

U.S. Sen Baldwin, U.S. Sen. Feinstein: Call on National Science Foundation to better assess LGBTQI+ representation in STEM

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) [called on the National Science Foundation](#) to improve diversity, equity and inclusion by adding voluntary gender identity and sexual orientation questions to its national workforce surveys.

NSF conducts several surveys of the science and engineering workforce to better understand how the American populace is being reflected in STEM and better target programs to support underrepresented communities. These surveys gather critical demographic information on the STEM workforce and are one of the primary sources of information about the health of our STEM workforce pipelines.

Notably absent from these surveys are any questions to assess the LGBTQI+ population with no questions about gender identity or sexual orientation of respondents. Although workforce surveys have estimated a 20 percent deficiency in the LGBTQI+ STEM workforce compared with the general population, this absence of precise demographic information has made it difficult to target programs to support the underrepresented LGBTQI+ population.

Although, NSF has piloted questions on sexual orientation and gender identity, it has recently decided to move ahead with a limited question on gender identity alone. A [letter signed by 1,700 scientists](#), including more than 25 Wisconsinites, was sent earlier this year urging NSF to include questions to assess the LGBTQI+ population, following years of other LGBTQI+ STEM organizations, such as Out to

Innovate and oSTEM, pushing NSF to include these questions.

“As you work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion at NSF and in the science community in general, we urge you to revise NSF surveys to adopt voluntary gender identity and sexual orientation questions on its national workforce surveys,” **the senators wrote**. “Without this key data, NSF will struggle to accurately assess the needs of the LGBTQI+ scientific workforce.”

In addition to Senators Baldwin and Feinstein, the letter was signed by Senators Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Bob Casey (D-PA), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Tina Smith (D-MN), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Cory Booker (D-NJ).

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below.

Dear Dr. Barber,

Congratulations on your appointment as the first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer of the National Science Foundation (NSF), a new role created by the CHIPS and Science Act. As you work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion at NSF and in the science community in general, we urge you to revise NSF surveys to adopt voluntary gender identity and sexual orientation questions on its national workforce surveys. Without this key data, NSF will struggle to accurately assess the needs of the LGBTQI+ scientific workforce.

Research into the LGBTQI+ population in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is sparse, but estimates from workforce surveys suggest that LGBTQI+ people are underrepresented in STEM by approximately 20 percent. A 2014 study suggested that this gap is not caused by a lack of interested individuals but from a higher proportion of LGBTQI+ students who leave STEM academic pathways compared to their straight and cisgender counterparts. The reasons for this are unsurprising: LGBTQI+ scientists consistently and systematically report more negative workplace experiences than their colleagues. The first step to addressing these shortfalls is collecting quality data on the LGBTQI+ population in STEM fields by adding voluntary questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to NSF's workforce surveys, as well as adopting robust privacy and confidentiality standards to ensure the data are adequately protected.

As you know, NSF conducts surveys of advanced STEM degree holders, including the Survey of Earned Doctorates and the National Survey of College Graduates. Although NSF committed to pilot testing questions on sexual orientation and gender identity in 2018, these questions have not been formally added to the surveys and, disappointingly, NSF abandoned the collection of sexual orientation data in favor of a more limited gender identity question design in December. The survey data provided by these questions is critical to implementing federal policy, including competitive awards in the CHIPS and Science Act to increase the participation of underrepresented communities in STEM studies and careers. Further, including questions on these topics is consistent with the directives in Section 11 of Executive Order 14075 to measure and address the disparities faced by LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as Executive Order 13985 to advance equity for underserved communities, including LGBTQI+ communities.

You have an opportunity as the first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at NSF to lay the groundwork for a more equitable future in STEM, and we urge you to include questions on both sexual orientation and gender identity in NSF's workforce surveys.

Sincerely,

An online version of this release is available [here](#).