



Ensuring Optimal Response Rates on Agency Data Collections Over Time

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Susan Brumbaugh, RTI International

Elizabeth Smith, RTI International

Chris Ellis, RTI International

Mary Cowhig, Bureau of Justice Statistics

Zhen Zeng, Bureau of Justice Statistics

Overview of Presentation

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

Acknowledgements

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 - 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

BJS Agency-Level Data Collection Examples



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**

BJS Agency-Level Data Collection Examples

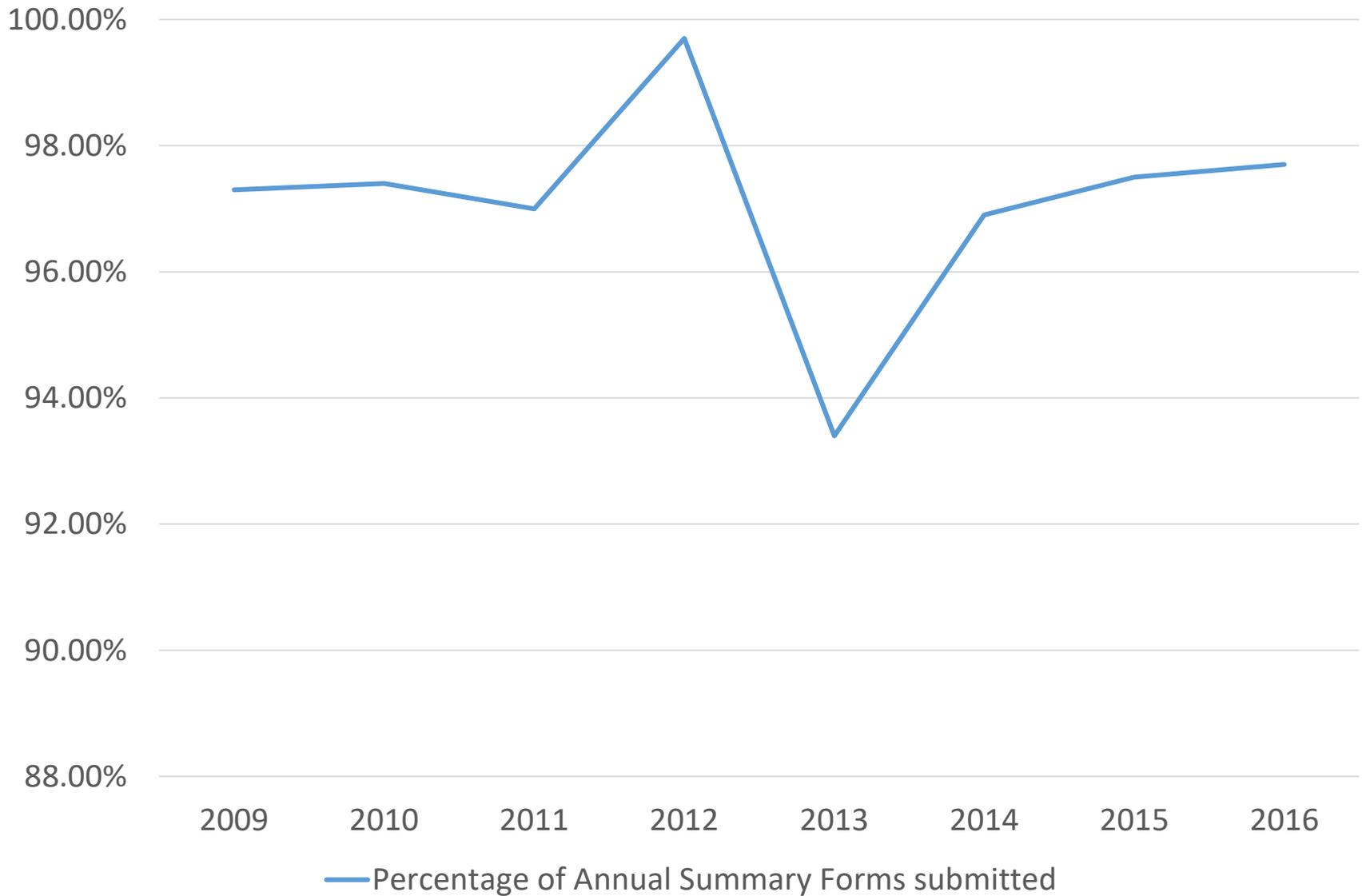
Annual Survey of Jails

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

Response Rate Trends

Year/Collection	Response Rate Percentage	Number of Eligible Agencies	Number Submitted
2009 MCI	97.3%	2,941	2,861
2010 MCI	97.4%	2,936	2,861
2011 MCI	97.0%	2,932	2,844
2012 MCI	99.7%	2,920	2,911
2013 MCI & Census of Jails	93.4%	2,992	2,794
2014 MCI	96.9%	2,983	2,890
2015 MCI & ASJ	97.5%	2,974	2,899
2016 MCI & ASJ	97.7%	2,963	2,896

