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Authors

Sprague, Laurel

Schein, Ayden I.

Sears, Brad

et al.

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RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

GUIDE FOR STATE & LOCAL SURVEY RESEARCH

with LGBTQ Communities

March 2026

Laurel D. Sprague
Ayden I. Scheim
Brad Sears
Elana Redfield
Keyanna P. Taylor
Neko Michelle Castleberry
Jody L. Herman

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1. Introduction

Gaps in reliable, local data remain a barrier to improving the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. Although national studies have expanded understanding of LGBTQ experiences, gaps at the state and local levels continue to limit progress toward equitable social and health outcomes. The exclusion of questions about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) from federal surveys, starting in 2025, highlights the importance of state and local research for making visible the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people. This guide offers practical information that is essential for governments, researchers, and organizations, including community-based and community-led organizations, that want to conduct law- and policy-relevant research that is credible and useful for improving LGBTQ health and well-being.

Built on more than 20 years of research experience from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, the guide shares what works when creating surveys for LGBTQ communities. It covers how to design questions that reflect people's experiences, how to make sure the data collected is not already available elsewhere, and how to gather data that speak to contemporary law and policy questions. The approach also helps funders feel confident that their support will lead to data that can drive real change at the local level.

Ultimately, the goal of this guide is to promote methodologically sound, community-centered survey data collection that informs policy and improves LGBTQ health and social equity. By encouraging the use of tested and inclusive measures for sexual orientation, gender identity, health, and socioeconomic indicators, the guide supports the creation of comparable and actionable data across communities and over time. This approach not only enables comparisons between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ populations but also highlights the diverse needs within LGBTQ communities—including those of women, men, transgender and nonbinary individuals, youth, elders, immigrants, and people of color—so policies and programs can be better tailored to advance equity and well-being at every level.

How this Guide is Structured

Each chapter of this guide is organized to provide principles, approaches, and examples of research with LGBTQ people. The examples come from studies conducted by the Williams Institute, focusing primarily on research in the State of California and Los Angeles County. A glossary of the studies included in this guide can be found in Appendix A.

The chapters are ordered to support researchers in the full process of law- and policy-relevant survey research with LGBTQ communities. They address community engagement, considerations for responsiveness to current issues, question identification and questionnaire development, survey design, implementation, analysis, and research dissemination.

Research based on the principles in this guide can focus on one, some, or all the groups that make up the LGBTQ community. As such, the approaches and examples reflect studies that examine outcomes and experiences based on different combinations of sexual orientation, gender identity, and cross-cutting variables such as age, race, disability status, immigrant experience, and more.

While the principles and approaches in this guide have been written to be relevant for researchers conducting LGBTQ survey research across the U.S., the examples and many of the resources provided primarily come from our experience conducting and supporting research in Los Angeles County and in the State of California, where we are based. For researchers in California, we intend these resources to provide a rich starting point. For researchers in other states and localities, we hope that the examples here will provide some direction for where to look for similar resources where your research study will be implemented.

The guide is written for people with some research experience. It is not intended to be a full research training on all aspects of survey research. When using this guide, it is important that research teams include members with training in research methods who can collaboratively help design and carry out the study. At the same time, we hope that community members newly involved in research will also find this guide a useful introduction. There is a resource list at the end of the guide for those who wish to learn more about conducting survey research.

Notes on Terminology

Sexual orientation and gender identity

While LGBTQ people—or sexual and gender minorities—are often discussed as one community, albeit with multiple subgroups making up the whole, sexual orientation and gender identity are two separate concepts.

Sexual orientation refers to who one is attracted to. Sexual orientation research examines and compares the experiences, priorities, and outcomes of lesbians, gay men, and bisexual (LGB) people, other sexual minorities (e.g., those who identify as queer or asexual), as well as heterosexual, or straight, people.

Gender identity refers to the gender someone knows themselves to be. Gender identity research examines and compares the experiences, priorities, and outcomes of transgender, nonbinary, and cisgender people. Transgender, nonbinary, and cisgender people may have any sexual orientation.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research studies

Research studies can be divided into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (a combination of quantitative and qualitative) approaches.

Qualitative research is word- and concept-based. It is designed to identify themes, connections, and meanings that people give to their experiences. Qualitative studies collect data using interviews, focus groups, field observations, written materials, pictures, and other similar types of engagement or media. Many qualitative analyses use more than one researcher to closely read the data, compare interpretations, and go through multiple rounds of thematic coding. This can strengthen the analysis by showing internal consistency among researchers. However, other qualitative studies may be carried out by a single, trained researcher.

Quantitative research is number-based. In survey research, quantitative research is designed to turn respondents' answers into numbers that can be counted and analyzed. For example, counting the number of responses to a question about sexual orientation allows researchers to report how many people from each sexual orientation category took the survey and to analyze whether the answers

to some questions differed by sexual orientation. Quantitative survey research generally relies on checkboxes with single- or multiple-choice answers, scales (e.g., from 1 to 10 or never to always), and ranked-choice questions.

When employing a quantitative design, sometimes it is still useful to collect certain data by asking participants to respond qualitatively (e.g., asking an open-ended question and providing space for respondents to share their responses). This may help researchers gain more insight into an experience or topic for which identifying response options ahead of time is challenging or not possible. However, this requires specialized expertise in qualitative research methods to develop, implement, analyze, and interpret the data properly.

This guide focuses on quantitative survey research methods, recognizing that most survey research is quantitative in nature.

2. The Continuum of Community-Engaged Research

Figure 1. The continuum of community-engaged research



Community engagement in research is best conceived as falling along a continuum:¹

- No community involvement
- Community informed: community informs the research, with or without their knowledge or involvement
- Community consultation: community members are explicitly asked to give input on the research
- Community participation: community members play an active role
- Community initiated: community identifies the research goals or questions
- Community-based participatory research: decision-making and ownership of the research are shared by community members and researchers
- Community-led: community leads and owns, with researchers playing a supporting role or no role at all

The developers of this continuum did not intend to suggest that projects further along the continuum are inherently preferable; we discuss criteria for identifying the level of engagement that is ideal for a particular research project at the end of this chapter. The continuum can also help research teams identify opportunities to increase community engagement if desired. This guide focuses on research that falls somewhere between “community consultation” and “community-based participatory research” (CBPR).

CBPR is often positioned as a “gold standard” for community engagement and has been widely used with LGBTQ communities, particularly for public health research.² The Resource List provided in Chapter 11 of this guide includes suggested readings and trainings on the history, philosophy, and methods of CPBR. The right community engagement approach for a specific study will depend on the nature of the research question and population of interest, the time and resources available, and the priorities of community partners.

¹ Key, K. D., Furr-Holden, D., Lewis, E. Y., Cunningham, R., Zimmerman, M. A., Johnson-Lawrence, V., & Selig, S. (2019). The continuum of community engagement in research: a roadmap for understanding and assessing progress. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action*, 13(4), 427-434. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2019.0064>

² Ricks, J. M., Arthur, E. K., Stryker, S. D., Yockey, R. A., Anderson, A. M., & Allensworth-Davies, D. (2022). A systematic literature review of community-based participatory health research with sexual and gender minority communities. *Health Equity*, 6(1), heq-2022. <https://doi.org/10.1089/heq.2022.0039>

Some key considerations for determining where on the continuum of community-engaged research include the following:

Who will identify the research questions?

In research on the right-hand side of the community engagement continuum (Figure 1), community members are actively involved in shaping research priorities and questions. These approaches are important when the overarching goal is to address the self-identified needs of an underserved community. For example, transgender and nonbinary community members living in Los Angeles County participated in identifying topics for inclusion in the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey conducted by The TransLatin@ Coalition and the Williams Institute, in partnership with the Royal Collection Corporation and the Connie Norman Transgender Empowerment Center. In other situations, current events or crises may highlight a gap in knowledge or prompt new research questions that respond to the experiences of affected communities. For example, in 2025, the Williams Institute partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) to conduct a study examining the impact of the 2025 Eaton Fire on LGBTQ+ people.

How is the community defined?

In general, projects focused on more narrowly defined populations lend themselves better to more heavily community-engaged approaches. For example, meaningful community engagement in a study of transgender and nonbinary Spanish-speaking people in Los Angeles is more feasible than in a study of all transgender and nonbinary people across California. That said, examples exist of large-scale CBPR projects. However, such initiatives generally require lengthy partnership and infrastructure development.

Another consideration is whether ‘natural’ community partners exist – are there organizations that can legitimately claim to represent members of the community of interest? As trust is an essential component of community-engaged research, it is important to partner with organizations that are known, trusted, and respected by community members.

How much time and funding are available?

Meaningful and effective community engagement takes time—studies falling further to the right of the continuum above will generally require more time at each stage of the research process. This includes both the additional time required for the research activities themselves (e.g., holding community meetings, hiring and training community members for staff roles) and the additional time needed to accommodate the competing demands and schedules of community partners (e.g., meetings may need to be held in evenings or on weekends only). For researchers working within university or government bureaucracies, getting approval for a system to distribute funds (e.g., incentives, honoraria, and travel costs) to community research partners and participants can be a lengthy process and often requires significant advance planning and potentially contingency plans.

Similarly, studies falling further to the right of the continuum will generally require greater resources, including funding for additional staffing, honoraria or stipends for community members, space and refreshments for meetings, translation and accessibility measures, and the development of community-facing dissemination materials. Hiring community members to perform research roles should not be seen as a cost-saving measure; community-based staff should be equitably compensated and may benefit

from additional on-the-job training and professional development opportunities, as well as supportive mentorship from senior researchers. Likewise, academic and government researchers can benefit from the training that community members can provide, including in reaching marginalized populations, understanding community concerns, interpreting research findings, and grounding research in the urgencies and realities of communities' lived experiences.

To what extent are researchers prepared for shared decision-making?

Community-based participatory research and community-led research require that academic and other professional researchers share power and control over decision-making with community members. This principle is often in tension with the norms and rules of universities, research funders, and other institutions. Researchers and community members seeking to embark on participatory research partnerships should be aware of these challenges and prepare strategies to address them.

3. How to Conduct Research that is Effective in the Law and Policy World

Survey research with LGBTQ communities is often conducted to inform laws and policies. To ensure your research is well-positioned to influence these decisions, key considerations include the following:

What problems would you like to address through your research?

Research doesn't have to be conducted to bring about a specific change. Much research is conducted simply to explore or better understand a problem, community, or circumstance. However, research can provide very useful information when a particular problem needs to be solved.

The starting point for ethical, accurate empirical research to inform law and policy is an identified problem combined with curiosity to understand more; this drives hypotheses about potential causes or solutions. Beware of a tendency to shape research around a pre-identified solution. Not only can this result in unethical and unreliable results, but it also constrains the possible outcomes and limits your ability to identify and explore critical information and potential solutions.

You may identify a problem through community engagement, through a literature review (described in Chapter 4 below), through stakeholder relationships, or based on prior research. A researcher may then hypothesize that policy decisions made by government or private decision-makers are contributing to the problem, or that policy changes could create an opportunity to address the problem.

For example, if a community organization determines that some of its members are harder to communicate with than others, it might conduct research to identify some possible reasons why. In this example, the organization might learn through a survey that some community members lack phones and don't have a way to receive information, others are too busy with work and don't have time to come to events, and yet others have unstable housing that makes it difficult to communicate for a variety of reasons.

Research can also help quantify this problem, so that the organization understands the types of communication barriers as well as the prevalence or severity of those problems. For example, assuming that 100 community members indicated there were issues receiving information from the organization and were asked a follow-up question as to why, consider the following results:

Table 1. Barriers to communication among community members

MAIN BARRIER TO COMMUNICATION	RESPONSES (N=100)
No phone or computer access	25
Schedule too busy	17
Unstable housing	45
I just hate communicating	3
No response	10

This information helps the community organization understand the specific problems causing communication issues. The community organization might then decide that it wants to address the issue of unstable housing by engaging in public policy efforts, because this issue affected the most respondents in the survey group and had the potential to address their underlying concern about communication.

After the Eaton fire in January 2025, researchers, community members, and service providers raised concerns about how the presidential executive orders announced at the end of that month would affect federal emergency response for LGBTQ people. The executive orders in question³ had redefined the meaning of “sex” for federal programs to exclude transgender and intersex people and ended efforts to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility by government contractors.

The study, *The Impact of the Eaton Fires on LGBTQ+ Communities*, was designed to better understand the impacts of these new federal policies, using both quantitative (survey results) and qualitative data (listening sessions). It examined whether LGBTQ+ experiences differed from those of non-LGBTQ+ people, what challenges they faced in accessing recovery systems, and how community spaces and providers were affected. The main goal was to document clear, community-informed evidence that could guide improvements to disaster preparedness and recovery systems and support more inclusive and equitable recovery efforts moving forward.

What is the law or policy environment?

Public policy is whatever government officials do (or do not do) about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action. Government officials make public policy through a wide range of methods: legislation and other legislative action; formal rulemaking by agencies, guidance, and other interpretive documents; any other official actions that require public input or hearings; and informal practices. Allocations of funding, whether legislative or discretionary, can affect public policy. Additionally, to some extent, individual actions or decisions by representatives of the government, such as the actions of law enforcement officers, can affect the public on a large enough scale to be considered public policy.

In response to existing or proposed public policies, community organizing may be taking place or being planned. Opportunities for constituent input may be scheduled. Court cases and litigation also affect public policy—sometimes on a small scale, and sometimes at the national level, and everywhere in between. These actions present an opportunity to impact public policy.

The law and policy environment, then, is the context in which a particular issue might be addressed: the existing laws and policies relating to the subject, public debate and debate about the subject on a local or national level, litigation, community organizing, or other areas of change or movement, and opportunities

³ The United States Government. (2025, January 21). *Defending women from gender ideology extremism and restoring biological truth to the Federal Government*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government/>; The United States Government. (2025, January 20). *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>

that may develop at the local, state or national level to address the issue. To help identify the policy environment, researchers might take the following actions:

- Conduct internet searches to get a broad sense of current laws and policies.
- Review news sources, including traditional media and blogs or other specialized media, to understand past and current developments related to the issue they are studying.
- Connect with community organizations working closely on the issue.
- Reach out to elected officials, community boards, or other civic engagement organizations to learn about their positions or find out about policies that are in place.
- Conduct informational interviews with a wide range of stakeholders.

To continue the example from our hypothetical community organization, the organization may identify a few areas of public policy that relate to their members' unstable housing. For example, the city may have adopted a recent ordinance that provides different avenues for people to connect with stable housing. City agencies may also have specific guidelines and recommendations for working with communities like the one represented by the organization. Additionally, the organization may learn that there is a lawsuit challenging some of these exact same policies, which could directly affect their organization's members.

At the time of the Eaton fire study, disaster recovery systems were operating under existing local and state policies; however, the federal policy environment was undergoing changes while the recovery was being rolled out. This created an uncertain environment, especially for transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people, specifically, and for all marginalized and minority communities affected by the fires. Clarity was lacking about how the new executive orders would be implemented on the ground by federal agencies, particularly the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Yet the disaster response had to continue despite the uncertainties. Agencies had to continue implementing established rules related to emergency shelter access, housing assistance, funding eligibility, renter protections, and civil rights protections. Community members, similarly, had to navigate these systems as they existed, and figure out how to engage as the systems evolved surrounding the disaster.

As a result, the study examined how the uncertainties and changes related to federal programs affected LGBTQ+ residents. It also explored how existing agency procedures, eligibility requirements, communication practices, and service delivery met the needs of LGBTQ+ residents during recovery. The resulting recommendations were intended to inform future policies at all levels to strengthen disaster response systems.

Who are the key decision-makers?

Once the policy environment is evaluated, the next consideration might be who, if anyone, has the power to change that environment. There are at least two groups to consider—those who can change policy directly (i.e., the decision-makers) and those who can influence policy changes indirectly (i.e., those whom the decision-makers listen to, sometimes called stakeholders).

The key decision-makers are those with the direct power to affect the issue being studied:

- Judges (court decisions)
- Legislators (laws)—both state and federal
- Executives: presidents, governors, mayors (executive orders, policies)
- Agencies (rules, policies, guidelines)
- Local elected officers, like school board members (ordinances, policies, regulations)
- Advisory boards and task forces (recommendations, planning)
- Prosecutors (policies, charges brought in individual cases)
- Public defenders (policies, defenses, and arguments in individual cases)

Decision-makers can also be private or nonprofit entities that directly interact with government officials, are funded by the government, or that enforce or comply with laws or policies in ways that affect the community at large.

- Businesses
 - Employers
 - Retailers of goods and services
 - Restaurants
 - Entertainment
- Service providers
 - Schools
 - Housing and shelter providers
 - Municipalities, such as sanitation or public transit
- Health providers
 - LGBTQ focused organizations
 - Organizations serving people living with HIV or those with other specific health conditions
 - Federally Qualified Health Centers
 - Mental health providers
- Professional organizations
 - Chambers of commerce
 - Bar associations

It is also important to consider who decision-makers listen to or consult with when making policy decisions. In other words, who do the decision-makers see themselves as accountable to? What kind of influence (money, public messaging, votes, expertise, opportunities) do those individuals and groups have over the decision-makers? Is there information that this secondary group might find relevant and persuasive on a particular policy issue?

This secondary group of **potentially influential stakeholders** can include the following:

- The public (hearings, protests, direct contact)
- Voters (elections)
- Donors (money)
- Interest groups (lobbying)
- Advisory boards and task forces (expertise)
- Subject matter experts (expertise)
- Nonprofit organizations and leaders (expertise)

“Power mapping”⁴ is a tool that can be used to identify who the decision-makers are, and who they listen to. This can help researchers identify policy opportunities by narrowing down who has power to make a specific change, who has influence over the outcome, and what kind of information they would need to motivate them to advance a new policy.

It can be advantageous to develop long-term relationships with decision-makers. For example, participating in meetings, hearings, and other events held by elected officials, both informally and formally, can create relationships that lead to policy change down the road. Sometimes, these relationships can be contentious or begin with community organizations bringing an issue to light through protest or other direct action. Other times, the decision-makers may seek out expertise or come to the table with some familiarity with a policy issue and want to solve it with additional guidance. The quality of data researchers produce, as well as the general rapport they have with the community, can help establish their credibility as trusted sources.

