

FEDERAL INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP FOR RESEARCH ON RACE AND ETHNICITY
2ND FEDERAL REGISTER NOTICE
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Submission Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Where can I find a copy of the Federal Register Notice (FRN)?*

The FRN is available on <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/related-omb-material> and on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

2. *How do I submit a comment?*

Written comments on these issues may be addressed to **US Chief Statistician, Office of Management and Budget, 1800 G St., 9th Floor, Washington, DC 20503**. You may also send comments or questions via email to **Jennifer Park, Senior Advisor to the US Chief Statistician** at Race-Ethnicity@omb.eop.gov or to <http://www.regulations.gov> – a Federal E-Government Web site that allows the public to find, review, and submit comments on documents that agencies have published in the Federal Register and that are open for comment. Simply type, “Race-Ethnicity” (in quotes) in the Comment or Submission search box, click Go, and follow the instructions for submitting comments.

3. *Is there a recommended format for comments?*

We recommend that comments be concise. Where issues are identified, we particularly value proposed solutions. You may attach items to a comment by uploading the item on the comments page.

It may be helpful to review the purpose and use of the Federal standards when preparing your response. These appear at the end of the FRN. Remember, the standards apply to all Federal information collections that ask about race and ethnicity.

Please see https://www.regulations.gov/docs/Tips_For_Submitting_Effective_Comments.pdf for a tip sheet on submitting effective public comments.

4. *What is the due date for comments to the [INSERT PUBLICATION DATE HERE] notice?*

Comments are due by **[INSERT 60 DAYS AFTER NOTICE PUBLISHED HERE]**.

5. *Will my comments, identity, and email address be disclosed on the public docket?*

All comments are made public in their entirety. If you wish to provide comments without disclosing your personal information, please do not include your name, email address, or other identifying information in your comment.

6. *Will I receive confirmation that my comment has been received?*

All comments received will be posted to regulations.gov on a flow basis.

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7. *How do I find my comment on regulations.gov?*

You can find your comment on regulations.gov by clicking on the “View All” link in the Comments section, and using the search box on the top of the page to search by name, keyword, etc. If you wish to edit your comment after submitting, please resubmit your comment with the changes noted.

8. *Whom should I contact if I have additional questions, and how should I contact that individual or agency?*

For additional questions, please contact **Jennifer Park, Senior Advisor to the US Chief Statistician** via email at Race-Ethnicity@omb.eop.gov.

9. *Is this my final opportunity to comment on the notice of potential revisions?*

Yes, will likely be the final opportunity for the public to officially comment on the current review of the standards. A third FRN is anticipated to be published later this year to notify the public of OMB’s decision.

10. *What happens when OMB has concluded its review?*

OMB will review all public comments, input and final recommendations from the Federal Interagency Working Group for Research on Race and Ethnicity. OMB will then determine if the proposed revisions to the standards are warranted. OMB may concur with the recommendations of the Federal Interagency Working Group, disagree and choose another alternative, decide that not enough information is available to warrant a decision to revise at this time, or some combination of all of these. According to established practice, OMB plans to notify the public of its final decision, along with its rationale. After this final notice has been issued, OMB plans to reconvene the Federal Interagency Expert Group to recommend implementation guidance for revisions made to the See <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf> for a full description of the current standard.

Content Frequently Asked Questions

11. *What is the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)?*

OMB assists the President in overseeing the preparation of the Federal budget and in supervising its administration in Federal agencies. The OMB also is charged by statute with several management/oversight responsibilities. One of these is coordinating the U.S. Federal statistical system. This includes the promotion of the quality of Federal statistical information, which facilitates evidence-based policies and programs. To learn more about the OMB and its oversight of statistical programs and standards, see *[insert when available]*.

12. *What are the OMB Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity?*

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The OMB Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity (referred to in the FRN as “the standard” and also known as the “OMB standards” or “Federal standards”) are used by Federal agencies that collect and report race and ethnicity data. The standard guides information collected and presented for the decennial census, household surveys, administrative forms, and numerous other statistical collections, as well as for civil rights enforcement and program administrative reporting. See <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf> for a full description of the current standard.

13. What is the purpose of the OMB standards?

The purpose of the OMB standards is to promote uniformity and comparability for data on race and ethnicity for the population groups specified in the standards. The standards were developed in cooperation with Federal agencies to provide consistent data on race and ethnicity throughout the Federal Government. Development of the standards originally stemmed in large measure from the responsibilities to enforce civil rights laws. Data were needed to monitor equal access in housing, education, employment, and other areas, for populations that historically had experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity. The standards are used not only in the decennial census (which provides the data for the "denominator" for many measures), but also in household surveys, on administrative forms (e.g., school registration and mortgage lending applications), and in medical and other research. The categories are not genetically, anthropologically, or scientifically based. Instead, the categories represent a social-political construct designed for collecting data on the race and ethnicity of broad population groups in this country.

