THE CENTRE FOR YOUTH IMPACT

E4P final recommendations

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Introduction

The guidance throughout this document is intended for anyone collecting demographic data from young people, either directly (for example, a youth worker who is responsible for collecting completed registration forms) or through others (for example, a team leader who is responsible for supporting youth workers running activities in local communities, or a funder asking grantees to submit reporting data).

This guidance is focused on what we call 'demographic data practices'. We used this term to refer to how people collect and use demographic data, from design of collection tools through to analysis and sharing. We would suggest that **everyone involved in demographic data practices within youth provision** takes some time to review this guidance and think about what they can contribute and where they might be able to influence practice.

These recommendations build on the insights of our [first report](#) and a number of subsequent consultation conversations. We would like to thank all the young people and practitioners who gave their time and energy to the E4P project and whose lived experiences have informed this work.

We must acknowledge that multiple tensions will continue to exist within this work, and that no individual person or organisation can make change happen by themselves. Our work highlighted the diversity of different perspectives about demographic data practices - with many individual young people and practitioners acknowledging that they were sitting with personal views that were tension with each other.

We need to work in a joined-up way if we are to move towards better practices and make decisions that will, ultimately, promote comprehensive, safe, and effective data collection and use—creating systems where young people can confidently share data knowing it will be used professionally, ethically, and safely in order to improve their lives and those of their peers. Beyond the life of the E4P project, there is no single organisation leading this work and so it will become our collective responsibility to drive improvements.

There will also be ways in which partners **outside of the youth sector** will be able to help drive positive change, whether or not they work directly with youth sector organisations. For example, by supporting young people with data citizenship and literacy in other

settings such as schools, and reviewing demographic data requests across different agencies and services.

In the current funding context, we must also acknowledge that many organisations will struggle to resource this work fully. Throughout the recommendations, we have highlighted where resourcing and capacity will likely present a challenge and where funders could provide additional support.

> *"So I think, like, we also need to acknowledge that those tensions are going to be there, because, like, ultimately there's going to be a power dynamic between the people who are giving money and the people who are, yeah, who don't get paid enough to do this work."*

> *"Even when you speak to funders who are open to those conversations [the people that you are directly dealing with are] also beholden to certain people. So then that's when it gets, like, real tricky..."*

Five things for the youth sector to do next

To begin with, we highlight five actions that the sector can take to move demographic data practices forwards.

1. Provide an online resource hub

What? Collate and maintain relevant training and resources in one place on a searchable online resource hub. This might cover topics such as:

- Language, phrasing, and ordering of demographic data questions
- Example statements about why demographic data is being collected
- Facilitating conversations about abstract or sensitive topics related to identity or demographic data categories
- Personal data protection within the context of youth provision – from design, through to collection, analysis, action, and sharing

Why? To draw on existing best practice (both within and beyond the sector), make it easier for everyone to access and navigate, and provide one comprehensive place when laws or policies change.

2. Develop new and tailored guidance

What? Work with young people, and specialist and expert youth sector organisations, to develop youth sector-appropriate guidance, training, and resources to improve methods and processes for different areas of demographic data (for example, race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, or disability).

This should include a shared understanding, grounded in the non-profit and/or youth sector contexts, of why data gets collected and used in various ways. This can form the basis and a blueprint for organisations to adapt their own, specific statements of intent.

Why? To draw on existing expertise and efforts within the sector to identify and respond to gaps in existing resources and guidance.

3. Support young people's knowledge and autonomy in relation to their personal data

What? Collate and develop new resources for work with young people to empower them to ask questions and understand demographic data practices (for example, why they are being asked for their data and what will happen to it), and to embed this within youth voice commitments.

Why? To ensure the core values, ethics, and principles of informal and non-formal education are embedded within any efforts to improve demographic data practices.

> *"There needs to be more of [...] an appetite for people to care about their data [...] think it's our job to drive, you know, to make people interested in understanding where their data is going and what's happening to it."*

> *"Yeah, I wish people cared more, but how, how do you make them care more? How do you make them feel like they have a choice in giving that information to you?"*

> *"But I think[...] we should be taking a more informed [approach]. We should be doing better [...] with young people, [...] we should aim to have kind of the highest standards of [...] ethical [...] understanding."*

> *"[...] It's around the values of what we're trying to achieve and, if our values are the values of youth work and just actually universal, kind of like humanistic values [...] it's about making sure that this doesn't harm the young people and it helps them develop. And if they can see themselves, what does that mean? What will that do to them? And you know, it doesn't matter if you collect data or you work in the finance office, or you actually deliver to the young people, like it needs to go through everything you do, doesn't it?"*

4. Create accessible tools and resources

What? Increase the accessibility of demographic data methods (both tools and processes) so that young people with various access requirements can understand and engage with what is being asked of them, and make informed decisions about consent.