Knowing which issues decision-makers and advocates are interested in can also help narrow down opportunities for policy-relevant research. For example, a legislator may be interested in passing a non-discrimination law or directing discretionary resources to community organizations in their district. A judge may be interested in understanding the number of people affected by a decision issued in their court, while a lawyer may be interested in presenting evidence of how a particular law helps or harms a specific community. Similarly, a government agency may want to know how their practices are excluding some community members or ways they could improve service delivery to better meet community needs. These scenarios all describe policy opportunities that emerge through knowing which issues decision-makers and those in a position to reach them are interested in and understanding what opportunities may be available with each of them.

A final consideration on this point: there are restrictions on the ways that various stakeholders can interact directly with local, state, and federal governments. A primary example of such a restriction is that nonprofit organizations are generally prohibited from “lobbying” for specific policies under federal and state laws or must register as lobbyists and comply with lobbyist obligations. Many activities, including any direct communication with state or federal lawmakers intended to support or oppose a legislative action, might be considered lobbying. Lobbying restrictions vary, so it is important to take steps to

⁴ Power Mapping Your Way to Success. (2018). Union of Concerned Scientists. https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/attach/2018/07/SN_Toolkit_Power_Mapping_Your_Way_to_Success.pdf

understand whether the policy-responsive work a researcher is doing could be considered lobbying. In general, nonprofit organizations can engage in a small amount of what is considered “lobbying” without violating the rules; however, at a certain point, they could risk consequences. For this reason, some organizations partner with groups that register as lobbyists (and are not nonprofits) if working on issues responsive to policy. It is recommended to consult local lobbying restrictions before engaging in any kind of policy-responsive work.

Will the research be relevant and persuasive to decision-makers?

Familiarity with issues that key decision-makers are interested in and knowing who they listen to can, in turn, help you identify the information that would bring the most evidence to bear in understanding a social issue and bringing about a change. This involves identifying research that is relevant to the issue and will provide data that helps to inform decision-makers as they prepare their position on a policy, legislation, or other decision facing them. In other words, research needs to speak to the decision-maker’s needs for it to be policy relevant.

If you have a good relationship with a decision-maker or the opportunity to connect directly with decision-makers, you can always ask directly what information the decision-maker would want to know if they were going to weigh in on an issue.

Otherwise, you may need to look at other law and policy resources to identify relevant research needs. This can be dependent on the type of decision-maker and the policy opportunities available.

Resources could include the following:

- **Court decisions.** When researching a question relevant to a court case, review past court cases on similar topics and look at what evidence was submitted and which evidence was cited by courts. For example:
 - In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court found research by Williams Institute scholar Gary Gates regarding children being raised by same-sex couples to be relevant when ruling that the U.S. Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. 576 U.S. 644, 668 (2015).
 - In *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, an earlier case challenging California’s ban on same-sex marriage, a lower court considered testimony about social conditions by UCLA researcher Gary Segura when evaluating an Equal Protection claim. 704 F.Supp.2d 921, 937.
 - In a recent Supreme Court case regarding transgender rights, the Supreme Court cited Williams Institute estimates of the transgender population. *U.S. v. Skrametti*, 605 U.S. 405, 523-525 (2025).
 - Research may also be relevant to a court’s deliberation, even if it is not explicitly relied upon in the decision. Research documenting outcomes from gender-affirming care, examining fairness in transgender sports participation, and documenting harms of conversion therapy was also submitted for consideration by various parties in recent Supreme Court cases, including Williams Institute scholars.⁵

⁵ See *U.S. v. Skrametti*, 605 U.S. 523-525; Transcript of Oral Arguments at 15, *Little v. Hecox/West Virginia v. BPJ* (No. 24-38, No. 24-43) (U.S. 2025); Brief For Amici Curiae Professors Joanna Harper, Philip Chilibeck, and Carol Ewing Graber Supporting Respondents, *Little v. Hecox/West Virginia v. BPJ* (No. 24-38, No. 24-43) (U.S. 2025); Brief of Amici Curiae Williams Institute Scholars in Support of Respondents, *Chiles v. Salazar* (No. 24-539) (U.S. 2025).

- **Legislation.** When considering legislation as a policy opportunity or opposing a proposed law, look at legislative history under local, state, or federal law. Include records of public hearings where testimony was offered and findings by legislatures, which often contain citations to research, as well as approaches taken by other jurisdictions. There are many tools that can be used to gather this information, including state and federal legislative websites, private legislative information vendors such as Legiscan, and research databases such as LexisNexis and Westlaw. For example, at the state level, California has a free, publicly available online source⁶ that provides historical legislative activities and related documentation. Legislation can be explored by assessing the following:
 - **Legislative testimony.** When legislation is proposed, lawmakers typically hold a hearing on the bill, which allows them to gather evidence and determine whether the bill is supported or opposed by their constituents. When the Equality Act was being considered by the House of Representatives in 2021, Williams Institute scholars submitted extensive testimony, alongside other experts on LGBT law and policy.⁷ Much of our testimony was focused on evidence of discrimination by states, because the lawmakers were considering whether to “abrogate” or limit state immunity to private lawsuits as part of the enactment of the law.
 - **Legislative findings.** Many bills include findings by the legislature that are used to justify the enactment of the law or legislative action. For example:
 - An enacted 2025 California bill increasing privacy protections for transgender Californians cited Williams Institute research on violent victimization, alongside other sources of data, such as the U.S. Transgender Survey.⁸
 - A Senate resolution adopted in 2025 cited research by the Williams Institute about the number of youths affected by various anti-transgender laws nationwide.⁹
 - A bill proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives addressing anti-LGBTQI+ bias in schools cited research by a Williams Institute scholar about families reporting the need to relocate because of anti-LGBTQ state laws.¹⁰
 - **Other legislative documents.** It may also help to look at other legislative documents, including prior iterations of a bill, fiscal notes, or legislative analyses.
 - **Prior legislative history.** Sometimes a bill has been introduced repeatedly over many years, and each iteration may contain research that lawmakers considered relevant, whether in committee, in hearings, or upon full vote. For example, before the Equality Act was proposed, a narrower bill called the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) was

⁶ State of California. (n.d.). *Home page*. California Legislative Information. <https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/home.xhtml>

⁷ The Williams Institute. (2021). *Equality Act: Testimony*. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/equality-act-testimony/>

⁸ Change of name or gender and sex identifier. S.B. 59, 2025-2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2025) (enacted).

⁹ Relative to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) Pride Month. S.R. 48, 2025-2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2025) (passed).

¹⁰ Supporting the goals and ideals of the Rise Up for LGBTQI+ Youth in Schools Initiative, a call to action to communities across the country to demand equal educational opportunity, basic civil rights protections, and freedom from erasure for all students, particularly LGBTQI+ young people, in K-12 schools. HR 1135, 2023-2024 Leg., Reg. Sess. (U.S. 2024) (introduced). <https://legiscan.com/US/text/HR1135/id/2979848>

proposed over multiple years.¹¹ The Williams Institute submitted testimony and evidence regarding ENDA on multiple occasions.¹²

- **Fiscal notes.** Fiscal notes assess the monetary impact of a proposed bill and often cite research. For example, legislatures in [Iowa](#) and [Montana](#) received fiscal notes for past anti-transgender bills that contained legislative analysis of issues where research could be impactful.
- **Legislative analyst notes.** For some legislation or ballot initiatives, legislative analysts (or Congressional Research Services) may publish an analysis that relies on research. For example, the California Legislative Analyst's Office published an analysis of a proposed ballot measure regarding parental notification about gender-related accommodations that relied on population estimates from the Williams Institute.¹³
- **Agency rulemaking.** For government agencies, consider whether public hearings or written comment opportunities are provided regarding a specific policy. Oftentimes, agencies publish a notice soliciting community input and may include a timeline for submission that can range anywhere from 15 days or less to 60 days or longer. Sometimes, when adopting a final regulation, the agency will include a rationale and cite research or other evidence that was submitted.
 - **Federal agencies.** In 2022, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requested comments on a proposed rule regarding its interpretation of Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, including a proposal to clarify that the statute's nondiscrimination protections extend to sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁴ Over 85,000 comments were submitted, including a comment from the Williams Institute describing research on health disparities and the effects of health care discrimination.¹⁵ When publishing its final rule, HHS included responses to comments and highlighted the types of information it found most useful.¹⁶
 - **State agencies.** The California Civil Rights Department proposed changes to its regulations for employment nondiscrimination in 2023 (in multiple rounds).¹⁷ When it adopted its final rule, the agency listed considerations it made to support the changes, including addressing comments that were received.¹⁸

¹¹ Hunt, J. (2011). A History of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Center for American Progress, Washington, DC. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/a-history-of-the-employment-non-discrimination-act/>

¹² The Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2009 (ENDA): U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, 111th Cong. (2009) (Testimony of R. Bradley Sears). <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Testimony-ENDA-Sep-2009.pdf>; Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2011 (ENDA): U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, 112 Cong. (2011) (Testimony of M. V. Lee Badgett). <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/ENDA-Testimony-Jun-2012.pdf>

¹³ Petek, G. & Stephenshaw, J. (2023, October 17). A.G. File No. 2023-018 [Letter to Rob Bonta, Attorney General]. Legislative Analyst's Office: The California Legislature's Nonpartisan Fiscal and Policy Advisor. <https://lao.ca.gov/BallotAnalysis/Initiative/2023-018>

¹⁴ Nondiscrimination in Health Programs and Activities, 42 CFR (pts. 438, 440, 457, and 460), 45 CFR (pts. 80, 84, 92, 147, 155, and 156), RIN 0945-AA17 (2024). <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2024-08711>

¹⁵ Redfield, E., Vasquez, L.A., Cohen, C., & Christy Mallory, C. (2022). Section 1557 of the ACA: Public Comment. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/comment-section-1557/>

¹⁶ Nondiscrimination in Health Programs and Activities, 42 CFR (pts. 438, 440, 457, and 460), 45 CFR (pts. 80, 84, 92, 147, 155, and 156), RIN 0945-AA17 (2024). <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2024-08711>

¹⁷ Civil Rights Council. (2023, October 12). SECOND MODIFICATIONS TO PROPOSED GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 11135 ET SEQ. REGULATIONS. Civil Rights Department, State of California, Sacramento, CA. <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2023/10/Notice-of-Second-15-Day-Comment-Period-on-Second-Modifications-to-Proposed-Government-Code-Section-11135-et-seq.pdf>

¹⁸ Civil Rights Council. (2024, March). GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 11135 ET SEQ. REGULATIONS FINAL STATEMENT OF REASONS. Civil Rights Department, State of California, Sacramento, CA. <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2024/03/GC11135-Final-Statement-of-Reasons.pdf>

- **Other decision-makers.** The type of research that would be relevant and persuasive may be individualized and unique to a group that holds local or national power.
 - For example, evidence of housing discrimination in local or national markets may inspire an association of real estate brokers to adopt LGBT inclusion initiatives or policy positions.¹⁹

When approaching policy-responsive research, several of the considerations described elsewhere in this guide can be applied to increase impact. For example, researchers presenting research to decision-makers may benefit from a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods – for example, quantitative data can be used to show the degree, type, and scope of impact, whereas qualitative information, such as personal stories, may be used to illustrate the human aspect of a particular policy. You may also want to conduct repeated cross-sectional research, which is used to assess needs at multiple points in time with a general or longitudinal (i.e., repeated over time using the same specific respondents to assess changes experienced by that group) sample.

Policy-responsive research may take many forms, including broad evaluation studies (e.g., needs assessments) and research structured to test a particular intervention (e.g., a pilot program). An example of the first type is the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, discussed throughout this guide. An example of the latter type of research is a survey that Williams Institute and Clark University researchers conducted to assess the impact of Florida’s HB 1557, the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, also called the “Don’t Say Gay” bill.²⁰ The researchers surveyed 106 diverse parents in Florida a year after the bill’s passage, finding that over 1 in 10 said that their children had expressed fear, anxiety, or avoidance of school related to HB 1557. Although this research was conducted after the Florida bill had passed, its findings can be used to inform decision-makers and courts considering similar policy proposals in other states.

¹⁹ *How Discrimination Impacts The LGBTQ+ Community On The Journey To Homeownership & Beyond*. (2021). LGBTQ+ Real Estate Alliance. <https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2564/2026/01/2nd-Annual-LGBTQ-Real-Estate-Report-.pdf>; LGBTQ+ Real Estate Alliance Cites Need for Discrimination Free Access To Credit and Homeownership in Endorsing “Transgender Bill of Rights. (2026, February 17). *LGBTQ+ Real Estate Alliance*. <https://members.realestatealliance.org/news/Details/lgbtq-real-estate-alliance-cites-need-for-discrimination-free-access-to-credit-and-homeownership-in-endorsing-transgender-bill-of-rights-313930>

²⁰ Goldberg, A.E. (2023). Impact of HB 1557 (Florida’s Don’t Say Gay Bill) on LGBTQ+ Parents in Florida. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Dont-Say-Gay-Impact-Jan-2023.pdf>

The findings from the Los Angeles County Trans and Nonbinary (TNB) Survey allowed policymakers to identify broad areas where transgender people reported needs or where findings for the sample were noticeably divergent from findings for the general population, such as with homelessness. Such findings can demonstrate specific areas where policy intervention is needed, such as housing solutions, or provide more evidence to support investment of resources into community organizations working with affected communities. In the case of the LA County TNB Survey, findings from the study were leveraged by community leaders to ask the County Supervisors to invest funds to support transgender and nonbinary community members, which they did – by offering an historic seven million dollars in grants to community organizations.²¹

Research can be tremendously influential on policy choices, ranging from individual case decisions to regulations and laws adopted by a state or nationally. The above considerations should help researchers to identify an approach to research that will ensure the findings are relevant to decision-makers and contribute to strong, evidence-based policy.

²¹ Board Advances TGI Wellness and Equity Initiative. (nd.) *Lindsey P. Horvath, Los Angeles County Supervisor, Third District*. <https://lindseyhorvath.lacounty.gov/tgi-wellness-equity-initiative/>; Palomera, G, (2024, December 4). Win for the TGI community addresses need during vulnerable time. *Los Angeles Blade*. <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2024/12/04/win-for-the-tgi-community-addresses-need-during-vulnerable-time/>

4. Research Landscape and Considerations Before Developing your Own Survey

After determining what research is relevant to key decision-makers or a policy of interest, you can begin to further consider the current research landscape in relation to the proposed research.

Conducting a new survey can be expensive, time-consuming, exceed the policymaking cycle or project timelines, and impose additional time burdens on community members, especially vulnerable populations that may be subject to multiple research requests. Before undertaking new studies, you should check that the necessary data do not already exist.

Thinking through the following questions may eliminate the need for a new survey entirely or help you conduct a new survey in a more efficient, cost-effective way. New research can be informed by and complementary to prior research. You may find that existing research answers only some of your research questions, or that you need more recent research or research on a different sub-population. A new survey could focus on the remaining unanswered questions or on using similar survey questions to create data that can be compared across geography, groups, or time. To be efficient in addressing LGBTQ law and policy research needs, you should consider:

Timeliness: What research can be done on the policymaking timeline?

When is the research needed? Law and policy-relevant research needs to arrive in enough time to inform policy. Research that is completed after the policy decision is made cannot inform this decision and wastes planning efforts, time, and resources. As the saying goes: “Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” That said, it is vital to adhere to quality standards outlined in this guide to ensure that the timely research you produce is methodically sound and accurate. Additionally, remember that research may be needed on a legal or policy issue regardless of whether there is an imminent policy decision. Considering what future policy decisions may be on the horizon can be useful, especially when the policymaking timeline is brief.

Geographic specificity: What level of geographic specificity is needed for the research?

Levels of geographic specificity include the following:

- National (U.S.)
- U.S. regional (e.g., the West)
- State (e.g., California)
- State regions (e.g., the Central Coast of California)
- Counties (e.g., Los Angeles County)
- Cities (e.g., Long Beach)
- Other regions: divisions within cities, CA assembly and senate districts, zip codes, neighborhoods, etc.

The more specific the geographic area, the less likely that research or data will already exist, and the more likely that you will have to conduct your own research. Sometimes, decision-makers request data for very specific regions, even smaller than the city-level, or for the specific part of the city or county they represent (e.g., data for their state assembly or senate district). This is often very hard to provide because the small population of LGBTQ people relative to the overall population can make it hard to get an adequate sample size for analysis.

You should be comfortable explaining why you are using the best available data, even if it's not at the geographic level of decision-making desired. This is part and parcel of doing LGBTQ related research. Continuing barriers to including LGBTQ questions on many government and private surveys, as well as the relatively smaller size of the LGBTQ population, limit the data available. Additionally, explaining current data limitations creates a foundation for calling for more and better LGBTQ-related data.

Consider how the specific geographic area of your policy focus might be similar to or different from a larger geographic area it sits within that has available data. For example, it is possible that LGBTQ workers in a conservative county in California are less likely to be out at work than LGBTQ workers in the state overall. One could argue that if statewide data show that almost half of LGBTQ workers are not out to their supervisor, state-level data may understate the level at which LGBTQ workers are not out to their supervisors in a more conservative county. For smaller cities or counties, using relevant California regions might be a way to use existing datasets to create a large enough LGBTQ sample. Choose a region that fits with the policy issue. For example, when trying to inform policy in a rural county, try using a broader region or regions that include several rural counties (see Appendix C for examples of how California regions are defined for different policy purposes).

Existing research: Does the necessary research already exist?

Before starting a new survey about LGBTQ people, you should make sure the needed research hasn't already been done. Doing a literature review can help to describe what relevant research does exist, what that research finds, and what gaps there are in the research on this specific topic, as well as identify existing studies that collected the necessary data but did not analyze it in the required manner. You can find existing data by searching online, looking for existing compilations of research on the topic, checking national LGBTQ research centers and organizations, and searching the websites of relevant national research organizations, state-level research centers, and government agencies that routinely collect data about LGBTQ people. The resulting literature review can form the basis of the background section of the research report and will show how this new study relates to what is already known. For tips and resources on how to write a literature review, see the resources list in [Chapter 11](#).

