

## DCF Racial and Ethnic Identity Reporting Guide Abridged

(Created by members of Region 4 Racial Justice Team and University of St. Joseph Social Work Program)

Obtaining and reporting racial and ethnic identity of families is a critically important function of the social worker. This is also a challenging task because Federal Race and Ethnicity categories do not fully capture how individuals self-identify. As a result workers must collect two levels of data – how individuals and families self-identify (micro level) and then how this identification fits within broader Federal categories (macro level). This may seem counterintuitive and may generate confusion, frustration or ambivalence within the client and worker. The following definitions are intended as a resource in assisting workers obtain this information in the most respectful and productive manner possible.

The terms *Race*, *Ethnicity* and *Nationality* have separate and distinct but overlapping meanings - leading frequently to confusion in reporting. Many consider the terms *Race* and *Ethnicity* to be synonymous. A range of factors including place of birth, immigration history and social context shape how people understand their identity as it relates to these terms. The following definitions are intended to inform your judgement in considering the meaning of these terms with the families you encounter.

**Race** is a term with highly charged social meaning where individuals are categorized by their physical appearance and skin color. This is controversial because science has proven there are no significant biological or genetic differences among humans. In addition, homogenous racial categories do not account for phenotypical variation and encourage subjective interpretations of racial identity. While categories have evolved over the history of the country since 2000, the U.S. Census has utilized the following six racial categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and people of two or more races.

**Ethnicity** refers to common ancestral and geographic origins of a population who may also share common language(s) and religion. Individuals who share an ethnic identity may be of different racial backgrounds. Currently the U.S. Federal Government collects data for two Ethnic categories (Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino).

**Culture**, a closely related concept, is the range of thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs and values associated with any (racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, professional, etc.) group. Culture is a dynamic and evolving dimension of individual and collective identity.

**Nationality** refers to a person's legal relationship to a nation state (an independent country). Because the borders and populations of nations change, an individuals' national origin (place of ancestry) or national identity (their subjective sense of belonging to a state or nation). A list of nations recognized by the U.S. Department of State can be found at <http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm>

In summary Race, Ethnicity and Nationality are distinct but overlapping concepts. Understanding the differences between these terms and where they converge assists child welfare professionals accurately capture identity related data and effectively plan and advocate for appropriate services. For more information see [www.understandingrace.org](http://www.understandingrace.org)

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- Race/ethnicity information should be obtained during a face to face interview whenever possible. A person's race and ethnicity are determined by how they define themselves. It is critical that workers engage clients in conversations that allow them to describe their racial and ethnic identity. For children age 12 and younger, parental report of race and ethnicity is acceptable.
- Workers must collect two levels of data: 1) How individuals and families self-identify (micro level); 2) How this identification fits within broader Federal categories in Link (macro level).
- Workers should avoid making decisions based on the physical appearance of the individual. When a family is unable or unwilling to disclose their racial/ethnic identity situation, the worker should attempt to elicit this information by asking questions. Potential questions include "Can you tell me where you were born and about the community where you grew up?; How would you describe your racial and ethnic background?; How have others described your racial and ethnic background?"
- Fluidity, the changing or evolving of racial/ethnic identity, is common, especially among adolescents. Care should be taken in recording client self-reported identity over time.
- Special care should be taken in discussing racial and ethnic identity with immigrant families. Conceptions of race and ethnicity may differ considerably within the family's country of origin. In addition, undocumented immigrants may be especially reluctant to answer questions related to their status.

## **Racial Categories (Adapted from AFCARS Data Elements, Revised 2012)**

The federal categories for racial and ethnic identity provide “a common language to promote uniformity and comparability for data on race and ethnicity for the population groups.”<sup>1</sup> Since the categories are designed as a means to quickly identify race and ethnicity, they are brief in nature. While many of these racial identities are inclusive of ethnic identity, the only two Federal ethnic categories are Hispanic and Non-Hispanic.

The following are geographically based descriptions of each federal category which may assist in more accurate reporting of racial and ethnic identity. Referring to the world map provided may assist clients and workers in identifying their country/region of origin.

- **American Indian or Alaska Native** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North or South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Asian** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Black or African American** – A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- **White** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

### **Ethnic Category**

**Hispanic or Latino** – Answer “yes” if the child is of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American origin, or a person of other Spanish cultural origin regardless of race. Whether or not a person is Hispanic or Latino is determined by how they define themselves or by how others define them. In the case of young children, parents determine the ethnicity of the child



Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, 1997.