With which of the following races or ethnic groups do you identify?

*Please choose all that apply.*

- African American/Black
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- East Asian
- Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino/Latina
- Middle Eastern/North African
- South Asian
- Southeast Asian
- White

- Prefer to self-describe\*
- Prefer not to say”

\*The survey tool should include an open text box for “Prefer to self-describe,” either in the question itself or in a subsequent question that pops up if "Prefer to self-describe" is checked.

*Aggregate reporting of race and ethnicity data*

Option 3 is more inclusive but will require some aggregation to align with census categories.

Answer...	Report as...
African American/Black	Black or African American
American Indian/Alaska Native	American Indian or Alaska Native
East Asian	Asian
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Hispanic/Latinx	Hispanic/Latino
Middle Eastern/North African	Non-Hispanic/Latino
South Asian	Asian
Southeast Asian	Asian
White	White
Prefer not to say	Prefer not to respond
Prefer to self-describe/other	Unknown

*Reporting multiple races*

Because these questions allow respondents to “choose all that apply,” you will likely collect participant data where two or more races are selected. PEARS accommodates this. Please reference [this guide](#) for further instructions.

**Gender Identity**

Extension collects data on gender to ensure we are meeting our federal civil rights requirements. UVM is moving towards using an internationally recognized standard for gender categories. The federal categories for gender are limited and we recognize that these do not reflect a comprehensive range of gender identities. When used for federal reporting purposes, gender data may need to be aggregated to fit the categories we are required to report to (see guidance on aggregation below).

Use the following expanded options whenever possible and, at a minimum, female, male, and nonbinary.

The recommended question language is:

“How do you describe your gender identity? (Optional; choose all that apply):

[add “why we ask” language, referenced above]

- Agender
- Cisgender
- Female/woman
- Genderqueer/gender fluid
- Indigenous or other cultural gender identity (e.g., two-spirit)

- Intersex
- Male/man
- Nonbinary
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-describe\*
- Prefer not to say”

\*The survey tool should include an open text box for “Prefer to self-describe,” either in the question itself or in a subsequent question that pops up if "Prefer to self-describe" is checked.

*Aggregate reporting on gender identity*

Some entities such as the federal government (e.g., NIFA) may require aggregate reports on the gender of the people we serve in a binary format (i.e., as either male or female), or that nonbinary gender be reported as “unknown.” UVM Extension’s planning and reporting system (PEARS) is currently structured this way (with updates coming soon). In these situations, the following methodology should be used when completing gender reports in aggregate:

<b>Gender Identity</b>		<b>Assigned Binary Gender Marker</b>
<i>if Male/man</i>	<i>then assign</i>	Male
<i>if Transgender/man</i>		
<i>if Cisgender/man</i>		
<i>if Female/woman</i>	<i>then assign</i>	Female
<i>if Transgender/woman</i>		
<i>if Cisgender/woman</i>		
<i>if Agender, Genderqueer/genderfluid, Indigenous identity, Intersex or Nonbinary Gender</i>	<i>then assign</i>	Unknown
<i>if Different Identity</i>		
<i>if No Response/Decline to State</i>	<i>then assign</i>	Prefer not to respond*

\*If “prefer not to respond” is not an option, use “unknown.”

**Pronouns**

Inviting people to share their pronouns is best practice because this allows them to let us know how to refer to them in the third person.

According to the National Institutes of Health, “Properly using an individual's correct pronoun is an easy way to show respect. Whether intentional or not, using the wrong pronouns can be hurtful, angering, and even distracting. Some might find it equivalent to being told they do not matter or deserve respect.

Invalidating someone's identity puts a strain on how a person moves about in society and how that individual interacts with others. The experience of accidentally misgendering someone can be embarrassing for both parties, creating tension and can lead to communication breakdowns" with colleagues, clients, volunteers, and stakeholders.

Source: What are Gender Pronouns and Why Do They Matter, from <https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/what-are-gender-pronouns-why-do-they-matter>

The recommended question language is:

*[add "why we ask" language, referenced above]*

"Which pronouns do you use? [single choice question]

- He/Him
- She/Her
- They/Them
- Ze
- Name only
- Prefer not to say"

If your survey tool allows it, you can add a "Prefer to self-describe" option where the person can fill in a text box.

## Year of Birth

For some programs, understanding the ages of the people who you are working with is an important aspect of delivering effective programming and appropriate technical advice. The following questions may be used when your program design and evaluation goals warrant understanding a person's age. Asking someone how old they are is not a recommended practice because it only provides a snapshot in time and quickly becomes outdated. Asking people to share a snapshot in time (e.g., a bracketed age range) is best used when the data will only be used once. (Note: 4-H or other programs may have specific guidance that might necessitate needing to know age or grade.)