5. Developing and Maintaining Community Partnerships and Engagement

Outreach and engagement strategies suitable for and tailored to diverse LGBTQ communities

When developing partnerships or engaging in outreach, be sure to include organizations that work with underrepresented subpopulations (e.g., people with disabilities, older adults, immigrants, Spanish speakers). Focusing solely on the organizations that are the most well-known and easiest to reach (e.g., large mainstream LGBTQ organizations) may take less effort but is sometimes less likely to result in successful engagement of communities that are traditionally underrepresented in research.

If possible, look at Census or other types of local data to get a sense of the subpopulations that should be represented, such as the largest racial/ethnic communities or linguistic groups.

Consider the resources necessary for meaningful inclusion. If the study will be offered in languages other than English, language access should be ensured throughout the project lifecycle, such as translation of all materials (including study reports), live bi-directional translation at events, and having fluent speakers as part of the research team.

Options for engagement that meet the needs of diverse community members, including those facing financial or safety barriers to participation

Whenever possible, offer multiple time and location options, including evenings and weekends, meeting locations near transit hubs and free parking, and virtual options (e.g., Zoom).

Hold meetings in spaces where community members already feel comfortable (e.g., LGBTQ community centers and local libraries). Be aware that not all LGBTQ community members may feel comfortable in the same venues. For example, some LGBTQ venues may be perceived as unwelcoming to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) or transgender community members, or inaccessible to those with disabilities. Seek out advice on the spaces that are frequented and trusted by diverse community members.

Respecting the time and resource constraints of community partners and members

To the extent possible, provide compensation for all aspects of engagement, as well as food at mealtimes/evening events. Ask community partners to suggest appropriate rates (e.g., honorarium and transportation) and length of engagement (e.g., how long a listening session should be). Use community vendors for food and other services if possible. And offer multiple dates and times to participate and be clear from the outset about any limitations on participation (e.g., deadlines, whether nonprofit staff can receive additional compensation for their time).

Understanding and accommodating the priorities and goals of various study partners

Academic, government, and community organizations face different funding structures and expectations. For example, academic partners are incentivized to obtain research grants (often spanning many years) and publish their results in peer-reviewed journals, which can take months or years. In contrast, state and local governments must contend with election cycles and are generally interested in research with direct implications for the policies and programs they oversee. Nonprofit community organizations generally rely on project-based funding and may prioritize research that demonstrates the need for, or benefit of, existing or proposed initiatives. Both government and community-based partners generally prioritize dissemination beyond academic journals. Keeping these priorities and constraints in mind can help teams develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Engaging the community, regardless of where your project falls on the continuum

Develop a communication strategy and relationships early on. Identify organizations that are led by people from the communities of interest. Often, there is an ecosystem of organizations; some might represent community interests but lack meaningful leadership by community members. Develop clear guidelines about how you would like to engage community organizations.

Develop a strategy for incorporating feedback from community stakeholders on research findings. Even if community partners are part of the research team, identify trusted community partners from whom you can solicit feedback on research findings before publication. Developing relationships early on helps to drive research questions. It also creates a ready audience for the research findings once they are released and helps communicate these findings in a way that is meaningful to community partners. It is especially important for researchers not from the community that is the focus of the study to have feedback on findings early on to avoid causing surprise or harm.

6. Developing Research Design and Methodology

Identifying research questions that are relevant to the legal and policy environment

The research question expresses the fundamental purpose of the study. As such, investing time to write one or more clear and specific research questions that communicate the overall goal of the research is essential. Once you have established the research questions and design, you can write the survey questionnaire (your final document, including all survey items and instructions) in such a way that the survey items will allow you to answer the research questions (see [Chapter 7](#)). Note that a research question is not the same as the questions that will be asked to respondents in the survey. The survey questions are often referred to as “survey items,” which helps to differentiate them from the overall research questions.

Research questions related to LGBTQ law and policy emerge from various sources (see [Chapter 3](#)). Topics might come from community members, service providers, LGBTQ organizations, researchers, or public officials and policymakers. Questions might be prompted by a desire to understand the needs and priorities of different LGBTQ communities; to study the effects on LGBTQ people of a policy, situation, or natural disaster; to explore disparities in political, social, or economic conditions; or to describe the number of LGBTQ people who live in a community, who benefit from a program, or who belong to specific racial, ethnic, immigrant, economic, health, education, and employment subgroups.

For example, as described earlier, in the LA County Fires research project, the Williams Institute worked with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to explore the research question: How have the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ people in the affected areas been impacted by the fires and how have changes in federal policy related to transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people, and minority groups broadly, affected the disaster response for LGBTQ+ people? The goal of the research was to identify needs that could be addressed and to develop recommendations that could support a better response for LGBTQ+ people in future disasters.

Whether the research ideas come originally from community members, policymakers, service providers, or academics, a refinement process is often needed to craft effective research questions. As you refine the questions, review closely to make sure that your research questions are not shaped to predetermine a specific policy outcome. As research questions are refined, check for clarity, succinctness, and that they are answerable and actionable. Think ahead of the reports, presentations, or fact sheets you want to develop from this research.

Survey research that follows the principles of CBPR will explore questions that are generated by community members (see [Chapter 2](#)). You might go to communities to identify questions that community members seek data to answer. Similarly, community members and organizations might identify questions themselves and seek out researchers or research expertise to turn their questions into a research design. Practices supporting community-led generation of research questions include listening sessions, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews.

Even when the people conducting the research identify themselves as LGBTQ, they still need to engage with LGBTQ communities to generate CBPR research questions. Researchers generally have multiple points of difference from broader LGBTQ communities. These differences may include the training they've received, education and employment opportunities and experiences, greater financial stability, and the inherent limitations of representing a broad and diverse community as a single or small group of researchers.

For example, for the 2023–2024 LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, the Williams Institute study team, along with The TransLatin@ Coalition and FLUX, held listening sessions to identify study topics. They recruited staff and individual participants through local community-based organizations (CBOs) serving transgender and nonbinary people in LA County, including through UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved email blasts and phone calls. CBO participants were required to be current staff or advocates working with the transgender and nonbinary community. Individual community members were required to be transgender or nonbinary LA County residents aged 18 or older. A screener survey was used to ensure participant diversity.

Sessions with CBO staff lasted one hour and were held online via Zoom. Community member sessions were offered concurrently in person and via Zoom at two LA locations, with participation capped at ten participants to ensure time for full engagement. All sessions were recorded with permission, professionally transcribed, and then de-identified by the research team. Participants were not required to participate on camera and could utilize the chat function to share their feedback via writing if preferred. Live Spanish-English translation was provided for one session. Community members received stipends in the form of gift cards, and those who attended in person were also provided with \$25 in cash to cover transportation and parking costs.

The findings from these sessions directly informed the research agenda. Topics mentioned most frequently across sessions—including health care needs, transportation access, housing, and interactions with police or immigration services—were identified as priority subjects and turned into research questions for the survey of trans and nonbinary adults in LA County.[end]

Selecting a data collection approach

Survey data can be collected using one or more of the following approaches (“modes”):

- Online (web-based) self-administered questionnaires
- Mailed (paper) self-administered questionnaires
- Telephone surveys, which may be administered by an interviewer or use automated methods (e.g., a recorded voice asks questions and respondents answer with their keypad)
- In-person surveys, which are usually interviewer-administered but may also be self-administered (e.g., using Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing or providing a tablet to access a survey programmed online)

Most contemporary LGBTQ community surveys are conducted online, which is less expensive and generally more convenient for participants. However, fraud prevention is a key consideration for online data collection (see [Chapter 8](#)). Online data collection may also reduce accessibility for community members who have disabilities, who are older, who do not speak English fluently, or who do not have reliable, private internet access. Survey research can use multiple modes to collect data to overcome the limitations of a single, specific mode. However, it is important to take steps to limit the influence of “mode effects” (systematic differences between modes). For example, participants may underreport stigmatized behaviors when an interviewer administers a questionnaire in-person or by telephone, as compared to when they complete it independently online. One strategy to reduce such mode effects would be to provide in-person survey respondents with an electronic tablet that records their answers to sensitive questions.

Choosing a sampling method

There are many ways to recruit LGBTQ people for survey research, but they often involve trade-offs between generalizability, accessibility, and costs. The main distinction is between probability and non-probability sampling. In a probability (often called “random” or “population-based”) sample, every member of the population of interest (e.g., LGBTQ adults in Orange County) has a non-zero probability of being recruited. Recruitment probabilities may or may not be equal. For example, researchers may wish to intentionally “oversample” smaller groups (e.g., from specific age or racial/ethnic groups) to generate sufficient sample sizes for within-group analyses. If oversampling is used, analyses should use weights to adjust for different probabilities of recruitment; probability-based surveys may also use weights to account for complex sampling designs.

The major advantage of probability sampling is that results can be generalized to the population of interest. Therefore, you should strongly consider probability-based sampling if you seek to estimate the prevalence of a particular health condition or experience, or to identify disparities between populations. However, probability sampling of LGBTQ populations is generally expensive and resource-intensive. For example, according to data from the CDC’s 2021-2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRSS), 263,700, or 0.9%, of Californian adults identify as transgender.²² A statewide survey seeking to recruit transgender people would have to screen approximately 111 people to identify one potential transgender respondent (and keep in mind that most people do not respond to calls or letters for survey recruitment). For this reason, probability-based studies of LGBTQ populations often draw on existing large data collection efforts, such as surveys conducted by state and federal agencies. As discussed previously ([Chapter 4](#)), it is often ideal to access existing data sources to answer research questions or to build on existing data collection efforts.

Another potential advantage of probability-based surveys, particularly when relying on existing data collection, is the opportunity to understand social and health inequities between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ people. For example, by drawing on the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s 2023 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS) for a study of LGBTQ adults in Los Angeles, the Williams Institute was able to directly compare LGBTQ Angelenos to their cisgender, straight counterparts. At the study design stage, it is important to consider who the desired comparison groups are and ensure sufficient

²² Herman, J.L. and Flores, A.R. (2025). How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States? The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Pop-Update-Aug-2025.pdf>

sample sizes to do so, as a sufficient sample size is necessary to have enough statistical power for comparisons. See [Chapter 9](#) for details on sample size and statistical power.

Most LGBTQ community surveys use nonprobability sampling. Because these surveys are generally designed by and for LGBTQ communities, a major advantage is the ability to collect nuanced data on experiences unique to these communities (e.g., minority stress, community connectedness). Although this is often called “convenience” sampling, it should involve a very thoughtful design and implementation to minimize bias.²³ For example, early studies of substance use and HIV risk among gay and bisexual men relied on recruitment from bars.²⁴ Not surprisingly, such research found high levels of alcohol use. Conversely, studies that use online-only recruitment may underrepresent LGBTQ people who engage in heavy substance use.²⁵ Further, it is expected that there will be differences in the demographic characteristics of LGBTQ people reached via bars versus online (e.g., bar-goers may be younger, more heavily male, and White). Designing the recruitment strategy for a nonprobability sample requires in-depth knowledge of local LGBTQ communities of interest. Peer-driven recruitment is often highly effective, particularly when peer recruiters are selected from diverse segments of the population of interest. If using a venue-based or online recruitment approach, it is critical to gather information on places where members of the population of interest (including key subgroups of interest) gather to socialize and access services. When presenting findings, it is important to be specific about the setting(s) where data were collected and to reflect on related limitations (e.g., that people who are not “out” are likely under-represented in studies recruiting from LGBTQ community spaces).

Considering funding sources and human resource needs

Available funding and human resources will necessarily influence the choice of study design. Consider the following funding and human resource needs:

- Community-based (peer) recruiters
- Incentives for study participation
- Funding for transportation, refreshments, translation, space rental, and other costs of primary data collection
- Promotional and recruitment materials and events
- Data use agreements for previously collected data (may require legal consultation or data use fees)
- Contract research firm to assist with or conduct recruitment and data collection
- Hardware and software for data collection (e.g., computers, tablets, Qualtrics or similar web-based survey software)
- Data analysts with the skills and training necessary to analyze (complex) survey data

²³ Meyer, I.H., Wilson, P.A. (2009). Sampling lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(1): 23–31. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014587>

²⁴ Greenwood, G.L., White, E.W., Page-Shafer, K., Bein, E., Osmond, D.H., Paul, J., Stall, R.D. (2001). Correlates of heavy substance use among young gay and bisexual men: The San Francisco Young Men’s Health Study. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 61(2), 105–112. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0376-8716\(00\)00129-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0376-8716(00)00129-0)

²⁵ Grov, C. (2012) HIV Risk and Substance Use in Men Who Have Sex with Men Surveyed in Bathhouses, Bars/Clubs, and on [Craigslist.org](#): Venue of Recruitment Matters. *AIDS and Behavior* 16(3), 807–817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-011-9999-6>

The Williams Institute developed the Lived Experiences in Los Angeles County (LELAC) Survey as a cost-effective approach to gather data from LGBTQ adults in Los Angeles County. When the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health launched the 2023 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS), they agreed to ask respondents who identified as LGBTQ if they would be willing to be recontacted for future research. Those who agreed received invitations from the Williams Institute to participate in the LELAC study. A total of 506 respondents participated in the follow-up survey and gave their consent to have their LELAC and LACHS survey data linked through a unique identification number. This approach allowed the Williams Institute to reach LGBTQ respondents with a shorter survey that focused only on issues of specific importance to LGBTQ communities, because their overall demographic and health responses had already been captured in the LACHS survey.

7. Questionnaire Development

Once you have decided that an original survey is best for answering your study's research questions, there are several aspects of questionnaire development to consider. What questions should be asked to answer the research questions? Have relevant questions already been created for other surveys that can be used? What new questions will need to be created for this survey? What questions can be included that will help understand how this sample differs from larger population benchmarks? How can a survey generate all the needed information without being too lengthy and burdensome for the respondent?

Drawing on reliable, valid measures

Once the topics are established for a survey, you will need to decide on the individual questions to include for each topic. When considering the individual questions to include, be mindful of the research questions that need to be answered. The questions should be sufficient in number and to the needed level of detail to answer the research question, without creating a substantial burden on the respondent. Use the minimum number of questions to get the needed information to prevent survey “drop-off” (i.e., higher rate of survey incompleteness) or fatigue²⁶ (i.e., poor or inaccurate responses from participants tired of completing the survey). Thinking about the study's policy focus and planned outputs (e.g., report and article topics) can help to narrow down the survey questions to be asked (e.g., a question may be interesting to team members, but if there is no plan to use it in analysis, you should consider deleting it).

Instead of creating new survey questions, you should first look at other surveys to see what questions could be used that have already been designed, fielded, and known to produce reliable results. Using existing questions can be beneficial because the questions are known to work well and, when drawn from official surveys that produce population-level findings, can provide information about your sample that can be compared to population-level benchmarks. For instance, using questions about disability status from the American Community Survey would provide a way to compare the prevalence of disabilities in your survey sample to the U.S. population. Appendix D describes several federal, state, local, and community surveys that are potential sources for survey questions.

There may be times when a topic requires developing new questions. When creating new questions, be mindful of principles for question design.

- Questions should be as short as possible and clearly written.
 - Avoid long, complicated sentences and terminology that is not well understood by all audiences.
 - You can use an online tool to check the grade reading level of your survey, which should be at a 5th to 8th grade level (over half of American adults read below a 6th grade level).
- Avoid “double-barreled” questions.
 - A question should not ask about more than one topic at a time (e.g., “How would you rate the quality and price of this item?”).
 - Gather only one piece of information at a time (e.g., “How would you rate the quality of this item? How would you rate the price of this item?”).

²⁶Ghafourifard M. (2024). Survey Fatigue in Questionnaire Based Research: The Issues and Solutions. *Journal of caring sciences*, 13(4), 214–215. <https://doi.org/10.34172/jcs.33287>

- Ensure the question format matches your desired format.
 - Use written instructions, visual guidance, and survey programming to ensure participants provide information in the format you want.
 - For example, if you ask, “When did you last see a health care provider?” participants could respond “two years ago” or “May 1, 2024”. If you want to know the date, you could ask “In what month and year did you last see a health care provider?” and format the response field for a two-digit month and four-digit year (using validation rules if programming the survey online).
- Carefully select the question type.
 - Forced-choice questions allow only one answer selection and are much easier to analyze, but they need to provide mutually exclusive and exhaustive response options.
 - The “check all that apply” question approach allows for multiple answers to be selected. For this type of question, it is important to include a “none of the above” option, if relevant, so all respondents can provide an accurate answer, and so that you can differentiate missing data (participant skipped the question) from a negative response (none of the options apply).
- Consider whether to allow respondents to write in unique answers.
 - Write-in responses take substantial resources to analyze and utilize in reporting, especially if the survey is long and/or the sample is large.
 - There is also a risk that some responses will not be able to be included in the analysis if a write-in response is not categorizable or cannot be grouped with other responses for analysis.
- If possible, test out new questions with a sample of individuals.
 - Test questions to ensure that participants will understand the questions and can answer them accurately.
 - This will assist you in developing the proper range of response options and limit the need for open-ended responses.
 - You will also have more confidence that the questions were not misunderstood and that your survey results are measuring what you intended.

Well-tested and inclusive demographic measures

Demographic measures in a survey allow the research team to understand the characteristics of the sample and how demographic groups may differ on key outcomes. Demographic measures, such as age, race, income, and educational attainment, are used in most large-scale official surveys, such as the American Community Survey, which can be adapted for use in your survey. Using demographic questions from large-scale official surveys also has the benefit of creating comparability between your sample and known population benchmarks.

It is important to review the most current questions in use and to consider their advantages and limitations for your research. Depending on the community of interest for your survey and the analytic resources available, you might want to ask different questions than can be found on official surveys. For example, the federal government has historically measured Hispanic/Latino ethnicity separately from race but announced new measurement standards in 2024 that combine race and ethnicity in one

question (and that include an option for Middle Eastern and North African [MENA] ethnicity).²⁷ These changes were made in response to the observation that an increasing number of Latino/a/e and MENA individuals did not see themselves reflected in existing racial categories and instead identified on the Census as “some other race.” However, some have raised concerns that a combined question will undercount Afro-Latino individuals.²⁸

Further, the approach for collecting race and ethnicity by the U.S. Census Bureau includes a series of write-in responses for national origin alongside individual check boxes. A more simplified approach that doesn’t include all the write-in options for national origins may be more appropriate for your survey, depending on your analysis plan and capacity for recoding variables, and could still provide comparable results.

