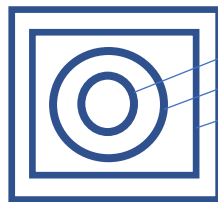


Consciously Capturing Demographics → Answering the Question, “*Diverse in What Way?*”

Why It Is Important To Ask Demographic Questions

There are a lot of elements about our lived experience that impact what we can uniquely bring to the workplace. As we’ve discussed in our work together, **there are differences that currently make a difference in the United States** (*for example: race, gender-identity and expression, age, immigration experience, ability, sexual orientation and more*). Put another way, there are currently elements of our identities that are predictive factors for how we will be treated by others – including **the accurate prediction of gaps and disparities** related to our physical, emotional, and financial safety, health, and well-being.

Research shows that these disparities happen at all four levels of interaction → that is why the experiences are so pervasive.



- ◆ Personal
- ◆ Interpersonal
- ◆ Institutional
- ◆ Structural

Circles = Individuals | Squares = Systems

In order to attract, build, and retain a team mixed across differences that make a difference we must ensure we are reaching diverse pools of people (constituents, candidates for jobs, potential board members, donors, patrons, etc.).

We cannot accurately assess the variety of embodied identities a person has just by looking at them. We shouldn’t guess. We must ask people about themselves. If we don’t ask, we simply won’t know.

Why We Ask Open-Ended Questions

Language is ever-changing, and culturally infused. *For example, some people use the word “queer” to refer to their sexual orientation, while other people would bristle at that word because it may have been used as a derogatory term or a threat.* The best way to keep your finger on the pulse of how different people and communities are talking about themselves is to ask open ended questions so you can learn about the language they are using.

At first glance, it may feel like creating check box is a simpler way to make inquiries about identity. But we assure you, if you are actually seeking robust, informative data, the very best way to learn about people is to allow them to self-describe. For example, imagine how much more informative it is to know that someone is “ethnically Somali, born and raised in Kenya, now residing in Minnesota” than someone just checking boxes about their national origin, race, and immigration experience.

In a cost benefit analysis of time vs. information, we posit that it will nearly always be worth it to do a little more data entry in order to accurately and completely capture someone’s lived experience, identities, and sense of themselves.

What Questions to Include + A Note About Question Priorities and Sequence

We recommend starting with questions about the protected classes in the region/state/county you are serving. You can look up the protected classes online. These identity markers have become legally protected because **bias, prejudice, and discrimination has been proven to exist**. *For example, a person may have been denied the ability to rent an apartment that they passed all other qualifications for, but they were Muslim, Jewish, Transgender, or some other identity and were denied housing solely for that reason.*

At Team Dynamics, we created our “Intersectionality House.” For us, this is a helpful metaphorical reminder to consider each of the protected classes when we are working to stay conscious about the number of differences currently making a difference for people currently living and working in the United States.



You will notice that you have to walk through the “race door” in order to get into our house. That is precisely because right now, race is the single most predictive factor of discrimination.

When + How To Ask A Series of Demographic Questions

It is illegal to ask a wide variety of demographic questions during an interview process as a way to protect applicants from being selected or passed over solely because of particular identities. That is a good thing.

The best times to ask demographic questions are when you are working to develop a diverse pool (*ex. of job candidates, of grant applicants, etc.*) also, *after* folks have been selected (*ex. are on staff/board, have been selected as grantees, etc.*).

Your request should be universal (ask everyone → don’t just single out certain staff members) because you want a full sense of your entire team. And your request should happen regularly; annually for staff and board is recommended. That is because some elements of our identity can change over time: *ex. disability, gender-identity, sexual orientation and immigration status.* Participation should be requested and optional (not mandatory) → it will take time to build trust that you will use the results well and with care. For good reason, some folks are afraid to disclose certain things. Make a practice of asking and responding will start to feel like a more normalized pattern as well.

