

Q&A – May 28 Demographic Data Standards Initiative

Overview

Question: Many states include race on driver licenses (DLs) / state IDs. Others require that it be recorded when getting a license, but is not listed on the DL / state ID. Instead, it is maintained in their database and available when appropriate, for instance, for law enforcement. Washington does not collect race for DLs. This seems to be one way to have a consistent database that is self-reported and could be merged into most other databases to get a consistent measurement of race/ethnicity. Has there been any consideration of integrating something like that in Washington to address the issue of inconsistent reporting?

Answer: We are not aware of a comprehensive statewide initiative related to this purpose. In Washington state, different agencies collect race and ethnicity data for different purposes with different authorities, business needs, and expectations from the communities they serve. We are currently trying to understand how data is collected across all state agencies to inform future efforts to improve data reliability and validity. The current federal standards focus on standards for race and ethnicity data, rather than prescribing a centralized statewide database.

Question: For regional demographics, what are those minimum populations standards and how are they applied to data collection?

Answer: SPD 15 establishes seven minimum race and ethnicity categories that should be available wherever race and ethnicity data is collected.

Question: Did I hear correctly that Approach 3 for reporting has to be used in conjunction with Approaches 1 or 2? Could you provide an example of what that would look like?

Answer: Using one or more of the three approaches is what the federal government recommends. Tabulating data in multiple ways more effectively shows the full picture of race and ethnicity data. There may be leeway for states to do things differently. States may use different tabulation strategies that align with their use cases. We recommend agencies with federal reporting requirements ask their federal partners for guidance.

Question: Last legislative session, Tribes introduced HB2685, which ultimately did not pass and will likely be revisited. In part: “When a Tribe’s data is located in a state dataset, the state agency has a government-to-government responsibility to consult and engage with Tribes in accordance with chapter 43.376 RCW on how the agency shares...” Are there any plans to review Tribal data in consultation and the impacts of not counteracting decades of externally driven data practices that have misrepresented or harmed Tribal nations? Thank you.

Answer: The Office of Equity Tribal Relations Team is actively engaged in this area and is working with Tribal partners. The federal SPD 15 review process also included engagement with Tribal communities.

Question: Will this initiative address SOGI data collection at some point?

Answer: This initiative is currently focused on race and ethnicity, and next phases of the work are still to be determined. The Office of Equity is aware that other agencies are providing guidance about SOGI data collection and does not want to get in the way of work that is ongoing. We will collaborate closely with those agencies to ensure the work is aligned.

Question: Are we expecting federal partners to release recommendations for detailed categories they recommend for Washington-specific data collection, or will recommendations for that be generated by OFM based on analysis of Census data?

Answer: We are not expecting federal partners to make recommendations. We have asked if Census Bureau questionnaires can be tailored. They will be based on national information. We will develop detailed categories ourselves.

Question: You mentioned agency concerns over protecting privacy and keeping this detailed data private. Do you have more specific guidance to share?

Answer: We do not have specific guidance to share at this point. We recognize that as data becomes more detailed, agencies will need to consider both data protection and appropriate reporting practices to reduce the risk of identifying individuals in small populations. There are a number of statewide and agency-specific efforts focused on data security and privacy, and we aim to align closely with existing privacy practices and guidance. WaTech, the Governor's Office, the Attorney General's Office, and Equity are coordinating work to protect sensitive data. OFM Forecasting & Research staff work closely with our privacy office to establish and follow policies and procedures that ensure personally identifiable information remains secure and is not re-disclosed. For reporting, it is important to ensure that suppression rules (minimum cell size) are followed to ensure individual identities are protected.

Question: What is the year for the charts in the presentation?

Answer: These charts represent the 2025 distributions.

Question: Can you repeat the Hispanic bridging?

Answer: Using the national bridging factors from the Census Bureau, the "Hispanic alone" category in the 2024 standard is entirely made up of the "Hispanic (of any race)" category in the 1997 standard. Many of those who indicated "Hispanic and another race" in the 1997 standard were bridged to the "Multiracial and/or Multiethnic" categories.