

Open Letter to the NSF about Gender Data Collection Practices

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Dear NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan, NCSES Division Director Emilda B. Rivers, NSF Program Director John M. Finamore, NSF Office Head Rhonda J Davis, NSF Office Head C. Suzanne Iacono, the Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Engineering, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy,

We write today as a collective of nonbinary, genderqueer, and trans scientists to propose changes in the way the National Science Foundation asks for and records gender and gendered information in applications and other forms where gender is requested. Several of the signers have felt discomfort and alienation as a result of the gender binary prevalent throughout NSF forms. While there is an option to not report gender, this diversity should be quantified; by not providing options for those who are not male or female, the NSF is collecting incomplete and incorrect demographic data. Although these changes might feel minor, they are vital to ensuring that gender minorities in our community are not othered, made invisible, or otherwise inaccurately represented in NSF records. Changes like these are an important step in decolonizing science and validating the many genders that have historically existed outside of man and woman in non-western spaces.

Ultimately, we recommend changing gender from a bulleted list to a write-in field -- this allows for people of all genders to accurately describe themselves. We recognize this data may be harder to analyze (via open text analysis), but it is the most inclusive approach. If a write-in field is not feasible, we recommend the following changes to questions regarding gender on all forms:

1. Replacing gender identities “male” and “female” with “man” and “woman”. Male and female are biological terms for sex, not socio-cultural terms for gender.
2. Including more gender identities, such as (but not limited to) “agender”, “gender variant”, “two-spirit”, “non-binary”, and “genderqueer”, besides “man” and “woman”.
3. Allowing respondents to pick more than one option.
4. Keeping the “Do not wish to disclose” option, but only with expanded options. Participants may wish to disclose their gender but do not see it reflected in the presented options.

Additionally, the NSF should provide the option on all forms for individuals to specify a chosen name when names are required. We acknowledge the need for the NSF to have legal names on grant forms and federal applications; however, the process of legally changing one’s

name is long, involved, and costly. Addressing correspondence and grant information to the member's chosen name will ensure all participants feel welcome, accepted, and recognized while pursuing research through the NSF. Publishers such as American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and Elsevier are offering trans-inclusive name change policies. The NSF allowing for the inclusion of chosen names on forms would be advancing a scientific culture of inclusion. The NSF adding a location for chosen names and pronouns would demonstrate the organizations respect for trans and nonbinary scientists.

These changes align with the NSF's stated diversity initiatives to actively support increasing workplace diversity and inclusion, which includes recruitment and retention. Further, they will create a more welcoming environment for people of all genders when applying to be a part of the NSF community. These changes will also ensure that NSF records of people's gender identity are accurate, and that people who are neither men nor women are represented.

Sincerely, 413 trans and gender diverse scientists

[Names Omitted from Public Letter]

We, the undersigned, support our trans and nonbinary colleagues and encourage the NSF to implement their recommendations: (n = 2,280 allies + 50 anonymous & name only submissions)

[Names Omitted from Public Letter]