Recommendation: Including a Gender X Options on Forms

Background

Whether someone identifies as male, female, bigender, agender, gender fluid, genderqueer, non binary, etc., gender is something we all have. From bathrooms to birth certificates, gender impacts us on a daily basis. For example, many trans and non-binary people experience anxiety around basic needs like using a restroom without fear.

Also, formalized gender markers can cause complications when using important documents such as passports or birth certificates if they don't match. In 2018 the Department of Health adopted gender X as an option on birth certificates. In 2019, the Department of Licensing followed suit and added gender X to ID cards. Numerous agencies have updated forms to be more inclusive of gender options and the new employee demographic data form has a third gender option as well.

What Now?

For individuals who do not exclusively identify as male or female, their identity falls under the umbrella term: non-binary. The Department of Health, the Department of Licensing and the Office of Financial Management – State Human Resources have adopted X as the letter for non-binary, similarly to how M and F are used for male and female.

Consistency across documents is important for our systems to function properly, to collect quality data, and for individuals to have consistent ways to fill out forms and have consistent identification across documents. As a result, RAIN's Best Practices Committee has three recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Determine if asking gender is required or serves a business need. For example, it is required for federal reporting purposes. Be transparent about the use and need for data collection. If there is not a need to collect gender information, we recommend removing the question.
2. For consistency, when asking for individuals' gender, we recommend using the following as options:
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. X/non-binary
    d. Prefer not to answer

    Additionally, if there is a default answer in the system that tracks the information, disclose the default.
3. If a description is used for the X/non-binary option, we recommend the following definition:

    Non-binary (X) is an umbrella term used to describe those who do not identify as exclusively male or female. This includes but is not limited to people who identify as genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, or bigender.

Looking to the Future

Humans are complex, and so is gender. The future may hold better language options that are even more inclusive. Our recommendations are not meant to be the final answer but to provide an opportunity to be more inclusive within systems and with the language that currently exists.