

# Reasons for Late Response and Nonresponse in Surveys of Government Agencies

Tim Smith (RTI International)

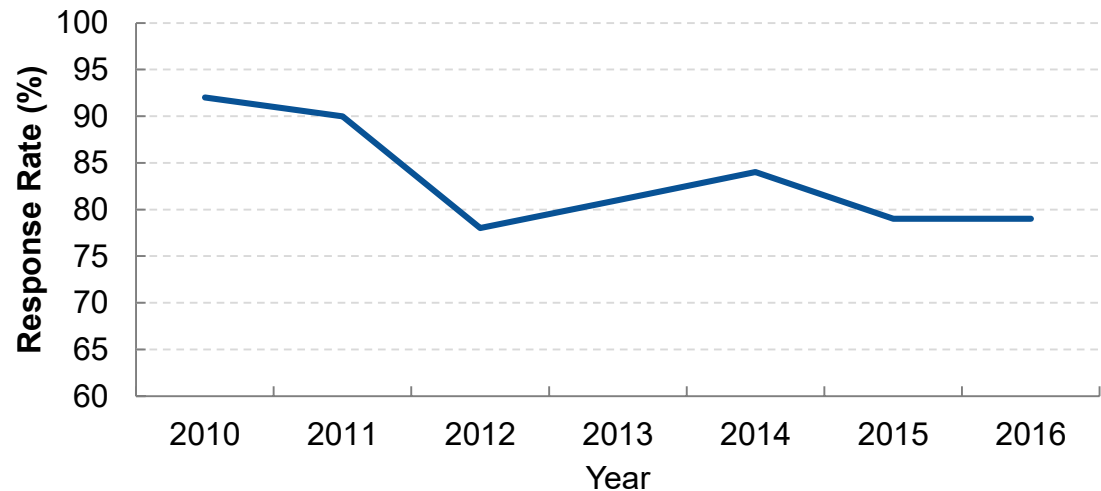
Christian Genesky (RTI International)

Danielle Kaeble (Bureau of Justice Statistics)

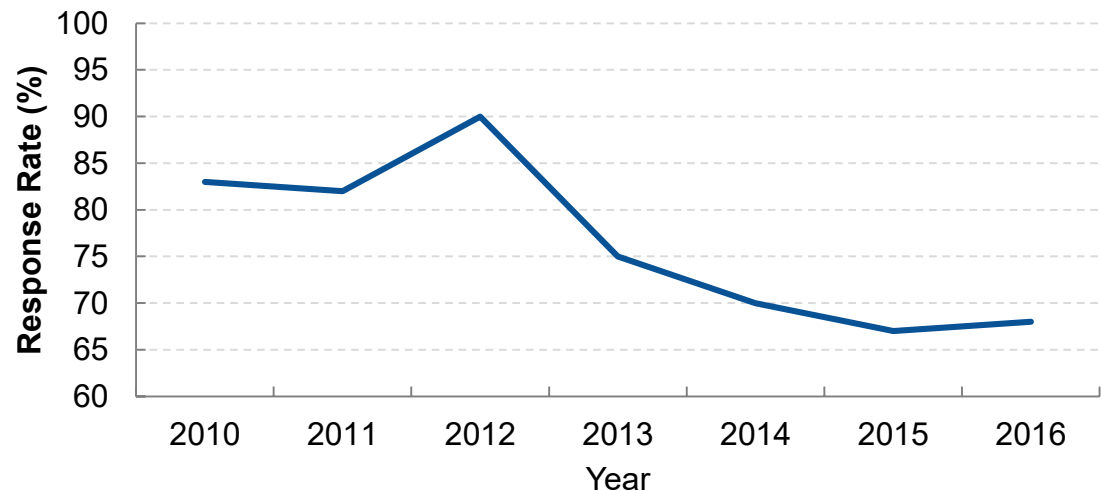
Anthony Whyde (Bureau of Justice Statistics)

