



Collecting diversity data with integrity

Building trust, ensuring compliance and driving change



Introduction: why does data matter?

Gathering diversity data helps organisations create inclusive workplaces with intention. Data provides valuable insights into the workforce to help better understand who your organisation is reaching, supporting and missing. It enables you to:

- **Identify underrepresentation and barriers to inclusion**
- **Understand the lived experiences of your workforce**
- **Inform inclusive policies and practice**
- **Measure progress and benchmark against sector and national averages.**

Diversity data also supports compliance with legal frameworks such as the **Equality Act 2010** and the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, helping organisations to identify and mitigate bias across all protected characteristics.

At WISE, while our focus is on women in STEM, we recognise that gender does not exist in isolation. People's experiences in the workplace are shaped by multiple, overlapping aspects of their identity and how they are treated. Therefore, taking an intersectional approach is necessary and can help organisations to:

- **Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions that might only benefit the majority.**
- **Identify where individuals face additional barriers or challenges. For example, Black women in engineering may face different barriers than White women or Black men.**
- **Design more targeted, effective interventions that reflect the real diversity of lived experience.**



What data are you collecting – and why?

You need to understand not only what you're collecting, but why. It's unlawful to collect data for the sake of having it. Your intentions must be purposeful, for example to identify gaps in recruitment, inform training and development, or to improve support within the workplace.

Before collecting any data, make sure you think about the following:

What data are you collecting?

If you are asking about sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or other protected characteristics, do you need all of this information? Be specific and intentional.

Why are you collecting it?

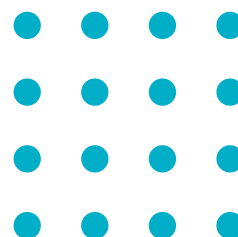
Data should never be collected "just in case." It must serve a clear purpose, so make sure you can clearly justify why you need to collect the data.

How do you intend on using the data gathered?

Be transparent about how the data will inform decisions, policies, and actions.

This helps build trust and demonstrates that the data will be stored and managed appropriately and be used to lead meaningful change.

Better understanding your workforce and their experiences is important. Diverse teams bring broader perspectives, leading to better research, services and innovation. You can read more about the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion in our business case here: <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/mp-files/5764.pdf/>



Challenges and how to overcome them

Trust and culture

It's common for stakeholders to feel cautious or even suspicious about sharing personal data — especially those from underrepresented groups. Concerns about privacy, misuse, or being singled out are legitimate and must be taken seriously.

It requires trust, transparency, and internal stakeholder buy-in. Without these, response rates will be low, and the data collected may not be meaningful or representative of the workforce.

What does this look like in practice?

Be clear on the why

Clearly communicate to stakeholders the intended purpose of data collection. Make it clear that the goal is to improve equity, not to monitor or judge individuals.

Share aggregated results openly

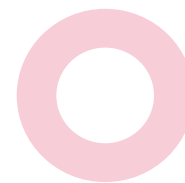
Report findings in a way that protects anonymity. Good practice is to only report on areas that have a sufficiently large sample size, as small numbers can risk identifying individuals. This will vary depending on overall size of your data set.

Hold yourselves accountable to make changes

Link data collection to action and set clear goals and timelines. It's important to celebrate progress but also acknowledge areas for improvement with a clear action plan to make change.

Involve stakeholders

Co-create solutions with employees. Seek to learn more about their lived experience to better enable you to address challenges head on and resolve them effectively.



Data completeness

Even with trust, some individuals may still hesitate to share personal data — particularly special category data such as sexual orientation, religious or philosophical beliefs, or health. To improve response rates, make the process respectful, transparent, and easy.

Here are some good practice ways to encourage higher response rates:

Always offer a 'prefer not to say' option

This gives respondents control over what they choose to disclose and means they can participate at a level they feel comfortable with.

Allow self-description where possible

Avoid forcing people into predefined categories. Let them describe their identity in their own words. Self-described data can take longer to analyse but it also more accurately reflects those who have responded.