Why? To ensure that we are not further contributing to inequalities by disadvantaging young people with additional needs.

> *"...if you don't have capacity or money, and then you're always, like, excluding a group of people who don't really understand what they're signing up for."*

5. Highlight best practice and stories of change

What? Over time and as practice develops, record examples from within the youth sector of where demographic data has been a) collected in an inclusive and young person-centred way and b) used to create positive change for underrepresented communities.

Why? To increase clarity and communication around *if* and *how* demographic data can be used to support wider equity goals.

Funders
Are you in a position to resource organisations to commit to any of the priorities set out above, or to fund development work?

Small positive steps: building a new standard of practice for demographic data

We recognise that the five recommendations above will take considerable and consistent time, commitment, and investment to put into practice. Below, we have sketched out what a revised process might look like if we can move forward with these recommendations through small, positive steps over time. This vision builds particularly on the key messages shared by young people and practitioners (see Insights Report pages 8-9 and 50-55.)

> *"As long as your guiding thought is that you want to help young people – gathering data for the sake of it is pointless at best, but if you are gathering data for a reason to help people - if that is your guiding principle, I think that is best."*

Funders

It is important to acknowledge that, in the current context, many delivery organisations will struggle to resource this work fully.

As well as applying these recommendations to your own work, there is a key opportunity for you to support your grantees with this work in multiple ways:

1. Providing explicit and protected funding for demographic data activities; [1]
2. Allowing sufficient time for more comprehensive data processes within grant cycles;
3. Bringing grantees together to share learning, and making an active commitment to taking on a responsibility for 'knowledge management' (so that organisations can learn from each other and do not have to keep re-inventing the wheel) and;
4. Providing further support and training, if required.

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[1] This builds on earlier recommendations made via the #iwill Fund Impact Accelerator, where we suggest that in order to support meaningful quality improvement within funded organisations, funders must explicitly fund and embed cycles of learning and improvement into grants. https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/iwill%20Fund%20Learning%20Hub%20Impact%20Accelerator%20Final%20Report.pdf.

Other reports exploring funding, reporting, and (in)equitable evaluation structures have offered similar recommendations, for example:
https://campaignbootcamp.org/resources/campaign-bootcamp-leadership-learning-report-2022/ (p.15, bullet point two); https://www.linkedin.com/posts/amy-cj-sutton_the-end-of-reporting-building-a-learning-ugcPost-7267176639409569792-PcUL?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop (p.3, bullet point one); https://npproduction.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/NPC-Monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-with-trust-and-equity.pdf?_gl=1*1avl316*_ga*NjYzMzUwODY1LjE3MzYxODAwMzc.*_ga_5Q3PNDTP66*MTczNjE4MDAzNi4xLjAuMTczNjE4MDAzNi42MC4wLjA (p.9, final paragraph; p.32); https://www.tsiconsultancy.com/wp-content/uploads/0075_EQUITABLE-EVALUATION-REPORT-2024_AW3.pdf (p.34, quote from Funder 3).

Planning and preparation before collecting any demographic data

Take time to plan

Plan in time to understand and clarify your demographic data requirements – whether that is at the beginning of a new piece of work or at a review point for your existing work.

Start by understanding what demographic data your organisation or project 'needs' or that you want to collect. Make a list or record this in your monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan.

Note that there will be likely be different requirements or motivations and you will need to assess how these intersect. For example, you might 'need' data on the ages and ethnicities of programme participants because your funder requires it. However, you could potentially do more with that data, such as building learning about your programme (does it work as well for 17 year olds as for 23 year olds, and what else might the 17 year olds need to get the most out of it? Is it reaching young people from different communities in your local area?)

Ensure that you are clear on what happens if you do not get any data that is required (this may happen for a number of different reasons). This will help you to understand which data is a genuine priority, which is not, and why.

"If you don't need it, don't ask."

Have conversations with others

Have conversations with colleagues in delivery, senior leadership or management teams, research and evaluation, and fundraising, to reach clarity and agreement on your demographic data requirements. These groups of people will likely have different perspectives and motivations for making decisions about demographic data collection – having early and continuous conversations will help to avoid challenges further down the line.

Wherever possible, bring young people into these conversations if appropriate and if you can effectively engage and support them to do so in a meaningful way. If you are a funder, bring grantees into this conversation too. If you work in partnership with others (for example, as part of a consortium), bring your partners into the conversation.

