

**THE GUIDE: IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS FOR STATISTICS ON
CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY**

A PUBLICATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH INTERDEPARTMENTAL
COMMITTEE ON MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS



A Committee managed by DIMA

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to present The Guide: Implementing the **Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity**.

The **Guide** is a tool to assist government departments and agencies to implement the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication, **Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity**. The **Guide** contains practical advice on how to improve statistical practices. Improved data collection can, in turn, significantly improve an organisation's effectiveness.

The **Standards**, establish a national framework which has been endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. It defines variables necessary for the collection of consistent, comparable and accurate information on cultural and language diversity in Australia.

I commend the **Guide** to you and encourage all departments and agencies to implement the **Standards**.

Philip Ruddock
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

June 2001

INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (MCIMA) in May 1996, Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers noted the problems associated with the use of the term 'non-English speaking background' (NESB) and agreed that the term and its acronym be dropped, where possible, from official communications.

NESB is no longer considered to be an appropriate measure of culturally related disadvantage, in terms of access to government services, for a variety of reasons:

- the term has many conflicting definitions;
- it groups people who are relatively disadvantaged with those who are not disadvantaged;
- it is unable to separately identify the many cultural and linguistic groups in Australian society; and
- it has developed negative connotations.

In summary, NESB is seen as an oversimplified indicator of disadvantage, which may result in inappropriate service provision and neglect the positive aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity. Consequently, government agencies at all levels have increasingly sought to develop a more accurate, effective and consistent measure of cultural and language diversity.

The terms used to describe a particular group of people should be as specific and descriptive as possible to avoid the problems associated with NESB. Examples of terms for the purpose of describing particular groups include:

- migrants;
- people born overseas;
- people who do not speak English well;
- people born in the English Proficiency (EP) Country Groups (1);
- children of people born in the EP Country Groups; and
- people born in a particular region (e.g. South Asia, North America, Africa) or country.

(1) There are four EP Country Groups. Recently arrived migrants born in EP1 countries have the highest proportion of people who speak English well, while those born in EP4 countries have the lowest proportion. DIMA Statistics Section, **1996 Classification of Countries into English Proficiency Groups**, Statistical Focus C96.1A Revised, April 1999. This publication can be accessed via the website http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/publications/ep_groups/ep_groups.htm

MCIMA and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) worked together to develop the new standards. The ABS publication **Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity**, Catalogue Number 1289.0 (the **Standards**) is designed to provide a comparative basis across Australia for government and non-government agencies when collecting data on cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The **Standards** is based on four core variables and this combination of variables allows greater potential for precision in analysing issues of access and equity, including determining whether government services are accessible to Australians of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This is not to say that every variable is relevant to every data collection system.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE?

The Statistics Working Group of the Commonwealth Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs (IDC) prepared The Guide: Implementing the **Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity** (the **Guide**) to assist government departments and agencies to implement the **Standards**.

It contains practical information on how to improve statistical practices and includes an implementation guide and checklist. While the focus of the **Guide** is on the Commonwealth sector, other levels of government may also find it useful. The **Guide** is available from the ABS and DIMA websites www.immi.gov.au.

THE STANDARDS - A DESCRIPTION

The **Standards** is a reference document that forms part of the ABS Statistical Concepts Library (Catalogue Number 1361.0.30.001) which provides authoritative information about the concepts, sources, methods and classifications underlying Australian official statistics. Information on the development of the **Standards** can be found in Chapter 1: Introduction of the **Standards**.

MCIMA endorsed the **Standards** in April 1999. It includes standard questions, classifications, coding structures and output categories for use in interview-based and self-enumerated data collections. The **Standards** are to be used by government, academic and private sector organisations.

Copies of the **Standards** are available from the ABS in hard copy (ABS Catalogue Number 1289.0) and on the ABS CD-ROM product, the Statistical Concepts Library or by downloading from the ABS website. The ABS also provides advice to individual clients on the use of the **Standards** (contact the Social Classifications hotline on telephone (02) 6252 5736, facsimile (02) 6252 5281 or by email: social.classifications@abs.gov.au).

THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE STANDARDS

MCIMA recommended that:

- the Minimum Core Set of variables be implemented in all Commonwealth, State and Territory statistical and administrative collections that require information on cultural and language diversity;
- additional variables from the Standard Set be added to the Minimum Core Set where a wider range of information is required; and
- the acronym NESB not be used.

The Minimum Core Set of the **Standards** consists of four variables:

- Country of Birth of Person;
- Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home;
- Proficiency in Spoken English; and
- Indigenous Status (for those data collections which are not specifically focussed on migrants to Australia).

