

MARCH 28, 2024

OMB Publishes Revisions to Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity

*By Dr. Karin Orvis, Chief Statistician of
the United States*

Earlier today, OMB published a set of
revisions to *Statistical Policy Directive*

*No. 15 (Directive No. 15): Standards for
Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting
Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*, the
first since 1997. This [process started in](#)
June 2022, with the first convening of

the Interagency Technical Working Group of Federal Government career staff who represent programs that collect or use race and ethnicity data. Since that first convening, we've reviewed 20,000 comments and held almost 100 listening sessions to finalize the important standards we are announcing today.

Thanks to the hard work of staff across dozens of federal agencies and input from thousands of members of the public, these updated standards will help create more useful, accurate, and up to date federal data on race and ethnicity. These revisions will enhance our ability to compare information and data across federal agencies, and also to understand how well federal programs serve a diverse America.

You can read the updated Directive No. 15 on the Federal Register as well as at www.spd15revision.gov.

The Process

In June 2022, OMB convened the Interagency Technical Working Group on Race and Ethnicity Standards (Working Group) to develop recommendations for improving the quality and usefulness of federal race and ethnicity data.

The Working Group, consisting of federal government career staff

representing 35 agencies, relied heavily on research conducted over the last decade, including new research and testing of potential alternatives by several federal agencies. The Working Group also relied on robust public input, including:

- over **20,000 comments** provided in response to a [January 2023 Federal Register Notice](#) proposing revisions to the Directive,
- **94 listening sessions** hosted by the Working Group,
- **3 public virtual townhalls**, and a Tribal consultation.

Informed by these perspectives, the Working Group delivered a thoughtful and data-driven [report](#) to OMB with recommendations for updating and improving Directive No. 15.

The Revisions

The Working Group's final recommendations included several critical revisions that have been thoroughly researched and tested over the last decade. The updated standards released by OMB today closely follow the Working Group's evidence-based recommendations and make key revisions to questions used to collect information on race and ethnicity, including:

- Using one combined question for race and ethnicity, and encouraging respondents to select as many options as apply to how they identify.
- Adding Middle Eastern or North African as a new minimum category. The new set of minimum race and/or ethnicity categories are:
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Middle Eastern or North African
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - White
- Requiring the collection of additional detail beyond the minimum required race and ethnicity categories for most situations, to ensure further disaggregation in the collection, tabulation, and presentation of data when useful and appropriate.

The updated standards also include several additional updates to definitions, terminology, and guidance to agencies on the collection and presentation of data.

Now What Happens?

- -

One of the primary goals of Directive No. 15 is to ensure consistent and comparable race and ethnicity data across the federal government. To help meet that goal, the standards instruct federal agencies to begin updating their surveys and administrative forms as quickly as possible, submit an Agency Action Plan for complete compliance within 18 months – which will be publicly available, and finish bringing

all data collections and programs into compliance with the updated standards within five years of today's date.

However, many programs will be able to adopt the updated standards much sooner than that. Starting today, the Office of the U.S. Chief Statistician will direct its efforts to help agencies collect and release data under these updated standards as quickly as possible.

In addition, this review process showed that racial and ethnic identities, concepts, and data needs continue to evolve. To improve the ability of Directive No. 15 to adapt and better meet those needs, OMB is establishing an Interagency Committee on Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards, convened by the Office of the U.S. Chief Statistician, that will maintain and carry out a government-wide research agenda and undertake regular reviews of Directive No. 15. Some areas of interest identified in the technical

interest identified in the technical expert research, as well as by stakeholders and engaged members of the public, lacked sufficient data to determine the effects of potential changes. Those areas of interest have now been identified as a top priority for additional research and data

development in advance of future reviews. The updated standards identify several key research topics for the Interagency Committee to focus on initially. For more information on these research topics and the planned schedule for future reviews, see the updated Directive No. 15.

This monumental effort was informed by the perspectives of staff across federal agencies and the members of the public who took the time to submit written comments, provide views at one of the virtual town halls, meet with the Working Group, and participate in our Tribal consultation. We are committed to maintaining a collaborative approach as we work to implement these new revisions.

[Click for Arabic translation.](#)

[Click for Spanish translation.](#)