# Establishment Response Rates

- Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll (n=50 state governments and about 90,000 local governments)

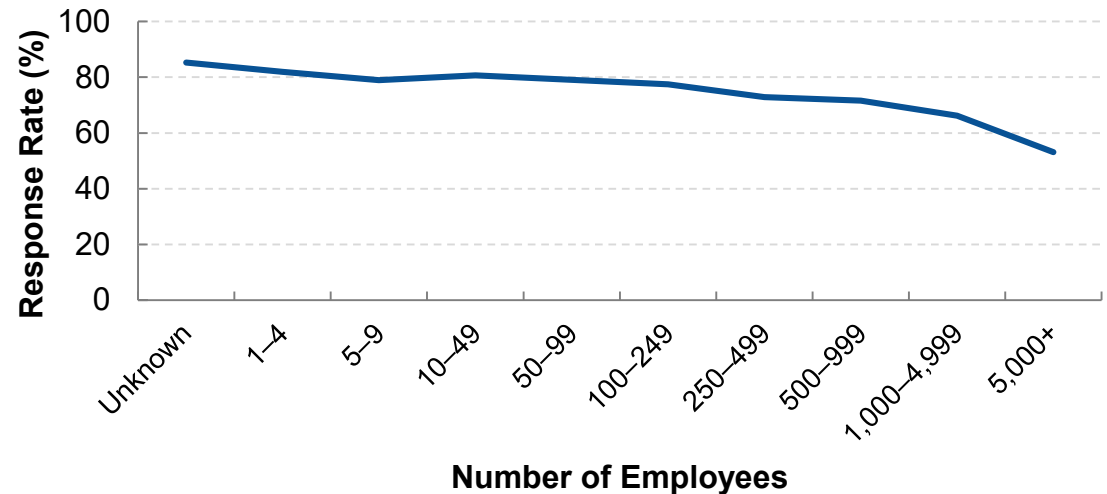


- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Private Sector Establishments

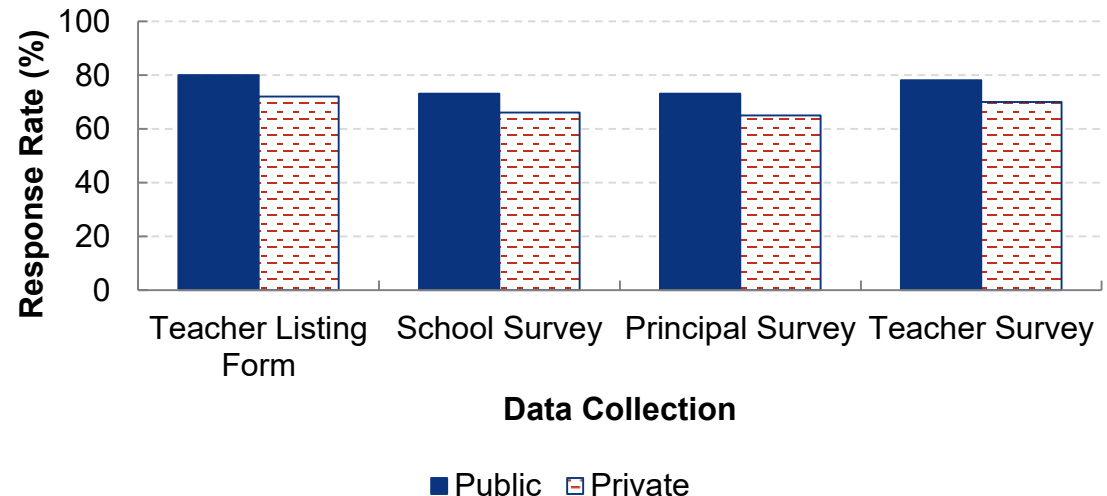


# Establishment Response Rates

- 2015 Occupational Information Network (O\*NET)