The OMB first issued the standard in 1977, and later revised the standard in 1997. The 1997 revised standard are still in effect today. See <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf> for a full description of the current standard.

14. What are the primary proposed revisions being considered in this potential review?

The FRN seeks public comment on four areas in the standard for potential revision:

1. Questionnaire format and nonresponse;
2. Classification of Middle Eastern or North African race/ethnicity;
3. Additional minimum reporting categories; and
4. Relevance of terminology.

15. What are the “minimum” reporting categories?

The standard provides five categories for data on race: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. It also presents two categories for data on ethnicity: “Hispanic or Latino,” and “Not Hispanic or Latino.” Federal agencies are required to use these race and ethnicity categories as the minimum categories for collecting and presenting data on race and ethnicity for all Federal reporting purposes. See *[insert link when available]* for definitions of each race and ethnicity category.

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The goal of the standard is to yield detailed but comparable Federal information on race/ethnicity. The standard encourages Federal agencies to report detailed race/ethnicity categories. However, it is also important that information collected in one survey, set of administrative records, or census be comparable to another. To facilitate these comparisons, the standard says that if an agency collects race/ethnicity information, *at a minimum* it must at least collect and present such information using five categories for data on race (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White) and at least two categories for data on ethnicity (“Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino”). If a more detailed information collection on race/ethnicity (ex. Decennial Census) is compared to a less detailed information collection on race/ethnicity (ex. a small survey on national park use) featuring the minimum reporting categories only, then the minimum reporting categories would be used to provide a common benchmark to compare estimates between the two surveys.

16. How will Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders be affected by the proposed revisions?

Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, like all members of the general public, already participate in various Federal data collection and reporting surveys and forms. Individuals with an opinion about any or all of the four proposed areas for revision described in the FRN—such as the description of the intended use of the minimum categories in the current standard—are encouraged to submit comments.

17. What specific findings, reports, and data will OMB consider in evaluating the proposed revisions?

OMB welcomes evidence-based recommendations and findings. You may attach any findings, reports, and data that support your comment by uploading the item on the comments page. Comments that take into account specific policy issues—such as the costs and benefits of implementing suggested changes, or how a proposed revision can help improve response rates—are particularly helpful.

18. Can I review the work done by the Federal Interagency Working Group for Research on Race and Ethnicity regarding the proposed revisions?

This FRN includes a summary of the Interagency Working Group’s findings to date regarding the proposed revisions.

19. How will my comment impact OMB’s decision on the proposed revisions?

OMB will review and consider all comments submitted in response to this FRN. Comments that take into account specific policy issues—such as the costs and benefits of implementing suggested changes, or how a proposed revision can help improve response rates—are particularly helpful.

20. What is considered a “consensus” on a general definition?

In this context, “consensus” would describe the large majority of comments received favoring a particular approach. It is not intended to be a precise term, but an indication of general agreement or lack thereof. It is one measure of overall public sentiment.

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TALKING POINTS

“Big Picture” Talking Points

1. Statistical standards help us understand information from many different sources. Just like other standard measures, statistical standards help us describe data from different sources. Without them, statistics (or other forms of data) from one source would be difficult to compare to statistics from another source. Rather than limiting data, statistical standards allow us to make use of all available data. In this way, Federal standards help us describe our entire Nation making use of data collected by all Federal agencies.

An example might be measuring cups. Recipes written using the US standard for 8 ounces to a cup of sugar help us understand how much sugar is in our meal overall—how much is in the tomato sauce and how much is in the cupcake for dessert.

2. Federal standards on race/ethnicity help us compare race/ethnicity information collected in hundreds of data sources. Federal standards on race/ethnicity allow Federal agencies to collect and report information describing the Nation in a consistent way. This means, for example, that race/ethnicity information collected by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) can be compared more easily to race/ethnicity information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. In this example, race/ethnicity data about home ownership (HUD) and race/ethnicity data about family size (Census) can be more easily compared.

February 2017’s Federal Register Notice Talking Points

3. The [INSERT DATE] Federal Register Notice provides an interim report of the Interagency Working Group for Research on Race and Ethnicity. Progress, initial proposals, and further questions to the public are provided. The Interim Report was not prepared by OMB, and OMB will not make a decision regarding any revision to the standards until the Working Group has completed its Final Report and OMB has reviewed it carefully.

Question Format and Nonresponse Talking Points

4. *Would a combined question for race/ethnicity reduce nonresponse to race questions that is observed when the current standard of two separate questions are used?*

Few public comments were received on this issue. Those received favored a question that combined race/ethnicity, rather than the current standard of offering one question to measure ethnicity and then one question to measure race.

In certain cases, a combined question may reduce nonresponse to race questions observed with the two separate question approach, but this solution may not fit the majority of information collections. We are still analyzing if allowing both question forms would result in comparable data.

For example, in Census Bureau collections, a high rate of selecting “Some Other Race” as a race category is observed for persons who respond to ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. This is expensive to

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address statistically, and may indicate that persons who identify as Hispanic do not see other race categories as salient to them; in other words, this may suggest that respondents see their "race and ethnicity" as "Hispanic or Latino." A combined question reduced the rate of respondents selecting a "Some Other Race" category when tested.