Measures for sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics

Survey questions to identify respondents’ sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics have been in development and use for many years. Your approach to framing these questions will depend on the focus of your research. For example, a survey conducted in an LGBTQ community may need—and allow for—more nuanced response options than a general population survey.

In 2022, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) published a report detailing current best practices for such measures, entitled “Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation.”²⁹ The NASEM recommendations, developed for National Institutes of Health (NIH) research, provide a good starting point for exploring examples of these questions. Additionally, in recent years, some federal surveys have added questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to their questionnaires, such as the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) for adults and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for youth.

The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recommended measures for sexual orientation:

Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself [Select ONE]?

- Lesbian or gay
- Straight, that is, not gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- [If respondent is American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN:)] Two-Spirit
- I use a different term [free-text]
- (Don’t know)
- (Prefer not to answer)

²⁷ Updates to Race/Ethnicity Standards for Our Nation (2024, Dec. 20). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/about/our-research/race-ethnicity/standards-updates.html>

²⁸ Nuñez, C., Silver, J., Galdámez, M., & López N. (2024 Aug 7). Latino is not a race: Understanding lived experiences through street race. Latino Policy and Politics Institute, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, Los Angeles, California. <https://latino.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Latino-is-Not-a-Race-Understanding-Lived-Experiences-through-Street-Race.pdf>

²⁹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Committee on National Statistics; Committee on Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation, Becker, T., Chin, M., & Bates, N. (Eds.). (2022). Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation. National Academies Press (US). <https://doi.org/10.17226/26424>

Existing approaches to sexual orientation measurement generally utilize a list of sexual orientation identities that respondents can choose from. There are several different approaches to gender identity measurement. For instance, one approach uses two items to ascertain sex assigned at birth and current gender identity. Those two items are then analyzed together to identify respondents as transgender or cisgender. In 2023, the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) added an option to the gender identity item of the two-step measure to separately identify nonbinary respondents.³⁰ Other approaches, like the CDC's BRFSS and YRBS, provide a definition of the term "transgender" and ask respondents if they are transgender.

From the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)³¹ measure for gender identity:

What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate?

- Female
- Male

What is your current gender?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Nonbinary
- I use a different term: (specify) _____

Respondents who indicate that their current gender is different from their sex assigned at birth receive a confirmation question:

Just to confirm, you were assigned [INSERT RESPONSE FROM SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH] at birth and now describe yourself as [INSERT CURRENT GENDER]. Is that correct?

Respondents who use the write-in option to specify their current gender receive a follow-up question:

We recorded your current gender as [INSERT: open-text gender identity response]. If you had to place your current gender in one of the following categories, which would you choose?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Nonbinary

³⁰ Health inequities abound in California, according to newest California Health Interview Survey. (2024, October 3). UCLA Center for Health Policy Research (CHPR). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/newsroom/blog/health-inequities-abound-california-according-newest-california-health-interview-survey#:~:text=In%20a%20new%20question%20added,being%20transgender%20or%20gender%20expansive>.

³¹ California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). (2026). UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis>

Depending on the population or community of interest for this study, you can review existing measures to see what might work best for your study. Notably, the examples of survey measures described above are designed for anonymous surveys of the general population, whereas those conducting community-based surveys may want to design questions that have more or different response options.

When selecting measures for sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics, be mindful that some approaches have substantial drawbacks. For instance, we do not recommend using long lists of identities to choose from, or the simple use of a write-in option for respondents to describe their sexual orientation or gender. While these approaches may give respondents the most freedom to express their unique identities, they require substantial analytic resources for reviewing and categorizing respondents. They can also lead to respondents being erroneously categorized by analysts, or removed from analyses altogether, if their responses are unclear or contradictory. If you do use these approaches, we recommend pairing those questions with a more limited list of identities, asking which category best fits the respondent's identity if they had to choose from a limited list. The series of questions about gender in the U.S. Trans Survey is a good example of this approach.³² Overall, research about LGBTQ populations benefits from choosing demographic questions that will generate key information about the sample, the ability to compare demographic groups, and that are appropriate for the community of interest.

Finally, keep in mind that respondents may be reluctant to disclose aspects of their identities on surveys, such as measures that include sex assigned at birth, especially amid a hostile political environment. This is an even greater concern if the survey is not anonymous, and if data security and data use protocols are not known to respondents. Be clear at the outset of your survey what the purpose is, who is conducting it, and how data will be used and secured.

Established measures for policy-relevant questions

Survey development should consider the policy goals of the survey, as described in Chapter 3. There are established measures in national and state policy arenas that are well-known benchmarks for guiding policy. For instance, the federal government has a specific definition and measure for poverty. The official poverty measure has several components, like family income and household size, that can be included in a survey so that the survey sample can be compared to the official poverty measure. In the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, other known measures and surveys were considered to reflect the policy goals of the survey and local concerns as established in the listening sessions. For instance, known measures for transportation burdens in daily life were incorporated in the survey, given that this was a topic of concern for listening session participants, with the policy goal in mind of relieving transportation burdens. Measures came from sources such as the LA Metro Survey and measures from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, which helped create meaningful measures of transportation access and burdens for our sample.

³² James, S E., Herman, J., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., and Anafi, M. (2019). 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS). Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37229.v1>

Preparing your survey to be fielded

Once you have established what questions to ask, the survey must be prepared to be fielded. The question topics should be arranged in an order that will flow well for the respondent. Some researchers prefer having demographic questions at the end of a survey. However, there will be respondents who drop out of surveys, so putting demographic questions up front helps in identifying the demographic characteristics of the full sample. If you are using an online platform, the survey needs to be programmed online and then thoroughly tested to make sure it is correct and the online platform is functioning properly. If you have incorporated “skip logic” or unique pathways through the survey for respondents based on their responses, test each pathway to make sure the skip patterns are working correctly. Create a group of individuals who were not involved in the survey development to take the survey and provide feedback (i.e., a pilot survey). Incorporate any feedback from the pilot and re-test to make sure the edits are incorporated and the survey is working properly. If this is a paid survey, you should establish and implement a system for payment and integrate fraud protections to mitigate fraudulent claims for payment.

The LELAC Survey was designed to complement existing socioeconomic and health data sources, including LACHS, and to avoid duplicating questions already asked in other large surveys such as the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey. The LELAC survey examined discrimination and harassment across schools, workplaces, health care, and public settings, as well as safety-related avoidance, social climate, outness, behavioral health access, family formation, religiosity, civic engagement, and perceptions of County services. When possible, established measures or questions from large, publicly funded surveys were used to develop the LELAC Survey. The research team also included several open-ended questions to gather community perspectives and policy recommendations that could not be captured through closed-ended items alone.

8. Fielding the Survey

Confidentiality, privacy, and ethical considerations in research with human subjects

Research ethics processes are designed to ensure respect for participants and to protect them from harm that could result from their participation in a research study. LGBTQ people, as sexual and gender minorities, are a population that requires planning for safety and confidentiality when included as research participants. Additionally, under federal regulations, enhanced protections are required for research participants from groups that may be at higher risk of coercion or inability to provide informed consent, including children, people in prison, pregnant people, people with intellectual disabilities, and people with limited education. In addition to potential harm to individuals, research ethics processes should consider potential group-level harms, such as research findings unintentionally contributing to stigma and discrimination against marginalized groups.

Attention to issues of privacy and safety is necessary at all stages of the research, including decisions about study topics, listening sessions and focus groups, survey methodology and design, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Planning is required to ensure that participants do not feel coerced to participate, have full information about how their responses will be used, and that any data that might identify participants, if gathered, is kept in a secure location that is separate from participants' responses. Whenever possible, taking measures to avoid gathering personally identifiable information reduces risks for participants.

Survey research that is conducted with LGBTQ communities should be submitted to and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRBs are designed to use established ethical standards to identify potential harms to research participants and ensure research projects adhere to respect, safety, and confidentiality requirements. All universities have independent IRBs. For those without a university affiliation, the simplest and least expensive way to access an IRB is to partner with a local university researcher who can submit the study to the university IRB. This partnership also provides the benefit of bringing someone with research training into your study. For health research, you might be able to access an IRB through a health department or hospital, generally through partnering with an internal researcher.

Researchers from organizations without access to an IRB and independent researchers can take courses and gain certification in ethical human subjects research standards through free online classes. These courses are provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and university-affiliated groups that focus on training for community members engaged in research. Private IRBs do exist and can be used, if a university affiliation is not an option; however, these can be expensive.

Recruitment campaigns and materials

Most community surveys use non-probability sampling and rely on community connections and knowledge to reach potential participants (see [Chapter 6](#)). Your sampling strategy will determine how and where you recruit participants. This strategy is needed to ensure your sample is as diverse and free from bias as possible. Who you need to recruit will depend on your research questions. For example, if you are interested in comparing patient experiences at an LGBTQ community health clinic versus a large hospital system, you will likely create a venue-based sampling plan. If you are interested in identifying barriers to accessing health care for LGBTQ people, then recruiting at clinics or hospitals will lead to biased results.

Whatever your strategy and target audience, recruitment materials and outreach plans are needed. Considerations for recruiting LGBTQ participants include the following:

- **Language:** In recruitment materials, terminology should reflect the language that community members prefer for themselves. Local slang terminology should be used with caution unless the research team is part of the community and knows that this will not be perceived as phobic or disrespectful. The materials also need clear language about the study, goals, research team, and any risks or incentives. Finally, translations into the study languages are needed. All translations should be confirmed with native speakers from the community to avoid giving offense by mistranslations of sensitive terminology.
- **Images:** Prospective participants will look to see if the recruitment material includes people like themselves. As such, universal and inclusive images are preferable. If images of people are used, consider including multiple people with different characteristics so that potential participants do not feel excluded.
- **Locations:** Identify venues that are safe and welcoming for the LGBTQ people that are the focus of your study. As mentioned previously, not all LGBTQ communities feel welcome in the same locations. Carefully consider the diversity of participants needed for your study and diversify the locations for recruitment to match. Be cognizant that some venues are inaccessible to people with mobility limitations or other disabilities.
- **Recruiters:** Consider engaging members of the study communities as recruiters. If the study is community-based participatory research, the community will already be invested and can conduct outreach to potential research participants. Hiring recruiters from diverse communities and backgrounds will demonstrate to potential participants that they are welcomed and their perspectives will be valued in the research.

Establishing a community advisory board (CAB) is one way to bring community expertise into your recruitment planning; ensuring that the study team includes paid positions for people with relevant lived community experience is another. In some cases, the research participants you are seeking may prefer to engage with someone who is not from their community, for example, if the participant does not want to risk being identified as LGBTQ. Community members in your study team can provide valuable perspectives on the most respectful and safe practices for engaging potential participants, given any community fears or risks. In addition, having community members on your team is beneficial for discussions about language, images, and locations, and determinations about the diversity of characteristics needed for recruiters.

For the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, the study team trained community recruiters who conducted outreach at local events, through personal networks, and via the Williams Institute's 2023 Unity Event. Recruiters received online training on ethical recruitment practices and were provided IRB-approved materials in both English and Spanish, including flyers, postcards, and digital/social media content. Interested participants could access the survey by texting a designated number or scanning a QR code to receive a survey link, or by visiting The TransLatin@ Coalition or the Connie Norman Transgender Empowerment Center for in-person access. Eligible participants were compensated with a \$30 gift card.

Ensuring accessibility

In consultation with community partners, consider the steps you can take to make survey participation accessible to community members of all ages, abilities, and socioeconomic situations. These steps can include the following:

- Offering multiple ways to complete a survey (e.g., online, by paper copy, in-person at a community organization)
- Providing multiple ways to access an online survey, such as QR codes or a ‘text to join’ number
- Providing telephone and email contact information for a team member who can help participants handle any technical challenges that arise
- Hosting survey completion events or “hubs” at community organizations to allow for technical support, language support, survey access for those without a personal phone or computer, and/or in-person payment of honorariums
- Ensuring that online survey questionnaires follow accessibility guidelines, including:
 - Avoiding features that cannot be read by screen readers used by people who are blind or who have low vision
 - Providing text alternatives to images
 - Pre-testing the survey for accessibility

Fraud prevention procedures

Fraudulent survey participation has been described as an existential crisis for social science research.³³ Fraud should be anticipated in any survey, but it is particularly prevalent in online surveys. Fraudulent participation may involve the following:

- Legitimate, eligible participants who respond multiple times using the same or similar responses to collect multiple incentives or for other reasons (e.g., forgot they already participated)
- Individuals, acting alone or as part of “survey farms” (organizations or networks focused on online survey fraud), who respond one or more times using falsified responses to collect incentives
- Survey farms that use AI bots to generate false survey responses to collect incentives
- Malicious actors entering false responses to tamper with or distort survey data
- Legitimate, eligible participants using AI chatbots to generate responses, especially to write-in (open text) questions

As illustrated above, most—but not all—fraudulent participation is financially motivated. Eliminating financial incentives for online surveys may reduce but will not eliminate fraud. Particularly for LGBTQ-focused research, fraudsters motivated by bias are also a major concern. Moreover, surveys that do not offer incentives will be more greatly affected by volunteer bias (differences between the population of

³³ Westwood, S.J. (2025). The potential existential threat of large language models to online survey research. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 122 (47): e2518075122, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2518075122>

interest and those who volunteer to participate) and by underrepresentation of key subgroups for whom compensation is more important (e.g., low-income individuals).

Strategies to prevent and detect fraudulent responses may be implemented prior to, or during, data collection and include the following:

- Targeted, limited, and/or offline promotion (avoiding public social media, with the caveat that others may share materials via social media)
- Not disclosing compensation amount on public-facing materials
- Using a unique survey link for each participant (provided on request)
- Pre-screening prior to receiving a survey link (via a separate survey or a telephone/videoconference call)
- CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) tasks to prevent participation by bots
- Trick questions or attention checks (e.g., questions that indicate the correct response in the instructions or questions that have only one plausible response)
- Asking for the same information multiple times to compare answers (e.g., on pre-screener and main survey)
- Collection of personal identifiers (e.g., IP address, geolocation) to identify repeat or ineligible respondents
- Analysis of metadata to assess response validity and quality (e.g., time elapsed between survey submissions, length of time spent responding)
- Reviewing write-in responses (e.g., “other, please specify” or open-ended questions) to assess relevance, plausibility, and sincerity
- Compensation provided only after the research team verifies the response (as indicated in the letter of information and consent)

None of these strategies is foolproof, and committed fraudsters can and will bypass many of them (e.g., by creating multiple email addresses or using VPNs to mask their IP addresses). These strategies also often involve difficult ethical trade-offs between maximizing inclusivity and accessibility and ensuring the validity of the results. For example, requiring that LGBTQ community members provide personal information for verification may raise safety concerns and deter participation, particularly among those who are most likely to face potential harm, which could lead to biased or limited results (i.e., people who cannot safely be out as LGBTQ may be under-represented). But it would also be unethical and unhelpful to the LGBTQ community to publish falsified data. Additionally, the effectiveness of strategies to prevent responses by AI “bots” is increasingly limited as technology improves; for example, many bots can now successfully pass CAPTCHA tests and write convincing and relevant free-text answers. See the Resource List in [Chapter 11](#) for articles that detail ethical and implementation considerations for various fraud prevention strategies.

Because the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey was a paid survey, RTI International and the Williams Institute implemented fraud protections. Prior to receiving a survey link, participants' phone numbers were screened for known fraud indicators, confirming they were cell numbers from legitimate carriers. Each number that passed screening received a unique survey link; those that failed were ineligible. RTI monitored survey link requests for suspicious patterns and could pause the system as needed. Due to a spike in fraudulent activity, the survey was closed from November 10-20, 2023, and protocols were adjusted to include screening for duplicate or out-of-state IP addresses and other metadata such as browser language. Fraudulent activity decreased substantially after these adjustments.

9. Data Analysis

For each of the following steps, it is important that your team includes individuals with experience managing and analyzing quantitative survey data. It is easy for even experienced data analysts to make human errors; ideally, multiple individuals will participate in this process and double-check each other's work. Additionally, while some statistical analyses, particularly descriptive analyses, can be run through Microsoft Excel, most are conducted using statistical software, including Stata,³⁴ SAS,³⁵ and R.³⁶

Steps to take for data management and cleaning

Before analyzing data, it's important to make sure the information is accurate and usable.

- Start by reviewing your data: Check whether most surveys are filled out, whether answers generally make sense, and whether there are obvious errors.
 - Set basic completion rules.
 - Decide on how many questions someone must answer for their survey to be included.
 - Surveys with large amounts of missing information are often removed because incomplete data can bias results.
- Remove duplicate surveys: Comparing IP addresses or geolocation, response patterns, timestamps, or repeated answers can help identify and remove duplicates.
- Remove surveys completed too quickly.
 - If a respondent completed a long survey extremely fast, it may indicate they did not carefully read the questions.
 - Research shows that these “speeder” responses are more likely to be inaccurate or unreliable.
- Remove people who were not eligible.
 - For example, if the survey is for adults, responses from people under the age of 18 should be removed; this ensures the data reflects the population the research is intended to represent.
- Review open-ended answers for harmful or invalid content.
 - Review for profanity, hate speech, nonsense text, or repeated signs that the survey was not taken seriously.
 - Surveys showing consistent bad-faith or careless responses should be removed to protect data quality.
- Check for contradictory items.
 - Some surveys may contain responses that clearly do not fit together (for example, reporting both being unhoused and owning a home).
 - When a survey contains many such contradictions, the information is unlikely to be reliable.