- Schools and Staffing Survey (SSAS) 2011-12



# Risks Due to Late Response/Nonresponse

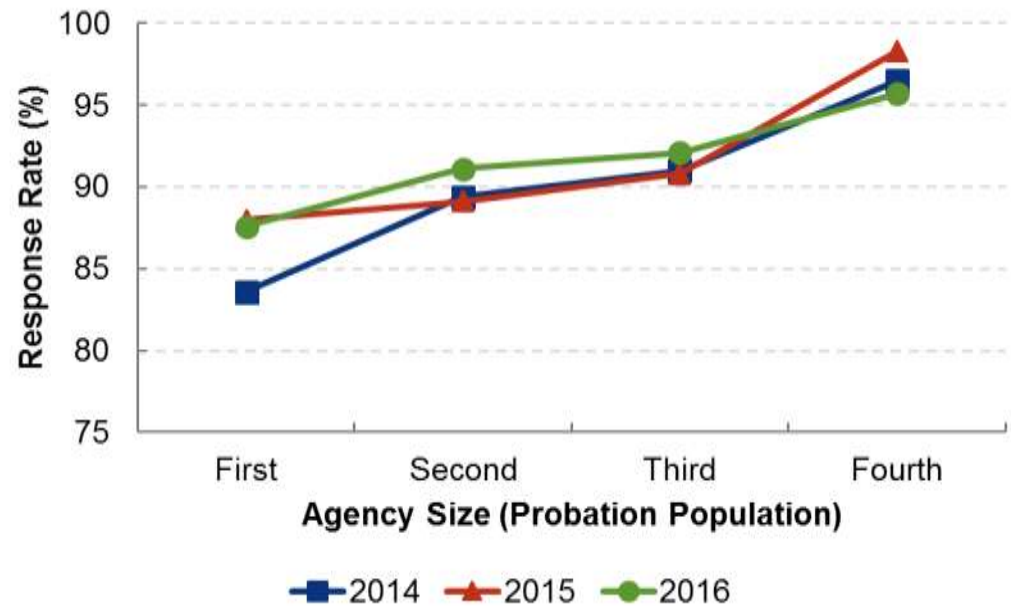
- Higher data collection costs
- Longer data collection period
- Lower data quality
- Staff turn-over
- Biased estimates

# Research Goals

- Identify reasons for late response/nonresponse among probation and law enforcement agencies
- Assess differences by agency size and other characteristics
- Define tailored strategies to encourage survey participation