The Standard Set includes the Minimum Core Set as well as the following variables:

- Ancestry;
- Country of Birth of Father;
- Country of Birth of Mother;
- First Language Spoken;
- Languages Spoken at Home;
- Main Language Spoken at Home;
- Religious Affiliation; and
- Year of Arrival in Australia.

The **Standards** can be used to generate aggregate information about users and potential users of government services, policies and programs and expected and actual outcomes. One practical means of doing this is to use the EP Country Groups developed by DIMA. (2)

(2) DIMA Statistics Section, **1996 Classification of Countries into English Proficiency Groups**, Statistical Focus C96.1A Revised, April 1999. This publication can be accessed via the website http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/publications/ep_groups/ep_groups.htm .

The EP Country Groups combine two of the four Minimum Core Set variables (Country of Birth of Person and Proficiency in Spoken English) and when correlated with other economic and social indicators (e.g. unemployment rate), produce more meaningful data on differences between migrant groups.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARDS

Departments and agencies have different structures, operational agendas and change management processes and their adoption of practices like the **Standards** will reflect these differences. The following suggestions will, however, have general application.

The process of identifying the scope of the implementation will probably involve several areas in the organisation. Successful implementation will depend on how well the benefits of adopting the **Standards** are communicated (see **Benefits and Costs**).

For most departments and agencies the adoption of the **Standards** throughout the organisation may take some time to accomplish and will need to be managed jointly by a project management team and the operational areas responsible for data collection.

It may be advantageous to implement the **Standards** in relation to an individual data set or system that is used widely in the organisation and/or to incorporate the requirement to implement the **Standards** in corporate directions.

As a first step, government departments and agencies should undertake an audit to develop an inventory of computer systems, data collections and major surveys where information on cultural and linguistic diversity is being or should be collected.

The inventory should also identify the following issues:

- is the Minimum Core Set of variables being collected? If not, what is missing?;
- opportunities to change data collection practices and adopt the Minimum Core Set (e.g. IT system re-designs, policy developments, program evaluations, agency re-structures, creation of new agencies, policies and programs, budget measures, cyclical reviews of forms/processes, legislative cycles);
- ways to incorporate the use of the **Standards** in service charters and contracts;
- priorities for bringing data collections in line with the Minimum Core Set; and
- data and systems that are part of linkages and exchanges with other organisations.

Departments and agencies will also need to develop a system for monitoring the implementation of the **Standards**, reporting progress (e.g. in the Access and Equity Annual Report) and distributing corporate knowledge of **Standards** implementation processes around the organisation. This will involve the:

- development of timelines and milestones; and
- assignment of responsibilities for implementation.

CHECK LIST FOR ASSESSMENT OF DATA COLLECTIONS

1. Identify the systems, data collections and major surveys that use cultural and language data. As well as the variables listed in the ABS **Standards** this may include concepts/terms such as:
 - ethnicity;
 - migrant, child of migrants; and
 - overseas born.
2. For each system, data collection or survey determine whether the ABS Minimum Core Set of variables is collected. If not, which variable is missing:
 - Country of Birth of Person;
 - Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home;
 - Proficiency in Spoken English; or
 - Indigenous Status.
3. For each system, data collection or survey determine what other variables from the ABS Standard Set need to be collected, such as:
 - Ancestry;
 - Country of Birth of Father;
 - Country of Birth of Mother;
 - First Language Spoken;
 - Languages Spoken at Home;
 - Main Language Spoken at Home;
 - Religious Affiliation; and
 - Year of Arrival in Australia.
4. For each system, data collection or survey, review measurement tools and data processing procedures and identify necessary changes. This could involve changes to:
 - question wording and sequencing;
 - definitions;
 - the classification of responses; and
 - manual and computer coding systems used to capture and manipulate data.
5. Identify opportunities for changes to systems, collections and surveys (e.g. scheduled change cycles, computer upgrades, program evaluations, and implementation of other ABS data standards such as education or health).
6. Develop a timetable for implementation of the identified changes and a system for monitoring the implementation schedule.

BENEFITS AND COSTS

While implementation of the **Standards** will involve resources, it will also improve the quality of the information collected and its comparability with data collected by other organisations, especially the ABS. Better data can add significantly to an organisation's effectiveness.

Effective and efficient governance requires that policy advisers and program managers can identify and measure the impact of policies and programs on different groups of the population, including those with various language and cultural characteristics. Organisations can undertake meaningful assessments of the impact of government on individual cultural and language groups if they collect and analyse standardised data.

The adoption of the **Standards** will be of particular benefit to departments and agencies that outsource functions. Quality data enables organisations to identify and include appropriate performance standards in contracts and memoranda of understanding.

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS AND REPORTING

We will seek information from departments and agencies regarding their implementation progress through the Commonwealth Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs. Departments and agencies will report on the implementation of the **Standards** in the Access and Equity Annual Report.

Questions about the **Guide** can be directed to:

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