



# Surveying your employees on cultural diversity and disability

## Background

There have been recent changes to the definitions to capture data on cultural diversity and disability across the public sector, as well as to the system used to collate the data.

To ensure accurate and comparative data, agencies may need to re-survey their existing employees and collect data from new employees as they commence, to ensure they have up to date diversity information for all employees. This will enable you to obtain a more accurate picture of the cultural diversity and disability status of your agency's workforce and assist in meeting your Equity and Diversity Plan objectives.

The changes bring the cultural diversity indicators into line with recent developments by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the disability indicators enable benchmarking with other Australian states. The disability indicators were developed in consultation with the CEO Diversity Forum Sub-Group for People with Disabilities.

The changes have been included as part of the recently revised Human Resource Minimum Obligatory Information Requirements (HRMOIR) reports and are necessary for providing data centrally using the Workforce Analysis and Comparative Application (WACA).

## The definitions

### **People from culturally diverse backgrounds**

People born in countries other than those categorised as Main English Speaking (MES) countries. The MES countries are: Australia, United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and United States of America.

### **Indigenous Australians**

Persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

(Note: The definition remains unchanged from previous years.)

### **People with disabilities**

Persons with an ongoing disability that requires any of the following:

- Restriction in the type of work they can do;
- Modified hours of work or time schedules;
- Adaptations to the workplace or work area;
- Specialised equipment;
- Extra time for mobility or tasks; and
- Ongoing assistance or supervision to carry out duties.

## Employee identifier

Each returned survey must have the field “Employee Identifier” completed.

Instructions for using the system and the definitions for entering the data are available at the PSC’s Workforce Information System website:

<http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/PSMD/WorkforcePlanning/Pages/WorkforceInformationSystem.aspx>

Officers responsible for entering HRMOIR reports through the WACA system should already have their agency/department identifiers and logon details. If this is not the case, Dan Midalia, WACA State Administrator at the PSC is able to assist and can be contacted at the following email address: [dan.midalia@psc.wa.gov.au](mailto:dan.midalia@psc.wa.gov.au)

## The diversity questionnaire

The Diversity Questionnaire captures all of the information needed for the above definitions. The questions have been designed to allow submission of the information required under HRMOIR EEO data.

## Timing

The Diversity Questionnaire is ready for use at any time. We are asking agencies to provide the data based on the new definitions by 24 July 2009.

## Frequency

Agencies should ensure they collect diversity data from new employees as they commence. Following your initial survey of employees, to update your database for 2009, it is recommended that you resurvey on a regular basis (e.g., every two years).

## Self-nomination

Disclosure of diversity information (on cultural background, disability and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander status) is voluntary. Employees may choose not to disclose this information for a variety of reasons. However, it is essential that your covering letter or email actively encourages employees to provide such information. You may do this by highlighting the benefits of disclosing such information and the positive impact that it has upon the ability to produce comprehensive sector-wide statistics (See “Achieving a High Response Rate” below for additional information).

Under no circumstances should assumptions be made about the cultural background or disability status of employees on their behalf.

## Adapting the survey

Some parts of the Diversity Questionnaire may be adapted to suit the particular circumstances of your agency. For example, you may wish to add details about collection points, return dates on the front cover or notes of particular relevance to your agency. Additional questions may also be added if required.

However, it is essential that the wording of the data questions are not changed as these questions follow the wording used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Using identical wording allows benchmarking between agencies, other states and the community.

## The procedure

1. Decide on collection points, closing dates, and people responsible. Specify a close-off date. Large multi-sited agencies may decide to have a number of contact people amongst their main sites. Enter this information onto the cover page of the Diversity Questionnaire.
2. Distribute the Diversity Questionnaire with a covering letter and/or email to all employees. Note: The “Employee Identifier” field is a compulsory field.
3. Follow up outstanding questionnaires by sending a reminder letter/email to all employees. Hint: You may decide to extend the closing date if necessary to ensure a good response rate.
4. Ensure that your diversity data is entered for each employee into your HR computer system.

The Diversity Questionnaire should also form part of the induction process to obtain diversity information from new employees.

## Achieving a high response rate

Some useful tips to ensure a high response rate include:

- Emphasising that the questionnaire is relatively short and will not take more than five to ten minutes to complete;
- Emphasising that the information will assist in attaining the diversity objectives of the Equity and Diversity Plan; and
- Provide equal opportunity for all people in public employment.

The recommended questionnaire provides us with important information on the diversity of our workforce that helps us assess how well we are achieving these outcomes. It will be used to inform and develop organisation and government policies and programs relating to employment and service delivery.

## Confidentiality

The willingness of employees to accurately complete the questionnaire is directly dependent upon the maintenance of confidentiality. Employees should be assured that the information will not be used to disadvantage themselves or colleagues. Agencies must ensure that the confidentiality provisions are contained in all communication with employees at the time that the questionnaire is administered.

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