



RESPONDING TO RACE/ETHNICITY QUESTIONS & NATIVE HAWAIIAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER IDENTITY



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WHO ARE NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER PEOPLE IN THE U.S.?

The OMB definitions above come from a 1997 amendment to the minimum categories for race/ethnicity, which included splitting the category, “Asian or Pacific Islander” into two separate racial groups: “Asian American” and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.” This separation acknowledges that Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have distinct cultures that should not be grouped with the rest of the Asian continent.

Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders (NH/PI) refers to people of origins in any of the original peoples of Oceania which is distinctively grouped into three major regions: Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia.

Polynesia, defined as the land of “many islands,” is the largest NH/PI population in the U.S. The region includes different ethnic islands from the Hawaiians Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, and Cook Islands. Micronesia (also known as “tiny islands”) are often smaller in island sizes and located north of the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. This region includes Guam, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Palau. Lastly, Melanesia, the region north of Australia and borders Indonesia, consists of ethnic groups of Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea (Saylor, 2012, p. 812).

The common ethnic groups that reside in the U.S are Hawaiians (not those born in Hawaii but those from the Hawaiian Islands), Samoans, Tongans, Chamorro (indigenous population of Guam), Marshallese, and Fijians.

Based on the 2020 Census, there were 689,966 people (or 0.2% of the population) who only selected NH/PI on the census. This increases to 1.6 million people (or 0.5% of the U.S. population) when including multiracial people who select NH/PI and at least one other race (Jones et al, 2021).

WHY SHOULD WE DISAGGREGATE THE NPHI CATEGORY INTO EVEN SMALLER, MORE SPECIFIC RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS?

The millions of people that identify with the NH/PI communities are diverse, with unique strengths and needs that policymakers should understand before making decisions that affect these communities.

For instance, NH/PI individuals are overrepresented in the military, meaning they enlist at a higher rate than other groups (VA, 2013). This fact is relevant to many important issues for this community, ranging from healthcare access to veteran employment. When compared to non-Hispanic White people in the U.S., the NH/PI population has generally less access to health services, including cancer prevention and control programs (HHS, 2022).

This information is especially important in states where there is a high concentration of Pacific Islanders, like Washington and California, that can design policies around healthcare and other sectors to be more inclusive (HHS, 2022).

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO DISAGGREGATED RACE/ETHNICITY QUESTIONS?

There is no 'right' way to answer questions about race and ethnicity. The way you respond to question(s) about race and ethnicity may also depend on how the question is formatted.

Self-reporting provides the most accurate responses to race and ethnicity questions. This means that these questions should be **open-ended questions**, giving people the opportunity to write in any response you wish. In this case, you should write out the race/ethnicity that you feel best represents your identity. If you identify with more than one racial/ethnic group, you should list all of them.

Sometimes, it can be hard for institutions and people who manage data to organize many written race/ethnicity responses, so instead they offer specific racial/ethnic categories for you to choose from. Including more specific race/ethnicity categories allows more options for accurate self-reporting.

Most forms will include a **multiple-choice** race/ethnicity question. In this case, the race/ethnicity options may vary. For example, there may only be one NH/PI category, or there may be more specific categories to choose from. You may or may not decide to select more specific groups. However, selecting all of the relevant racial/ethnic groups that you identify with is recommended for more accurate reporting.

Here are some example scenarios of how someone might respond to different race/ethnicity question formats:

| Scenario 1: Multiple choice, limited disaggregated options; respondent identifies as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander only | Scenario 2: Multiple choice, limited disaggregated options; respondent identifies as Chamorro/Guamanian |
|--|--|
| <p>What is your race or ethnicity (check all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern or North African <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian, Native, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples of the Americans, or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Some other Race or ethnicity: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <p>Since "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander" was selected as your race or ethnicity, which group best represents your ethnicity or ancestry (check all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Chamorro <input type="checkbox"/> Fijian <input type="checkbox"/> Marshallese <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan <input type="checkbox"/> Tongan <input type="checkbox"/> Another option: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer | <p>What is your race or ethnicity (check all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern or North African <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian, Native, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples of the Americans, or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Some other Race or ethnicity: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer <p>Since "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander" was selected as your race or ethnicity, which group best represents your ethnicity or ancestry (check all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chamorro <input type="checkbox"/> Fijian <input type="checkbox"/> Marshallese <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan <input type="checkbox"/> Tongan <input type="checkbox"/> Another option: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Scenario 3: Write-in only; respondent identifies as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Samoan) | Scenario 4: Write-in only; respondent identifies as biracial (NH/PI & Asian American) |
| <p>What race or ethnicity best describes you?</p> <p><u>Samoan</u></p> | <p>What race or ethnicity best describes you?</p> <p><u>Fijian and Japanese</u></p> |

WHAT DISAGGREGATED RACE/ETHNICITY GROUPS CAN I EXPECT TO SEE ON A FORM OR SURVEY?

The table below shows the different groups that can fall within the NH/PI category. In some regions of the U.S., these populations may be very small, so they are unlikely to be included as a specific multiple-choice option on all forms.

- Please note that this table may not include every single group that fits these categories, and it's possible that there is overlap between broad race groups. This means that some ethnic groups may fall under more than one racial category.

| Category: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | |
|---|--|
| Native Hawaiian | Tongan |
| Samoan | Tahitian |
| Guamanian or Chamorro | Another Melanesian American group not listed here |
| Marshallese | Another Micronesian American group not listed here |
| Fijian | Another Polynesian American group not listed here |

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence. **Census Data & API Identities**. 2022. Available from: <https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/>

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. **Invisible No More**. 2022. Available from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f36d65bb133d41b244bc521/t/5f5b1125b652894e962bb5e5/1599803685281/Invisible+No+More+One+Pager_Policy_Advocacy.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). **Profile: Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders**. Office of Minority Health. 2022. Available from: <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=65>

Jones, et al. **2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country**. U.S. Census Bureau. 2021 Aug 12. Available from: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html>

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Saylor, Academy. **World Regional Geography People, Places, and Globalization**. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Edition. 2012.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). **Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans Fact Sheet**. Center for Minority Veterans. 2013. Available from: <https://www.va.gov/centerforminorityveterans/docs/factSheetAaNH/PIInDepth.pdf>

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