Tool 3.19: Sample Demographics Survey Questions

Why do we ask demographics questions on surveys?

Demographic data helps us better understand who we have surveyed, and also allows us to look for any patterns in how different communities are impacted by the issue being studied. It also allows us to compare our survey data to other data from existing data sources or baseline data.

Why do we compare demographic and baseline data?

Baseline demographic data is existing data from other sources such as the census. When you collect demographic data from your survey sample, this information can be compared with baseline data of the larger population. Comparing the demographics from your research to baseline data can allow you to demonstrate you have conducted research with a sample that is similar to the overall population. Background demographic data can also allow you to highlight the ways in which the demographics of your research sample are unique. You may find that your research sample differs from the general population in a way you want to highlight. In addition, you might intentionally oversample a particular community, such as non-English speakers, if they are the focus of your research.

What if the questions or answer choices here don't reflect my community?

You may want to tailor questions and answer choices based on your research topic. For example, if you are conducting a survey about workplace issues, you will want to ask demographic questions related to employment and if you are conducting a survey about housing you will want to ask demographic questions about people's housing status.

Do demographics questions violate the privacy of respondents?

It is important to make clear to respondents that their responses are confidential. Researchers should be careful not to connect survey responses to identifying information such as names or phone numbers.

How do I make sure respondents are not at risk by answering demographic questions?

Particularly with more vulnerable communities, we should be mindful of the types of questions that we ask, how responses are linked to identifying information, and how data is stored. For example, you may not want to keep the names and addresses of undocumented members in case your data is seized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or any another government entity that gives information to DHS.

Standard Demographic Questions

1) Do you identify as (check all that apply) [1]:
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Transgender
   - ☐ Different Gender Identity:_____

2) How old are you?[2]
   - ☐ Under 5 years
   - ☐ 5 to 9 years
   - ☐ 10 to 14 years
   - ☐ 15 to 19 years
   - ☐ 20 to 24 years
   - ☐ 25 to 34 years
   - ☐ 35 to 44 years
   - ☐ 45 to 54 years
   - ☐ 55 to 59 years
   - ☐ 60 to 64 years
   - ☐ 65 to 74 years
   - ☐ 75 to 84 years
   - ☐ 85 years and over

3) What is your zip code? _____

4) What is the highest level of education you have?[3]
   - ☐ Did not finish High School
   - ☐ High School Diploma or GED
   - ☐ Associates Degree (2-year degree)
   - ☐ Vocational Degree
   - ☐ Some College
   - ☐ Bachelor's Degree (4-year degree)
   - ☐ Graduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D, JD, MD, etc)
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

5) Are you registered to vote in the US?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Not eligible to vote (Under 18, not a US citizen, etc)

---

[1] Further background on demographic questions on gender identity can be found here.
[2] These answer choices were taken from the American Community Survey.
[3] Education status questions should be modified if the survey sample received education primarily outside of the United States since these answer options may not be applicable.

Race and Ethnicity Questions

While data about race and ethnicity can give valuable information about our communities, it is important to be thoughtful and intentional about how questions of race and identity are asked. These questions may be sensitive or complicated for respondents, and can potentially replicate oppressive power dynamics. We should be mindful that respondents may not want to self-identify and/or may have questions about how data from these questions will be used.

6) How would you identify your race/ethnicity (check all that apply)?
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Black
   - ☐ Latino (any race)
   - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
   - ☐ Native American
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

7) What is your country of birth?
   - ☐ United States
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

8) Which country or countries are you a citizen of? Check all that apply.
   - ☐ United States
   - ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

9) What is the language you are most comfortable speaking?[4][5]
   - ☐ Cantonese
   - ☐ English
   - ☐ French
   - ☐ Guyanese
   - ☐ Indian Languages (Hindi, Bengali, etc)
   - ☐ Italian
   - ☐ Mandarin
   - ☐ Russian
   - ☐ Spanish
   - ☐ Other Please specify): _____

---

[4] Languages are based on statistics from the report ["Hear This!: The Need for Multilingual Housing Services in New York City"](#)

[5] Projects that are more focused on language proficiency/access may require additional questions that gauge oral and written proficiency, such as "how difficult would it be for you to understand an important written document (such as a lease) in English?"

Federal Poverty Level/Self-Sufficiency Standard

Using the location and household information, the Self-Sufficiency standard[6] calculates how much household income is needed for the family to support themselves, which can be compared to the reported household income (question 17). This is a more robust measure of poverty and need than the federal poverty level (FPL)[7]. In order to compare to the Self-Sufficiency standard, the survey needs to include all the following questions, plus questions 3 in the previous section. Only the information from questions 10 12, and 13 are needed to compare to the federal poverty level, since that is calculated simply based on the number of household members.

10) What is your household's estimated yearly income?[8]
 - ☐ Less than $10,000
 - ☐ $10,000 to $14,999
 - ☐ $15,000 to $24,999
 - ☐ $25,000 to $34,999
 - ☐ $35,000 to $49,999
 - ☐ $50,000 to $74,999
 - ☐ $75,000 to $99,999
 - ☐ $100,000 to $149,999
 - ☐ $150,000 to $199,999
 - ☐ $200,000 or more

11) How many working adults (over 18) are in your household? _____

12) How many total adults (over 18) live in your household? _____

13) How many total children (under 18) live in your household? _____

14) What are the ages of the children in your household?
 - ☐ Age of Child 1_____
 - ☐ Age of Child 2_____
 - ☐ Age of Child 3_____
 - ☐ Age of Child 4_____
 - ☐ Age of Child 5_____
 - ☐ Age of Child 6_____

15) Do you have health insurance coverage?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

---

[6] More information about the SSS can be found here: http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/self-sufficiency-standard-0

[7] Federal poverty levels are issued every year by the Department of Health and Human Services and determine eligibility for public subsidies. More information about FPL can be found here: https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines

[8] These answer choices were taken from the American Community Survey

16) Do you receive any public assistance? Check all that apply.
- ☐ Public housing
- ☐ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, food stamps)
- ☐ Supplemental Security Income
- ☐ Social Security
- ☐ Medicaid
- ☐ Section 8
- ☐ Public Housing
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Not Applicable

Employment/Worker Questions

These questions focus worker or employment status, and can be important to learn more about the respondent's workplace and economic status. These questions can be sensitive for respondents as they may be fearful of employer retaliation or vulnerability because of immigration status. Again, it is important to protect the confidentiality of survey respondents and to be careful of how data is stored. If a research project is focusing on workers' rights, additional questions may be needed.

17) What is your immigration/worker status?
- ☐ US Citizen
- ☐ Lawful Permanent Resident (green card holder)
- ☐ Other (non-LPR) lawful immigration status
- ☐ Undocumented/no lawful status
- ☐ Unknown

18) What is your employment status?
- ☐ Employed Full-Time (40 or more hours/week)
- ☐ Employed Part-Time (less than 40 hours/week)
- ☐ Not in Labor Force (retired, homemaker, etc)
- ☐ Unemployed

19) On average, how many hours do you work per week?
- ☐ Less than 5 hours
- ☐ 5 to 10 hours
- ☐ 11 to 15 hours
- ☐ 16 to 20 hours
- ☐ 21 to 30 hours
- ☐ 31 to 40 hours
- ☐ More than 40 hours

Other Possible Questions

Depending on the topic of your research project you may or may not want to ask additional questions. Below are some questions that we have found helpful in the past.

20) What type of residence do you live in?
- ☐ Rental Apartment
- ☐ House or Condominium
- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ Shelter