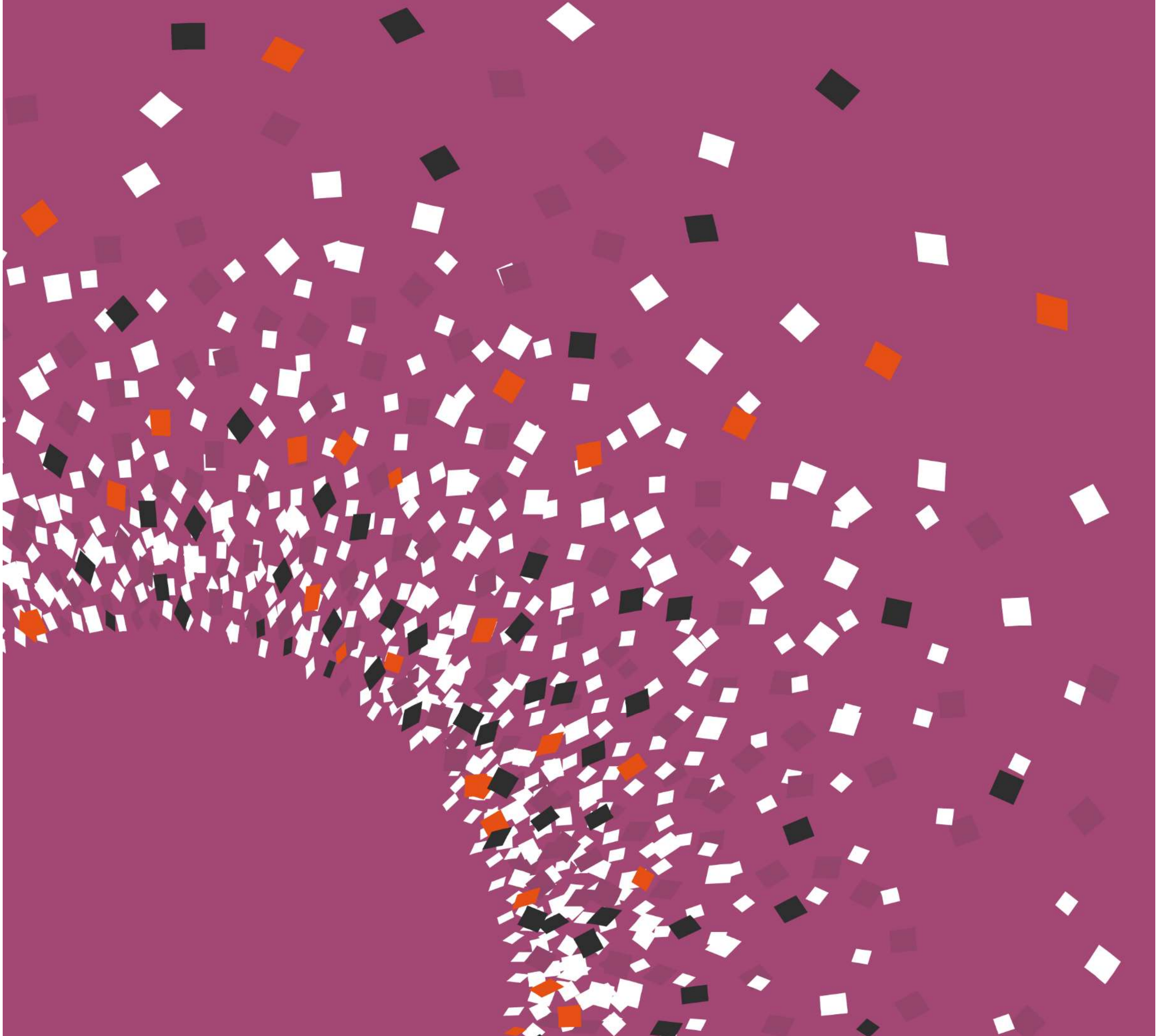
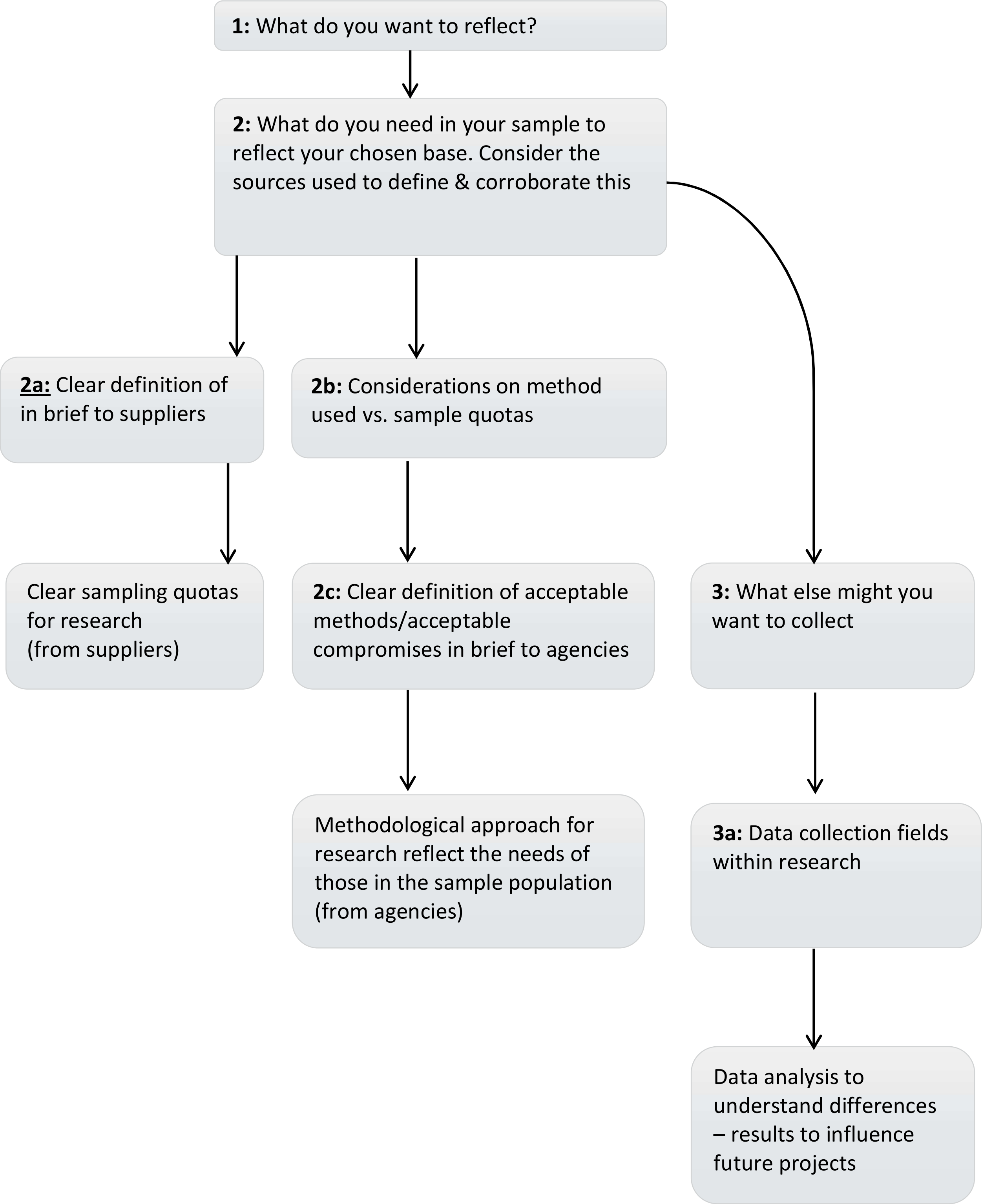
MRS Evidence Matters

