



Guide to cultural and linguistic data collection for the public sector

‘If you can’t count you can’t plan’



A guide to assist State Government agencies to collect data relating to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of their clients.

November 2014

Introduction

The Office of Multicultural Interests' (OMI's) vision is 'an inclusive and cohesive society which draws on its cultural and linguistic diversity to enhance the social, economic and cultural development of the State'. OMI provides leadership on multicultural interests within the public sector, to the Western Australian community and with business—creating partnerships for a more inclusive and productive society.

Of all States and Territories, Western Australia has the largest proportion of people born overseas (30.7 per cent). Indigenous people constitute 3.1 per cent of the population. Over 14 per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home. Western Australians come from over 200 countries, speak nearly 300 different languages and follow over 100 faiths. It is vital that this diversity is reflected in government policy, programs and services. Data collection is a key part of this process.

Purpose of the guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist State Government agencies to collect data relating to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of their clients. It provides suggestions and strategies for the collection of this data, including the use of standard variables. The aim of the guide is to improve the quality and quantity of information collected, achieve consistency in data collection and enable meaningful comparisons to be made.

Statistics ... aid the decision making process by enabling us to establish numerical benchmarks and monitor and evaluate the progress of our policy or program. This is essential in ensuring that policies are meeting initial aims and identifying any areas which require improvements.

*Australian Bureau of Statistics,
A guide for using statistics for evidence based policy, 2010*

Why collect cultural and linguistic data?

To facilitate effective planning and delivery of culturally appropriate services to Western Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) population, it is important that government agencies and other service providers have a clear understanding of, and relevant data on, the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of their client base. The same consistency in data should apply for collecting information on the workforce.

BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Data on cultural and linguistic diversity assists agencies to:

- measure and appreciate the diversity of their clients
- assess and measure the impact of policies and programs on different groups in order to improve outcomes
- review, plan and deliver services that meet the needs of communities, including new migrants and refugees
- respond effectively and in a culturally appropriate way to community needs



- recognise where discrimination and marginalisation may arise
- meet access and equity requirements
- reduce complaints of racial discrimination by making sure needs and barriers are identified earlier
- compare outputs across agencies
- inform the development of legislation, budgets, action plans, reports and research proposals.

For example, collection of data can help to:

- assess clients' cultural and linguistic requirements, such as the need for interpreters and bilingual staff
- identify recent significant growth rates in specific groups or the settlement of new groups
- identify specific needs in relation to issues such as literacy, employment, health, community safety and wellbeing
- substantiate funding applications for CaLD-specific programs and services
- ensure staffing and skills are representative of an agency's client base
- indicate which groups are using essential services and how satisfied they are with them.

Used in association with information on gender and age, collected data can identify levels of access to services by particular groups such as women, seniors or young people. Under-represented groups can be targeted with responsive and relevant services and programs.

BENEFITS TO CLIENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Collection of cultural, linguistic and religious data may potentially benefit clients by facilitating:

- increased access to information
- improved service delivery

- equitable access to services
- increased access to interpreters and translated information
- opportunities to participate in social, economic and cultural life.

What data to collect

In November 1999, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released its *Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity*. This document sets national standards for measuring diversity through a core and standard set of cultural and language indicators. It includes standard questions to be asked.

By using the core and standard sets, it provides consistency in the collection of data and enables comparisons to be made between agencies, jurisdictions, local government areas, regions and against census data.

The core set comprises:

- country of birth
- main language other than English spoken at home
- proficiency in spoken English
- Indigenous status (used when the focus is not specifically on people of migrant and refugee backgrounds).

The other indicators in the standard set are: ancestry, birthplace of parents, first language spoken, languages spoken at home, main language spoken at home, religious affiliation and year of arrival in Australia.

Agencies are encouraged to collect the minimum core data set and to identify and include relevant standard variables as appropriate.

Deciding the variables

Each agency collects data for different reasons and has unique administrative and management processes. There is also no single measure of cultural and linguistic diversity. The type of data collected and how it is collected will depend on the:

- ▣ core business of the agency or program
- ▣ target demographic of the agency or a program
- ▣ purpose of the data (for example, performance indicators, needs analysis, community profiles).

For example:

- ▣ 'country of birth of person' used in conjunction with 'year of arrival in Australia' will provide an indication of the extent to which migrants are likely to have adapted to Australian society
- ▣ combining main language other than English spoken at home with proficiency in spoken English can help identify the need for language services and to inform marketing and promotional strategies
- ▣ a number of variables, such as 'country of birth', 'language spoken at home' and 'year of arrival in Australia' may be needed when developing a more detailed client profile for planning or evaluation purposes.

What questions to ask and why

The ABS has developed a set of standard questions and definitions to help ensure consistency of data collection. Agencies may find it necessary to adapt the questions to collect relevant and additional data.

CORE INDICATORS

Country of birth

Country of birth is mainly used to determine if someone is a migrant to Australia and the country from which they originate. It can also provide an indication of the community group to which they are likely to be attached.