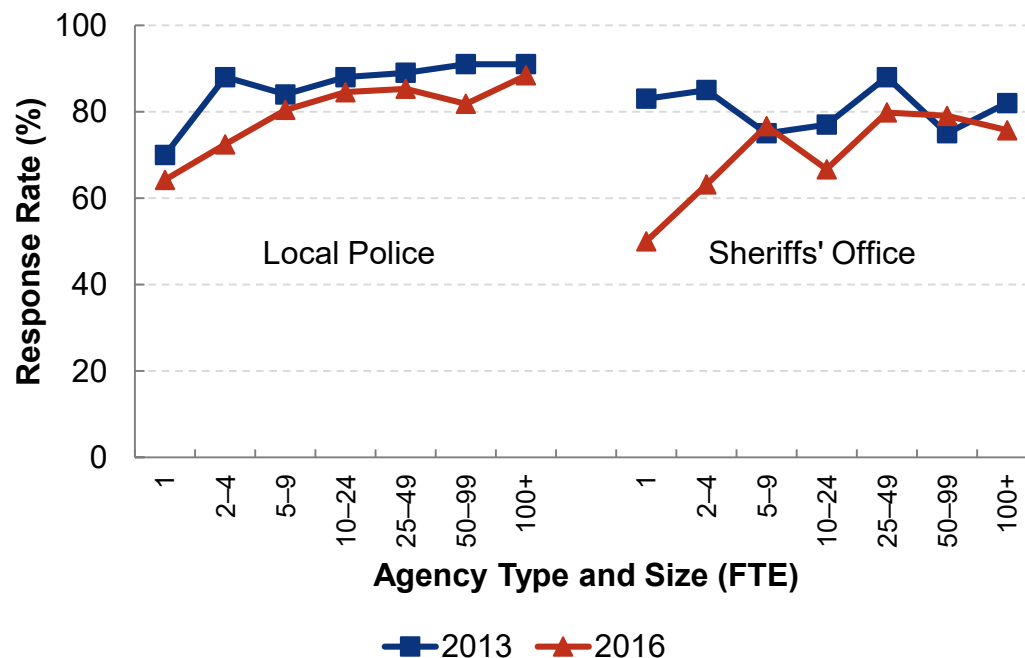
# Methods – Focal Studies

- Annual Probation Survey (APS)
  - Census of 456 agencies nationwide
    - 42 provide state-level data
    - 13 provide data for multiple agencies
    - 401 provide data for a single agency
  - Burden between 30-90 minutes
  - Annual confirmation of agency head contact information for survey pre-notification
  - Web survey, with telephone follow-up
  - 5-month data collection period
  - 92% response rate



# Methods – Focal Studies

- Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Core Survey
  - Sample of 3,500 state and local law enforcement agencies
    - 50 state agencies
    - 2,640 local police departments
    - 810 sheriff's offices