MRS Senior Client Council

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION BEST PRACTICE GUIDES: SAMPLING METHODS



Sampling decisioning tree



1: What do you want to reflect?

2: What do you need in your sample to reflect your chosen base. Consider the sources used to define & corroborate this

2a: Clear definition of in brief to suppliers

Clear sampling quotas for research (from suppliers)

2b: Considerations on method used vs. sample quotas

2c: Clear definition of acceptable methods/acceptable compromises in brief to agencies

Methodological approach for research reflect the needs of those in the sample population (from agencies)

3: What else might you want to collect

3a: Data collection fields within research

Data analysis to understand differences – results to influence future projects

1 What population do you want the research to reflect?

Considerations

- What is currently done?
    - Is this a piece of continuous research, or a new project?
    - What is the impact of making changes (reporting/analysis) if continuous?
- Do you need the data to be nationally representative (nat rep)?
- What source are you using to base your population on (ONS/Census etc.) – is it the most up-to-date source?
- Do you need to reflect/represent your existing base?
- What type of research is it?
    - Qualitative vs. quantitative – sample size may impact ability to quota

2 What do you need in your sample to reflect your chosen population?

Based on your chosen research population, your next consideration should be to decide what you quota against in your sample vs. what should be collected within the research questionnaire as additional fields

As a standard we recommend sampling (setting quotas against) the below:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Region
- Vulnerability: Every sector has a responsibility to define what vulnerability is for their business, and sample accordingly. Vulnerability can encompass physical and mental health conditions, financial vulnerability, caring responsibilities etc. Vulnerabilities can also be long or short term

It is important to consider:

- Participants may not identify themselves in these ways (i.e. an older participant who has mobility difficulties may not consider themselves to have a disability)
- Getting neurodiversity representativeness can be difficult. There is limited data on neurodiversity, some neurodiversity's are also physical health conditions but not all are
- Be careful to avoid unconscious bias or pity when discussing vulnerabilities

See the **MRS Best Practice Guide on Research Participant Vulnerability** for more advice.