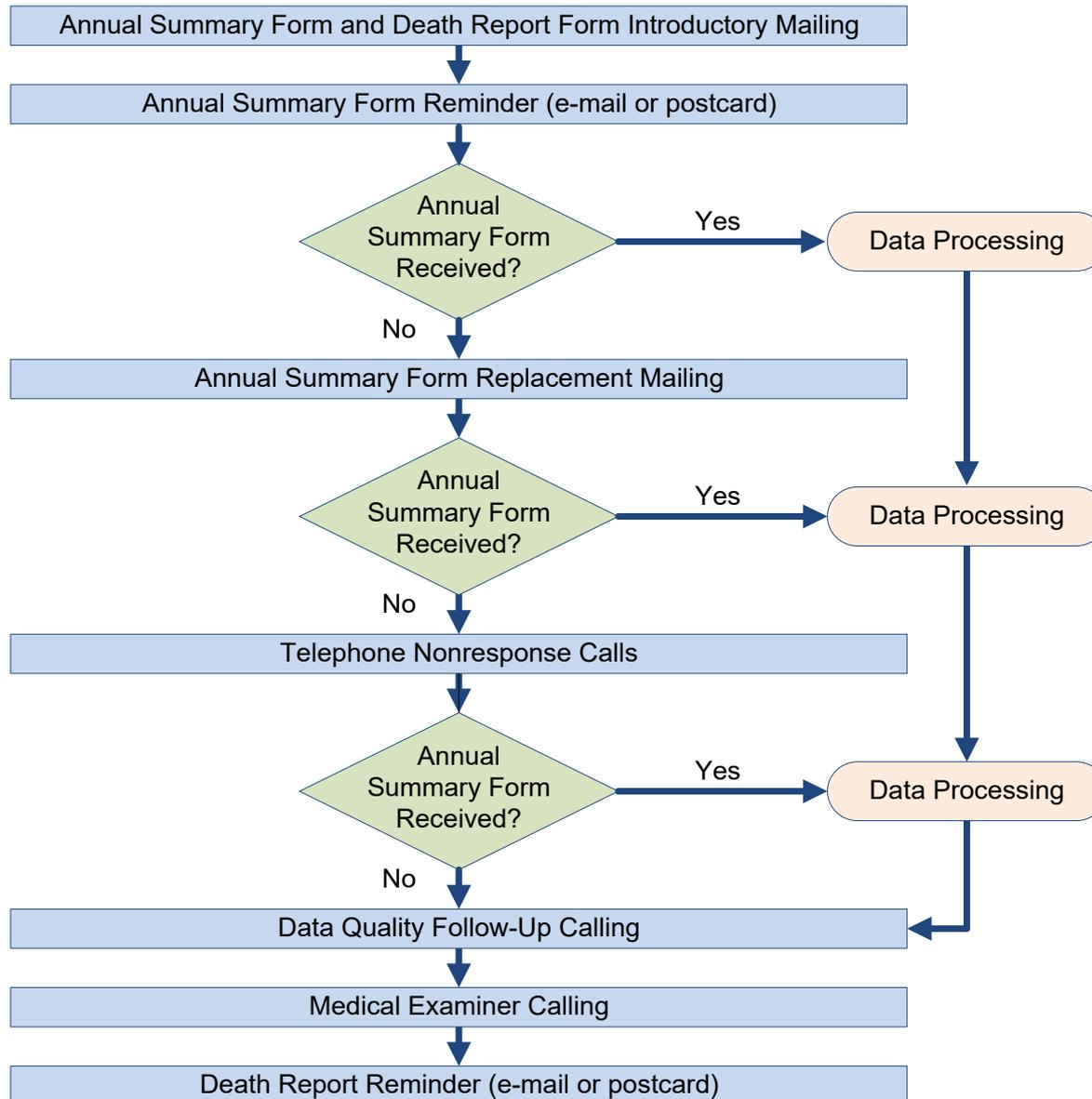
Response Rate Trends--Graph



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



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

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

* Strategies used during the 2017 ASJ standalone midyear survey only.

Conclusion

- ✓ 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

More Information

Susan Brumbaugh

Research Sociologist

919.485.7701

sbrumbaugh@rti.org