

# OUR IDENTITIES | OURSELVES



## ***A Guide to Anti-Racist Data Collection for: System Leaders and Data Administrators***

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), in partnership with Casey Family Programs, presents this guide to share best practices for collecting data about race, ethnicity, and other demographic information including sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), national origin, language spoken, disability, religion, and tribal affiliation in child welfare agencies nationwide. Our purpose is to produce recommendations for how caseworkers and service providers can ask young people and families about their racial and ethnic identities in more accurate, inclusive, and affirming ways, and how system leaders and data administrators can better report and incorporate that information to support them. We sought input from caseworkers, data administrators, young people with lived experience in foster care, parents, and caregivers over the course of six focus groups, surveyed data leaders from 27 different jurisdictions, and completed a literature review, drawing from the fields of education and public health. This guide will support the collection of comprehensive demographic data to serve multiple purposes: to affirm young people and their families in their identities, to be able to identify trends and analyze racial disproportionality and disparities, to enforce anti-discrimination policy, and to develop programs and services to meet specific needs.

### ***Why is this important?***

An important step in developing targeted strategies to reduce disparities and improve well-being for people who are inadequately served by government systems, particularly those involved with child protection agencies, is to collect more accurate and nuanced data on race, ethnicity, and other demographic information. Child welfare agencies face challenges collecting, reporting, and using data to ensure people are served in ways that best meet their needs and identify trends at the population level. There is a lack of guidance regarding who, what, when, where, and how to gather this information. Despite the well-established best practice of collecting demographic data to reveal which populations are under- or inadequately served, and support analysis to rectify those inequities, much of the data currently collected by child protection agencies are missing, flawed, or not specific enough to be used in ways that could meaningfully support young people, and families. To be clear, systems must remain vigilant against the ways data can be used to increase surveillance in communities.

“If your data starts out biased, then you don’t have a strong likelihood of creating good metrics from there.”

– Child Welfare Data Administrator

If these data can be accurately collected, properly analyzed, and used to support strategic change, the implications are considerable:

- ◆ Policies and practice guidelines can be developed that protect more groups from discrimination, support true inclusivity, and dictate how staff should treat *all* families;
- ◆ Resources and funding can be directed toward services and supports to historically underserved, misrepresented, or otherwise excluded populations and communities; and
- ◆ Well-being outcomes can be improved because of having one's racial and ethnic identity affirmed, which contributes to positive identity development in adolescents.

### **How can this guide advance equity?**

Equity and justice fundamentally require an examination of power, regarding who makes decisions that impact people's lives. **Thus, it is critical for systems to partner with a diversity of communities and people to shift power** toward populations that have been marginalized or misrepresented by society whenever possible. Engaging young people and families as co-developers in data collection and analysis protocols, and as partners in deciding how the information should be used, will result in improved systems for data collection as well as more effective feedback. **Collaborating on data collection and analysis strategies also creates an opportunity to engage young people and families in conversations about their stories, their experiences, their strengths, their needs, and what types of supports will help them thrive.** Conversations about personal identity must be normalized and consistent. Collecting and reporting accurate data disaggregated by racial subgroups and other identity characteristics will not repair the historical and current harm done by child welfare systems to families who have been over surveilled and unnecessarily separated. However, if data can be used to recognize problems that would otherwise be undetected, exacerbated, or ignored, then further action can be taken to eliminate inequities.

### **Best Practices for System Leaders**

1. Acknowledge historical harm committed against particular groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and immigrant families, and create a plan for reparations.
  - While repairing historical harm is much beyond the realm of data collection and use, consider ways in which data has been used to reinforce implicit and explicit racial biases and negative stereotypes because it was not designed or analyzed with proper social, ecological, and political contexts.
  - Use qualitative and quantitative data deliberately to highlight the strengths of young people, their families, and communities.
  - Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify root causes of racial disparities.
  - Be transparent with community members about institutional factors that have contributed to disproportionate child welfare system involvement and punishment of Black, immigrant, and Indigenous families in particular.
2. Develop a publicly available agency-wide purpose statement and policy for the collection and use of demographic data, particularly on race and ethnicity.
  - Include diverse perspectives (such as young people and families with lived experience with the child welfare system, community leaders and providers, as well as agency staff from all levels) in co-developing the purpose statement and policy guidelines.
  - Ensure that collecting and using data on personal identity is compatible with a mission of promoting equity, inclusion, and justice.
  - Make the purpose statement as accessible and transparent as possible to convey the purpose of data collection to all staff and clients.

