

STREET NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Creating an LGBTQ2S Inclusive and Affirmative 2021 Street Needs Assessment Presented by Dr. Alex Abramovich Webinar Question and Answers

Q1. Why do we ask about sexual orientation and gender identity on the Street Needs Assessment survey?

Doing ethical research and work involves asking the right questions and ensuring that we ask inclusive questions that truly capture people's actual identities. If we don't ask inclusive questions, we are not collecting accurate data and we end up erasing people. People need to see themselves reflected in the response options rather than forcing people into categories that do not represent who they are.

Sexual orientation and gender identity questions are essential questions because they represent important aspects of people's lives and in many cases are directly linked to people's pathways into and out of homelessness. People have intersectional identities, which need to be included in our attempts to understand and end homelessness. The questions that we ask on surveys and intake forms matter, because not only can these questions help us collect important data, but they can also help people feel welcome and safe, or they can actually do quite the opposite. The data also provides us with a better understanding of the scope of the problem of LGBTQ2S homelessness and the needs of service users which will ultimately help inform service delivery.

Q2. How would you suggest a surveyor respond if a client gets offended by these questions, or feels they're too invasive or starts making comments that, for example, it's wrong, disgusting, or against their religion?

Let clients know that the City of Toronto supports equity, diversity and inclusion, and that all homelessness services are meant to be inclusive and safe spaces. Clients should also be reminded that their participation in the survey is voluntary and that they can skip any questions they do not want to answer or terminate the survey anytime. In addition, there are a number of questions on the Street Needs Assessment survey that are personal, including those related to experiences of homelessness, service needs, and sources of income. The sexual orientation and gender identity questions have been designed to be inclusive and to better understand homelessness so that we can create lasting and effective solutions.

Q3. What would you recommend the surveyor do if the client seems to be dismissive or not taking seriously the gender identity and sexual orientation questions responding, for example, "purple" or "prince charming"?

Your role as surveyor is not to assume or question how people respond but to record what the client says. It is very important to clearly explain the purpose of the Street Needs Assessment and that this survey is their opportunity to have their voice heard

and their experiences captured. It might also be helpful for people to know that we've added the sexual orientation and gender identity questions so that we could better understand the diverse needs and experiences of service users and that we've added a more inclusive list of response options for that.

Q4. As a surveyor, how can I ask the questions if I don't fully understand all of the terms? I want to be respectful, but I am afraid I may offend someone if I don't understand what all the different terms mean.

It's okay if you don't know the definition of every response. You are not expected to understand every single definition. Your role as surveyor is not to question how people respond but to ask the questions and record what the person tells you. However, it is important and respectful to have a basic understanding of the terms which you can get from reviewing the [Glossary of Important Terms on Gender and Sexual Diversity](#) in advance of conducting surveys.

People are pretty forgiving if you don't understand something and respectfully ask. At the same time, this is not the time to start a conversation with the respondent about their identity or to ask them to educate you about their identity, for example, saying "Oh so you identify as trans? So, what does that mean exactly?" The purpose of the Street Needs Assessment is to provide respondents the opportunity to tell us about their experience and their service needs – not to educate you about their sexual or gender identity. You should educate yourself before and after the SNA and there are a lot of great resources that can help you do so.

Q5. How would you respond if a client asks what is the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity? What should you do if they have the same response for both questions?

Sexual orientation describes a person's romantic, physical and emotional attraction to another person (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual/straight) and gender identity refers to a person's internal and personal sense of their gender, which can correlate with or differ from their sex assigned at birth (e.g., woman, man, non-binary, trans). Gender identity and sexual orientation are different but there are certain terms that can be fluid and represent both gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, people may identify as "queer" or "two-spirit" for both their gender identity and sexual orientation. Your role as surveyor is to ask the question and record their response – not question how they identify. If they provide a response that you don't see on the survey, there is a "not listed" section where you can record this.

Q6. How should we respond if we realize that we've misgendered someone or used incorrect pronouns? Or we've made an assumption and realized we should not have?

We are all human and make mistakes. The best thing to do is to apologize immediately, use the correct pronoun and then move forward and use that as a good opportunity to remember that we should never make assumptions about people's identities. This is why it's so important to share our pronouns when we introduce ourselves and to make it part of our everyday language which will help us avoid these types of situations. We need to understand, however, that for some clients it might actually be very traumatic,

particularly if they are in a really rough place and are regularly misgendered. It's important to be mindful and not ignore it when it happens and to apologize and then move forward. Most importantly, check in to make sure the person is doing alright and ask them if they need support.

Q7. If I think that the client is a man, can I just record his gender identity as 'male' and not ask him the question so as not to offend him? What should I do if I am surveying a client and I think that they are a different gender than what they tell me?

It is very important that every respondent is asked all of the questions and given an opportunity to respond regardless of how you think they might identify. It is not possible for us to determine how a person identifies even if we think that we might know the client. We should never make assumptions based on the way the person dresses, how they present themselves, or based on the sound of their voice. Staff should never fill in the responses for the client. Our sexual orientation and gender identity is self-identified and only the client knows how they identify. These are not offensive questions – they are inclusive questions and we are asking the questions to be inclusive and to truly understand who is experiencing homelessness.

Q8. What is the rationale behind reading out loud or showing the sexual orientation and gender identity response options to the survey participants? Why is this an important part of asking questions in an inclusive way?

The questions can be read out loud or shown to clients, what's important is that all of the questions are treated similarly. For example, if you read out all of the questions but then turn the survey to the client only for the sexual orientation and gender identity questions, that would be singling out those questions. Normalization of the terms is promoted by saying them more. This also demonstrates to those being surveyed that the surveyors and service providers are comfortable with the subject and related terms.

When people can see themselves reflected in the list of response options they will be more likely to respond openly and honestly. All of the Street Needs Assessment survey questions that must be shown to the survey participant are being provided to staff on a laminated sheet – that includes the sexual orientation and gender identity questions, as well as many other questions. This way we are not stigmatizing clients but treating all the questions in a similar manner.

Staff should never assume how a client identifies. Ask everyone these questions and give them the opportunity to answer – this is their opportunity to have their voice heard. You can say something like "You might notice that there are more response options that are provided here than on other forms, or on previous surveys. In the past, we only listed man and woman in our surveys. However, that did not capture everyone's gender identity. So, we have added a more inclusive list of response options for people to be able to select how they identify." If a client asks for clarification, you can refer to the glossary of terms.