

IS YOUR RESEARCH REALLY REPRESENTATIVE?

The Nat Rep Journey

The Essential Questions for Planning,
Designing and Undertaking Inclusive Research

Introduction

The [MRS Code of Conduct \(2023\)](#) requires that when defining samples as representative of segments of the population, such as when reporting Nationally Representative ('Nat Rep') or City Representative ('City Rep'), the technical data and research reports contain details of the sampling characteristics and parameters used to define samples as being representative.

The MRS best practice recommendation is that for research and data collection to be inclusive of the population, all relevant personal characteristics should be included where it is appropriate and practical to do so. This ensures that all participants are equally valued, and their opinions and attitudes are being gathered and represented. At present the guidance is focused on practitioners collecting data in the UK, from UK participants – although many of the principles can be used and/or considered in some international markets. The international landscape is significantly more complex although MRS' longer-term aim is to produce international guidance.

MRS has produced Best Practice Guides to help practitioners act legally and ethically when collecting data and asking research participants questions on certain characteristics including ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions from UK participants. The guidance can be accessed via the following links:

- [MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Sample Data on Sexual Orientation](#)
- [MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Sample Data on Physical Disabilities and/or Mental Health Conditions](#)
- [MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Ethnicity Sample Data](#)
- [MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Data on Sex and Gender](#)

The aim of this document is to provide a checklist of inclusive considerations when planning, designing and undertaking Nat Rep research projects, as outlined in the MRS Best Practice Guides.

The MRS Best Practice Guides include some optional question and response wordings when gathering some of the information covered in this checklist. We recommend that you use the Nat Rep Journey Checklist in conjunction with the MRS Best Practice Guides.

This checklist could be adapted for any other defined samples such as City Rep.



Commissioning

1. What is the sampling approach for the proposed project?
2. Will a Nat Rep or any other defined sample be required?
3. What are the proposed sampling characteristics and parameters?

Comment



For example: age, gender identity, social grade, region, ethnicity, physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions and sexual orientation are all options for consideration when determining sampling parameters.

4. Are the sampling characteristics and parameters selected suitable for the research objective?
5. Are there any groups of participants for which collecting Nat Rep demographic data may require additional design considerations, e.g., children or vulnerable participants?
6. Will changes in response options be required for some of the characteristics used to gather Nat Rep data e.g., country specific ethnicity terms?
7. What are the quota targets for the research and where will these come from?
8. Should any quotas be interlocked and, if so, which ones and are these feasible?
9. Are there any proposed population characteristics required for the research which are small segments and may require sample boosts?
10. Can the proposed characteristics be asked in all the countries to be included in the research?

Comment



For example, ethnicity questions and response options tend to be country specific. In some countries asking questions on sexual orientation and gender identity may be illegal and/or culturally sensitive. In the UK, for example, a gender identity question was not included in the Northern Ireland census whilst it was asked in England, Scotland and Wales.



Design

11. What demographic information needs to be gathered from the participants?
12. Is the question/s and response options suitable for gathering Nat Rep data in all markets covered by the research?
13. Are the proposed Nat Rep questions and response options suitable for the participants being researched?
14. What response options for Nat Rep questions should be provided?
15. If interviewer administered, have the interviewers been briefed to enable participants to self-identify to any Nat Rep questions where this is necessary and/or appropriate?
16. Can the responses for Nat Rep questions be optional?
17. Are there open field options for participants to self-describe/identify where appropriate?
18. Are 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say' options included in the response options for questions about Nat Rep characteristics?
19. Should the response options be re-ordered to reflect the characteristics of the sample e.g., is 'white' first on the ethnicity list and is this appropriate?
20. Are there regional and/or country adaptations which should be applied for the Nat Rep questions and response options?
21. Is this a project for the UK's four nations, and have the response options been amended to reflect the characteristics of each of the UK's four nations e.g., Scottish Asian or British Asian, and if so how will this affect quotas being set on the characteristics?
22. Is there a research purpose for collecting Nat Rep data using the identified parameters?
23. Is the inclusion data being collected to meet Nat Rep requirements or is it for another purpose?
24. Does the data collection documentation clearly explain what information will be collected and why?
25. Have the key principles of inclusive research been considered from the outset?
26. Have the materials been piloted and/or subject to consultation with a diverse range of people to ensure that they are inclusive?