³⁴ <https://www.stata.com/>

³⁵ https://www.sas.com/en_us/home.html

³⁶ <https://www.r-project.org/>

In the LA County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, after initial fraud screening by RTI International, the Williams Institute conducted additional data cleaning on the delivered dataset of 335 respondents, removing 13 respondents and yielding a final sample of 322 respondents. Cleaning steps included the following:

- **Minimal completion:** Respondents who skipped 25 or more questions asked of all respondents were removed.
- **Duplicate responses:** Two diagnostic tests identified and removed respondents who may have completed the survey multiple times.
- **Speeders:** Two checks identified respondents who moved through the survey too quickly to have responded meaningfully.
- **Ineligible respondents:** Respondents under the age of 18 were removed, as the survey was limited to adults.
- **Mischievous responders:** Write-in responses were reviewed, and respondents whose answers contained profanity, hate speech, or gibberish were removed.
- **Contradictory responses:** Respondents with four or more internally contradictory response combinations (e.g., reporting both current homelessness and homeownership) were removed.

Steps to code variables, particularly sexual orientation and gender identity variables

Detailed guidance on coding variables is beyond the scope of this guide. You should refer to the source of your survey questions for information on how the variables should be coded. Coding demographic information means organizing how people describe themselves into mutually exclusive categories that can be analyzed consistently and respectfully. If using validated measures (e.g., of mental health symptoms), coding instructions will be available in the original publication or on websites.

- Coding gender identity and transgender/nonbinary variables
 - If using the “two-step” approach³⁷ (i.e., asking about gender identity and sex assigned at birth as two separate questions), see [Chapter 7](#).
 - Classify respondents based on how these answers relate to each other.
 - Respondents whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth may be classified as cisgender.
 - Respondents whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth, or who explicitly identify as transgender or nonbinary, are classified as transgender or nonbinary.

³⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Committee on National Statistics; Committee on Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation, Becker, T., Chin, M., & Bates, N. (Eds.). (2022). *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. National Academies Press (US). <https://doi.org/10.17226/26424>

- Respect and interpret write-in responses carefully.
 - Write-in responses that clearly describe a transgender or nonbinary identity are included as such, regardless of sex assigned at birth.
 - Write-ins that describe sexual orientation, rather than gender identity, are excluded from gender classification and documented as such.

Why this matters: This approach reduces misclassification (e.g., of people of transgender experience who do not self-identify as trans) and ensures transgender and nonbinary people are accurately represented in research.

- Coding sexual orientation variables
 - **Use self-identified sexual orientation:** Sexual orientation is based on how respondents describe themselves, not assumptions about behavior or attraction.
 - **Group identities only when necessary for analysis:** When sample sizes are small, identities may be grouped together to allow for trustworthy results and a meaningful analysis; groupings should be clearly explained.
 - **Document exclusions and heterogeneous groups:** Respondents who select “not sure,” “prefer not to state,” or “don’t know,” or those with orientations not captured by standard categories (e.g., asexual, pansexual), or do not answer the question, may be grouped separately and described transparently.

Why this matters: Clear documentation helps prevent erasing identities while still allowing analysis when data are limited. Research also suggests that people who say they are unsure about their sexual orientation or who prefer not to answer have different demographic and health characteristics than people who say they are LGB or straight.³⁸

For the Williams Institute’s LGBTQ People’s Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment study, participants were asked about their sexual orientation, current gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Participants who selected gender identity options that were the same as their sex assigned at birth were classified as cisgender, while participants who selected gender identity response options (i.e., male, female, or transgender) that differed from their sex assigned at birth were classified as transgender. Participants who selected the nonbinary gender identity response option were classified as nonbinary. Additionally, cisgender participants who reported “something else” as their sexual orientation were excluded from analyses, given uncertainty about whether they were part of the LGBTQ community or not.

³⁸ Kim, H. J., & Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I. (2013). Nonresponse to a question on self-identified sexual orientation in a public health survey and its relationship to race and ethnicity. *American journal of public health, 103*(1), 67-69.

Steps to take for descriptive analyses

Descriptive analysis involves using statistical methods to organize, summarize, and present your survey data to identify patterns, trends, and characteristics of your sample or population. Descriptive analyses can help you answer the “who,” “what,” “where,” and “when” questions without overinterpreting results or establishing causal relationships.

- Summarize who participated in the survey.
 - Count how many people answered the survey and describe their key characteristics, such as age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, income, and other relevant demographics for your sample.
 - This summary helps readers understand *who* the findings represent.
- Calculate percentages and proportions.
 - Percentages are used to describe how common different responses, cases, or experiences are within your sample.
 - Percentages make patterns in the data easier to understand than raw counts alone. However, providing both raw counts and percentages can help readers understand the scale and proportion of important characteristics.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number in category}}{\text{Total number eligible to answer}} \times 100$$

- When calculating percentages, pay attention to who should be included in the denominator. For example, participants with missing data (who skipped the question) should not be included unless you are reporting a “missing” category. In addition, some participants may not have answered a question because of your “skip logic”, but you may be able to use other answers to fill in their responses (e.g., if they said something never happened to them, you know it didn’t happen in the past year). For check-all-that-apply items, your denominator will be the number of respondents who answered the question, so proportions may sum to more than 100%.
- Present other summary measures for continuous variables (like age or number of months unhoused).
 - Mean (average): Adds all values and divides by the total number.
 - Median: The middle value when ordered from smallest to largest. The median is often preferred when there are outliers (extreme values that pull the average up or down).
- Present confidence intervals.
 - Confidence intervals (CIs) show the range within which the true population value you aim to estimate is likely to fall when using a probability-based sample. For example, a 95% confidence interval means that if the survey were repeated many times, the true percentage would fall within that range 95% of the time.
 - Including confidence intervals communicates uncertainty, prevents overconfidence in exact percentages, and is considered best practice in survey reporting.

- Confidence intervals can be calculated in Excel or in another statistical software of your choice, such as R, STATA, SAS, or SPSS.³⁹

Why this matters: Descriptive statistics provide context. Without them

- Readers cannot interpret subgroup comparisons.
- Policy implications may be misunderstood.
- Findings may appear more dramatic than they are.

The LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment study included responses from 1,902 LGBTQ adults. Of these 1,902 adults, 89% self-identified as cisgender (95% CI: 87.8, 90.6%), 7% as nonbinary (95% CI: 5.5-7.6%), and 4% as transgender (95% CI: 3.3-5.2%).

Using survey weights

To improve the accuracy of survey estimates, most large-scale datasets, especially government datasets, include survey weights. Survey weights are numerical values assigned to each survey response to correct for nonresponses, unequal probabilities of selection, and undersampling or oversampling. These survey weights are used to improve the accuracy of estimates.

Why this matters: Unweighted counts and percents can be misleading and do not accurately represent the population.

All LELAC analyses used sampling weights developed for the 2023 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS), adjusted for nonconsent, noncontact, and nonresponse. Weights were benchmarked to LGBTQ LACHS respondents on sex assigned at birth, age, race/ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, economic status, and homeownership, such that the weighted LELAC sample represented the adult LGBTQ population of Los Angeles County at the time of survey administration. Analyses of LACHS 2023 data used weights that were developed by RTI International.

³⁹ Bobbitt, Z. (2021, August 26). How to calculate confidence intervals in R. Statology. <https://www.statology.org/confidence-interval-in-r/>; Bobbitt, Z. (2021, September 2). How to calculate confidence intervals in SPSS. Statology. <https://www.statology.org/confidence-interval-spss/>; Bobbitt, Z. (2022, November 22). How to calculate confidence intervals in SAS. Statology. <https://www.statology.org/confidence-interval-sas/>; Bobbitt, Z. (2020, October 14). How to calculate confidence intervals in Stata. Statology. <https://www.statology.org/confidence-interval-stata/>

Comparisons across LGBTQ subgroups and between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ people

In addition to describing overall patterns, you may want to compare responses across groups. This type of analysis is often called bivariate analysis, because it examines the relationship between two variables at a time (for example, housing status by gender identity). These comparisons can help identify disparities or differences across groups, but they must be conducted carefully and interpreted responsibly.

- Choosing appropriate comparison groups
 - Make sure your survey includes the groups you wish to compare (e.g., LGBTQ samples should not include responses from non-LGBTQ people).
 - Ensure that there is no overlap between your groups (i.e., that no responses are counted in both groups).
 - Consider using prior research to define your comparison groups (e.g., historically marginalized groups, groups that have had different responses or results in prior studies).
- Paying attention to sample size and power (see [Chapter 11](#))
 - Check the sample size of your comparison groups to ensure there is sufficient power to compare groups.⁴⁰
 - Sufficient sample sizes are needed to determine whether differences between groups are statistically significant (whether the difference is genuine or likely due to random chance).
 - If you lack large enough sample sizes, you cannot meaningfully compare two groups. You can still report the results for both groups, without directly comparing the two.
- Transparency and evidence-based interpretation
 - Make sure you keep detailed records of how comparison groups were defined, both to ensure accuracy and to include in your final reports.
 - While a report for a layperson can include a basic, simplified definition, consider publishing the full, detailed definition of groups in an appendix or supplemental text.
 - When reporting comparisons, it is standard to report the confidence intervals, the exact p-value, and/or whether the p-value is less than 0.05 (standard definition of statistical significance for social science).
- Within LGBTQ research, some common comparisons include comparing LGBTQ people with non-LGBTQ people and comparing LGBTQ people by key demographic characteristics, like those listed above.

⁴⁰ Bhandari, P. (2021, February 16). Statistical Power and Why It Matters | A Simple Introduction. [Scribbr.com](https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/statistical-power/). <https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/statistical-power/>; Dorey F. J. (2011). Statistics in brief: Statistical power: what is it and when should it be used?. *Clinical orthopaedics and related research*, 469(2), 619–620. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11999-010-1435-0>

For the LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment study, analyses compared White LGBTQ people to LGBTQ people of color, and cisgender LGBTQ people to transgender and nonbinary people.

Single-race coding was used to prevent overlap; respondents who selected Black, Asian American, American Indian, or Other for race or who self-identified as Hispanic/Latino were coded as people of color. All comparison groups included at least 200 respondents. Analyses used the survey package in R v4.3.2 statistical software with design-based F-tests (Rao-Scott chi-square tests) to assess differences in proportions across demographic groups ($\alpha=0.05$).⁴¹ [end]

Steps to take for analysis of open-ended questions

Data from open-ended questions are qualitative data (i.e., non-numerical), so statistical analyses are not appropriate. Analyses of these responses require coding complex and lengthy responses into consistent themes using a meticulous, systematic process.⁴²

- Coding common themes
 - Review data line-by-line multiple times to identify recurring patterns of themes.
 - Use a single word or phrase to define the theme.
 - Consider using the exact words of participants as codes.
 - Identify how often these themes are present.
 - Multiple researchers should review and code response themes and these themes should be cross-examined to improve consistency and reduce biases.
 - Common themes can be identified deductively or inductively.
 - Inductive qualitative analysis involves generating codes and themes directly from the data without imposing pre-existing theoretical categories.
 - Deductive analysis applies an a priori coding framework derived from theory or prior research.⁴³
- While data coding is often done manually, common software programs for qualitative analysis include NVivo,⁴⁴ ATLAS.ti,⁴⁵ and Dedoose.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Sears, B., Castleberry, N., Lin, A., & Mallory, C. (2024). LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment. The Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Discrimination-Aug-2024.pdf>

⁴² Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000). Qualitative research in health care. Analysing qualitative data. *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)*, 320(7227), 114–116. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1117368/>; Wong L. (2008). Data analysis in qualitative research: a brief guide to using nvivo. *Malaysian family physician : the official journal of the Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysia*, 3(1), 14–20. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4267019/>; Wolff, B., Mahoney, F. J., Lohiniva, A. L., & Corkum, M. (2024). Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data. In S. A. Rasmussen, & R. A. Goodman (Eds.), *The CDC Field Epidemiology Manual*. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Reprinted from *The CDC Field Epidemiology Manual*, pp. 213–233, by S. A. Rasmussen, & R. A. Goodman Eds., 2018, Oxford University Press). <https://www.cdc.gov/field-epi-manual/php/chapters/qualitative-data.html>

⁴³ Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

⁴⁴ <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

⁴⁵ <https://atlasti.com/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.dedoose.com/>

- Consider using direct quotes to present key themes in the participants' own words.
 - Do not include information that would personally identify the person being quoted (e.g., participant names, exact names of workplaces, organizations, schools or universities, clinics, service providers, streets, etc.).
 - Correct quotes for spelling and punctuation, as it makes sense for readability. Protect the dignity of your research participants by not erasing their contributions with your own words, while also avoiding "othering" them by including spelling and punctuation mistakes.
 - When the quote is part of a larger response, use ellipses "..." to indicate the sections not included.
 - Use square brackets "[]" to denote words added for clarification or to replace identifying information (e.g., replace their employer "Starbucks" with "coffeehouse chain").

Continuing from the example above, open-ended survey questions were coded in NVivo or Excel using a content analysis approach organized around main themes. Responses indicating no opinion or uncertainty were excluded. Quotes were copyedited for spelling and grammar, and word clouds were created in Adobe Illustrator using the remaining write-in responses. Listening session and survey write-in data were coded deductively by topic area to incorporate participants' voices into the findings and recommendations. Selected quotes were presented throughout the report to add depth and context to the quantitative findings. Future research could utilize a more inductive approach to this dataset.

10. Strategies for Presenting Data in a Compelling Way

To have an impact on law and policy, research must be communicated in a way that people can understand the main outcomes and their significance for law and policy decisions. Key audiences include community members, policymakers, media, and the public.

Develop a dissemination plan at the beginning of your project

- Before you finish your survey design, you should try drafting a press release and/or executive summary based on hypothetical results to your survey questions—do you have the information that you need? Do you have it in a form that a layperson or a decision-maker can understand?

Provide an opportunity for community participants and partners to learn about and react to findings before releasing the findings more broadly

- LGBTQ research cannot be done unless LGBTQ people give their time and share their attitudes, opinions, and life experiences, both positive and negative. This generosity should be respected by reporting the research back to participants and broader affected communities first.
- Ideally, in community-based research, researchers will schedule time to share research findings and receive community feedback on the interpretation of the results before the final report is written.
- Once the report is finalized, holding an event at a venue that is accessible to the community in the study demonstrates appreciation and respect for the community and prepares them, if they wish, to be able to share the research outcomes more widely.

Synthesize and condense your main messages and findings

- You should be able to succinctly describe the main findings and implications of your research in one to three paragraphs.
- An executive summary is not just a summary; it is a synthesis. The process of writing the executive summary can reveal further analyses that need to be done. Your analysis isn't done until you have this synthesis completed.
 - The executive summary and key findings should fit in one to three pages.
- You should be able to orally give the main results in a few sentences; typically, you may only have three minutes to present at a hearing.
- You will eventually have to communicate key results in the shortness of social media posts.

Consider language access

- Make sure you disseminate your findings in languages spoken by the communities that the research is about.
- Translation and interpretation services need to be built into the timeline and budget.
- Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

- If you can't translate the report in all of the languages used (as in, for example, LA County), can you do the top several? The top two?
- If you can't afford to translate the entire report, can you translate the executive summary? The press release? Social media postings?
- This also requires early planning. Translation takes time; if you want to disseminate your findings to Spanish speakers, for example, do you have someone on your research team who is fluent in Spanish who can speak at events and/or to the media?

Express data in ways that are visual and interactive

We live in a world that is increasingly online and where media is visual and interactive. To effectively communicate your research in your report, you should think about how to format and present your text and include compelling graphs and tables. While various programs make formatting reports and creating graphs and tables easier, enlisting a graphic designer and building time for them to do their work into your project timeline can make a big difference in the dissemination of your work.

Social media and online content are visual and interactive. You may want to prepare graphs or images for social media, shoot short videos of community members or researchers discussing the findings, or create data interactives that let viewers engage more with the findings they see.

For example, the Williams Institute created a data interactive based on the results of the Generations study. Users can explore topics including health, stress and discrimination, adverse childhood experiences, work and housing, relationships and parenting, and identity and resilience, and see differences in responses between LBQ women, GBQ men, and transgender people.

Combine data with stories

- Numbers and statistics can grab attention, particularly when very high percentages of people are revealed to have experienced bad things or very low percentages to have experienced good things. However, numbers cannot convey the full human impact.
- Policymakers may need a combination of data and personal stories from constituents. The stories are needed to make the data real, while the data give them the evidence they need to craft good policies and negotiate with those who might oppose them.
- Include illustrative anonymous quotes from open-ended survey questions to communicate to readers the people behind the data.
- For events, testimonies, and engaging with policymakers, partner with community members who can explain to those who may not know what the data mean for people in the community in real life.
- Never relay someone else's story without their permission. When relaying someone else's story, particularly when it is a difficult experience that a community member shared, use caution to avoid objectifying them. People's life experiences are not a means to an end. Significant self-reflection is required to avoid using other people's stories for self-promotion, one's own ego, or to communicate that the audience—and you—should react with pity rather than solidarity. People have agency and can, and should be invited to, speak on their own behalf wherever possible.

Identify your primary audiences for making a law and policy impact

- The main audience will be those with direct power to make laws and set policy, as well as those charged with interpreting laws. This includes legislators, council members, other policymakers, judges, and other decision-makers.
- Don't forget the other stakeholders who might be more accessible to you and who have influence on the law and policymakers.
- Now is the time to return to the analysis of key decision-makers (see [Chapter 3](#)) and map out ways to reach them.

Disseminate your findings in ways that effectively reach those audiences

- Elected officials, such as city council members and state and federal representatives, frequently hold office hours and are available by appointment. They are most receptive to their own constituents, which is part of their representation role, so it is useful to map out which research and community partners are based in key localities.
- For new legislation and legislative changes, public hearings are often scheduled. You might need to sign up in advance. Comments usually have tight time limits (e.g., three minutes), so plan to highlight the key research findings succinctly and practice your delivery. Overwhelming policymakers with information won't be helpful. It is better to keep comments brief and follow up through email. For example, you can send the executive summary or a fact sheet, along with the full survey report.
- If you have research that speaks to an important pending legal question, you could consider partnering with a legal organization to submit an amicus brief or with a legal education partner to share findings.
- As noted in Chapter 3, nonprofit organizations (those with 501(c)(3) status) can share research findings, but they must be careful not to engage in advocacy work. Be aware of the policies so that your organization and organizations you partner with are not put at risk of violating them.