Return to your theory of change

If you have a theory of change (ToC), your demographic data should align with who your organisation intends to reach and support, including any relevant contextual factors (for example, young people aged 6-11 living within a specific postcode). Check – are you missing any data that is key to understanding and testing your theory of change? Conversely – are you collecting any data that is not essential for understanding your quality and impact? If so – why are you collecting it? If it is because funders or other stakeholders require it, is there scope for a conversation about the how that data is used?

Consolidate existing efforts within your monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan

Where relevant, ensure that you are bringing in existing demographic (and other) data practices and datasets when planning for new projects. Are there any approaches that are working elsewhere that you could replicate or draw learning from? How will this new data contribute to the picture that you are already building with existing demographic data? This process might surface areas where you can reduce duplication or streamline processes.

Ideally, you will bring together all your data collection plans within a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan. This helps to ensure everyone is on the same page about what is happening, when, and who is responsible. It also helps to surface duplication and gaps, and to ensure that you have considered your plan for analysing and acting on data (thereby helping you to communicate clearly to young people why you are collecting specific types of data, and what will happen with it).

Some key questions to consider as part of this include:

- What needs to happen to ensure that you can do some data analysis and take action once you have collected the data? *For example, X number of responses, protected staff time, training and support, data in a particular format, etc.*
- Is your plan for analysis and action built into your delivery cycles, with individuals nominated to take the lead and with protected time and resources?

Funders

If you are specifically asking for demographic data or expect grantees to report against demographic data, have you allowed time within the grant cycle for organisations to have these conversations and do this preparation work?

Can you provide any additional support, such as peer learning spaces, coaching and mentoring, training, or signposting to resources?

Improving your practices

To go further, for each category of data that you decide to collect, you could then:

Review best practice for language, phrasing, and data collection methods

This will vary from topic to topic and, as noted in the E4P Insights Report, there is a lack of guidance currently available that is specific to the youth sector in England.

However, there is a lot of general guidance on different categories of data, which can be a good place to start. The E4P Insights Report includes some of these in the reference list on pages 68 – 72. In addition, there is:

- For practitioners: Back Youth Alliance Demographic Data Standard for youth provision [not yet published]
- For funders: DEI data standard for funders / 360 Giving

Our recommendation (on page 5) to develop a more comprehensive resource hub would further assist with this.

Work with young people to make improvements

Ask the young people that you work with for feedback on current language and methods. Where possible, co-create a vision and statement of intent for what could be achieved with more demographic data analysis – what questions are you hoping to answer and what changes are you hoping to work towards? This can help to ensure that young people feel and see how demographic data is serving them, and their peers.

"...at the end of that year, we [...] had some comments from youth workers who were kind of saying things for themselves, but also for the young people that they work with, that they couldn't find themselves there, or they didn't think it was right. So we did a little exercise [...] looking at what's out there, talking to our staff team, like the youth practitioners and also youth workers, and talking to our youth board as well.

So the young people came out as a group with [...] 'okay, this is what we're doing now, and [...] we decided that we're only going to collect date of birth, postcode, and they don't have to give their own postcode. They can [...] give, or the youth worker will give the postcode of the centre, like of the club, and gender, ethnicity and disability, yes or no. And so first of all, really minimizing it, but also then changing the categories that we had before for gender and ethnicity and disability [...] like a lot of different elements that really did sit well with people, and also didn't."

Check if you really 'need' to collect that data

A good test for whether or not you *need* to collect specific demographic data could be to develop a brief statement (just a sentence or two) explaining why you are collecting it and how you intend to use it. If you cannot do this, then you cannot confidently say to young people that there is a clear need and justification. *Note that there might be a range of justifications for collecting specific categories of data, from safeguarding, medical, or other legal duties, to understanding reach or monitoring consistency and quality.*

> *"Creating clearer [...] stories or reasons that are [...] age appropriate to explain why we need it, and actually thinking about why we need it as organisations is probably going to have a big positive impact."*

Look at the language you are using

One of the key challenges raised through the E4P project was on inconsistency of language across the sector, both within and between organisations. To address this at your organisation and build both clarity and understanding, have a think about the following questions:

- Can you standardise language used to collect demographic data across projects or services?
- As a practitioner - what barriers might prevent you from doing this?
- As a funder – can you offer this flexibility to your grantees or partners, and work with other funders to convene around some common language?
- Will young people be able to understand everything that is being communicated and requested?
- If not, can you provide appropriate adult support for this during provision and data collection?
- Do you need to provide any training or support to those adults?