  - Burden of 3 hours
  - Online search for agency head contact information for survey pre-notification
  - Web survey, with telephone follow-up
  - 7-month data collection period
  - 80% response rate (2016)



# Methods – Reasons for Late Response/Nonresponse

- Codes based on experiential/anecdotal evidence
  - Perception that limited resources (e.g., budget and staff), benefits, and role of federal government in state/local issues might impact cooperation
  - Tested on 2016 LEMAS Body-worn Camera Supplement Survey
    - Verbatim reasons
    - Double-coded into 21 categories, with adjudication
  - Refined for APS and LEMAS-Core



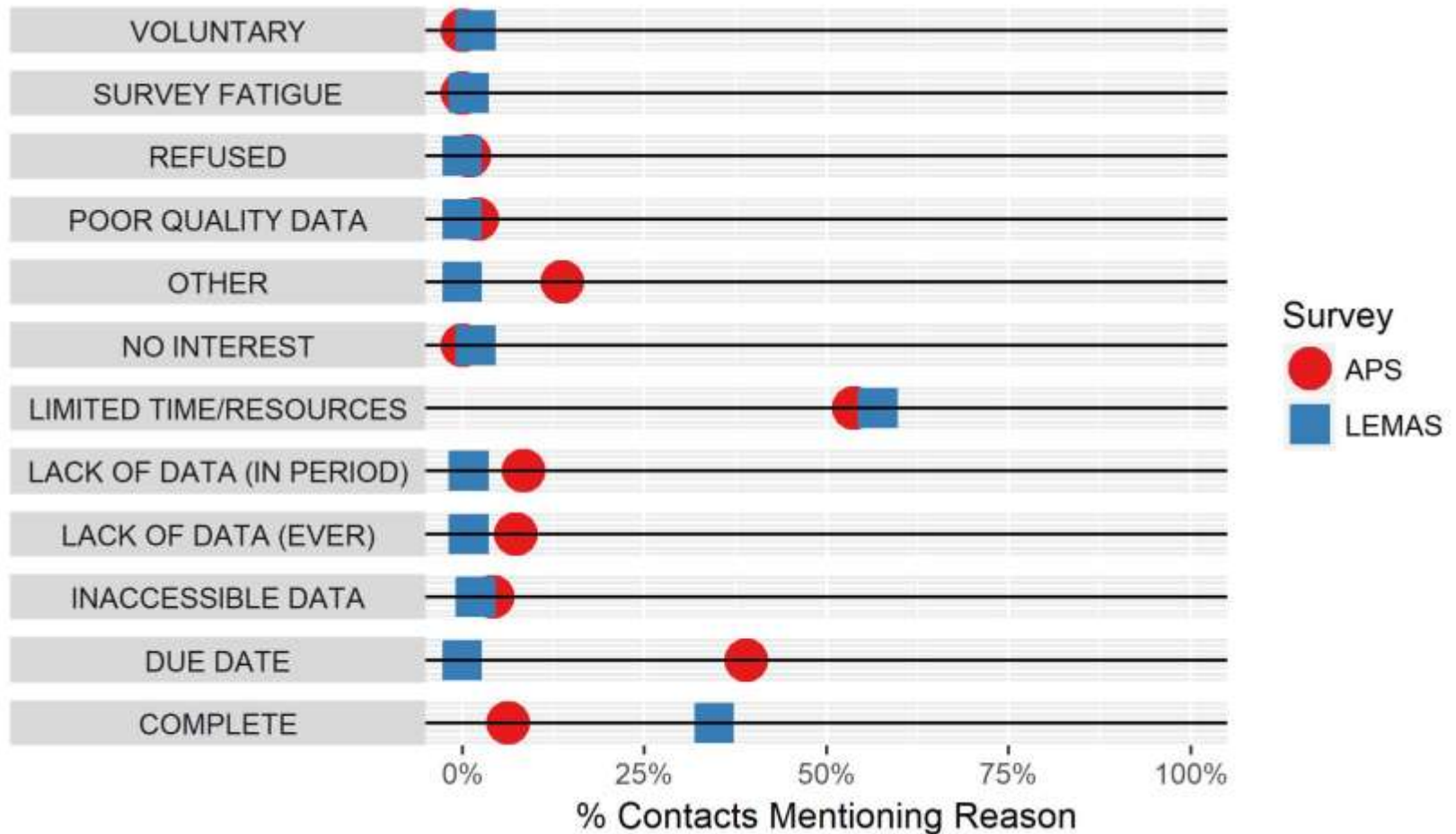
# Methods – Reasons for Late Response/Nonresponse