Partner with community members to help with disseminating your findings

- Community members may be interested in disseminating the research findings. This is particularly true when communities either led or were part of the research team from the beginning.
- Developing written materials, such as brochures, one-page summaries, bookmarks and cards, will support community members' outreach while ensuring that the research findings are correctly described by those who may not have been deeply involved in the process.

Time your initial release with a law and policy “hook” or “peg”

You may want to plan your initial release around a “news hook” or “news peg” that underscores the timeliness or relevance of your work to media and decision-makers.

- Some occasions that can increase relevance for LGBTQ-related research are annual, such as Pride Month (June), National Coming Out Day (October 11), and World AIDS Day (December 1).

- Given your study, your results might also have more relevance if released on other commemorative days, months, or holidays. For example, a study focused on Black LGBTQ people could be released during Black History Month; a study on LGBTQ veterans could be released in conjunction with Veteran's Day; or a study on food insecurity in the LGBTQ community could be timed just before Thanksgiving and Giving Tuesday.
- Anniversary years for key events also provide an opportunity to bring more attention to your research. For example, the Williams Institute released two reports on married same-sex couples to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the *Obergefell* decision.
- Anticipated law and policy moments (e.g., introduction of a bill, hearing before a committee, or state ballot initiative in California) can be ideal opportunities for the release of policy-relevant research. Depending on the visibility of these moments, the media, decision-makers, communities, and even the general public may be primed to read the information you have to share.

Track news hooks and policy opportunities for further dissemination after the initial release

You can make further use of your research by tracking other news and law policy hooks after the initial release. Using social media on relevant commemorative dates and holidays can focus attention on some of your key findings. Also, keeping alert to litigation, legislation, or other policy developments related to your findings will provide additional opportunities for your research to have an impact. For example, when a federal spending bill was passed in the summer of 2025, the Williams Institute prepared a media advisory summarizing past research related to how the bill would impact access to health care, student loans, and SNAP/food stamps for LGBTQ people.⁴⁷ Even tracking what elected officials and/or celebrities are talking about in the news might provide additional opportunities for you to disseminate your research.

Be available and responsive to further requests about your project

Over the long term, you want to make sure you can support future uses of your data that you may not anticipate, including requests from media, decision-makers, and other researchers. Ideally, your final report and dissemination materials will have a home on a website for at least several years, so others can easily find them through an online search. You will also want a data archiving plan that allows you to store your data while maintaining your participants' privacy, so you can confirm your initial findings and/or conduct new analyses if requested. For example, after the initial release of the LELAC and TNB survey results, the Williams Institute received requests to create fact sheets based on housing instability in the LGBTQ community that would be relevant to state ballot initiatives focused on housing. In addition, the Institute was requested and funded to do new analyses and a report looking specifically at LGBTQ Latinas in Los Angeles County.

⁴⁷ Sears, B. (2025, March). Impact of Changes to Federal Student Loans Programs on LGBTQ Adults. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Federal-Student-Loan-Changes-Mar-2025.pdf>; Sears, B., Flores, A. R., & Harbeck, J. (2025). LGBTQ Adults with Medicaid as Their Primary Source of Health Insurance. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Medicaid-LGBT-May-2025.pdf>; Sears, B., Cisneros, N., & Harbeck, J. (2025). Food Insecurity and Reliance on SNAP Among LGBTQ Adults. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/SNAP-Reliance-Jul-2025.pdf>

For the study on the Experiences of Trans and Nonbinary Immigrants in Los Angeles County, the Williams Institute and the TransLatin@ Coalition secured initial funding from the LA County Supervisors, which built institutional buy-in from the start. After the study was complete, the research team reviewed publicly available Board of Supervisors meeting minutes to identify gaps already on the county's radar that the research findings could inform. The LA County LGBTQ+ Commission's inaugural Executive Director was invited to present the research findings at a Supervisors' meeting. At the same meeting, the Supervisors took up an agenda item to explore a TGI (Trans, Gender Expansive, and Intersex) fund. Meanwhile, community partners engaged in activities to share research information. They also coordinated community testimony for the Supervisors' meeting and engaged local press. As mentioned in Chapter 3, that fund was later approved in November 2024, creating a \$7 million investment over two years to address systemic barriers for TGI communities across Los Angeles County.

Community dissemination was further conducted through a town hall event designed to reflect and honor the communities being researched. Community members were paid to cater the event—the food spread was an incentive for other community members and local partners to attend. A community member from a local Indigenous community led the land acknowledgement, allowing that person to honor their community in a conscious and intentional way. The motivation behind these practices was to approach community members not as passive recipients of research findings, but as active, valued participants in the process of sharing and applying them.

11. Resource List

Introduction

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Developing and maintaining community partnerships and engagement

See resources for [Chapter 2](#).

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Authors

Laurel D. Sprague, Ph.D., is the Research Director and Blachford/Cooper Distinguished Scholar at the Williams Institute.

Ayden I. Scheim, Ph.D., is a Senior Scholar of Public Policy at the Williams Institute.

Brad Sears, J.D., is the Rand Schrader Distinguished Scholar of Law and Policy at the Williams Institute. He is also the Associate Dean of Public Interest Law at UCLA Law.

Elana Redfield, J.D., is the Arnold D. Kassoy Scholar of Law and Federal Policy Director at the Williams Institute.

Keyanna P. Taylor, M.P.H, M.S., is a Research Data Analyst at the Williams Institute.

Neko Michelle Castleberry, Ph.D., is a Research Data Analyst at the Williams Institute.

Jody L. Herman, Ph.D., is the Reid Rasmussen Fellow and a Senior Scholar of Public Policy at the Williams Institute.

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ABOUT THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE

The Williams Institute is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy. A think tank at UCLA Law, the Williams Institute produces high-quality research with real-world relevance and disseminates it to judges, legislators, policymakers, media, and the public. These studies can be accessed at the Williams Institute website.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law
williamsinstitute@law.ucla.edu
williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS



Appendices

Appendix A. Glossary of Williams Institute Studies

Impact of the 2025 Eaton Fire on LGBTQ+ Communities, 2025

In January 2025, Los Angeles County experienced two of the most destructive wildfires in California's history. This study, conducted in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, used data from a wildfire rapid needs assessment survey conducted by the Department of Public Health and from two rounds of listening sessions to examine the impact of the Eaton Fire on LGBTQ+ survivors.

Sears, B., Sprague, L.D., Taylor, K.P., Castleberry, N.M., Efron, B., Cui, Y., & Shah, M.D. (2026). The Impact of the 2025 Eaton Fire on LGBTQ+ Communities. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, California. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-eaton-fires-impact/>

Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS)/Lived Experiences in Los Angeles County (LELAC) Survey, 2023

This study examined the lived experiences and needs of LGBTQ people in LA County using representative data collected from 1,006 LGBTQ Los Angelenos who completed the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's 2023 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS), including 504 LGBTQ Angelenos who also completed the Lived Experiences in Los Angeles County (LELAC) Survey, which was a call-back study to LACHS developed by the Williams Institute. The reports published from this study presented information about experiences with discrimination and harassment in the areas of education, employment, housing, health care, public spaces, and law enforcement, as well as findings about the health and economic well-being of LGBTQ Angelenos.

Sears, B., Conron, K.J., Mallory, C., Carreño, M.F., Cui, Y., & Shah, M.D. (2024). Communities of Resilience: The Lived Experiences of LGBTQ Adults in Los Angeles County. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-la-county/>

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Los Angeles County Trans and Nonbinary Survey, 2023-2024

The LA County Trans & Nonbinary Survey was conducted by The TransLatin@ Coalition and the Williams Institute in collaboration with the Royal Collection Corporation and the Connie Norman Transgender Empowerment Center. In addition to listening sessions with 32 community members and organizational staff, researchers surveyed 322 trans and nonbinary adult residents of LA County. The study focused on their experiences with various issues, including economic stability, housing, health, transportation, access to services, community involvement, and encounters with law enforcement and incarceration.

A later report focused on the responses from 98 transgender and nonbinary immigrants who participated in the 2023–2024 LA County Trans & Nonbinary Survey. Findings highlighted the experiences of trans Latina immigrants, who made up two-thirds of the sample, and provided comparisons to transgender and nonbinary non-immigrants.

Herman, J.L., Salcedo, B., Chatham, K., Mahowald, L., Ortega, H.M.S.Q.V., & Redfield, E. (2024). Para Mi Punto de Vista/From My Point of View: Results of the 2023 LA County Trans & Nonbinary Survey. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/tnb-la-county-survey/>

Redfield, E., Salcedo, B., Herman, J.L., Chatham, K., Koppam, R., Mahowald, L., & Ortega, H.M.S.Q.V. (2025). Experiences of Transgender and Nonbinary Immigrants in Los Angeles. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/tnb-immigrants-in-la-county/>

LGBTQ People in the US: Select Findings from the Generations and TransPop Studies

The Generations study was a national probability sample of cisgender sexual minority (LGBQ) individuals, including nonbinary people who reported that their gender is the same as their sex assigned at birth, while the TransPop study was a study of transgender adults, regardless of sexual orientation, defined as individuals who stated that their current gender identity (e.g., man, woman, transgender, or nonbinary) was different from the sex assigned to them at birth (male, female). Both studies recruited their samples between 2016 and 2018. Using data from these studies, the Williams Institute published a report presenting the topline findings, which examined similarities and differences across a variety of LGBTQ-relevant topics among key subgroups of LGBTQ people—GBQ cisgender men, LBQ cisgender women, and transgender people.

Meyer, I.H., Wilson, B.D.M., & O'Neill, K.K. (2021). LGBTQ People in the US: Select Findings from the Generations and TransPop Studies. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/generations-transpop-toplines/>

LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment, 2023

In 2020, U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County* extended employment non-discrimination protections to LGBTQ people nationwide. Using survey data collected in the summer of 2023, this study examined experiences of discrimination and harassment against LGBTQ employees using a survey of 1,902 LGBTQ adults in the workforce conducted in the summer of 2023. It was based on a similar study published by the Williams Institute in 2021.⁴⁸ This report examined the lifetime, five-year, and past-year workplace experiences of LGBTQ employees. It compared the experiences of transgender and nonbinary (TNB) employees to those of cisgender LGBQ employees, LGBTQ employees of color to those of White LGBTQ employees, and LGBTQ employees who were out to at least someone in the workplace compared to those who were out to no one. Additional reports focused on Latinx, Black, Asian American, and public employees who were LGBTQ.

Sears, B., Castleberry, N., Lin, A., & Mallory, C. (2024). LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-workplace-discrimination/>

⁴⁸ Sears, B., Mallory, C., Flores, A.R., & Conron, K.J. (2021). LGBTQ People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Discrimination-Sep-2021.pdf>

Appendix B. Research Centers and Organizations with a Focus on LGBTQ People

Reviewing the work of research centers is a helpful way to identify both researchers and research reports that might be useful for determining whether the data you need already exists. Your online search might have already pointed you to an expert or research center that specializes in the topic area of interest to you.

Many research centers have a general email inquiry form or email address. If you're unsure who to contact, see if they have a communications team that can help.

California

- **The Williams Institute** (<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/>) at UCLA's School of Law is the nation's (and state's) premiere research center on LGBTQ law and policy. Their website organizes research by topic (data collection, demographics, education, etc.) and is also searchable by keyword. The Williams Institute's research spans everything from children and SNAP to HIV criminalization and global LGBTQ acceptance. The Williams Institute may have the data you need or might be able to point you in the right direction.
- **The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research** (<https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/>) is the primary home for the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), one of the best sources for health-related research in California (see Appendix E for more information on CHIS). The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research has amassed a long list of LGBTQ+ research papers over the years using the rich data contained in CHIS (<https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/publications?keys=LGBT>). From mental health to crime victimization and gun ownership, the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and CHIS explore topics well beyond what people often imagine for health policy.
- **UCLA Center for LGBTQ+ Advocacy, Research, and Health** (<https://lgbtq.ph.ucla.edu/>) focuses on public health interventions. Their in-house experts and extensive community partners roster might be able to identify little-known already existing data that can be used to answer your research question. As their contact page says, "We'd love to hear from you."
- **The Center of Excellence for Transgender Health** at UCSF (<https://prevention.ucsf.edu/transhealth>) is a leader in research on "increasing access to comprehensive, effective, and affirming health care services for transgender communities".
- **California Health care Foundation (CHCF)** (<https://www.chcf.org/>) works to broadly strengthen California's health care safety net so all Californians — especially those who qualify for Medi-Cal — have access to the care they need when they need it. They have a number of LGBTQ+-focused resources on their website, but of particular note is their fact sheet on *Listening to Black Californians who Identify as LGBTQ+* (<https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/LCBAIdentifyLGBTQ.pdf>). CHCF's larger *Listening to Black Californians* study, conducted in 2021 and 2022, was based on 100 individual interviews, 18 focus groups, and a statewide survey of 3,325 adult Black Californians. The study included one-hour interviews with 13 Black LGBTQ+ Californians, two focus groups of LGBTQ+ participants, and 330 survey respondents who identified as LGBTQ+.

- Some of **California LGBTQ Centers** are engaged in research or have engaged in research in the past. They are often also a gateway and nexus connecting researchers who want to do community-based research with community members themselves. They might know about local research projects with relevant data. Even if they can't connect you to relevant researchers or data, they might be a key audience or stakeholder for your own research results.

National LGBTQ-focused research centers and organizations

National organizations are often key sources of already-collected data, national surveys, policy briefs, and administrative analyses. Even if they are not traditional academic research centers, many maintain research divisions that publish reports, data dashboards, and methodological documentation. They may already have collected the data you need or can point you toward it.

- The **Movement Advancement Project (MAP)** (<https://www.lgbtmap.org/>) produces detailed policy analyses, demographic reports, and interactive state-level policy maps. MAP's work frequently combines original policy coding with secondary demographic and economic data. Their reports often contain compiled datasets that would otherwise require significant independent coding (for example, LGBTQ policy tallies across all 50 states).
- The **U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS)** (<https://ustranssurvey.org/>) conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality (now **Advocates for Trans Equality, A4TE**), is the largest survey of transgender people in the United States. The 2015 wave is available and includes detailed national and state-level findings on employment, health, discrimination, housing, education, and interactions with law enforcement. The published reports—for both 2015 and 2022—contain descriptive data, and researchers may request access to public use files or special tabulations. If your research involves transgender populations, the USTS is often the first place to look.
- **Glisten** (formerly the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, GLSEN) (<https://glisten.org/>) conducts the National School Climate Survey, one of the most widely cited datasets on LGBTQ+ youth experiences in K–12 education. The survey includes detailed measures of harassment, safety, and school policy environments and often provides state-level breakdowns.
- The **Trevor Project** (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>) produces annual national surveys on LGBTQ+ youth mental health. These surveys generate high-profile findings on suicide risk, access to affirming environments, and protective factors. While the full datasets are not always publicly released, published reports contain detailed tabulations and methodological appendices.
- **SAGE (Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders)** (<https://www.sageusa.org/>) is the leading national organization focused on LGBTQ+ older adults. In addition to advocacy and services, SAGE has produced substantial research on aging, housing stability, health disparities, long-term care access, and economic insecurity among LGBTQ+ seniors. Their reports often draw on national survey data, community-based research, and collaborations with academic partners.
- The **LGBTQ Economic Impact Research Initiative** (<https://lgbtq-economics.org/>) focuses on economic modeling and analysis of LGBTQ populations and policy impacts. Their reports frequently estimate macroeconomic consequences of discrimination or policy change, drawing on labor market and demographic datasets.

- The **Human Rights Campaign** (HRC) (<https://www.hrc.org/>) produces annual and special reports such as the Corporate Equality Index and health care equality reports. These publications often include institutional-level data that may not exist elsewhere, particularly regarding employer policies, corporate practices, and hospital nondiscrimination measures.
- The **National LGBTQ Task Force** (<https://www.thetaskforce.org/>) has historically conducted community-based research, including surveys on LGBTQ+ aging, economic insecurity, and transgender issues. Their research often emphasizes intersectionality and lived experience and may include datasets not widely circulated in academic channels.

National research organizations that routinely collect data about LGBTQ people

In addition to LGBTQ-specific organizations, several national survey organizations now include sexual orientation and gender identity measures in major national surveys.

- **Gallup** (<https://news.gallup.com/>) regularly tracks national trends in LGBTQ+ identification and public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues. Gallup's polling data are frequently cited and provide longitudinal trend data.
- The **Pew Research Center** (<https://www.pewresearch.org/>) produces high-quality national surveys on public opinion and social attitudes, often including sexual orientation measures.
- The **Public Religion Research Institute** (PRRI) (<https://www.prri.org/>) conducts annual surveys tracking religion, politics, and social attitudes, including LGBTQ nondiscrimination, same-sex marriage, and transgender policy issues. PRRI frequently provides state-level estimates and downloadable topline results.
- The **RAND Corporation** (<https://www.rand.org/>) is a nationally recognized research institution that conducts rigorous, data-driven policy analysis across health, defense, education, and social policy. RAND has produced research on LGBTQ+ topics, including military service by transgender individuals, health care access, youth mental health, and the economic impacts of discrimination. RAND frequently works with federal agencies and large administrative datasets.

Appendix C. Geographic Regions for California

You may be initially focused on a geographic area that is too small to make use of existing SOGI data collected on national surveys or, for example, the California Health Interview Survey. You might be able to overcome this obstacle by expanding the geographic area from a neighborhood, town, city, or county in California to a larger geographic region. The larger region might provide you with enough SOGI data to work with, while still being relevant to local policymakers. If you do this, what can be helpful is using a region that has already been used in California. There are a number of these, and they have been created for different policy purposes. Table C1 provides some of the ways that California has been divided into regions for specific policy purposes.

