UPDATING THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET'S RACE AND ETHNICITY DATA STANDARDS

1. **What are the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Race and Ethnicity Data Collection Standards?**

   Federal agencies collect data on race and ethnicity in accordance with standards for federal data established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Because federal data guide a broad range of critical decisions made in the public and private sectors, the OMB's standards should ensure that these data accurately reflect how Latinos and other diverse population groups identify their ethnicity and race.

2. **What do the OMB standards require for the collection of data on the Latino population and other population groups?**

   In **1997**, the OMB undertook a major revision of its classification standards, which govern how we currently collect data on race and ethnicity. The OMB adopted an approach that defined two ethnicity categories — "Latino" and "not Latino," as answers to what is commonly known as the Hispanic origin question. The standards also require that data on race be collected separately from data on Latino ethnicity. The standards define five minimum race categories — White, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. We usually refer to this format for collecting data on race and Latino ethnicity as the "two separate questions" approach.

3. **How have the OMB standards affected data collection on the Latino population?**

   Extensive research by the U.S. Census Bureau has revealed a growing mismatch between how Latinos identify their ethnic and racial background and the framework established by the current OMB standards. For example, in responding to the census, many Latinos believe they have fully expressed their identification when answering whether or not they are Latino. Some also do not identify with any of the racial categories set forth in the separate question on race — they do not "see themselves" in those categories. Thus, many skip the question on race or indicate that they are of "Some other race." Furthermore, census research has found that most of those who identify or have been classified as "Some other race" are Latino. Growing numbers of Latinos identify as "Some other race" on census questionnaires, and in Census 2020, this category became the country's second-largest racial group after "White." **Ultimately, the two separate questions approach has produced incomplete and inaccurate data about the Latino population.**

4. **Why does a "combined question" approach on race and ethnicity collect better data than the two separate questions approach?**

After **researching** whether different formats for its questions on Hispanic origin could collect better data on the Latino population, the Census Bureau recommended a combined question approach. This research included surveys, focus groups, and other ways of obtaining respondents' perspectives on the formats. The Bureau tested a combined question approach, where "Hispanic or Latino" was one choice among several racial and ethnic categories. Thus, Latinos could indicate that they identify as Hispanic without having to also select another race or ethnicity category. Latino respondents could also choose to select Hispanic and as many other race or ethnicity categories they felt best expressed their self-identification — for example, Hispanic and Black; or Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian.

In addition, under the OMB's existing standards, Latinos can only choose one national origin or subgroup category when responding about Latino identification. For example, respondents can only choose to identify solely as Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, or Dominican. The combined question format recommended by the Census Bureau would allow Latinos to select more than one Hispanic national origin or subgroup — for example, Dominican and Colombian or Puerto Rican and Cuban.

TWO SEPARATE QUESTIONS
FROM CENSUS 2020

COMBINED QUESTION
RECOMMENDED BY
CENSUS BUREAU RESEARCH

Ultimately, the Census Bureau's **research** shows that a single combined question on Hispanic origin and race would produce more accurate and complete reporting within the OMB-recognized race and ethnicity categories and obtain better-detailed reporting of Latino national origin and sub-groups. **This would result in more complete and accurate data about Latinos and all of our nation's population groups.**

5. **Why is the OMB in the process of updating its standards for federal data on race and ethnicity, and what has it proposed?**

As the Census Bureau has recognized the challenges of the current OMB standards for collecting accurate and complete data on our nation's population, the OMB has also recognized the evolution in the ways in which the people in the United States self-identify their race and ethnicity. On January 27, 2023, the OMB released its initial **proposal** to update the standards, which included moving from the two separate questions approach to a single, combined question for self-reported race and ethnicity. The release of this proposal represents the next step in an ongoing **process** to update the standards in ways that better reflect how people self-identify, allowing for a more accurate representation of the population.

6. **Would a combined question format prevent Afro-Latinos from fully expressing their identity as both Black and Latino?**

No. The Census Bureau's research found that the optimal combined question approach actually led to a higher proportion of Latinos also identifying as Black than with the two separate questions approach. This meant that more Afro-Latinos were able to identify as both Black and Latino with the combined question approach than with the two separate questions approach. If the combined question approach is adopted, community groups will need to educate Latino and Black residents to mark both categories if that best expresses how they identify.

7. **Will a combined question approach prevent Latinos from fully expressing their identity as Latino or Indigenous or Native American?**

The Census Bureau's research indicates that the combined question did not reduce the rates at which Latino respondents indicated American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) identity compared to the two separate questions approach. The AIAN category allows Latinos to indicate a specific Latin American Indigenous identity, such as Mayan or Aztec. If the combined question approach is adopted, community groups will need to educate Latinos to mark both Latino and the AIAN category if that best expresses how they identify.

8. **What are the next steps in the process for revising the OMB standards for federal data on race and ethnicity?**

On April 27, 2023, the period to comment on the Initial Proposals for Updating the OMB Standards closed. The OMB will now review, process, and take into consideration over 20,000 comments received from the public as final recommendations for revising the OMB's race and ethnicity data collection standards. In the meantime, The OMB will continue to hold public listening sessions into Fall 2023. The goal is still to complete the revisions by Summer of 2024. The OMB must complete the revisions in a timely way because the standards must be in place so that the Census Bureau can do the planning and any further testing needed to use a redesigned census question in its surveys. This is particularly crucial so that a combined question can be used in Census 2030, as there are several steps the Bureau must undertake before it can add a combined question to the next decennial questionnaire.

9. **Why are accurate federal data on race and ethnicity critical for the Latino community and the nation as a whole?**

We need accurate data from the census and other federal agencies for several purposes. Latinos are the nation's second-largest population group and one of its fastest-growing communities. Latinos account for more than one of every five U.S. residents and one of every four of the country's population under 18. Thus, we cannot collect complete and accurate data on our nation's population without complete and accurate data on the Latino community.

These data are critical for fair redistricting and enforcing civil rights protections. Federal data on Hispanic origin and race also help ensure that sound decisions are made in the public and private sectors about a broad range of policies that affect the prosperity and well-being of Latinos and all our nation's residents — such as decisions affecting economic opportunities, education, health, local infrastructure, and housing.

Ultimately, how we collect federal data on race and ethnicity must also reflect the ongoing evolution of Americans' racial and ethnic identity. A combined question format to collect data on Hispanic origin and race best achieves this important goal.

For more information about the revision of the OMB standards, including upcoming town halls or other engagement opportunities, please contact Valerio Martinelli, Legislative Director, NALEO Educational Fund, at vmartinelli@naleo.org.