Review the accessibility of your methods

In addition to language, there are many other access barriers that might prevent young people from engaging with and fully understanding what is being requested through demographic data practices. Have a think about the following questions:

- Do you need to provide information in different formats (for example, video, images, audio) or adapt it to be used with accessibility tools (such as a screen reader)?
- Do you need to provide time and budget to translate materials into additional languages?
- What other access barriers might young people experience? What assumptions might you have made about access?

Go deeper: questions to reflect on

Building on any feedback from the young people that you work with, you could also undertake a reflective exercise to better understand how young people might experience your demographic data practices. It is important to consider how different young people might feel when asked these questions at different timepoints throughout their engagement with your provision.

Below we offer some prompt questions on a range of areas, which may sit alongside or as part of a broader Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA):

Disclosure and safety

- If the data is coming from the young person directly, are they trusting you with information about themselves that they have not shared elsewhere, such as about their sexuality, refugee status, or gender identity?
- Will providing this information prompt any sensitive conversations? If so, are staff adequately prepared, trained, and supported to have these conversations?
- Might there be exceptional cases where there are legal implications from data that is shared, for example with young people in asylum seeking, migrant, and refugee families?

"Sexuality - I feel like even if you are using it for statistics, you can't get a good picture - not everyone is aware of what could be done with that form - they might lie about their sexuality or gender if they are worried about coming out."

"And a lot of [the project was] actually to do with your identity and [...]a lot of conversations about identity, and we found that not all youth workers were kind of ready for that [...] They didn't think that it's going to happen, and they weren't ready in that they didn't know how to deal with it."

Organisational safeguarding and GDPR training

- Have you considered demographic data collection and use against your organisational safeguarding and GDPR policies? Are staff aware of this?
- Do young people know their rights and responsibilities in relation to these areas (for example, if a safeguarding concern arises from demographic data sharing)?

Pressure and expectations

- Is there a possibility that a young person might not know what their response is (for example, if aspects of their identity feel fluid, or if they don't know their date of birth)?
- Might a young person feel like they are obliged to provide data in order to access provision or because they feel they will be easily identified from other data that is already provided?
- Does your organisation make clear to young people what will happen if they do not share data?
- Does your organisation make clear to young people who might be able to identify them from any data that they have shared?
- Might young people be asked to provide information about other people, such as their parents and guardians? If so, how might this feel? Will they be able to share 'accurate' data?

Data ownership and sharing

- If you are not getting the data from young people directly, where are you getting the data from? Is the young person aware? Do they need to be?
- Is the data likely to feel 'accurate' from the young person's perspective?
- Do you have data sharing agreements with anyone who might be sharing that data on a young person's behalf (for example, school)?
- Are you following UK GDPR and Data Protection Act guidelines? *Note that these will vary based on young people's ages*
- Are there particular types of data that young people might want to update at a later point (such as sexuality) or that they might be particularly concerned about the retention of (such as a criminal record)?

Data literacy and education

- What external resources or support can you signpost young people towards, to build their own data literacy?
- How might these conversations and this learning align with other activities and content that you cover with young people?

Representation

- Might any young people struggle to see themselves or aspects of their identity represented in the response options?
- *Note that sometimes "identity" won't be all that important to the data collection process but it could still be very important to how you relate to the young people that you work*

with and how they relate to you. See the next section for more guidance on thinking about this.

> *"Having something simple like having one extra box or saying you can tick multiple boxes – ethnicity, ticking a few boxes and writing something - widens what you can say - rather than just you can tick one box and there isn't an appropriate box."*

Stigmatisation and stereotyping

- Is there potential to influence how a young person perceives themselves or how they believe others perceive them? How can you support this responsibly and positively?
- Might they feel that they are being 'check boxed?'
- Could the ordering of any questions lead to young people feeling stigmatised or stereotyped? For example, placing sexual orientation and gender identity questions next to questions about risk behaviours or negative life experiences. [2]

Emotional wellbeing

- Are there any topics that might feel abstract, unfamiliar, triggering, confusing, conflicted, or otherwise prompt emotions?
- Are there any current contextual factors to be aware of for specific young people, that might mean they need additional support or guidance?

In addition to the risks outlined above, you might explore what potential **positive impacts** could come from your demographic data requests – such as letting young people know that you recognise their identity/ies or signposting to additional opportunities for support on particular topics.

Funders

Are you prepared to explore and discuss these potential impacts with the organisations that you fund, and make any necessary changes?

Are there any opportunities for grantees to share learning or best practice on particular areas?