Clearly Stating WHY You Are Asking + What is Going to be done with this info

When you're beginning a new practice, like asking demographic questions (either in a new way, at all, or at different point in a process than you have before), **it is good to be clear about why you are asking and what you are planning to do with the information.** Building trust takes time, and for many of us, facets of our identities have been used to exclude or diminish us in the past. Viewing diverse identities, and therefore lived experience, as assets can feel new and different. Not everyone will feel comfortable asking or disclosing certain facets of their identity. That's okay. That is one reason we recommend asking everyone *while also* making sure it's optional. The more often we ask, the more regular the pattern becomes, the less loaded it may begin to feel. Remember, if we don't ask, we'll never know. And in order to meet our goals of having a more diverse team, across differences that make a difference, asking demographic questions is a great way to start.

Sample opening sentences to a demographic survey you could include in your preamble prior to a survey, dependent on if this is a brand new practice, if it's about hiring, if it's about tracking who is already part of your team:

- ◆ *It is important to us to know who our outreach for this role is reaching. As part of our efforts to ensure a diverse pool of candidates for this role, we are including this anonymous survey about demographics.*
- ◆ *Capturing demographic information this helps us hold ourselves accountable to a robust recruitment process.*
- ◆ *The information shared here will be kept anonymous. In accordance with employment law, we will not be discriminating against any candidates based on elements of their identity.*
- ◆ *We will be reporting on the demographic diversity of our overall pool of applicants, but will not be connecting applicants or applications to the information captured in this survey. Thank you in advance for helping us learn more about who we are (and may not be) effectively reaching with our outreach.*
- ◆ *We recognize that previously, it was a regular practice for us to ask a short series of questions about identity and lived experience of our board, staff, and stakeholders. You will notice that we have expanded that list of questions. Our reasons for expanding this survey to include even more categories, as well as ways of responding, are that we would like to capture a fuller picture of how the people we work with and serve are experiencing their surroundings.*
- ◆ *As you know, we are working to proactively address disparities and gaps that exist. Part of that work includes more fully tracking demographic data ourselves so that we can learn more about the differences currently making a difference in the lives, health, and well-being of distinct populations.*

Sample Demographic Questions + Sample Instructions and Examples Intentionally Designed to Help a Respondent Answer

This is an anonymous survey; we invite you to answer each question, using your own words, in the language(s) in which you feel most comfortable. Thank you, in advance, for taking time to let us know more about our team!

For the following questions, we would love for you to use the words you use to describe yourself to friends, family, and colleagues:

- ◆ What word(s) do you currently use to describe **your racial identity**?
(ex. Third Generation Mexican American; Black; African American; Filipino and White; Lakota)
- ◆ What word(s) do you currently use to describe **your gender identity and/or gender expression**?
(ex. woman; masculine of center; genderqueer; trans + FTM; male; androgynous; Two Spirit)
- ◆ What **pronouns** do you currently use?
(ex. they/them; she/her; prefer not to use pronouns – just my name; he/him)
- ◆ Do you currently have visible and/or invisible physical, cognitive, or emotional **disabilities**?
(ex. yes; visible physical disability; not currently)
- ◆ Which **languages** are you currently fluent in (able to read and write at a 6th grade level or above)?
(ex. Portuguese, Arabic, Hebrew and English; English only; Spanish + English)
- ◆ What word(s) do you currently use to describe **your sexual orientation**?
(ex. bisexual; straight; lesbian; gay; queer; asexual; questioning; pansexual)
- ◆ In which **country** were you born (to the best of your knowledge)?
(ex. Somalia; Vietnam; United States; Canada; on an Air Force Base in Germany)
- ◆ What is your **lived experience of immigration and/or forced migration**, thus far?
(ex. grew up in a refugee camp in Kenya; my parents immigrated from Laos before I was born; I moved to the U.S. from Russia in 3rd grade; I got my Green Card when I was 26; I grew up on the Rosebud Reservation; I do not have a lived experience tied recently to immigration)
- ◆ In which **year** were you born (to the best of your knowledge)?

For more examples, or help phrasing a particular inquiry, please email: team@teamdynamicsmn.com