If your sample needs to be nationally representative (nat rep), the MRS best practice requires the following characteristics in order for it to be genuinely representative of the current UK population (and therefore be truly nat rep):

- Age

- Gender identity
- Region
- Social grade
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Physical disability and/or mental health conditions

It’s important for research projects to be transparent on their use of Nat Rep. The MRS Code of Conduct is updating its reporting requirements to mandate that research projects undertaken with a Nat Rep sample declare the characteristics that have been used to define Nat Rep.

The inclusion of other sample characteristics should be considered based on the research question and the population identified in step 1

Considerations

- Why is this being collected for research purposes?
- What purpose does it serves (e.g. reporting, further analysis, tracking)?
- What is the benefit to respondents?

Characteristics to consider outside of the standard:

- Social grade
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status
- Religion
- Working status
- Household (presence of children/dwelling type)
- Language (is English the first language)
- Level of education
- Income
- Health

2a: Clearly define your population within the research brief

Once you are clear on your population you need to ensure that your suppliers (if you are using suppliers) fully understand and are clear on why it is important/impetrative

Who's your target audience?

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- What population are you looking to reflect – nat rep, your customer base, something more targeted
- What are the required sample characteristics
  - How do you want the quotas set against these (i.e. reflect the UK population)
  - What are the minimum options within each characteristic required (e.g. how many genders need to be represented)
  - How does your company/industry define 'vulnerability'
- Is there anything 'nice to have' if available within the recruitment

2b: Consideration of accessibility/inclusivity of method based on inclusion of different characteristics within sample

Impact of methods on sample

- Quantitative research (and especially nat rep) should be built on the above list
- Qualitative research is typically more targeted and therefore the sample may need to be adapted
    - The sample should be as representative of quotas above as possible, unless research is targeted for a reason (e.g. specific focus on one gender)
    - The sample size shouldn't be an excuse for not having a representative sample
        - What is it you are trying to research? Think about all potential groups within the quota
        - Considering intersectionality may help here
    - It is important to remember that people are not homogenous – don't assume that one person represents an entire group

Conducting research virtually has allowed the research sector to be more inclusive and we shouldn't lose this representativeness because of logistics once we move back to more in person/F2F research

- Considerations
- Accessibility of qualitative and quantitative research based on the characteristics within your sample population
- Pros/cons of methods in relation to the sample you are trying to reach
- Benefits of flexing the approach to be appropriate to the quotas

Please see the Diversity & Inclusion Best Practice Guides: Use of Different Methods

2c: Clearly explain any methodological considerations within the research brief

Whether you use suppliers or not, you need to consider the impact a more inclusive sample may have on the methodological approach needed

What, if any, methodological considerations are there?

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- Should a mixed method/flexible approach be considered to allow both F2F and virtual qual (e.g. in order to be more inclusive towards those with physical disabilities who may not be able to travel)
- What are the pros/cons for your chosen sample
  - Where are you happy to draw the line/compromise (on either quotas within the sample, or the method used)

3: What else might you want to understand (for reporting, analysis, or tracking purposes)?

Considerations

- Do we need to collect this information?
  - What are you going to do with it/what purpose does it serve?
  - Is there a research purpose for collection (and not for sampling)?
  - Is it relevant and not excessive?

- Do you want to match with other data sets or sources?
  - If so, what do they collect currently and can they also be improved/made more inclusive?

- If you already know the answers/have the information through a difference source, ask yourself if there is a need to capture/ask it again
- What is the benefit to participants of providing you this information?
- Consider the impact on questionnaire length – this may require a compromise

3a: How do you include these fields within your research?

Considerations

- Do you need to ask for specific consent?
- Are you offering enough options?
- How will you ensure the terms/language you are using are up-to-date and will not cause harm?
- Have you explained; why you are asking for this data? how this data will be used? and how you are keeping it safe?

The **MRS Code of Conduct 2019** contains rules which require practitioners to design data collection which allows participants to express their views in the way that they prefer. Breaching this requirement can leave you or your business open to investigation under the MRS disciplinary and complaint processes.

