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LGBTQ SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Employers committed to diversity and inclusion routinely invest in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community with initiatives related to recruiting, retention, professional development or other employee satisfaction measurements. In order to track the impact of those investments employers may adopt LGBTQ self-identification programs that gather important data on the composition of their workforce with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity. In fact, **54% of employers in the [2020 Corporate Equality Index](#) reported having self-identification initiatives.**

Employers generally capture employee demographic information in two ways: 1) in confidential employee records via Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), and 2) through anonymous employee engagement surveys. Whether storing this information as part of the HRIS record or collecting it in a survey, employers should be sensitive to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer employees in how they request the information.

In addition, specifically for transgender and gender non-conforming employees, employers will want to expand the options to allow employees to self-identify beyond the binary of female/male. The question of gender with only “female” and “male” options can pose a challenge for transgender and gender non-conforming people. Many transgender and gender non-conforming people do not identify with either one of the simple binary gender designations, and some may feel limited by the “female” or “male” options.

Questions to ascertain sexual orientation and gender identity can be structured to allow anywhere from quite restrictive answers to quite open ones. Employers should evaluate how best to capture the data they need while allowing for a range of expression.

To maximize response rates over time, employers need to proactively communicate the purpose for the self-identification questions and emphasize the confidentiality of survey answers in order to address these concerns. **One overall recommendation is to restate the company’s commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression immediately prior to asking for self-identification and to clearly state the purpose of the question.**

As with all sensitive and confidential data, employers asking about gender identity and sexual orientation should take care to protect how the data are used, stored and reported as well as consider any legal restrictions on data collection and storage here in the United States as well as globally.

In the end, the best way to allow for self-identification varies by company based on several variables such as: the purpose and use of the data, the perceived overall acceptance of LGBTQ employees, the company’s overall LGBTQ cultural competency, and the mode of self-identification (engagement surveys vs. applications vs. HR information systems).

Examples of Employee Self-ID Questions

Here are some examples of how to ask employees about their sexual orientation and gender identity in self-identification programs. These are a few of many options. The right choice for your company will depend on many factors such as the desired end use of the data, the company’s familiarity with LGBTQ inclusion issues and more. HRC’s Workplace Equality Program is available to discuss self-ID programs with your firm. Reach out to us at cei@hrc.org.



**EXAMPLE:
BROAD SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS LGBT (or LGBTQ)**

Our company does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. In order to track the effectiveness of our recruiting efforts and ensure we consider the needs of all our employees, please consider the following optional question:

Do you consider yourself a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer (LGBTQ) community?

- Yes
- No
- No, but I identify as an Ally
- Prefer not to say

**EXAMPLE
SPECIFIC: GENDER & TRANSGENDER STATUS (ASK TOGETHER)**

Our company does not discriminate on the basis of gender identity or gender expression. In order to track the effectiveness of our recruiting efforts and ensure we consider the needs of all our employees, please consider the following optional question:

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/ third gender
- I use another term _____ (with or without free text field)
- Prefer not to say

Transgender is an umbrella term that refers to people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Other identities considered to fall under this umbrella can include non-binary, gender fluid, and genderqueer – as well as many more.

Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

**EXAMPLE:
SPECIFIC: SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Our company does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. In order to track the effectiveness of our recruiting efforts and ensure we consider the needs of all our employees, please consider the following optional question.

What is your Sexual Orientation?

- Straight/Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Queer
- I use another term _____ (with or without free text field)
- Prefer not to say