Table C1. Examples of how California regions are defined for different policy purposes

TOPIC	NUMBER OF REGIONS	LINK
General/Social Services	6	https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Divide-CA-Jun-2015.pdf
California Census	10	https://census.ca.gov/regions/
Health	6	https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/RPHO
Economic	9	https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-economy/ https://lab.data.ca.gov/dataset/medi-cal-birth-statistics-by-select-characteristics-and-california-resident-hospital-births/532d0741-ea17-4c59-a738-1de74e7b77b0 https://california100.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/61823-Californias-Future-A-Regional-Analysis_fixed.pdf
Environment	6	https://coolcalifornia.arb.ca.gov/regions
Geography/Historical	4	https://www.californiahistoryteachers.com/blog/california
Transportation	12	https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/transportation-planning/documents/final-2017-rph-11-9-17.pdf

Also, consider getting data for other commonly referred to regions in the state, such as the areas below. Note that definitions of these more informal areas are contested, so you should let your policy issue or available data guide you, and be sure to define the area(s) appropriately:

- **Northern California/Southern California** (<https://bayareatelegraph.com/2023/04/23/where-does-southern-california-stop-and-northern-california-start/#:~:text=Cultural%20and%20Geographic%20Perspectives,the%20Central%20Valley%2C%20near%20Bakersfield>): geographic split at the county line between Monterey and San Luis Obispo
- **Inland Empire** (<https://www.inlandaction.com/the-inland-empire/>): Riverside and San Bernardino counties, often analyzed together for planning.
- **The Bay Area** (<https://www.kqed.org/news/11689315/how-do-you-define-the-bay-area-2>): Nine counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay
- **Central Valley** ([The Project Focal Area: The California Central Valley](#) | [California Climate Commons](#)): Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, based on economics and focus on agriculture

Note: If you decide to combine data that has already been reported for several geographic units into a larger region, you will need the help of a trained researcher. For a variety of reasons, you cannot, in most cases, just aggregate already reported data and will need to get the original data to analyze the larger region.

Appendix D. National SOGI Data Sources with CA Samples

Below are several key national data sources with samples specifically for California (or one of its major sub-areas) or with large enough LGBTQ samples that allow analysis of California data. These data sources differ from the state data sources in Appendix E because a national sample is also available for comparison.

American Community Survey (ACS)

- **To learn more, start here:** <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html>
- **Population sampled:** Households
- **Topics included:** Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, including education, employment, income, housing, and transportation
- **LGBTQ measures:** Relationship status (married or unmarried same-sex partners)
- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2024
- **Geographic areas:** U.S., state, county, place (e.g., cities), MSA, zip code, census tract, block group, and more
- **Overview:** The ACS has served as the nation's foremost source of demographic and housing statistics since 2005. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the ACS collects detailed information from a large sample of households across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Surveys are anonymous and can be completed in paper format or online in English and Spanish.
- ACS data can be downloaded directly from the Census Bureau at <https://www2.census.gov/> or accessed through IPUMS USA at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/samples>.
- Some statistics are available at <https://data.census.gov/> and through the resources posted at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/data-tools-chart.html>.
- Custom data tabulations can be conducted using the IPUMS ACS Online Data Analysis System available at https://sda.usa.ipums.org/sdaweb/analysis/?dataset=all_acs_samples.

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)

- **To learn more, start here:** https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDSRB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/BRFSS/BRFSS_At_A_Glance_May_2025.pdf
- **Population sampled:** Adults 18+ who reside in households
- **Topics included:** Physical and mental health, diet, activity, tobacco use, cancer screening, health care access, quality of life, income, marital status, education level, and demographic characteristics.
- **LGBTQ measures:** Sexual orientation identity and transgender status (Transgender status no longer collected, starting in 2025⁴⁹)

⁴⁹ Bouton, L. and Redfield, E. (2026). Removal of sexual orientation and gender identity measures in federal data collection: January 2025 to January 2026. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Federal-SOGI-Data-Collection-Feb-2026.pdf>

- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2024
- **Geographic areas:** Data are available for the state of California and county-level analyses.⁵⁰
- **Overview:** The BRFSS is an annual state-based survey of adult health launched in 2014 by the CDC and conducted in partnership with states, territories, and the District of Columbia. The BRFSS is one of the main sources of information about the health and socioeconomic status of LGBT adults in the U.S. due to the size of its state samples (N=4,000, on average). Every year, an anonymous survey is conducted by telephone (landline and cellular since 2011) with representative household-based samples of adults in each state. The survey, available in English and Spanish, includes a core set of questions about health (e.g., physical, mental, diet, activity, tobacco use, cancer screening, health care access, quality of life) and demographic characteristics. States can include optional question modules provided by the CDC and add their own questions. An optional “SOGI” module, with questions about sexual orientation identity and transgender status, was made available in 2014.⁵¹
- **California BRFSS:** Some states, including California, initiated SOGI data collection prior to this time with their own questions. California began collecting sexual orientation identity data in 2006 and information about transgender status in 2016.⁵² The CDC lists California as having used the SOGI module in 2016, 2017, and 2020.⁵³ BRFSS data for the state of California can be downloaded directly from the CDC website at https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/annual_data/annual_data.htm.
- **Data access note:** As of this writing, the CDC documentation for the BRFSS 2024 indicates that sexual orientation data are included in the state data available through the CDC. Information about transgender status is missing from the CDC’s 2024 BRFSS documentation. Data may be requested from the California Department of Public Health by completing a data use agreement form available at https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDSRB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/BRFSS/BRFSS_DUA_Final_Jan2024_ADA.pdf.
- For questions about the California BRFSS data, email BRFSShelp@cdph.ca.gov.

Decennial Census

- **To learn more, start here:** <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about.html> and <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.2020.html#list-tab-693908974>
- **Population covered:** All residents of the U.S. and U.S. territories.
- **Topics included:** Demographic characteristics (age, sex, relationship, race-ethnicity, rent/own home)
- **LGBTQ measures:** Relationship status (married or unmarried same-sex partners)

⁵⁰ Confirmed by the state BRFSS coordinator in February 2026.

⁵¹ 2014 BRFSS Modules Used by Category. (2015, August 19). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/questionnaires/modules/category2014.htm>

⁵² Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Selected Demographics and Health Indicators California Adults, 2015-2019. (2021, April). Snapshot: A Quick Look at California’s Health Behaviors. https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDSRB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/BRFSS/Snapshot_SOGI_Issue4_April21_final_ADA.pdf

⁵³ BRFSS Questionnaires. (2025, September 24). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/questionnaires/index.htm>

- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2020
- **Geographic areas:** U.S., state, county, place (e.g., cities), MSA, zip code, census tract, block group, and more
- **Overview:** The U.S. Census is a constitutionally mandated count of people living in the U.S. (citizens and noncitizens with a usual residence)⁵⁴ that occurs every 10 years to guide the apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among states. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Decennial Census collects demographic information from all households and group quarters⁵⁵ in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories. In 2020, surveys could be completed in paper format, online, or by telephone in English and Spanish.
- Anonymized Census 2020 data can be downloaded directly from the Census Bureau at <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2020/dec/2020-census-redistricting-summary-file-dataset.html>.
- Resources to assist with data analysis are available at <https://www.census.gov/data/academy.html>.
- Some statistics are available at <https://data.census.gov/>.
- Williams Institute analysis of Census 2020 data for California can be found at:
- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020-Census-Snapshots-CA-Sep-2025.pdf>
- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/subpopulations/same-sex-couples/>

Household Pulse Survey (HPS)/Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey (HTOPS)

- **To learn more, start here:**
 - **HPS:** <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html>
 - **HTOPS:** <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/htops.html>
- **Population sampled:** Adults 18+ who reside in households
- **Topics included:** Physical and mental health, health insurance coverage, education, employment, housing security, food sufficiency, vaccinations, COVID-19 impacts, transportation, inflation concerns, household spending, childcare arrangements, social isolation, and the impact of living through natural disasters.
- **LGBTQ measures:**
 - **HPS:** Sexual orientation identity, sex assigned at birth, and gender identity
 - **HTOPS:** Sexual orientation⁵⁶

⁵⁴ U.S. residents include “military and civilian employees of the U.S. government who are deployed outside the United States (while stationed or assigned in the United States) and can be allocated to a usual residence address in the United States based on administrative records from the Department of Defense.” see Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). (2021, November 22). U.S. Census Bureau.

<https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/congressional-apportionment/about/faqs.html#accordion-964dc2a4db-item-f5263f00de>

⁵⁵ “Group quarters include such places as college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities, and workers’ dormitories.

The resident population counts include all people (citizens and noncitizens) who are living in the United States at the time of the census.” See Glossary (G). (nd.). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/glossary/?term=Group+Quarters+%28GQ%29>

⁵⁶ Bouton, L. and Redfield, E. (2026). Removal of sexual orientation and gender identity measures in federal data collection: January 2025 to January 2026. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Federal-SOGI-Data->

- **Latest data available at time of writing:**
 - **HPS:** 2024
 - **HTOPS:** 2025 (limited, see note below)
- **HPS Geographic areas:** State of California and three large Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) – Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, and Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario.
- **HPS Overview:** The HPS was launched in April 2020 by the U.S. Census Bureau to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic well-being and health of the U.S. population.⁵⁷ Anonymous online surveys were conducted every few weeks in English and Spanish with adults ages 18 and up sampled from U.S. households supporting both analyses of time trends and pooled analyses in very large samples. Starting July 21st, 2021, and ending at the conclusion of the HPS on September 16th, 2024, HPS surveys collected data about sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and sexual orientation identity. The HPS was designed to produce national-, state-, and Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)-level estimates for the 15 largest MSAs,⁵⁸ including three from California. Public use datafiles can be downloaded directly from the U.S. Census Bureau at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data/datasets.html>
- **HTOPS Overview:** The Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey (HTOPS) was launched in 2025 to gather information about the social and economic well-being of the U.S. population. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, HTOPS and HPS were both created to monitor emergent issues and population welfare; however, there are notable differences in study design and sample size. HTOPS is a longitudinal survey of individuals and households conducted monthly and designed to produce national-level estimates (N=16,000)⁵⁹. The target sample size was increased to N=30,000 to support subnational estimates.⁶⁰ At the time of this writing, sexual orientation identity was collected on HTOPS surveys fielded in February and March 2025.
- Data tables for each HPS survey phase are available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data/tables.html>. Tables for each topic assessed on the survey display findings for LGBT and non-LGBT groups, as well as for cisgender male, cisgender female, and transgender respondents, and specific sexual orientation identity groups. Table tabs provide information for the US, by state, and by 15 MSAs.
- Public use datafiles can be downloaded directly from the U.S. Census Bureau at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data/datasets.html>. At the time of this writing, only February and March 2025 data have been released.

Collection-Feb-2026.pdf

⁵⁷ Household Pulse Survey: Measuring Emergent Social and Economic Matters Facing U.S. Households. (2025, September 8). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey.html>

⁵⁸ Source of the Data and Accuracy of the Estimates for the 2020 Household Pulse Survey. (nd.). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/technical-documentation/hhp/Source-and-Accuracy-Statement-May-28-June2.pdf>

⁵⁹ High Frequency Surveys Program/Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey, 90 FR 20272 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/13/2025-08397/census-bureau>

⁶⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024, April 15). *Data Collection Begins for Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey* [Press release]. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/household-trends-outlook-pulse-survey.html>

- **Note on HPS data analysis:** HPS users are advised not to use imputed values for sex assigned at birth. Please refer to the methods section of the Food Insufficiency Among Transgender Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic report for further information (<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Food-Insufficiency-Update-Apr-2022.pdf>).

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

- **To learn more, start here:** <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/index.html>
- **Population sampled:** High school students⁶¹
- **Topics included:** Injuries and violence, bullying, sexual behavior, substance use, suicide, physical activity, diet, and demographic characteristics.
- **LGBTQ measures:** Sexual orientation identity and transgender status (Transgender status will no longer be collected starting in 2025⁶²)
- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2023
- **Geographic areas:** Data are available for the state of California, and for San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Oakland school districts.
- **Overview:** The YRBSS⁶³ was developed in 1991 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor the health of adolescents in the U.S. Every two years, representative samples of 9th through 12th grade students complete an anonymous school-based survey coordinated by CDC and conducted in partnership with states and local school districts.
- **California High School YRBS:** Although the state of California participated in the high school YRBS only three times (2015 to 2019), YRBS high school data have been collected by California's largest school districts (i.e., San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego) for over 20 years, and Oakland initiated its YRBS survey in 2015.⁶⁴ Sexual orientation identity was added to the core YRBS survey in 2015,⁶⁵ although some states and school districts, including San Francisco, began collecting this information much earlier.⁶⁶ Transgender status⁶⁷ was added to the core national YRBS survey

⁶¹ A handful of states and some school districts participate in the Middle School Survey YRBS. See YRBS Participation History, Data Quality, and Data Availability. (2024, September). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/media/pdf/2023/2023-ms-participation-history508.pdf>

⁶² Bouton, L. and Redfield, E. (2026). Removal of sexual orientation and gender identity measures in federal data collection: January 2025 to January 2026. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Federal-SOGI-Data-Collection-Feb-2026.pdf>

⁶³ Brener, N.D., Kann, L., Shanklin, S., Kinchen, S., Eaton, D.K., Hawkins, J., & Flint, K.H. (2013). Methodology of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System — 2013. MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 62(1), 1-2. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6201.pdf>

⁶⁴ YRBS Participation History, Data Quality, and Data Availability. (2024, September). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/media/pdf/2023/2023-hs-participation-history508.pdf>

⁶⁵ Kann, L., Olsen, E.O., McManus, T., Harris, W.A., Shanklin, S.L., Flint, K.H., Queen, B., Lowry, R., Chyen, D., Whittle, W., Thornton, J., Lim, C., Yamakawa, Y., Brener, N. & Zaza, S. (2016). Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Related Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12 — United States and Selected Sites, 2015. MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 65(9), 1-2. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/pdfs/ss6509.pdf>

⁶⁶ Mustanski, B., Van Wagenen, A., Birkett, M., Eyster, S., & Corliss, H. L. (2014). Identifying Sexual Orientation Health Disparities in Adolescents: Analysis of Pooled Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005 and 2007. American Journal of Public Health 104, 211-217, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301748>.

⁶⁷ Sometimes referred to as transgender identity in CDC publications, even though the question does not ask about gender identity or provide gender identity response options and may not reflect the respondent's gender identity.

in 2023⁶⁸; however, California and the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego districts were gathering this information by 2017.⁶⁹

- YRBS data for the state of California, as well as Los Angeles and San Diego, can be downloaded directly from the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/data/index.html>.
- Some health statistics can be obtained from the YRBS 2021 and 2023 surveys for Oakland,⁷⁰ San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego by sexual orientation identity, transgender status, or LGBTQ status at <https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>.
- Analysis of the latest YRBS data for high school students for San Francisco can be found in the PowerPoint presentation available at: <https://www.sfusd.edu/announcements/2024-06-08-youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs-and-california-healthy-kids-survey-chks-results>.
- **California Middle School YRBS:** San Francisco and Los Angeles have also participated in the middle school YRBS for over 20 years.⁷¹ Although the core middle school survey provided by the CDC does not collect information about sexual orientation or transgender status, states and school districts can add these questions. By 2023, San Francisco had included both demographic questions on its middle school YRBS survey.⁷²
 - Analysis of the latest YRBS data for high school students in San Francisco can be found in the PowerPoint presentations available at: <https://www.sfusd.edu/announcements/2024-06-08-youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs-and-california-healthy-kids-survey-chks-results>.

Appendix E. California State SOGI Data Sources

Below are examples of key state-level SOGI data sources for California and a guide to a wealth of data collected by state and local government agencies in California that should become more available in the next few years.

California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)

- **To learn more, start here:** <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis>
- For a list of LGBT related publications using CHIS data: <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/publications?keys=LGBT>

⁶⁸ 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results. (2024, September 29). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/results/2023-yrbs-results.html>

⁶⁹ Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., Barrios, L. C., Demissie, Z., McManus, T., Rasberry, C. N., Robin, L., & Underwood, J. M. (2019). Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students - 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 68(3), 67–71. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803a3>

⁷⁰ Sexual orientation identity only

⁷¹ YRBS Participation History, Data Quality, and Data Availability. (2024, September). U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/media/pdf/2023/2023-hs-participation-history508.pdf>

⁷² Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results: SFUSD Middle School Trends & Results (Fall 2022). (2023). San Francisco Public Schools [PowerPoint Slides]. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1FdxXdCmIQGT9bAAmkykaTMh_jEBpHfz/edit?slide=id.p3#slide=id.p3

- **Population sampled:** Adults 18+ who reside in households⁷³
- **Topics included:** Health care use, access, and insurance; health status, conditions, and behaviors; public program participation; mental health; intimate partner violence; housing, income, and employment; discrimination; childcare and school; food and nutrition; gun violence; encounters with police; adverse childhood experiences; and demographic characteristics.
- **LGBTQ measures:** Sexual orientation identity, sex assigned at birth, and gender identity
- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2024
- **Geographic areas:** Data are available for the state of California and county-level analyses.
- **Overview:** CHIS is an annual survey of more than 20,000 adults conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research since 2001.⁷⁴ The survey is offered in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Tagalog and collects information about a broad range of health topics. In 2019, CHIS began utilizing a mixed-method approach (web and telephone) using a random sample of California addresses. Prior to 2019, CHIS was administered only by telephone using random digit dialing. Sexual orientation identity has been collected on CHIS since 2001. Questions about sex assigned at birth and gender identity were added in 2015.
- Details about the CHIS survey design and samples are available at: <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis/chis-design-and-methods/chis-design>
- CHIS questionnaires and information about topics covered each year are available at: <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis/chis-design-and-methods/survey-topics-and-questionnaires#chis-survey-topics>
- CHIS public use data files (PUFs) can be downloaded directly for free or analyzed through the Data Access Center (DAC) for a fee. See <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis/access-chis-data> for details.
- **Note on data access:** Health and demographic statistics can be obtained by sexual orientation identity and transgender and cisgender status through AskCHIS—an online data query platform maintained by the UCLA Center for Health Survey Research. Information can be aggregated over several years, restricted to groups of interest (e.g., 18- to 24-year-olds, Latino/as), and obtained at state, regional, and county levels. AskCHIS is available at <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)

- **To learn more, start here:** <https://calschls.org/>
- **Population sampled:** Middle and high school students

⁷³ Adolescents and children within households are also sampled and surveyed directly (12–17-year-olds) or by proxy (< 12 years); however, sample sizes for the “teen” and child surveys are much smaller. Questions about gender expression were added to the adolescent survey in 2015, while questions about sex assigned at birth and gender identity were added in 2019. Sexual orientation identity was added to the adolescent survey in 2023.