Ask: In which country [were you] [was the person] [was (name)] born?
Australia.
Other—please specify:

Main language other than English at home

This provides information on the number of people who speak English only and, if one or more other languages are spoken, the main non-English language used in the home. Although it does not capture all the languages spoken it indicates those cases where the main language spoken is English but a language other than English is still used in the home. This can also help identify more established migrant communities.

Ask: [Do you] [Does the person] [Does (name)] speak a language other than English at home? (*If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often*)
No, English only
Yes, other—please specify:

Proficiency in spoken English

This provides a broad measure of the English proficiency of people whose first language is not English. It is a subjective measure as it relies on self assessment. There are two standard questions: one for self-enumerated collections and the other for collections by interview.



For self-enumerated collections, **ask:** How well [do you] [does the person] speak English?

- Very well.....
- Well.....
- Not well.....
- Not at all.....

For interview-based collections, **ask:** Do you consider [you speak] [(name) speaks] English very well, well, or not well?

- Very well.....
- Well.....
- Not well.....
- Not at all.....

Indigenous status

This provides data on the number of people who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Indigenous Status is a fundamental element of cultural diversity in Australian society and should be included in all relevant data collections except for those specifically focused on migrants and their descendants.

Ask: Are you] [Is the person] [Is (name)] of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? *(For persons of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, mark both 'Yes' boxes)*

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal.....
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

STANDARD INDICATORS

Ancestry

Ancestry describes the ethnic or cultural heritage of a person. It relates to the ethnic or cultural groups which the person *identifies* as being his or her ancestry, and therefore also involves self assessment. For this reason, it may not be a reliable measure of service needs and should be used in conjunction with 'country of birth' and

language variables to provide additional information about a person's cultural identity.

For example, a person may indicate four ancestries because each grandparent is from a different ethnic or cultural background. However, another person with the same ancestry may choose to identify as 'Australian' because one or both parents were born in Australia, or because of a particular attachment to Australia.

However, it can be used in combination with other variables to measure the extent to which people retain the ethnicity and culture of their forebears (for example, parents and grandparents).

Ask: What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] ancestry? *(For example: English, Scottish, South African, Italian, Malaysian, Vietnamese). Provide more than one ancestry if necessary.*
Ancestry :

Birthplace of parents

Used in association with other cultural and language variables, the country of birth of a person's father and mother can help determine the extent to which second generation Australians retain their parents' culture, ethnicity or language.

Ask: In which country was [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] father born?
Australia
Other—please specify:.....

Ask: In which country was [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] mother born?
Australia
Other—please specify:.....

Languages spoken at home

This provides data on the range of languages actively used. However, it may not reflect complete language use. For example, one language may be spoken in the home but other languages spoken outside the home within a person's ethnic community group. This indicator also does not determine the frequency with which each language is used or the language of greatest competence.

Ask: Which language or languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] speak at home?
(Please indicate all languages spoken)
English.....
Other—please specify:.....

First language spoken

This provides accurate information about a person's cultural and linguistic background as it does not change over a person's lifetime. It is regarded as a good surrogate measure of ethnicity because of its connection with a person's origins.

In some instances, however, depending on age, year of arrival in Australia, and living arrangements, a person's first language spoken will not necessarily be the person's language of greatest competence or the main language he or she currently speaks at home or in the community. Like 'main language other than English spoken at home', it may overstate the real level of usage of languages other than English.

Ask: Which language [did you] [did the person] [did (name)] first speak as a child?
(Mark only one box)
English.....
Other—please specify:.....

Main language spoken at home

This is an indicator of 'active' ethnicity and is useful in identifying levels of inter-generational language retention. It can also help providers of language and

community services to effectively target the population groups that most need their services.

Ask: Which language or languages [do you] [does the person] [does (name)] mainly speak at home?
(If more than one language, indicate the one that is spoken most often)
English.....
Other—please specify:.....

Religious affiliation

This identifies the religious belief to which a person adheres or the religious group to which they belong. It can be helpful in delivering more culturally relevant services to clients, particularly where religious practices and requirements need to be considered.

Ask: What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?
(For example: Judaism, Islam, Greek Orthodox, Buddhism, Baptist, Church of England) Please write in your religion or mark the box if no religion.
(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)
Religion
No religion

Year of arrival in Australia

'Year of arrival in Australia' is defined as the year a person, born outside of Australia, first arrived in Australia from another country with the intention of living here for one year or more. It gives an indication of how familiar migrants are likely to be with Australian society and practices and how familiar they are likely to be with the domestic labour market and available services.

Ask: In what year did [you] [the person] [(name)] first arrive in Australia to live here for one year or more?
(Write in the calendar year of arrival or mark the box if here less than one year)
Calendar year of arrival:.....
Will be here less than one year



Collecting the data

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Data relating to people from CaLD backgrounds should be treated with the same confidentiality as other personal information collected for planning purposes. People generally will not object to supplying information of this type if there is an explanation of its purpose and a guarantee of appropriate confidentiality. If objections persist in individual cases the wishes of the individual should be respected.