Keep it short and simple

Use clear, concise language that avoids the use of jargon. Limit the number of questions to reduce survey fatigue.

Communicate with your employees

Utilise a variety of methods/channels to communicate clearly and effectively with all your stakeholders. Understand your audience and the ways they receive their information; for example, reaching those who work on site, or in remote areas, will require different methods to those who are office based.

What is special category data?

Special category data is personal information that's more sensitive and requires extra protection under the UK GDPR. This includes details about a person's race or ethnicity, health, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics that could be used to discriminate against them.

Because of its sensitivity, organisations must have a clear legal reason for collecting it and take extra steps to keep it secure and confidential.



Good practice

Confidentiality is key

When collecting diversity data, protecting confidentiality is not just best practice — it's a legal and ethical obligation. Under the **UK GDPR** and the **Data Protection Act 2018**, organisations must handle personal data in ways that are:

- Fair, lawful, and transparent
- Used for specified, explicit purposes
- Adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary
- Accurate and kept up to date
- Stored securely and only for as long as needed.

Seek advice from your Data Protection Officer or team to ensure that all data handling is legal and compliant.

They can advise on:

- The lawful basis for processing diversity data (especially as it falls under special category data)
- Whether a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is required
- How your organisation's Privacy Policy or Notice should reflect the collection and use of this data

It's important that all data is held securely and confidentially. This can be done by:

- » Encrypting data with passwords to prevent unauthorised access.
- » Limiting access to only those who have a legitimate interest/purpose.
- » Working with trusted third-party suppliers for data collection and reporting.
- » Regularly auditing and testing your data handling process to ensure compliance.



Track progress

Collecting diversity data is not a one-off task — it's an ongoing process that should evolve alongside your organisation.

Tracking progress means regularly reviewing both the **data itself** and the **methods used to collect it**.

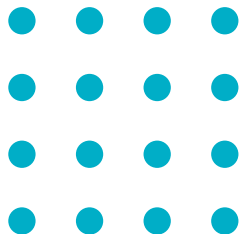
While not every aspect of your approach may be perfect initially, legal compliance - especially around data protection - is essential and must be built in from the outset. Regular reviews will help you identify gaps, refine your approach and ensure that the data gathered, and its purpose, remain relevant and actionable.

Benchmark with purpose

Benchmarking allows you to compare your organisation's data against sector or national averages.

This gives you a clearer indication of your performance, whether it's areas where you are leading or performing above average, or identifying areas of improvement.

Make sure you benchmark with purpose by understanding what you're benchmarking against and what you can do to reach, and even succeed, sector or national averages.



How WISE can support you

WISE Gender Equity Framework

The WISE Gender Equity Framework underpins many of our products and services at WISE. It gives a structured, comprehensive and evidence-based approach to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) by providing clear guidance, best practice, and practical solutions that can be embedded across STEM organisations to support inclusive and equitable workplaces for women.

Our supporting Gender Equity Framework diagnostic tool helps organisations assess their current position, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and develop targeted action plans. It's designed to support meaningful, measurable progress – focusing specifically on women in the workplace and gender equity.

If you'd like to know more about the WISE Gender Equity Framework, please email WISE@theiet.org.

Consultancy

At WISE, we offer tailored consultancy services that support your organisation's unique EDI goals. Whether you're building your strategy from scratch or refining existing initiatives, we're here to help you move forward with clarity and confidence.

We offer a broad range of support to help your organisation progress its EDI journey, including:

- **EDI strategy and policy reviews**
- **Data collection and monitoring guidance**
- **Leadership and HR coaching**
- **ERG and EDI initiatives guidance**
- **Mentoring support and training**

[Get in touch with us](#) today, and let's build something meaningful – together.



Find out more about WISE and what
we have to offer by getting in touch at
wise@theiet.org.

@thewisecampaign  

@wise-campaign 

@wisecampaign_org 

www.wisecampaign.org.uk

The Institution of Engineering and Technology is registered as a Charity
in England and Wales (No. 211014) and Scotland (No. SC038698). Futures
Place, Kings Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 2UA, United Kingdom.