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[2] "Surveys that place SOGI items with data on risk behaviors or negative life experiences such as sexual assault or unwanted pregnancies may suggest to youth that their identity is viewed negatively by the researcher." p.21
https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Measuring-Youth-Sexual-Orientation-and-Gender-Identity.pdf

Ongoing training and peer learning opportunities

It is natural for these questions and topics to feel overwhelming. As a sector, we are 'at the start of a conversation' and have a lot of work to do to build our capacity, skills, and experience in demographic data practices. Training, peer learning (for example, through communities of practice), and support will be a key part of this.

As you collect demographic data, make a note of any feedback, challenges, or things that have worked well. Respond to any requests for further conversations or support that come from data requests and identify if you need to provide staff or volunteers with training in any of the following areas:

Having supportive conversations around identity

This is often a key aspect of work with young people, but there is an opportunity to be more aligned, holistic, and responsive in joining the dots between this work and where demographics data categories might feel sensitive, intrusive, personal, or even abstract.

There is also an opportunity to draw on the expertise of existing specialist organisations within the sector (for example, see this recent National Youth Agency (NYA) panel on 'Knowledge Based Approaches to Gender Identity')

Exploring language and intersectionality – what this means for different young people

In the E4P project, practitioners highlighted a particular need to be clearer when asking questions about race, ethnicity, and nationality, and to build our understanding of what these different terms mean. Other practitioners highlighted that some young people might not regard themselves as living in a rural area, when national data sets and definitions would determine that they do.

Recognising and building understanding of what these and other terms mean for different people, as well as on intersectionality, will be key to increasing clarity on what data we are asking young people to provide and why, and to respond to questions they might have.

Building trusting relationships for data collection

This would cover topics such as:

- Embedding intentional conversations about data into work with young people
- Supporting young people to understand their rights in relation to their personal data
- Understanding the Data Protection Act and UK GDPR for young people of different ages

- Creative methods to help make demographic data requests less boring and more engaging

How to use demographic data effectively

This would cover topics such as:

- Making decisions about what you collect and why
- Planning your demographic data collection methods
- How to act on demographic data and use it to inform continuous improvement
- Sharing stories about impact using demographic data

Navigating tricky conversations

This would cover topics such as:

- Requesting and sharing data with partners or other stakeholders (such as schools)
- Communicating with parents and carers
- Reaching agreement and clarity with funders
- Reaching internal agreement and clarity as an organisation (volunteers, staff, and trustees)
- Dealing with no data – if young people do not want to provide it, if something goes wrong with collection, or if there is not enough data to meaningfully analyse

> *"If we are open to explaining more to young people about how why their data is used, we have to be prepared for a lot more […] 'no, you can't use my data."*

Demographic data analysis

This would cover topics such as:

- Navigating 'non-comparable' data sets, including 'prefer to self-describe' responses
- Analysing demographic data with an intersectional lens
- Avoiding bias (for example, interpreting or changing a young person's response for them)
- Accessing and navigating up-to-date national data sets

Closing the feedback loop after data collection

Once you have conducted any data processing, analysis, and reporting, make sure that you are *closing the feedback loop*. This might look like:

❑ Sharing back specific actions and improvements with the young people who have provided personal data, and the staff or volunteers who have facilitated the process
❑ Recording any stories of change that have been driven by demographic data practices
❑ Sharing these stories of change with any relevant partners and stakeholders, especially if you think that others could learn from your approaches
❑ Updating your theory of change, MEL plan, and any other documentation (for example, delivery manuals) as required to reflect changes in how you will manage demographic data in future delivery.

It will be important to ensure that any new learning and insights are considered when you go back to **planning and preparation before collecting any new demographic data collection.**

"So out of that research report, we were able to highlight two very clear gaps, young people of colour and young people who are LGBT are not currently well represented in [services] that we fund. Therefore, this year we have ring-fenced some money for young people of colour. Next year we're going to ring fence some money for young people who are LGBT."

"[...] also it's about us learning in order to be able to deliver better for them [...] We try as much as we can, and we've got some programmes that it's happened all the time [where] we provide back this data and kind of an personalised Impact Report to each of our clubs, so for each of our members, and then they can do the same for the young people. So that kind of benefit is clearer...|

About us

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Impact at YMCA George Williams College supports organisations to generate and act on evidence of the impact of their provision. Using a robust evidence base, the Centre for Youth Impact designs, tests, and champions shared approaches to quality and impact that facilitate collective insight and learning, consolidating and sharing open access resources, research, and training for all those working in informal and non-formal youth provision.

To find out more about our work, visit ymcageorgewilliams.uk or follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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