Sample selection

27. Are the participants from whom Nat Rep data is being collected likely to be vulnerable?
28. If there are vulnerable participants, has the [MRS Best Practice Guide on Research Participant Vulnerability](#) been referred to?
29. Are there any children included in the sample? If so, have the demographic questions been adapted for this audience?
30. If there are participants who are children, has the MRS guidance for children be referred to? This includes the [MRS Guidance: ICO Age-Appropriate Design Code](#) and [MRS Guidelines for Conducting Data Collection Activities with Children](#).
31. Are there any potential sensitivities for some of the sample to the questions being asked to determine Nat Rep characteristics?

Comment



For example, some cultural, religious and ethnic groups may have some sensitivities to sexual orientation and/or gender identity questions being asked.



Data collection

- 32. Is the Nat Rep data being collected relevant and not excessive?
- 33. Are there interviewer instructions for collecting the Nat Rep characteristics for interviewer administered data collection?
- 34. Do the instructions for interviewers offer flexibility for collecting Nat Rep data?
- 35. Have interviewers been trained and briefed on how to answer questions about the reasons for collecting Nat Rep data? If so, has this training included guidance on not inferring demographic data and the need to allow participants to self-identify?
- 36. If interviewer or moderator administered, have demographic characteristics of interviewers/moderators been considered to support and boost engagement with underrepresented groups?
- 37. Are stimulus materials being used during the data collection, such as show cards, digital recordings and images? Are these optimised for accessibility for those with physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions? Are alternative formats being offered?



Translation

- 38. Can all the questions and response options be translated into the languages being used for the project?
- 39. Are there any translation issues with the questions and response options being used to collect Nat Rep data?

Comment



For example, in French 'What is your gender?' can be offensive as 'gender' is an object due to the gendered nature of the language. In other languages 'Female' and 'Woman' is the same term whereas in English these terms have different meanings.



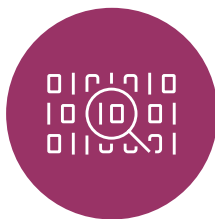
Scripting

- 40.** Has the script been checked for accessibility requirements? For example, are there screen readers on all devices that are to be used to access the research? Are closed captions available for digital recordings? Is Alt-text being used on images for online research?



Data entry

- 41.** How are language differences in demographic questions and response options being managed to ensure consistency for data entry?
- 42.** How are open-ended responses for demographic questions being managed to ensure consistency for data entry?



Coding

- 43.** Are the variations between countries and languages for Nat Rep open ended demographic response options being matched correctly?
- 44.** How are open-ended questions being coded? Are the responses comparable?



Data Tables

- 45.** Do the data tables include clear and complete explanations of Nat Rep variables used in the analysis of the data?
- 46.** Do the data tables or data to be released minimise the risk of disclosure of participant personal data for small output cells with Nat Rep data?
- 47.** If weighting is being applied, is the weighting appropriate and not overused?



Data Analysis

- 48.** Has the Nat Rep data analysis been undertaken in accordance with the specifications agreed with the client including question, response options and country/regional variations?
- 49.** How are language differences in questions and response options being managed for data analysis?
- 50.** How are cultural issues, such as the exclusion of some questions in some markets, being managed in terms of the data analysis?
- 51.** Are all the demographic groups being analysed large enough for robust analysis? If not, have any limitations in interpretation been included in the analysis to ensure that data is not misinterpreted, or conclusions misunderstood?



Reporting and Publishing

- 52.** Does the report detail the characteristics and parameters used for determining any Nat Rep or City Rep samples?
- 53.** Does the report contain sufficient information to determine the validity of any results reported, including sampling parameters?
- 54.** How are cultural and country variations, e.g., the exclusion of some culturally sensitive questions such as gender identity and sexual orientation, being reported?
- 55.** If imagery is used in reporting is the imagery inclusive and representative of the characteristics represented in the data?
- 56.** Is the format of the report readable and accessible to all potential users e.g., are screen readers used, etc?