- Rule 9 of the MRS Code of Conduct: Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities and ensure that there are measures in place to guard against potential harm.
- Rule 28 (c) of the MRS Code of Conduct: Members must take reasonable steps to ensure …. that participants are able to provide information in a way that reflects the view they want to express, including don’t know/prefer not to say

The **Data Protection Act 2018** and the UK General Data Protection Regulation sets out a core requirement to have a legal basis for processing personal data in the UK. The guiding construct can be summarised as informed consent of individuals being asked for or providing information about themselves

Laws exist to protect the confidentiality of data about living individuals (“personal data”) and give individuals rights to privacy or to access information held about them by public authorities. These laws are:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000

Within the Data Protection Act 2018 and the **UK GDPR** some personal data is categorised as 'special category data' and is subject to additional requirements when being collected

Personal data categorised as special category data is data on:

- religious or philosophical beliefs
- health
- racial or ethnic origin
- trade union membership
- political beliefs
- sex life or sexual orientation
- genetic data
- biometric data (including photos when used for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person) of data subjects

The presumption is that special category data needs to be treated with greater care because collecting and using it is more likely to interfere with these fundamental rights or open someone up to discrimination. This is part of the risk-based approach of the UK GDPR

Researchers processing special category data as well as personal data will need to have a legal basis for all categories of data being processed. When processing special category data practitioners must have a lawful basis under Article 6 of the GDPR in addition to meeting a special condition under Article 9 of the GDPR but these grounds do not have to be linked. The MRS GDPR in Brief No.10 - Collection of Ethnic Data and Other Special Category Data provides guidance on what you need to do to meet these requirements and checklists to help to identify what you need to do to collect sensitive special category data in accordance with GDPR

There is no restriction on processing any special category date as long as the requirements of Article 6 and Article 9 are met, and it is fully documented what the data is collected for and how it is collected

The answers must be optional, and you must provide 'prefer not to say' and 'prefer to self-describe' options. Avoid using 'other' as a term as this can be derogatory

As standard we recommend including the below fields in your research, in addition to those you have set quotas/ are sampling against:

- Social grade
- Sexual orientation
- Neurodiversity
- Physical disability

Other characteristics to consider collecting within the survey:

- Marital status
- Religion
- Working status
- Household (presence of children/dwelling type)
- Language (first language)
- Level of education
- Income

Care should be taken when designing data collection questions for sensitive data. The MRS Code of Conduct states that special care must be taken when the nature of a project is sensitive or the circumstances under which the data is collected might cause a participant to become upset or disturbed **(rule 33**).

There is no single way in which inclusivity questions can be asked or answered. The MRS Code of Conduct sets out the considerations when collecting data, for example rule 28:

***Rule 28**. Members must take reasonable action when undertaking data collection to ensure all of the following:*

a) that data collection processes are fit for purpose and clients have been advised accordingly

b) that the design and content of data collection processes are appropriate for the audience being analysed

c) that participants are able to provide information in a way that reflects the view they want to express, including don't know/prefer not to say

d) that participants are not led toward a particular point of view

e) that responses and/or data collected are capable of being interpreted in an unambiguous way

f) that any potential use of the personal data is revealed

g) that personal data collected and/or processed is limited to what is relevant

h) that personal data is stored and transmitted by secure means and only accessible to authorised individuals

Clauses a) to e) are particularly relevant when collecting sensitive data. It is therefore important to consider design issues such as:

- **Potentially providing response options in alphabetical order:** For example not having the Male option at the top of a gender response list. Alphabetised answer lists will get rid of any perceived superiority stigma which people may subconsciously have for the response first given. If you decide to alphabetise, this should be done with due consideration to order affects, and potential affects these can have on data collection
- **Provide options to self-describe:** this allows participants to define their identity in their own words as this could be a sensitive topic: For example offering as a response to the question...:
  - How would you describe your sexuality?,
  - I would describe it as (please define) __________________:
  - ...allows participants to describe themselves without narrowing them to a predefined list. This also ensures that Rule 28 clause c), d) and e) is being met.
- **Always include a prefer not to say option**: this ensures that participants don’t have to answer questions they don’t feel comfortable with. This also ensures that Rule 28 clause c) is being met
- **Remind participants that they have the right to withdraw or terminate any data collection**: this should provide participants reassurance that they are in control of the process. This also is an MRS Code requirement **(rule 34**)

Include a clear introduction to sensitive questions, explaining why the information is being requested, how it will be used, and convey to participants the steps that will be taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of their responses

Characteristics – definitions

MRS has produced Best Practice Guides on Collecting Sample Data for Ethnicity, Sexual orientation, Physical disability and/or mental health conditions and Sex and Gender:

- MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Ethnicity Sample Data
- MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Sample Data on Physical and/or Mental Health Conditions
- MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Sample Data on Sexual Orientation
- MRS Best Practice Guide on Collecting Data on Sex and Gender

While the MRS guides provide examples of how ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity and physical disabilities and/or mental health conditions data can be collected researchers are able to use their own approach as long as MRS Code of Conduct considerations are adhered to

The MRS guidance will be adapted as understanding and circumstances change

Please see the Diversity & Inclusion Best Practice Guides: Use of Language