

Participant Application Forms

Gathering Information about Gender and Sexual Orientation

What to Ask About

Figure out what information you want to collect in the application. If there is something you need to know about admitted participants, but not about the applicant pool, consider collecting that information separately from the application, after admissions decisions are announced. Here are some examples of types of information you might want in the application *or later*:

In most cases, you want to know the applicants' **preferred name, terms of self-identity** and you may also want to know their **pronouns**:

- Name the person prefers to be called (whether the same or different from the name on their identity documents)
- gender identity (how they understand themselves in relation to categories like man, woman, transgender, and so on)
- sexual orientation (how they describe their patterns of romantic attraction in terms of potential partners' gender, e.g. heterosexual, queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)
- pronouns (how they prefer to be referred to as she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/theirs, ze/hir, etc.)

Some organizations also collect demographic information about **relationship status**.

In many cases you may also need to know what name and sex marker (M or F) is listed on applicants' **government-issued id**. Keep in mind a person's id documents may have different sex markers than each other. Ask about those documents that are relevant to your program.

- If you need to verify someone's eligibility for federal financial aid, it helps to know what sex marker is listed on their **social security records** (the card itself does not show sex).
- If you'll be purchasing airline reservations for participants, you need to know the sex listed on whatever government-issued id the participants will be travelling with (usually **driver's license or passport**).
- If the program includes international travel, it's useful to know the sex marker listed on participants' **passport**.
- If the program provides health insurance and reports participant information to a **health insurance company**, you should ask what sex marker to use for that purpose.

For residential or travel programs you may need information about **medications** a person is taking. Many (not all) trans* people take injected medications and will need to bring needles and syringes.

Information you almost *never* need to know in a non-medical setting includes someone's surgical status, genital status, chromosomal sex, "birth sex" or "birth name," and sexual history/behavior.



How to Ask

Always explain why you need the information and what you will use it for. For example, you might say something like:

- “This information will be kept separate from the rest of your application. Aggregate data will be used to assess the demographic diversity of our applicant pool.”
- “This information is not used in the admissions process. Once admissions decisions are made, orientation leaders will have access to this information to aid them in planning activities for the group.”
- “This medical information is kept on file in case of emergency and will be shared only with medical personnel in the even the participant is unable to provide needed information.”

Specify whether the information will be kept confidential and who will have access to it. If any information about participants’ identities will be disclosed to the group, ask what information each participant wants to share and how. For example:

- A participant who openly identifies as trans in application materials may not want to be out as trans to the group, or may prefer to disclose in person. Even referring to someone as “he” or “she” may reveal information about their identity that they’d prefer to keep private, or to share another way.

Phrase questions and response options so that they apply to anyone and avoid implicit assumptions. For example:

- In asking about relationship status, don’t assume that everyone who is in a long-term committed relationship is married or is able to marry legally.
- In asking about roommate preferences, don’t assume that everyone identifies as either a man or a woman, or that everyone feels most comfortable rooming with someone of the same gender.

Whenever possible, use open response questions rather than pull-down menus or check boxes. e.g.:

“Gender: _____”

“Sexual orientation: _____”

Structuring the question this way demonstrates that you welcome applicants of any gender and sexual orientation, including those not usually included in check lists, and gives applicants an opportunity to describe their identity in their own words.

If you need to use pull-down menus or check boxes, allow participants to choose more than one option, and to fill in a term of their choosing if none of the options work for them. Call the fill-in-the-blank option “another category” or “add your own” rather than “other.”



Sample Questions:

Name, Terms of Self Identity, Pronouns: Best Practice

Name (what you like to be called): _____

Legal name for financial aid purposes (if different than above): _____

Gender: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

What pronouns should we use when referring to you? (e.g. she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.) _____

Terms of Self Identity: Also Okay

Which best describes you? Check as many as you wish.

- Man
- Woman
- Transgender
- Transexual
- Genderqueer
- Trans man / FtM
- Trans woman / MtF
- Another category _____

Which best describes you? Check as many as you wish.

- Gay
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual / straight
- Another category _____

(Adding additional options to the list is fine, and is important if you're working with a specific population where you know another term is in wide use.)

Relationship Status

Which best describes your relationship status? Check as many as you wish.

- Single
- Partnered
- Married
- Domestic Partner
- Divorced
- Separated
- Another category _____