- Final code list
  - COMPLETE — Claims that survey has been submitted
  - DUE DATE — Cannot respond by due date
  - LIMITED TIME/RESOURCES — Not related to due date
  - APPLICABILITY — Thinks survey does not apply to agency
  - NO INTEREST — Uninterested in survey topic/goals
  - NO BENEFIT — No benefit to agency from participation/survey
  - VOLUNTARY — Participation is not mandated by law
  - SURVEY FATIGUE — Agency receives too many survey requests
  - LACK OF DATA (IN PERIOD) — Data are not available during survey period
  - LACK OF DATA (EVER) — Data do not exist or are not maintained
  - INACCESSIBLE DATA — Data exist, but are not easily accessible
  - POOR QUALITY DATA — Data exist, but are of questionable/poor quality
  - CONFIDENTIALITY — Data cannot be shared outside of agency/authority
  - FEDERAL ROLE — Federal government should not be involved in local issues/operations
  - JURISDICTION RULE — Jurisdiction does not participate in research
  - OTHER
  - REFUSED TO GIVE REASON FOR DELAY/REFUSAL

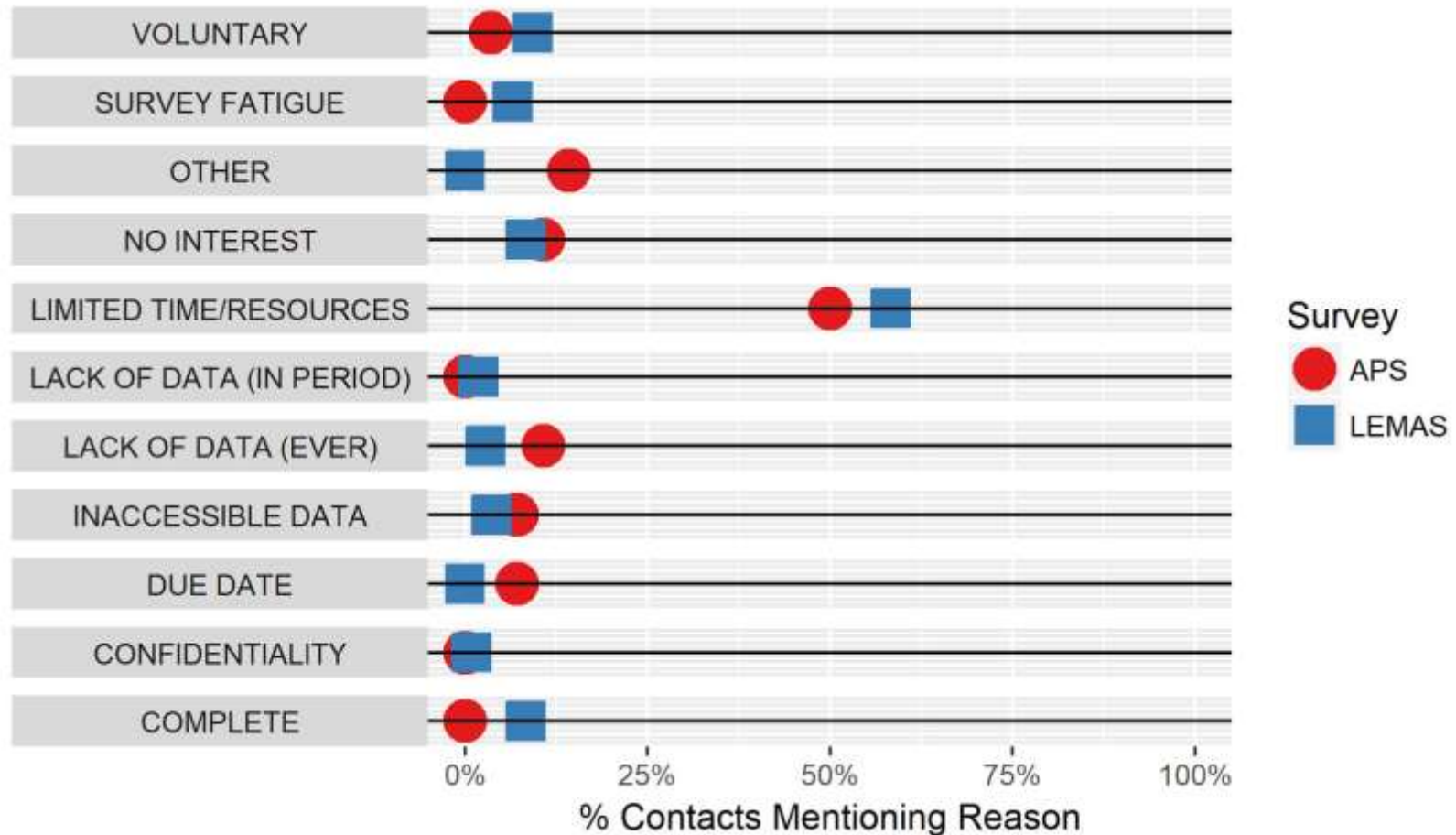
# Findings – Overview

- Late respondents
  - APS: 165 cases; 129 contacts gave reasons
  - LEMAS: 679 cases; 339 contacts gave reasons (240 “did not receive”)
- Nonrespondents
  - APS: 38 cases; 29 contacts gave reasons
  - LEMAS: 572 cases; 310 contacts gave reasons (223 “did not receive”)
- Five reasons were not cited by late respondent or nonrespondent contacts on either study
  - APPLICABILITY — Thinks survey does not apply to agency
  - NO BENEFIT – No benefit to agency from participation/survey
  - CONFIDENTIALITY – Data cannot be shared outside of agency/authority
  - FEDERAL ROLE – Federal government should not be involved in local issues/operations
  - JURISDICTION RULE – Jurisdiction does not participate in research