⁷⁴ California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) (n.d.) *CHIS design and methods*. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Retrieved November 21, 2023, from <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis/chis-design-and-methods>

- **Topics included:** School climate and safety, student engagement, student supports, bullying, substance abuse, and demographics.
- **LGBTQ measures:** Sexual orientation identity and transgender status
- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2023-2025
- **Geographic areas:** State, county, and district
- **Overview:** CHKS is a biennial school-based survey initiated in 1985 by the California Department of Education to monitor the school learning environment and promote student learning. All districts are encouraged to participate in the CHKS and use CHKS data to inform their Local Control and Accountability Plan. At the time of this writing, districts that receive tobacco prevention funding are required to participate in the CHKS.⁷⁵ Students ages 10 and up in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11⁷⁶ at participating schools complete an anonymous survey in English or Spanish about school connectedness and climate, safety, physical and mental well-being, and resilience-promoting factors. Districts can opt to add questions and may choose to conduct the CHKS annually. Questions about sexual orientation identity and transgender status are core demographics in the 2025-2026 CHKS middle and high school surveys. In addition, students have the option to select nonbinary as a gender identity on these surveys. Sexual orientation identity was added to the CHKS by 2013, and transgender status by 2017.
- Supplemental modules available to secondary schools can be used to gather additional information about topics including substance use and sexual behavior, after-school activities, and LGBT harassment and inclusion: <https://calschls.org/administration/downloads>
- Applications to request the CHKS data are available at <https://calschls.org/reports-data/>
- Some statistics (key indicators) from the most recent completed CHKS cycle for the state and participating districts are available by sexual orientation and transgender

From Challenges to Resilience, California Department of Aging (CDA)

- **To learn more, start here:** https://aging.ca.gov/Survey_of_LGBTQIA/
- **Population sampled:** LGBTQIA+ California Residents aged 50 and older
- **Topics included:** Economic well-being; social well-being; discrimination and safety; health care access; service utilization; mental health and substance use; cognitive and physical health; and technology access.
- **LGBTQ measures:** Sexual orientation identity, gender identity, and intersex status
- **Latest data available at time of writing:** 2024
- **Geographic areas:** State, intra-state California Census 2020 regions, intra-state rural/suburban/urban

⁷⁵ California Healthy Kids Survey: A comprehensive student data collection system that addresses school climate, health risks and behaviors, and youth resiliency. (2025). State of California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/chks.asp>

⁷⁶ Grades 7 and 9, at minimum, are required to complete the CHKS at participating schools. Schools may opt to have grades 5 and 11 participate.

- **Overview:** The CDA spearheaded *From Challenges to Resilience*, the first statewide survey to explore the current and future health and well-being of California's mid-life and older LGBTQIA+ population. This 2024 baseline survey aligns with the goals of California's Master Plan for Aging, a blueprint for state and local governments and their philanthropic and private-sector partners to prepare for California's growing population of older adults. A team of researchers from CITRIS and the Banatao Institute at UC Berkeley, the University of California, San Francisco, Openhouse, and the Center for Advanced Study of Aging Services at UC Berkeley designed and administered the survey. The survey collected responses from January 8, 2024, to March 31, 2024. Questions were available in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Chinese. Over 4,000 individuals from across every California Census 2020 region responded to the survey.
- **Data access:** A full report, summary report, fact sheet, and press release can be found at https://aging.ca.gov/Survey_of_LGBTQIA/. In addition, the site has an interactive data tool that allows users to pull up data on the surveys' eight primary topics, listed above. Within each topic, you can select a survey question and sociodemographic characteristic, including viewing results by California 2020 Census region and rurality. Deidentified survey data is available via an interactive data tool. The questions are organized into the eight topics listed across the top of the tool. Within each topic, select a survey question and a sociodemographic characteristic to view the result.
- **Note about the data:** Even though the sample is large, the researchers advise using the results with caution because they are based on a convenience sample that may not be representative of all LGBTQIA+ people over the age of 50 in California.

Appendix F. SOGI Data Collection Required by California Law and Local Ordinances

The state of California and some local jurisdictions (e.g. Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Clara County) have laws and ordinances that require the collection of sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or intersex data (SOGI) when other demographic data is collected through voluntarily, such as age or race, on surveys or administrative forms. While implementation of these laws has been slow to date, a recent state audit and a new law, SB 957, have increased attention on making data from these sources publicly available. In preparing your research, you should consider whether relevant data has been made available pursuant to California state law or local ordinances.

California state law

California state laws relevant to data collection by state and local government entities include the following:

- **AB 620 (2011)**, which requests that the Trustees of the California State University, the Regents of the University of California, and the governing boards of community colleges begin collecting data on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression when collecting other demographic data, such as race and ethnicity (https://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_0601-0650/ab_620_bill_2011008_chaptered.html)
- **AB 959 (2015)**, which requires the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Department of Aging (CDA)

to collect sexual orientation, gender identity, and variations in sex characteristics/intersex status data when collecting other demographic data, such as ethnicity, age, and race (https://www.leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB959)

- **AB 677 (2017)**, which requires education and employment-related government agencies to collect SOGI data when collecting other demographic data (<https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB677/id/1652917>)
- **SB 179 (2018)**, which requires a third, nonbinary gender marker on California birth certificates, drivers' licenses, identity cards, and gender-change court orders (https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB179)
- **SB 932 (2020)**, which requires that electronic reporting tools used by local health officers for reporting communicable diseases include SOGI data and mandates that health care providers in California report SOGI data for all reportable communicable diseases, including COVID-19 (<https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB932/id/2210289>)
- **SB 957 (2024)**, which builds upon AB 959 by requiring the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to collect SOGI data from third-party entities, including local health jurisdictions, on any forms or electronic data systems unless prohibited by federal or state law (<https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB957/id/2898625>)

SB 957 was passed in response to a 2023 audit⁷⁷ by the California State Auditor, which concluded that the California Department of Health had been slow to adopt and implement AB 959, and that many of its data-collection forms (90) fell within an exemption for data collected by third-party entities. Of the 129 forms identified by the audit as potentially including SOGI data, 105 were exempt under AB 959. Of the remaining 24, only 17 collected complete SOGI data and made that data publicly available. Of those, Public Health had only performed internal analyses of SOGI data collected from four of them. At the time of the audit, it had not reported data collected on any form directly to the legislature, as required by AB 959.

Further, the audit noted that although SOGI data was collected by the state's communicable disease reporting system, "because of resource and technical limitations," SOGI data for 100 of the 128 reportable diseases could not be exported for analysis. In addition, at the time of the audit, the three largest health jurisdictions in the state were not participating in the reporting system for certain diseases. The audit notes that this system was scheduled to be replaced in 2025.

The audit also noted that state law requires 10 additional state entities to collect SOGI data, as listed in the text box below. It contacted these agencies and determined that seven were collecting SOGI data, one was collecting only gender identity data, and two were not collecting any SOGI data. While not assessing the efforts of each of the agencies, it noted the California Department of Aging's efforts "as a potential best practice." As described above, among other initiatives, in 2024, the California Department of Aging conducted the first statewide survey focused on the health and well-being of California's LGBTQIA+ population aged 50 and older.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ California State Auditor. (2023). California Department of Public Health: It Has Missed Opportunities to Collect and Report Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data (Report 2022-102). <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2022-102/index.html>

⁷⁸ LGBTQIA+ Older Adult Survey Report. (2026). State of California Department of Aging. https://aging.ca.gov/Survey_of_LGBTQIA/

State entities required, under certain conditions, to collect SOGI data

- California Department of Public Health
- California Department of Health Care Services
- California Department of Social Services
- California Department of Aging
- California Department of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the exception of the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System
- California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System
- Commission on Teacher Credentialing
- Civil Rights Department
- California Labor and Workforce Development Agency
- Department of Industrial Relations
- Employment Training Panel
- Employment Development Department, with the exception of the Unemployment Insurance Program

Source: This text box is from: <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2022-102/index.html#section2>

California Department of Health Care Services

Following the enactment of AB959, many Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) program applications were updated to include transgender response options for the required “What is your sex?” question and to include optional SOGI questions. The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has released two reports on its efforts to include SOGI questions, in particular for Medi-Cal and Family Planning, Access, Care, Treatment (Family PACT) enrollees.⁷⁹ Medi-Cal is California’s Medicaid program, and approximately 36% of the state’s population, 14.8 million people, are enrolled in Medi-Cal. However, both reports conclude that the Medi-Cal SOGI data is not yet usable because of low response rates. By 2021, less than 4% of Medi-Cal members had responded to the optional SOGI questions on the Medi-Cal application,⁸⁰ and this had only increased to less than 6% by 2024.⁸¹

Family PACT is a California-based, no-cost public health program that provides comprehensive reproductive health and family planning services to low-income residents. Although the response rate is higher, the reports also note similar issues with data collected through SOGI questions for Family PACT enrollment.

⁷⁹ Medi-Cal Statistical Report: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection. (2023). State of California Department of Health Care Services. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/dataandstats/statistics/Documents/SOGI-Data-Collection-Jun2023.pdf>; Medi-Cal Statistical Report: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection. (2024). State of California Department of Health Care Services. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/dataandstats/statistics/Documents/SOGI-Data-Collection-Nov2024.pdf>

⁸⁰ Medi-Cal Statistical Report: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection. (2023). State of California Department of Health Care Services. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/dataandstats/statistics/Documents/SOGI-Data-Collection-Jun2023.pdf>

⁸¹ Medi-Cal Statistical Report: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection. (2024). State of California Department of Health Care Services. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/dataandstats/statistics/Documents/SOGI-Data-Collection-Nov2024.pdf>

The most recent reports note improvements in 2024 and 2025 that could lead to higher response rates in the future for the SOGI questions on Medi-Cal and Family PACT enrollment forms.⁸² The report also summarizes SOGI data collection efforts for the following DHCS programs: California Children's Services (CCS), California Outcomes Measurement (CalOMS), Every Woman Counts (EWC)/CHEER, and Genetically Handicapped Persons Program (GHPP). Given DCHS's attention to SOGI data collection, these could be more useful sources of SOGI data in the future.

Local SOGI data collection plans and ordinances

Several local jurisdictions have adopted ordinances or plans to implement or build upon the state law requirements for SOGI data collection, including Los Angeles,⁸³ San Francisco,⁸⁴ and Santa Clara County.⁸⁵ San Francisco's efforts were noted in the 2023 audit⁸⁶ described above:

... the city and county of San Francisco has taken significant steps to collect, analyze, use, and report on SOGI data. In 2016, San Francisco amended its administrative code to require certain departments and contractors that provide health care and social services to collect and record data concerning the sexual orientation and gender identity of the clients they serve, and further, require the covered departments to analyze and report to the city administrator the SOGI data that it collects, including SOGI data collected by contract or through grantees. To comply with this requirement, San Francisco departments—including the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)—publish annual reports on their collection of SOGI data. For example, reports from the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (SFHSH) include updates on efforts to record and report SOGI data due to COVID-19, the outcomes of SOGI data analysis, and the impact of initiatives to increase the LGBTQ populations' access to services. SFHSH's most recent annual report noted that its collection of SOGI data allowed it to identify disadvantaged LGBTQ groups and increase LGBTQ outreach and participation in its services.

If you are focused on a county or city in California, we recommend that you also research whether that jurisdiction has adopted a plan or requirements for SOGI data collection and if such data is publicly available.

⁸² Medi-Cal Statistical Report: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Collection. (2024). State of California Department of Health Care Services. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/dataandstats/statistics/Documents/SOGI-Data-Collection-Nov2024.pdf>

⁸³ Loo, P. (2021). Standardization of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data Collection. Office of the Chief Information Office. https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dmh/1122809_2021-6-21ReportBackonExpansionandStandardizationofSexualOrientation.pdf; Standard of Practice for Collecting and Reporting Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data. (2021). County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health. [http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/irb/Docs/CSO-003%20SOP%20\(SOGI\).pdf#:~:text=AB%20959%20%2D%20Lesbian%2C%20Gay%2C%20Bisexual%2C%20and,SOGI%20data%20when%20collecting%20other%20demographic%20data](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/irb/Docs/CSO-003%20SOP%20(SOGI).pdf#:~:text=AB%20959%20%2D%20Lesbian%2C%20Gay%2C%20Bisexual%2C%20and,SOGI%20data%20when%20collecting%20other%20demographic%20data)

⁸⁴ Collection of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data: FY22-23 Annual Report. (2023). San Francisco Human Services Agency. https://www.sfhsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024-01/report_sogi_fy22-23.pdf

⁸⁵ The County of Santa Clara County. (nd.) Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE). https://stgenssa.sccgov.org/debs/program_handbooks/common_place/assets/6CC/22CivRights/SOGI.htm

⁸⁶ California State Auditor. (2023). California Department of Public Health: It Has Missed Opportunities to Collect and Report Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data (Report 2022-102). <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2022-102/index.html#QL3>

Appendix G. Local SOGI Data in California

We recommend researching whether the county or city you are focused on has collected data about LGBTQ people. Below are some examples of such efforts from California's most populous counties and cities.

- **Los Angeles County (Los Angeles, Long Beach)**
 - Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS): <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/centerfortheequity/LGBTQDataReporting.html>
 - LELAC Survey (2024):
 - County reports: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-la-county/>; <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/la-lgbtq-contributions/>; <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LACo-Elected-Officials-Jun-2024.pdf>
 - By LA County Supervisorial District: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LACo-Districts-Nov-2024.pdf>
 - Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) Research:
 - <https://dmh.lacounty.gov/about/mhsa/uscc/lgbtqia2-s-uscc/>
 - Los Angeles Homeless Count Data (2025): <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=1043-2025-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-data>
 - Department of Medical Examiners, violent death reporting system: <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/190181.pdf>
 - LA County Human Relations Commission Annual Hate Crimes Report (2025):
 - <https://lacounty.gov/2025/12/04/la-county-report-reveals-the-second-highest-hate-crimes-in-44-years/>
 - Rapid Needs Assessment Los Angeles Fires (2025) <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LA-Fires-Jan-2026.pdf>; https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1196933_LACWildfireRNAReport-Nov2025_Final_.pdf
- **San Diego County (San Diego)**
 - Report using data from CHKS: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/CHS/LGBTQ%20Youth%20Population%20in%20SDC%20Brief%202021-2023.pdf>
 - Report using CHIS data: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/CHS/Adult%20LGBQ%20Population%20in%20SDC%20Brief%202018-2022.pdf>
 - SD Unified School District report using YRBS data: https://www.sandiegounified.org/departments/sexual_health_education/surveillance/youth_risk_behavior_survey/2019_yrbs_data_and_reports/sexual_identity_and_gender_expression_reports
 - Senior Services at SD LGBT Community Center 2023 Community Survey: <https://thecentersd.org/events/senior-services-survey-2023/>
- **Orange County (Santa Ana, Anaheim)**

- LGBTQIA+ Community Population Overview by Equity in OC: <https://ocuw.app.box.com/s/8ss45vu5r9baojlsipqpdfnl3siy2hnl>
- Orange County LGBTQ+ Community Collective by Equity in OC: [https://ochealthinfo.com/sites/health care/files/2025-06/HEP-LGBTQ_2023_r3.pdf?u=20250626](https://ochealthinfo.com/sites/health%20care/files/2025-06/HEP-LGBTQ_2023_r3.pdf?u=20250626)
- LGBTQ+ Youth in Orange County Community Needs Assessment: <https://www.acls.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/LGBTQ-Youth-in-OC-Community-Needs-Assessment-Report-2021.pdf>
- Orange County's Inaugural Transgender, Gender Nonconforming, and Intersex (TGI) Survey 2021: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/636c4e4a5f6e4627958415a0/t/669843b8bdbffc7b2dca24c4/1721254848214/2024+SURVEY+REPORT-Addendum.pdf>
- Cross-sectional study on health care access among LGBT population in Orange County: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10842985/>
- **Riverside & San Bernardino Counties (Inland Empire)**
 - Riverside County Department of Public Health 2014 and 2017 transgender health reports: <https://idyllwildtowncrier.com/2017/04/06/county-reports-on-the-health-of-inland-empire-transgender-community/>
 - Coachella Valley LGBT Mental Health Needs Assessment 2019: https://harcdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/LGBT-Center-Report_2019.pdf
 - Riverside County Department of Public Health's 2014 LGBT Health & Wellness Profile: https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/PDF/2014/LGBT_Health_Wellness_2014.pdf
 - LGBTQ Community Center of the Desert launched online survey in late 2025: <https://kesq.com/news/2025/10/06/valleys-lgbtq-population-encouraged-to-participate-in-quality-of-life-survey/>
 - 2015 Inland Empire Transgender Health & Wellness Profile: https://www.ruhealth.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Inland_Empire_Transgender_Health_and_Wellness_2015_Final.pdf
- **San Francisco (City and County)**
 - San Francisco Human Services SOGI data collection report: https://www.sfhsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024-01/report_sogi_fy22-23.pdf
 - The San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing has gathered substantial SOGI data and has implemented LGBTQ-targeted initiatives: https://media.api.sfgov/documents/FY2023-24_SOGI_Report_-_HSH.pdf
 - Bay Area community needs assessment: <https://www.horizonsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SF-Bay-Area-LGBTQ-Needs-Assessment-Report-2018-.pdf>
 - San Francisco LGBTQ Older Adult Survey 2021: <https://lgbtagingcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2025/08/San-Francisco-LGBTQ-Senior-Survey-Report-Final.pdf>
 - Lavender Phoenix (formerly APIENC) Up to Us assessment of transgender and gender nonconforming Asians and Pacific Islanders in the Bay Area 2020: <https://lavenderphoenix.org/uptous/>

- San Francisco Planning 2017 LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy: <https://sfplanning.org/project/lgbtq-cultural-heritage-strategy>
- SF LGBT Center LGBTQI Violence Prevention Needs Assessment 2015: <https://www.sfcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/violence-report-final.pdf>
- San Francisco Transgender & Gender-Variant Immigrant Survey (TGVIS) 2023: <https://transbar.org/san-francisco-transgender-gender-variant-immigrant-survey-tgvis-2023/>
- San Francisco State University's Family Acceptance Project: <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>