“You know, when we’re collecting data, are we asking the family or is the caseworker making an assumption? Also, where in the data process are we actually collecting this information? Is it coming from a reporter who may have seen the family once and is making an assumption? Is it a teacher that says, ‘well, the kid looks like this’? Whereas, for me, I grew up white-passing and my name [is] super British. I am sure if I had a teacher that had reported on something I would be labeled as White.”

– Child Welfare Data Administrator

“We really have to make sure that we are showing on our end, and also training and teaching, why this is a critical component. And that we really need [to know] how the family and the child identifies if we want good cultural competency around services.”

– Child Welfare Data Administrator



- Establish policy guidelines that clearly indicate that race and ethnicity should be determined by how a young person and family define themselves and that workers must not make assumptions about identity.
- Promote policy and practice that allows that individual family members may identify themselves using different languages.
- Among both data teams and programmatic teams, determine how data will be analyzed and how feedback loops will be established to affect decision-making.

“One of the challenges is we not only have to ask the [basic] question, [but also,] tell me where you’re from. We have to be cognizant of the fact that these labels are very minimal and there’s so much more that needs to be explored than just this person’s race.”

– Caseworker

3. Develop training protocols for the purpose of collecting accurate and affirming demographic data and about how to ask about race and ethnicity.
  - Share the purpose statement with frontline staff so they are aware of the goals of collecting and utilizing demographic data and can be coached about how to answer questions from young people and families about why the data are being collected, with whom data are shared and how the information will be used.
    - ▶ Workers should make clear they will not ask about documentation status.
    - ▶ Workers should be aware of confidentiality laws related to the data collected and assure young people and families of their right to privacy or to decline to share how they identify.
  - Integrate more accurate and nuanced race and ethnicity categories into existing client engagement training, as well as implicit racial bias and antiracism training, training on accessibility, disability, and inclusion, and other related protocols.
4. Partner with young people, families, and community organizations to inform data collection and analysis methods.
  - Prioritize the ability for young people and families to self-identify and self-report their information.
  - Ask young people and families regularly if they would like to update their information, to improve the quality of the data and account for shifting or evolving identities over time.
  - Collaborate with community members to establish racial and ethnic categories for forms and data systems that are representative of the jurisdictional population, including Tribal affiliation, national origin, and religion.
  - Develop publicly accessible reports with de-identified demographic data inclusive of the community characteristics so that it can be used and interpreted by constituents and advocates.
5. Partner with local community-based organizations that provide culturally relevant services to identify and connect with diverse communities in your area.
  - Allow those culturally specific organizations to share their priorities and co-develop data collection methods to identify the programs and services that might be beneficial to their particular population. This should be an ongoing conversation.
  - Include diverse perspectives (such as community members with lived experience in the foster care system as well as agency staff) on planning committees for service and program development and procurement.  
*Note: Youth, parents, and community members should always be compensated for their time.*
6. Translate data into action.
  - Consider how findings from data analyses should affect programs, services, workforce decisions, and resource allocation.
  - Be transparent in the process, sharing information openly about how data are collected, analyzed, and published, and seek consistent feedback in the process.
7. Create an advocacy agenda for state and federal policy makers about increasing the number of categories used to collect demographic data.
  - Inform government partners on a continuing basis about how communities are asking to define their identities.
  - Work with government partners to identify the ways in which accurate and affirming data on personal identity can be used to support constituents.