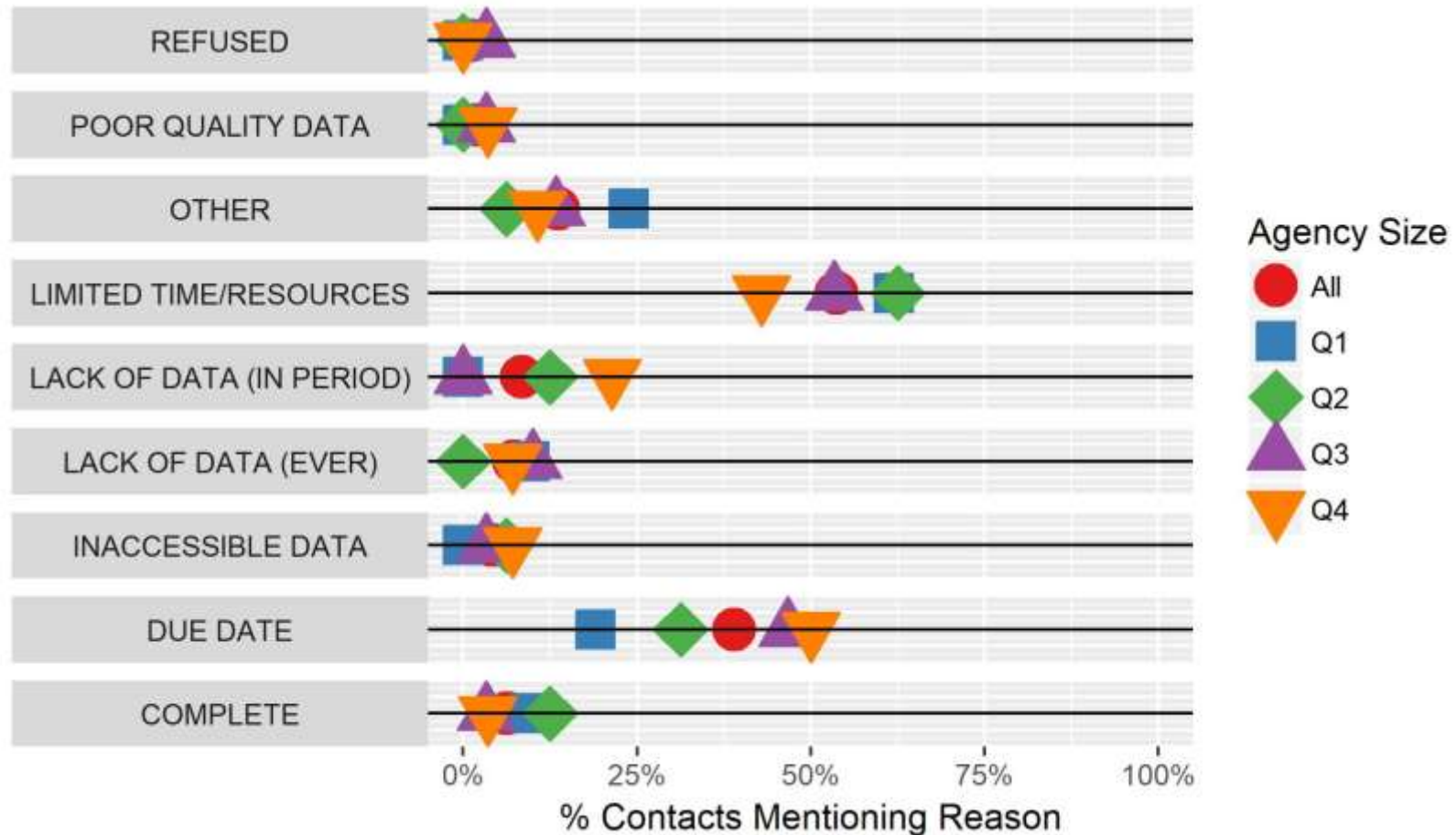
# Findings – Late Respondents



