

Personal Information on Surveys: When (not) to Ask and Why

Deciding what to ask on a survey can be complicated. We want to consider our respondents' feelings and we also want to collect meaningful information to support our project objectives. Sometimes when we develop seemingly harmless questions we may overlook societal power dynamics or the ways people are labeled by society. Examples of personal topics may include, but are not limited to, social identity (e.g., gender identity, race), health status, income, education level, and other potentially sensitive characteristics, behaviors, or experiences. We hope the questions below will help you decide whether and how to ask about personal information on a survey.



1 Why are we considering collecting this information?

We feel it is important to collect so people feel recognized or included or because we think we should.

If this is your *only* reason for asking for personal information on your survey, please do not include these items. While the intention may be honorable, it is unethical to collect information, especially information that some consider sensitive, if it will not be used for analyses and/or reporting. If, however, you have other reasons for collecting personal information, please explore the options below to determine what to collect based on what you'd like to report.

2 What data do we need? 3 What do we tell respondents up front? 4 What can we report? 5 What's an example of what we could say in a report?

	2 What data do we need?	3 What do we tell respondents up front?	4 What can we report? ● Counts and Percentages ■ Subgroup Comparison ▲ Change in Equity/Disparity	5 What's an example of what we could say in a report? <i>In these examples, the personal information is eligibility for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS).</i>
We want to describe our respondent sample.	Personal data from the survey	The following questions will ask for personal information. Your responses will be used to tell us who has completed this survey and will not be used to identify you as an individual. We appreciate your response to these questions.	●	In the 2022-2023 school year, 45% of students who completed the survey reported that they are eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) at school.
We want to find out if our sample reflects our larger community or population(s) of interest.	Personal data about the population(s) of interest and from the survey	The following questions will ask for personal information. Your responses will be used to identify you as an individual. We appreciate your response to these questions.	●	In the 2022-2023 school year, 45% of students who completed the survey reported that they are eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) at school. This is similar to the percentage of students in the district who are eligible for FARMS (47%).
We want to compare responses to one or more questions based on personal data.	Personal data from the same people who answered the question(s) of interest	The following questions will ask for personal information. Your responses will be used to analyze and organize data based on key characteristics and will not be used to identify you as an individual. We appreciate your response to these questions.	● ■	In the 2022-2023 school year, the average schoolwide rating of school connectedness was 3.6. Students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) at school scored lower on measures of school connectedness (average score of 2.1 out of 5) than students who are not eligible for FARMS (average score of 4.4 out of 5).
We want to measure changes in disparities/equity over time.	Responses to question(s) of interest at 2+ points in time that can be linked to the same individual plus personal data from at least one of those points in time	The following questions will ask for personal information. Your responses will be used to analyze data based on key characteristics and measure change over time, overall and by sub-group. Your responses will not be used to identify you as an individual. We appreciate your response to these questions.	● ■ ▲	In the 2022-2023 school year, the average schoolwide rating of school connectedness was 3.6. Students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) at school scored lower on measures of school connectedness (average score of 2.1 out of 5) than students who are not eligible for FARMS (average score of 4.4 out of 5). In the 2024-2025 school year, the average schoolwide rating of school connectedness was 3.8; the gap between these groups narrowed such that students eligible for FARMS averaged a 3.7 on school connectedness compared to an average of 4.5 for ineligible students.