Community Support to Gather Feedback on Proposed Changes to the Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Identity Homeless Management Information System Data Elements

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One of the most important things one owns, regardless of whatever else happens, is one's identity. HUD, and other partners engaged to end homelessness in the United States, have always asked a core set of questions in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) around personal identity, including a person's race, ethnicity, and gender identity. This data is collected in part for homeless assistance providers to coordinate housing and services, manage their operations, and better serve their clients. In recognition of how important one's identity is, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is offering people with lived experience and expertise of homelessness, case workers, and community leaders an opportunity to provide feedback regarding proposed changes to HMIS.

The Opportunity

Partner with people experiencing homelessness, including people with diverse identities, to gather feedback on whether the proposed changes to the response options for the race, ethnicity, and gender data elements reflect the identities they want to be recognized as they search for housing and services to end their experience of homelessness.

Background

With strong encouragement from people with lived homeless experience, providers, and policymakers, HUD recognized a need to update the race, ethnicity, and gender data elements. As a technical assistance effort, we heard from people with lived homeless experience and expertise, Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership and providers, researchers, advocates, and technical assistance providers to evaluate these data elements. This effort resulted in proposed changes to the data elements based on diverse perspectives and opinions, and shaped new resources to better recognize that communities are working with real people for whom homelessness is a severe crisis. These new resources explore how homelessness intersects with racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

Now, we would like to pause and offer an opportunity for feedback from communities to bring a much broader representation of voices to this effort. **Do not make any changes in HMIS yet.** Communities that participate should gather feedback on these options outside of HMIS with the people they are serving.

Gathering Feedback

Communities know best how to engage with the people being served in their systems, and HUD trusts that you know best how to engage people who represent diverse perspectives. While participating in this feedback opportunity is completely optional, we encourage participation because contributing to this will not only help shape data collection efforts but also allow those who truly are the experts—people with lived expertise and experience of homelessness—to be heard. Consider the following suggestions to help make this feedback opportunity as effective as possible.

- *Ask meaningful questions.* Feedback on this effort will determine whether the proposed data elements provide an opportunity for clients to accurately reflect the identity they want to be known by in the community's HMIS, which is a core resource for assisting people to connect to housing and services. This may mean different response options or it

may mean thinking about these kinds of questions in a different way. Consider what would be helpful for your communities to know in this process and prepare some questions accordingly. Communities may ask:

- Are the elements missing peoples' identities or experiences because of the way the data element/question has been set up?

- Do the response options make sense to those asking or being asked the questions (i.e., do the options represent how clients want others to see them)? (e.g., transgender experience, Middle Eastern and North African).

- *Why is HUD creating an opportunity for feedback?* Clearly state why this feedback is being collected and also that this in no way impacts their ability to receive services. The main reason to collect this feedback is to more accurately reflect someone's identity to better serve them and to create a more inclusive environment for all those experiencing homelessness.

- *Who is gathering feedback?* Decide who is best positioned to gather this feedback in your community. This does not have to be led by CoCs. Street outreach workers, frontline shelter staff, coordinated entry staff, and others have meaningful relationships and can effectively lead this effort.

- *Who is giving feedback?* It is vital that communities hear the voices of people experiencing homelessness. Engaging those with whom there is already an existing relationship —as opposed to those who are new to the system —would be the least invasive and will likely get the best feedback. Include those that have a diverse set of identities, including racial, ethnic, and gender identities, and those who have been marginalized in your community. Feedback from providers and CoC staff is welcome as well, especially as communities consider how people have accepted, rejected, or avoided engaging in your homeless response system based on their individual identities. HUD strongly encourages communities to compensate those who provide feedback for their time.

- *How to ask for feedback?* There are a lot of ways to solicit feedback depending on your circumstances. Ensure that people feel safe and comfortable providing honest feedback. Here are some ideas:

  - Host a focus group.

  - Ask people in your project(s) after ensuring their basic needs are met (including food, water, safety, access to bathrooms, and housing or shelter).

  - Use a survey but note that some may not be able to read a survey due to health issues, language barriers, and other reasons.

  Communities can use a laminated card for feedback where one side has the current requirements and the other side has the suggested change and then simply ask which one the people providing feedback prefer and provide space for additional feedback.

- *How to share feedback with HUD?* Please provide the feedback received no later than December 31, 2022 to HUD. To submit feedback, use the HUD Exchange AAQ and select "HMIS: Homelessness Management Information System" for the "My question is related to:" prompt. Different people will have different feedback that may contradict, but be open to all responses and share those responses with HUD. Contextualize the feedback if there are contradictions; for instance, if the majority of the people talked to prefer the

recommended changes but a small number do not, clarify whether that small group represents a specific group in your community.

- *Additional Support?* HUD will host at least one office hours call (after the October 20, 2022 deadline for the Special NOFO to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness) to provide additional support.

Proposed Changes to the Elements

The current Race (3.04), Ethnicity (3.05), and Gender (3.06) data elements can be found in the FY 2022 HMIS Data Standards.

Element Name: Race and Ethnicity

Field 1	Race and Ethnicity
Response options (as many as are applicable)	1. American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous 2. Asian or Asian American 3. Black, African, or African American 4. Hispanic/Latin(a)/(o)/(x) 5. Middle Eastern or North African 6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 7. White 8. Client Doesn't Know 9. Client Refused 10. Data Not Collected
Follow-up to Field 1	**Additional Race and Ethnicity Detail**
Response	Open-ended
Note on changes: The proposed change combines the race and ethnicity data elements into a single element. It includes a follow-up question that allows people to choose additional responses, or use different language, to identify themselves. People experiencing homelessness should continue to be able to select as many response options as they desire.	

Element Name: Preferred Language(s)

Field 1	Preferred Language(s)
Response options (as many as are applicable)	1. English 2. Spanish 3. Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese, or Other Chinese Languages) 4. Tagalog (Filipino) 5. Vietnamese 6. French or French Creole 7. Arabic 8. Different Preferred Language: [specify] 9. Client Doesn't Know

	10. Client Refused
	11. Data Not Collected
Follow-up to Field 1	**Other Preferred Language**
Only answer if selected "Different preferred language"	Open-ended
Note on changes: This is a new element. The options are based on the most common languages in the United States, but there is space to enter a different preferred language to allow communities to gather that information.	

Element Name: Gender

Field 1	**Gender**
Response Options (as many as are applicable)	1. Woman/Girl
	2. Man/Boy
	3. Non-binary
	4. Culturally-Specific Identity (e.g. Two-Spirit)
	5. Questioning
	6. Different Identity: [specify]
	7. Client Doesn't Know
	8. Client Refused
	9. Data Not Collected
Follow-up to Field 1	**Different Identity Detail**
Only answer if selected "Different identity"	Open-ended
Field 2	**Transgender Experience**
Response options (only one option should be selected)	1. Yes
	2. No
	3. Questioning
	4. Client Doesn't Know
	5. Client Refused
	6. Data Not Collected
Note on changes: The proposed change divides the gender question into two parts. The first part of the question is about preferred gender identity and the follow-up question allows a person to identify if they have had a transgender experience. For the first part of the question, people experiencing homelessness can choose as many identities as they feel represent their gender. For the second part of the question, there should be a single response. For further information on the response options, please refer to the Client-Centered Approach to Recognizing Gender Identities.	