However, only the Census Bureau offers a "Some Other Race" (SOR) category, which is required by law. SOR is not a part of the Federal standard, and other Federal agencies may not use it. Several other Federal agencies do not observe persons who identify as Hispanic as not also identifying a specific race category. A combined question was not yet tested against a separate question format when "Some Other Race" is not offered (the typical scenario for the majority of Federal agencies).

A further complication is the increasing use of administrative records to produce Federal statistics, particularly those from nonfederal sources, such as States. These collections are not required to conform to the Federal standard, and several offer response categories that cannot be mapped to the current standard (e.g., "other").

Further, the feasibility and cost of this change must be considered.

The Subgroup will test a combined question with "Some Other Race" versus separate questions when a "Some Other Race" category is not offered. Nonresponse to the race question will be examined.

The subgroup will also examine other possible solutions to the observed rate of "Some Other Race" among Hispanics.

The public is asked for their opinion on how to balance improved information quality against public cost and burden. How much improvement is worth the cost and burden?

Middle Eastern or North African Talking Points

5. *Can a classification for persons identifying as Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) be standardized? Should MENA be added as a new, additional minimum reporting category (and thus required)?*

About 1/3 of all public comments received (~1,000), the vast majority favoring the classification of MENA.

The Census Bureau has conducted several focus groups and information collections to test a working definition of MENA, with good success. Further, the Census Bureau working definition of MENA resonated with the public in field tests. Persons within the working definition consistently selected MENA as it was offered to them via information collection testing. Some refinement of the detailed groups comprising the overall classification may be made based on test results.

The Subgroup recommends that MENA be offered as a response category with the adjusted working classification. The Subgroup will further test the examples given with the MENA response category to ensure all relevant groups are reflected.

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Additionally, the vast majority of MENA comments received in response to the first FRN favored a new additional minimum reporting category for MENA. However, the estimated percentage of MENA in the overall US population is very low, potentially challenging the ability for Federal agencies who use sample surveys to produce reliable statistics and protect respondent confidentiality. (This same reporting issue is observed currently for Native Hawaiian Other Pacific Islander group, and, to some extent, the American Indian or Alaska Native group.)

The Subgroup will also try to describe the overall public cost and burden of requiring a new additional minimum reporting category for MENA.

6. *Should MENA be considered an ethnicity or a race? How should cost and public burden be considered against the resulting information quality if MENA were made an additional reporting category? And, if most Federal agencies could not REPORT statistics for MENA based on small sample sizes and associated reliability and confidentiality concerns, should these agencies COLLECT MENA data?*

We are posing this question to the public as part of the Interim Report's Federal Register Notice.

Detailed Groups and Reporting Categories Talking Points

7. *How can the Federal government encourage the use of detailed collection and reporting of race/ethnicity data?*

More than ½ of all public comments (~2,000) advocated for detail categories—almost all of these for the detailed categories of Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

The current standard encourages Federal agencies to provide detailed reporting categories—but does not require them to do so. Some agencies, such as Census and NCHS, have been collecting more detailed categories for some time. Most other agencies have not done so—in some cases, due to small sample sizes and the associated reliability and confidentiality concerns.

The Subgroup described several detailed groups currently used by some agencies.

The Subgroup proposes that detailed groups be standardized and encouraged for use. The Subgroup is evaluating whether requiring the use of detailed groups is necessary to improve reporting rates where possible. The estimated percentage of these detail groups in the overall US population is very low, potentially challenging the ability for Federal agencies who use sample surveys to produce reliable statistics and protect respondent confidentiality.

8. *Are the detailed groups described by the Subgroup appropriate? If they should be changed, what standard should be used? Should detail groups be required? Should an agency who cannot REPORT data for a detailed group due to reliability and confidentiality concerns stemming from sample size be required to COLLECT data for that detailed group?*

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Terminology Talking Points

9. *Are the terms used in the current standard to describe race/ethnicity still relevant since the last revision to the standard?*

Few public comments were received in this area, but those that were received favored a review of terminology.

As an example of where terminology could be clarified, the current standard is unclear about how some detailed categories would map to minimum reporting categories. (For example, Brazilian is not mapped to any specific race or ethnicity.) Some terms are now out of favor (for example, "Negro" and "Far East"). Further, the concept of "principal minority race" may no longer be relevant or may have a different meaning in current times.

From their review of Census records, the Subgroup determined that some mapping could not be done based on response patterns due to small overall population sizes.

The Subgroup recommends removal of "Negro" and "Far East" terms from the current standard. It recommends that agencies make their coding (or mapping) lists public so that data comparability can be examined.

10. *Should "principal minority race" remain in the standard, but be clarified to include ethnicity as well? How should this be decided?*

We are posing this question to the public as part of the Interim Report's Federal Register Notice.