The recommended question language is:

### Option 1: Birth year

*"In what year were you born?" [Use numerical text box that requires four digits – for example, 1991]*

#### Pros

- Unlike date of birth, birth year is generally not considered to be personally identifiable information that needs to be protected.
- Unlike age, birth year does not change over time, so it is not necessary to know when the information was provided to calculate age.
- You can use this information to group (and filter) participants by any date (or age) range you wish.

#### Cons



- Participants may be uncomfortable providing this information because it is close to their birth date. You may want to make this question optional.
- You will need to do a calculation (current year minus the year of birth) to get the age of your participants.
- Age will be approximate; all people with a birth year of 1991 (for example) will have their age as 30 throughout 2021, regardless of whether they were born in January or December.

**When you might want to use this approach:**

- Application/registration forms for programs that anticipate engaging with the same participants over multiple years *and* when age might be a relevant factor in determining appropriate technical assistance/referrals.
- When age may be a relevant piece of reporting qualitative outcomes and impacts.
- When you are obligated to report ages for participants.

Option 2: Age group method

*“How old are you?”*

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or older
- I do not wish to answer”

**Pros**

- Participants may be more comfortable answering this question because it is more general.
- If you align your age brackets with reporting requirements, it can simplify reporting for single events.
- If you align your age brackets with those used in secondary data sources (such as the USDA Census of Agriculture) you can compare data about your participants with population-level data. If that’s the case, be sure to check the age brackets of the secondary data source in developing your brackets.
- If you include an opt out (I do not wish to answer) you can make this a required question and use it for logic and branching if you have age-related questions to ask.

**Cons**

- The data is only relevant at one point in time since you don’t know where in the age range any individual falls.

**When you might want to use this approach:**

- This approach may be helpful in registration and evaluation instruments for single events – such as a workshop or conference.

## Veteran Status

The recommended language is:

“Are you a military veteran? [single-choice question]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

## Open-ended question related to other aspects of identity

The recommended question language is:

“Is there anything else you’d like us to know about you?” [open text box]

## Other personal information

Some funders are interested in additional data about program participants, including things like income level, educational status, or tribal affiliation. In situations when this type of data needs to be collected, please work with the DEI Committee to develop language.

## Definitions

This list is borrowed from UVM (guidance to be published in late 2022). UVM’s team adapted this list from a range of sources including the University of California San Francisco and Planned Parenthood.

**Agender:** A person who identifies as genderless (without a gender identity) or gender neutral.

**Aromantic:** Describes a person who is not interested in romantic relationships.

**Asexual:** Describes a person who is not drawn to people sexually and does not desire to act upon attraction to others in a sexual way.

**Bisexual:** Describes a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation can be toward people of their own or other genders.

**Cisgender:** Denotes or relates to a person whose gender identity corresponds with their assigned sex.

**Gay:** Describes a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is toward people of one’s own gender. Also, describes a man whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is toward men.

**Gender identity:** The gender(s), if any, a person identifies with. An individual’s gender is their gender identity, which can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

**Genderqueer/genderfluid:** A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of dominant social norms, is not fixed, and is capable of changing over time.

**Heterosexual or straight:** Describes a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is toward people of another gender.

**Indigenous** or other cultural gender identity: An umbrella category for various terms used to describe gender that are culturally specific (e.g., two-spirit).

**Intersex:** Intersex is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of natural bodily variations that do not fit typical definitions of male and female bodies. These variations may include (but are not limited to) unique chromosome compositions, hormone concentrations, and external and/or internal biology.

**Legal gender:** A gender appearing on a government-issued document.

**Legal name:** A name appearing on a government-issued document.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is toward women.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Sometimes the acronym is expanded to LGBTQIA+ to include intersex, as well as asexual, agender and aromantic people, plus other associated communities.

**Lived name:** A self-chosen or personal and/or preferred professional name used instead of a legal name.

**Nonbinary gender:** A gender identity, or umbrella term, for genders other than woman or man, including genders with aspects of both or neither.

**Pansexual:** Describes a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is toward people of any gender, not just men and women.

**Preferred name:** Preferred name, like lived name, is a self-chosen personal and/or professional name used instead of a legal name.

**Queer:** A broad term describing sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Queer is sometimes used to express that sexuality and gender can be complicated, change over time, and might not fit neatly into existing categories. Queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term, similar to the acronym LGBTQ.

**Sexual orientation:** Describes a person's physical, romantic, or emotional attraction to other people.

**Transgender/Trans:** An umbrella term describing a person whose gender differs from their sex assigned at birth. A trans person may take social, medical and/or legal steps to transition. A person may identify as trans before/without taking any steps to transition, as gender is self-determined and not based on social, medical, or legal recognition.

## Questions and Feedback

This document was created by a subcommittee of the Extension DEI Committee, with guidance provided by several UVM entities. We recognize this guidance may need to change over time and welcome your questions and feedback (please contact Stephanie Albaugh, [stephanie.albaugh@uvm.edu](mailto:stephanie.albaugh@uvm.edu)).