



ALBA Guidelines: Designing inclusive forms for gender and sexual diversity

(I) Why is this important & what type of forms would this guideline be applicable to?

It has become more common to gather demographic information in a variety of settings related to neuroscience, such as conference registrations and job application forms. In addition, many neuroscientists work with human participants and need to gather accurate demographic information on them. Collecting such information is an important part of improving diversity and inclusion; after all, if one does not know who is or is not included in certain settings, it is hard to address underrepresentation or disadvantage with targeted affirmative actions.

With this guideline, we aim to set out best practices for improving the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other identities) people, that is, individuals with varying genders, sexualities, and transgender and intersex people. Please note, that it is a work in progress, practices and identities may change over time, depending on region and culture, and as such, feedback is very welcome. The guidelines are applicable to any setting in which such identities are surveyed, and we encourage its use for conference registration forms, HR surveys and demographic surveys for human participants in research projects. The goal is to help anyone unfamiliar with these identities improve their forms or surveys to more accurately capture these individuals.

(II) Best practices

1. General recommendations

Provide information about how data are used, processed and stored.

LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially those with intersectional identities, are easily identifiable from surveys that are supposed to be anonymised. Giving information about how the data are handled can help mitigate worries about this.

Consider what is relevant to your form.

Consider what the goal of the form is, and what questions are relevant. Generally, LGBTQIA+ surveys are used for gauging diversity of attendees, and as such, questions about sexuality, gender, and transgender status will be relevant. However, in a non-medical setting, questions about birth sex are often not relevant. If a survey is used to determine effects of either sex or gender on a specific fact, consider what the most relevant factor is. For example, sex does not directly map onto hormones (e.g., people taking Hormone Replacement Therapy), so if you're performing an experiment to determine the effect of testosterone on a dependent variable, asking birth sex will not be accurate enough to answer your question.

Always give the options to self-describe and to not answer.

As much as we try to include every option, it is impossible to capture the full diversity of people, so adding an option to self-describe their identity will allow everyone to be included and will allow your data to be more accurate. In addition, acquired data can be used to improve further surveys. Having

just a single option to self-describe rather than a list of possible options is often preferred, as it allows for more accurate data, even though this can make analysing the data more laborious.

Allow for multiple options to be selected.

Often people do not fall neatly within a single box, but rather have an identity that can be described by multiple terms. Allowing people to tick more than one option allows you to capture this.

2. Specific recommendations

Gender

Gender identity describes the gender of an individual. Gender is separate from the sex assigned at birth, a person's gender expression, and their physical appearance. Although these often line up (when a person's sex assigned at birth and gender line up, they are cisgender), this is not always the case. People who do not have the same gender as their sex assigned at birth are transgender. However, 'transgender' itself is not a gender, but rather an adjective (someone may be a transgender woman for example). Therefore, one should not include 'transgender' in the gender options. It is recommended to include a question asking whether someone is transgender as a separate question, if this is something that is relevant to your survey. In addition, 'male' and 'female' are used for sex, but it is preferred to use 'man' or 'woman' for the gender options. Below is an example of how to survey gender identity.

Gender identity (select all that apply)

- Agender
- Androgynous
- Bigender
- Genderfluid
- Genderqueer
- Gender non-conforming
- Man
- Non-binary
- Pangender
- Questioning
- Two-spirit
- Woman
- Prefer not to say
- Additional gender category/identity not listed (please specify below)

Note: This is not an exhaustive list and contains mainly North American identities. If you are surveying an international audience, or one specifically in another country or region, including terms from that specific region would be encouraged, especially since identities often do not match up across cultures. For example, when surveying a population that includes New Zealand's Māori people, consider including whakawāhine. Educating yourself on what identities exist within your surveyed areas is advised. The digital transgender archive (<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/learn/terms>) has compiled an exhaustive list, or you can get into contact with local organisations with the appropriate expertise.

Do you consider yourself to be transgender? (single-choice)

- Yes
- No
- Do not know/questioning
- Prefer not to say

Sexuality

Sexuality or sexual orientation describes the gender or genders a person is generally attracted to. Sexuality includes a wide spectrum, and distinctions can be made between romantic and sexual attraction (e.g., a biromantic asexual person describes a person who is romantically attracted to people of two or more genders, but not sexually attracted to anyone). It can therefore be hard to capture the full spectrum in a multiple-choice list but including an option to self-describe and allowing people to choose multiple options can mitigate this. Below is an example of how to survey sexuality:

Sexual Identity/Sexual Orientation (select all that apply):

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Demisexual
- Fluid
- Gay
- Greysexual
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Straight (heterosexual)
- Two-spirit
- Prefer not to say
- Additional category/identity not listed (please specify below)

Sex

If sex assigned at birth is relevant (e.g., for medical reasons), this can be surveyed. However, you need to carefully consider what question to ask, as the wording may change the answer a person gives (e.g., a person's sex assigned at birth may be different from their legal sex). Often times we use sex as a shorthand for other relevant information. For example, you might be researching something related to people with a uterus and are considering using sex as an inclusion criterium. However, using sex to select your population would exclude trans men, and include trans women or women who have had hysterectomies, thus not accurately capturing the population of people with uteruses. Therefore, it is important to consider what information is relevant to your survey or questionnaire and decide what question would most accurately capture this.

Sex assigned at birth:

- Male
- Female

- Not listed
- Prefer not to say

Intersex people

Some people were born with physical differences in sex anatomy, reproductive organs, chromosomes and/or hormone function, which do not fit typical expectations. These people are called intersex or having Difference in Sex Development (DSD). They are often included under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, but they are not captured by either gender, sexuality or sex assigned at birth questions. Based on guidelines by InterACT (<https://interactadvocates.org/intersex-data-collection/>), an advocacy group for intersex youth, we recommend including a separate question to accurately measure this group. It is also recommended to include a (short) description, because some people, even those who are intersex, may not be familiar with the term.

Were you born with a variation in your physical sex characteristics? [This is sometimes called being intersex or having a Difference in Sex Development (DSD)]

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Prefer not to say

(III) Resources

NASEM consensus study report 'Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation'. Includes data and recommendations on how best to survey sex, gender identity and sexuality.

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26424/measuring-sex-gender-identity-and-sexual-orientation>

Further reading on creating an LGBTQIA+ inclusive survey by Vanderbilt university

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/resources/how-to-ask-about-sexuality-gender>

Article on various gender identities in Asia

<https://kontinentalist.com/stories/transgender-people-in-asia>

More information on intersex people

<https://interactadvocates.org/faq/>

(IV) Glossary of terms

Overview of LGBTQIA+ terms and their definitions

<https://health.ucdavis.edu/diversity-inclusion/LGBTQI/LGBTQ-Plus.html>

Overview of trans-specific terms and their definitions, and recommendations for language to avoid

<https://www.glaad.org/reference/trans-terms>

Overview of gender identity terms across the globe

<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/learn/terms>