

Increasing Voluntary Submission of Demographics Information with USAJOBS Applications

Combination of default settings and simplified language increases voluntary submission of demographics information

Agency Objective Increase the proportion of job applications on the USAJOBS platform that are submitted with demographics information, so that the agencies have more complete information about the diversity and inclusion in their recruiting.

Background USAJOBS is an online platform owned and maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to help job seekers find and apply to Federal Government employment opportunities. Between October 2015 and October 2016, USAJOBS had 4 million users submitting 22 million applications for over 360,000 posted jobs. Each applicant to a Federal job must create a USAJOBS profile, which contains both basic information about the applicant and a voluntary demographics section. When a user wishes to apply to a particular job posting, the user chooses whether or not to submit the demographics information from their profile as part of the job application. The information, in aggregate form and from post-audit announcements only, is then used to help evaluate diversity and inclusion in the Federal Government in order to assist with future recruitment and hiring activities.

Between October 2016 and January 2017, users submitted 59.3% of their applications with demographics information attached. A higher submission rate would provide the Federal Government with a more complete picture of the applicant pool.

Program Change OPM and the Office of Evaluation Sciences tested four variants of the application submission utility: Variant 1 was the control condition, with the utility appearing just as

it had before the study began in October 2016; Variant 2 made the attachment of demographics information the default choice when a user submitted a job application (the user could voluntarily opt-out); Variant 3 made the attachment of demographics information an option that required an affirmative action by the user, just as in the control condition (i.e., Variant 1), but simplified the language explaining why USAJOBS collects demographics information in both the profile and the application process; finally, Variant 4 used simplified language as in Variant 3, but again made the attachment of demographics information the default choice (as in Variant 2).¹

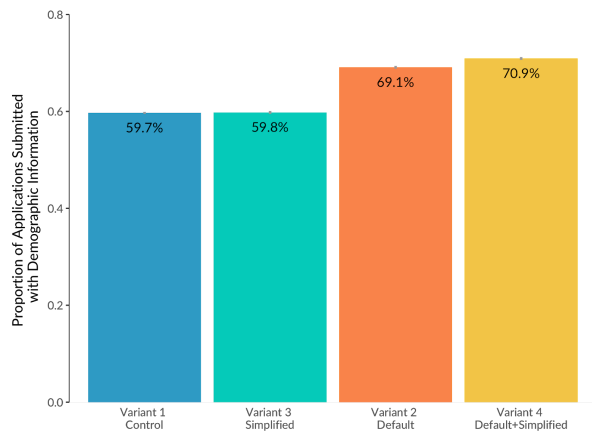
Evaluation Methods Users were randomly assigned one of the four variations, and we observed applications between 10/20/2016 and 1/5/2017. This captured 2.6 million applications submitted by nearly 800,000 users.

Results Variant 4 increased the submission of demographics information the most. In Variant 1 (control group), the average rate of submission of demographic information was 59.7%. This rate was 9.4 percentage points higher in Variant 2 ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [9.1, 9.7]), and 11.2 percentage points higher in Variant 4 ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [10.9, 11.5]).

¹ Opt-out policy has shown to be effective in many situations. For example, it can increase organ donations. Johnson, E. J.; Goldstein, D. (2003). "MEDICINE: Do Defaults Save Lives?". *Science*. 302 (5649): 1338–1339

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Conclusion There is strong evidence that attaching demographics information by default increases the rate of demographics information submitted. Combining this with a simpler explanation of why the information is collected marginally increases the rate of demographics information submitted. OPM has rolled out Variant 4 for all of its users.

Note: This Abstract updated May 2018