Ensuring Optimal Response Rates on Agency Data Collections Over Time

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Overview of Presentation

- Acknowledgements
- The problem
- Background
- Response rates over time
- Strategies and protocols
- Experiments and innovations
- Impact of outreach protocols
- Conclusion
Acknowledgements

▪ Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)
  – Mary Cowhig, Program Manager for the Mortality in Correctional Institutions (MCI) collection
  – Zhen Zeng, Program Manager for the Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ) collection

▪ RTI International
  – Elizabeth Smith, ASJ Data Collection Manager
  – Chris Ellis, MCI-ASJ Project Director

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Bureau of Justice Statistics; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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The Problem: Declining Response Rates

- General decline in response rates over the last two decades

- Particular challenges collecting data from agencies

- Importance of response rates
MISSION

To collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government.

These data are critical to federal, state, and local policymakers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded.
Example Studies

- MCI (formerly the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program)
- Sponsored by BJS
- Jail and prison deaths
- Key population data (e.g., end-of-year population)—jails only
- Scope: All US jails and prisons
Annual Survey of Jails

- ASJ
- Sponsored by BJS
- Detailed jail population data
- Reference date: End of June
- Scope: Sample of 950 US jails
## Response Rate Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Collection</th>
<th>Response Rate Percentage</th>
<th>Number of Eligible Agencies</th>
<th>Number Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 MCI</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>2,941</td>
<td>2,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 MCI</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>2,936</td>
<td>2,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 MCI</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>2,932</td>
<td>2,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 MCI</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>2,920</td>
<td>2,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 MCI &amp; Census of Jails</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
<td>2,992</td>
<td>2,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 MCI</td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>2,983</td>
<td>2,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 MCI &amp; ASJ</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>2,974</td>
<td>2,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 MCI &amp; ASJ</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>2,963</td>
<td>2,896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Response Rate Trends--Graph

Percentage of Annual Summary Forms submitted

- 98.00%
- 90.00%
- 92.00%
- 94.00%
- 96.00%
- 98.00%
- 100.00%

Years:
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
Strategies to Achieve High Response Rates

- Maintaining the frame of agencies and contact persons
- Varied communication methods
- Multi-mode data collection
- Accounting for external factors that affect agencies’ ability to respond
Outreach Protocols

Annual Summary Form and Death Report Form Introductory Mailing

Annual Summary Form Reminder (e-mail or postcard)

Annual Summary Form Received?
Yes → Data Processing
No → Annual Summary Form Replacement Mailing

Annual Summary Form Received?
Yes → Data Processing
No → Telephone Nonresponse Calls

Annual Summary Form Received?
Yes → Data Processing
No → Data Quality Follow-Up Calling

Data Processing

Medical Examiner Calling

Death Report Reminder (e-mail or postcard)
Experiments and Improvements

- **2010 MCI:**
  - Initial mailing method (FedEx, USPS Priority Mail, USPS First Class)

- **2011 MCI:**
  - Withheld the paper form from the initial mailing to encourage web submissions

- **2015 MCI/ASJ:**
  - Initial invitation method (E-mail, USPS)
  - Changed the timing of data quality follow-up
Experiments and Improvements

- 2017 standalone ASJ:
  - Extra e-mail reminder
  - Short form
  - Signature-required letter

- 2017 MCI:
  - Initial invitation sent by e-mail to certain agencies
# Impact of Outreach Strategies: ASJ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RY 2015 ASJ (with MCI) RR</th>
<th>RY 2016 ASJ (with MCI) RR</th>
<th>RY 2017 ASJ Standalone RR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial invitation mailed</strong></td>
<td>1/2/16 4.8%</td>
<td>2/2/17 3.9%</td>
<td>8/1/17 1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail sent and postcard reminders mailed</strong></td>
<td>3/14/16 61.9%</td>
<td>4/2/17 63.5%</td>
<td>8/23/17 18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail #2 sent and postcard reminders mailed</strong>*</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>9/5/17 40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper forms reminder mailed</strong></td>
<td>4/11/16 69.3%</td>
<td>4/24/17 72.7%</td>
<td>9/22/17 50.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonresponse contacting</strong></td>
<td>4/25/16 77.5%</td>
<td>5/15/17 85.4%</td>
<td>10/5/17 56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short form offered by email</strong>*</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>11/5/17 74.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signature-required letter mailed via UPS</strong>*</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A N/A</td>
<td>11/15/17 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final response rate</strong></td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Strategies used during the 2017 ASJ standalone midyear survey only.
High response rates are possible for establishment/agency surveys
A variety of outreach strategies helps
Adjusting protocols through experimentation reduces the risk of change

92% response rate for ASJ
98% response rate for MCI
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