Applicable principles of privacy and data collection are that:

- ▣ only essential data should be collected
- ▣ individuals are not specifically identified or named in the reporting of such information without their consent
- ▣ individuals should have the option to indicate that they do not wish to provide personal profile information
- ▣ data collected for monitoring purposes should be kept separate from personnel and client files
- ▣ all proposals to collect data should be non-intrusive and rely on commonly collected items such as birthplace or support for language needs
- ▣ there should be transparency about what client information is collected and how it is used. Any information sharing should be in accordance with the Public Sector Commissioner's Circular 2009-29 – *Policy Framework and Standards for Information Sharing Between Government Agencies*.

You may wish to develop a client information and privacy statement (translated where appropriate).

Sample statements:

Purpose of the survey

By answering the following short questions, you will help us improve our services.

Confidentiality

You will not be identified in any data collected or published by [the agency/service provider].


CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural awareness of staff may affect the quality and quantity of data collected. For this reason cultural competency training may be important. For example, some clients may:

- ▣ speak some English but not be competent to respond appropriately to complex questions or not be proficient in English
- ▣ not be proficient using a computer
- ▣ be reluctant to respond to some (or all) questions for cultural reasons or due to past experiences.

Increased cultural awareness will ensure that staff do not make assumptions about clients on the basis of their appearance, accent or language proficiency.

Data can be collected over the telephone, pen and paper, face-to-face or using a computer. Cultural competency training will assist staff to identify the most culturally appropriate methods. Low levels of English proficiency may require questions to be translated or for an interpreter or bilingual staff to be present. Some cultural groups, although literate in their own language, may not be in a position to complete a written form.



Other issues that require cultural awareness in data collection processes relate to cultural interpretations of concepts and questions. For example:

- some clients may perceive confidentiality differently and it will therefore be important that the concept is explained in terms to which clients can relate
- some clients may interpret questions from their own cultural perspective. For example, some clients may have limited understanding of Western cultural concepts such as place of birth. They may interpret birthplace as tribal country rather than being a citizen of Australia or another country. Similarly, shifting global boundaries means that some people may identify countries of birth that no longer exist
- although not a core indicator, date of birth is often collected by service providers. Some clients may not be able to answer this question. They may calculate their birth dates according to a different calendar or birth documentation may have been lost due to civil unrest or war.

It may also be useful to trial questions before implementing surveys.

MONITORING

Once the process of data collection is underway, it is important to consider how the information is used. Monitoring helps ensure consistency, particularly where data is collected by a number of areas within an agency and for different reasons.

Ways to ensure that data collection is monitored include:

- incorporating data into key performance indicators for the agency
- building in specific measurements (how many clients, list of backgrounds/age groups/gender) for each service being surveyed

- including data in reporting processes, such as annual reports
- introducing requirements for reporting on specific measurements for particular target group(s), for example, in key performance indicators.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis can reveal:

- why certain groups are accessing the service or program more than others, why this is so, if more data is needed and whether new strategies need to be considered to draw in other target groups
- the extent to which services are being delivered to meet the needs of all members of the community
- if the service or program is reaching the target groups and to provide evidence required to secure funding to continue a successful program or introduce a new initiative.

Agencies may then choose to:

- review which communities a program has reached to identify the rate at which it is used by different groups and/or by age and gender
- compare data over a time period to identify trends.

GETTING STARTED

As a first step, it is useful to conduct an audit of computer systems, data collections and major surveys where information on cultural and linguistic diversity is collected.

The audit will identify:

- whether or not the minimum core set is being collected
- whether any standard variables are being collected
- ways to incorporate the minimum core set and any other relevant variables in existing collections.

RESOURCES

DATA COLLECTION GUIDES

The National Statistical Service (www.nss.gov.au) provides resources and assists government agencies to improve the quality of their statistical collections and information management activities.

Other resources include:

- Dr Anne Aly and Gavin Currie, *Ethnicity Data Collection Tool*, Women's Health and Family Services, available at www.whfs.org.au/resources
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *A guide for using statistics for evidence based policy*, 2010, available at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1500.0
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian standard classification of cultural and ethnic groups*, catalogue 1249.0, available at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1249.0
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Guide: implementing the standards for statistics on cultural and language diversity*, 2001, (originally published by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) available at [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/79fab04272992d54ca25697e0018febd/\\$FILE/ATT41EIH/DIMA%20Guide_Final.pdf](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/79fab04272992d54ca25697e0018febd/$FILE/ATT41EIH/DIMA%20Guide_Final.pdf)



SOURCES OF ETHNICITY DATA

Key sources of data and information on people from CaLD backgrounds include:

- ABS Census and Statistics, available at www.abs.gov.au
- *The People of Western Australia: Statistics from the 2011 Census*, available at www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi_publications.cfm
- Department of Immigration and Border Protection Settlement Databas, available at www.immi.gov.au
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, available at www.aihw.gov.au

More information

For more information and assistance, please contact:

OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS

Department of Local Government and Communities

GPO Box R1250 PERTH WA 6844

Phone: (08) 6551 8700 Fax: (08) 6552 1555

Email: harmony@omi.wa.gov.au

Website: www.omi.wa.gov.au

