



**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

# **IMPROVING SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

*Best Practices*

## About Self-Identification (Self-ID)

Self-identification is an important tool that provides an avenue for employees to anonymously share their diversity data so that their employers can implement strategies to build a culture that supports all employees, and measure their progress towards their diversity goals. Candidate self-identification is a valuable tool that helps organizations measure their progress towards diversity goals during the talent acquisition process.

While self-identification is optional, some employers are required to collect and report race/ethnicity and gender statistics to the Federal Government for civil rights enforcement purposes. When an employee chooses to self-identify their race/ethnicity, an employer cannot override their elections. If an employee chooses not to self-identify their race/ethnicity, employers may either conduct a visual survey to determine the information, or use employment records.

Organizations committed to diversity and inclusion routinely implement anonymous employee engagement surveys, or access employee records to help bolster their initiatives related to recruitment, hiring, retention, professional development, performance management, and promotions. However, employees often opt out of disclosing their diversity identity out of fear of discrimination or being singled out. When employees know it is safe to share, they will.

## The "Why Not" of Self-ID

- **Fear of discrimination and stigma:** People who are LGBTQ, a Veteran, or have a disability do not want to be viewed differently or for their “label” instead of as a person first. There also may be fear that identifying could negatively impact their chances for promotion or other opportunities if they are now doubted or viewed differently.
- **Not sure of the benefit:** In most cases, employees are unsure of the personal benefit, and benefit to the employer, of self-identifying.
- **No impact on their daily job functions:** Some feel that if they do not need an accommodation, or if their disability does not affect their ability to perform their regular job functions then the employer doesn't need to know.
- **Don't know they have a disability:** Many people are unaware of the definition and examples of disabilities and therefore do not realize that they have something that they could identify with.

## The "Why" of Self-ID

Self-identification data is critical to understanding inequalities, targeting diversity and inclusion policies and strategies, and monitoring the impact of remedies. The data also helps identify specific problems and barriers faced by marginalized employee groups and informs actions to mitigate those barriers. Additionally, when these topics are discussed openly, the stigma is decreased, which leads employees to feel more comfortable and accepted for all of who they are.



### Tips to Encourage Self-ID

- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout your organization and include that messaging on self-ID and employee engagement surveys.
- Make sure disability, Veteran status, and LGBTQ identity are included in your company's diversity statement. This sends a message to current employees, potential employees, and customers that you value these factors in the same manner that you value other forms of diversity.
- Decide what data to collect: Can we ask? Should we ask? How do we ask?
- Obtain ongoing input and feedback from company D&I, HR, IT, and legal professionals.
- Ensure that the survey is voluntary and employees are not forced or coerced into responding.
- When asking employees to self-identify, employers should proactively communicate the purpose of the request and emphasize the confidentiality of the responses to help mitigate the discomfort or isolation that diverse employees may feel.
- Provide multiple anonymous avenues for employees to disclose their diversity identity.
- In the surveys, communicate the definition of each diversity pillar you are seeking.
- Stress data confidentiality and communicate who will have access.
- Communicate the benefits of self-identification and how it links to the company's overall commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Share examples of how the information can impact access to resources, programs, and benefits.
- Ask employees to identify obstacles to self-identification and encourage them to offer suggestions for overcoming the obstacles. Find out which messages resonate, and which ones repel.
- Utilize Employee/Business Resource Groups to encourage respondents to self-identify.
- Launch a Self-ID Campaign; include messaging from senior leaders about why they self-ID; identify self-ID "champions." Include videos, e-newsletters, posters, and whatever communication channels reach your employees.



## Tips to Encourage Self-ID...continued

- Spotlight individuals with disabilities, Veterans, and LGBTQ employees about the benefits of self-identifying.
- Equip managers to communicate the purpose and goals of the self-ID program directly to their teams.
- Take action on what is learned from the self-ID data and communicate what changes have been made based on the data.
- Share survey results to build transparency, foster corporate unity, and allow employees to follow actions that are based on results.

### Sources

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## About OutSolve's Diversity & Inclusion MIRROR™

OutSolve's Diversity & Inclusion MIRROR™ Action Plans focus on actionable steps companies can take to implement a D&I program proportionate to their needs. The program is designed to focus on areas with the greatest impact. It helps companies move from the abstract, to a defined diversity and inclusion program that is manageable, even by smaller HR teams.

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