

Information and Data Collection Involving Gender and Sexuality

The following recommendations are meant to guide researchers, higher education and government administrators, student affairs professionals, and others collecting information and data related to gender and sexuality.

These recommendations are based on the best practices outlined by the [Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals](#) in their recent publication of the [Suggested Best Practices for Asking Sexual Orientation and Gender on College Applications](#).

1. Provide information about how the information and data collected will be used, how it will be protected, and who will have access to it.

Individuals may have questions and concerns about how information related to gender and sexuality will be used, if the information will be public at any point, if the information could be connected to identifying information such as their name or a student identification number, and so on. If possible, communicate the following to individuals prior to completing the survey:

- This information is used for _____.
- Only (name of office) will have access to this information.
- Your responses will be kept private and secure (and if the form is anonymous, please do indicate that).
- The information will not be used for a discriminatory purpose.
- You can change this information in the future by _____.

2. Avoid conflating concepts of sex and gender.

Too often, concepts of sex and gender are conflated in surveys, forms, and data analysis. The terminology "male" and "female" are associated with sex assigned at birth. Whereas, "man," "woman," "transgender," "genderqueer," "agender," etc. are terms associated with gender identity. Recognize that individuals can identify their gender identity in a multitude of ways, including using language associated with sex assigned at birth.

3. Avoid asking questions that are not relevant or helpful for meeting the unit or research objectives.

Consider what the objective of the information request or survey is and what data collections will support that objective. For instance, if the objective is to learn how individuals of different genders experience an activity, asking individuals to disclose their sex assigned at birth is unlikely to be helpful. This is because sex assigned at birth is a label related to sex and biological traits, whereas gender identity is related to how individuals define and experience their gender, how they move through the world, how others are perceive them as gendered people, and so on. In this case, gathering information about individuals' gender identities will be most helpful for meeting the objective.

If gathering data about sex assigned at birth is not relevant to the survey objectives, we recommend not including a question about it on the survey.

4. Ask questions related to gender and sexuality using the most inclusive option possible.

Gender and sexual identities are complex, nuanced, and sometimes fluid, depending on the individual completing the form or survey. We recommend that allowing individuals to describe their gender and/or sexual identities in their own words will be the most inclusive option when constructing surveys.

However, if allowing individuals to fill in answers is not feasible for the research outcomes or data analysis confines, we recommend that offering as many options as possible will be the most inclusive of diverse identities. Ultimately, the more inclusive one's survey is, the more complete and accurate the data will be.

Information and Survey Options Related to Gender, Sexuality, and Sex Assigned at Birth

The following are options for formatting information and survey questions related to gender, sexuality, and sex assigned at birth, ranked from most inclusive to least inclusive. Our staff welcome questions, suggestions, edits, and collaborative dialogue regarding these recommendations: center@iastate.edu.

For inquiries regarding gender identity:

Options	Statement	Level of Inclusivity
1	Gender (optional; fill in the blank): _____	Most Inclusive
2	Gender (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agender • Genderqueer • Gender fluid • Man • Non-binary • Questioning or unsure • Transgender • Trans man • Trans woman • Woman • Additional gender category/identity: please specify _____ • Prefer not to disclose 	Very Inclusive
3	Gender (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man • Transgender • Woman • Additional gender category/identity, please specify _____ • Prefer not to disclose 	Somewhat Inclusive
4	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man • Woman 	Least Inclusive
5	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female 	Least Inclusive and conflates gender identity and sex assigned at birth

For inquiries regarding sexual identity:

Option	Statement	Level of Inclusivity
1	Sexual Identity (optional; fill in the blank): _____	Most Inclusive
2	Sexual Identity (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asexual • Bisexual • Gay • Straight (Heterosexual) • Lesbian • Pansexual • Queer • Questioning/Unsure • Same-Gender-Loving • Additional sexual identity category not listed, please specify _____ • Prefer not to disclose 	Very Inclusive
3	Sexual Identity (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bisexual • Gay • Straight (Heterosexual) • Lesbian • Queer • Additional sexual identity category not listed, please specify _____ • Prefer not to disclose 	Somewhat inclusive
4	Sexual Identity (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bisexual • Gay • Straight (Heterosexual) • Lesbian 	Least Inclusive

For inquiries about sex assigned at birth:

Option	Statement	Level of Inclusivity
1	Sex Assigned at Birth (optional; select all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male• Female• Intersex• Prefer not to disclose	Most Inclusive
2	Sex Assigned at Birth: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male• Female	Least Inclusive
3	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male• Female	Least Inclusive and conflates gender identity and sex assigned at birth