## Best Practices for Data Administrators

1. Ensure data systems are updated with nuanced categories aligned with population needs and specific categories around tribal affiliation, national origin, and language spoken.
  - Create a “Prefer to self-describe” field instead of “Other.” Be intentional in how you collapse or combine “Other” fields in analysis, and consider keeping as many descriptors as possible, rather than capturing in existing fields.
  - Include a “Prefer not to identify at this time” or “Worker did not ask” field instead of Decline or Unknown, respectively. This will help inform data collection strategies and reporting.
  - Identify ways to collect and report data internally that may differ from federal requirements, to be more useful to your local jurisdiction.
    - ▶ Instead of the broad federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) racial categories, your data system could capture Black or African American, African origin, and/or Caribbean origin, Middle Eastern origin, different nationalities within the Asian racial category (Korean, Chinese, Laotian, Hmong, Indian, etc.)
  - Race and ethnicity should be collected within a single question, rather than separated into two, to capture:
    - ▶ Tribal affiliation (an inclusive list of all federal- and state-recognized Tribes with a write-in option for First Nations or other tribal affiliation not listed). Be careful not to only capture federally recognized Tribes.
    - ▶ Latinx/Latine<sup>1</sup> identity, which may capture both racial and ethnic identity, as well as options for identifying by nation of origin (e.g., Dominican, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, etc.)
  - Within “Multiracial” categories, report on specific combinations of races and ethnicities instead of choosing one race that “seems” most salient. Collect and report what is self-identified by young people and families. Do not delete information for it to fit into a racial or ethnic category more neatly.
    - ▶ Data administrators should add categories for specific combinations of “Multiracial” (e.g., Black, Navajo & Hispanic; White, Puerto Rican & Cuban; Chinese, Black & White, etc.).
2. Consider the historical and systemic context of results when analyzing data.
  - Before reporting, be aware of the ways in which data can be misconstrued to reinforce stereotypes.
  - Learn about “damage imagery,” which is when the use of visuals, text, or data to highlight inequities lacks appropriate historical and sociopolitical context, and thus could be misleading, often blaming individuals or certain communities for systemic failures or racist actions against them.
3. Build feedback loops for “missing” or unknown data.
  - Develop mechanisms for following up with workers, and/or families themselves, when data are missing so that it can be properly updated.
  - Consider how data reports on race and ethnicity can be made more accessible to young people, families, and other constituents, and able to be updated over time.
  - Create an internal system for tracking outcomes of small populations that still protect the privacy concerns inherent within a small demographic.
    - ▶ Consider developing qualitative data protocols like focus groups for small populations for which quantitative data might be identifying and thus violate privacy concerns.
4. Track the updated data and consider how it can be used for continuous quality improvement.
  - Identify how the data are being shared internally and externally and whether a difference is being made in decision-making.

<sup>1</sup> While the terms Latino and Latina refer to male and female individuals, Latinx is a pan-ethnic term that honors those with nonbinary gender identities, Latine is also a gender-neutral term that is easier to pronounce in the Spanish language. For more resources, please see: <https://www.motherjones.com/media/2019/06/digging-into-the-messy-history-of-latinx-helped-me-embrace-my-complex-identity/> and <https://comnetworkdei.org/glossary>.



## JURISDICTIONAL EXAMPLES

- ◆ The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families recently released a report called [Using Data in DYCF to Advance Racial Equity](#), which makes recommendations regarding the collection and use of racial identifiers in performance metrics and other data responsibilities of the Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability. The report focuses both on understanding race and ethnicity data, as well as identifying disproportionality and disparity and related outcomes.
- ◆ Both [Alaska](#) and [Hawaii](#) have developed and implemented nuanced race, ethnicity, and tribal identification data categories and codes that are specific to the populations in their respective jurisdictions.
- ◆ Allegheny County has partnered with CSSP's getREAL initiative to better support young people achieve healthy sexual and identity development. The [getREAL Institutional Analysis](#) and the [LGBTQIA+ Standards of Practice](#) of Allegheny County are useful models of practice for working with LGBTQIA+ populations and collecting identity data on SOGIE in particular.
- ◆ The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family services has [specialized programs](#) to serve unique needs including an American Indian Unit, [Asian Pacific Program](#), and Deaf Services Unit. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health also has [service area navigators](#) to quickly identify available resources tailored to an individual.

## Other Helpful Resources

- ◆ [Counting a Diverse Nation](#)
- ◆ [More than Numbers: A Guide toward DEI in Data Collection](#)
- ◆ [CSSP's Antiracist Intersectional Frame](#)
- ◆ [Welcoming, Affirming, Supporting: Child Welfare Systems Must Honor the Whole Child](#)
- ◆ [Our Identities, Ourselves Literature Review](#)
- ◆ [Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration](#)
- ◆ [Best Practices for American Indian and Alaska Native Data Collection](#)