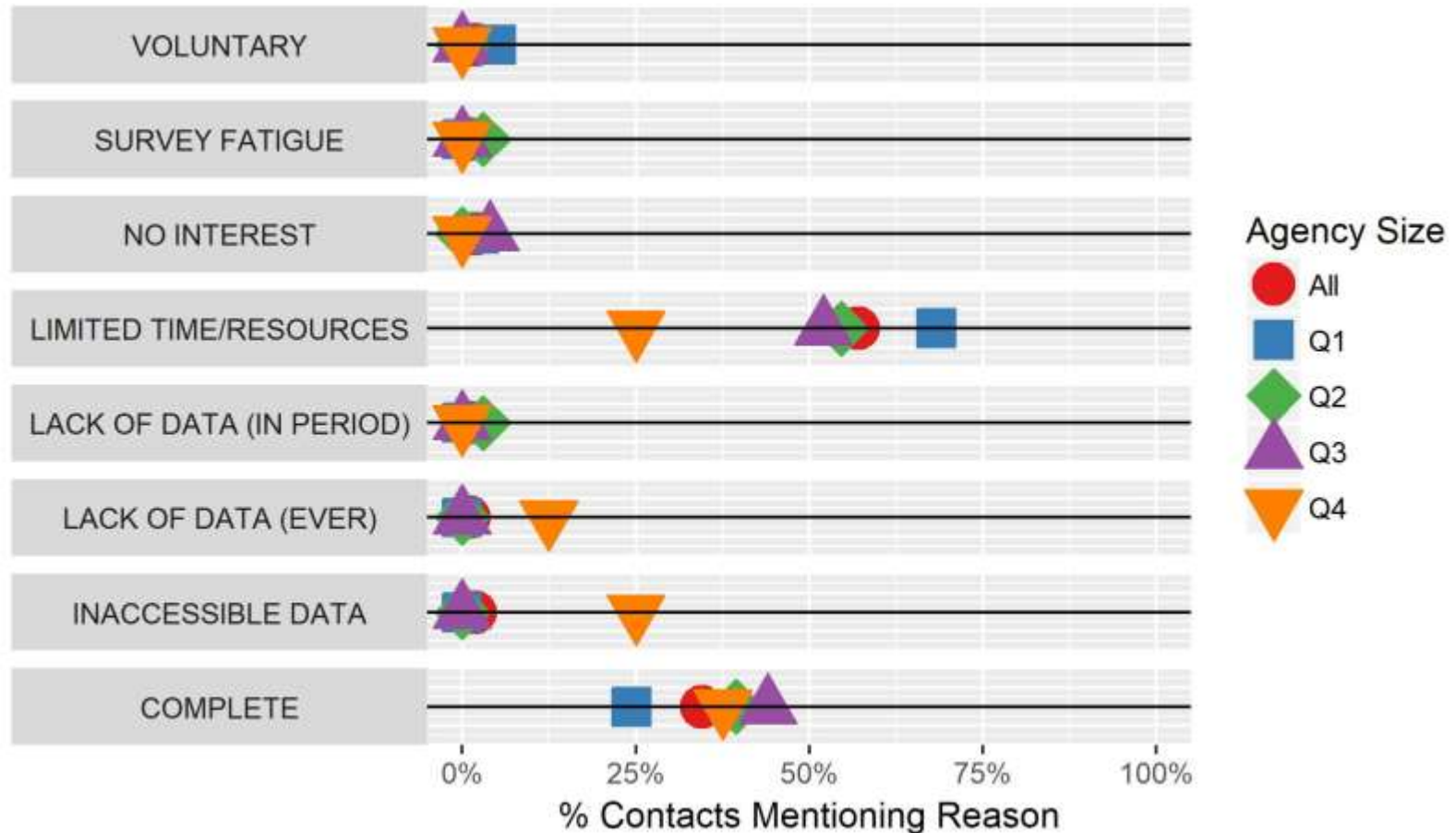
# Findings – Nonrespondents



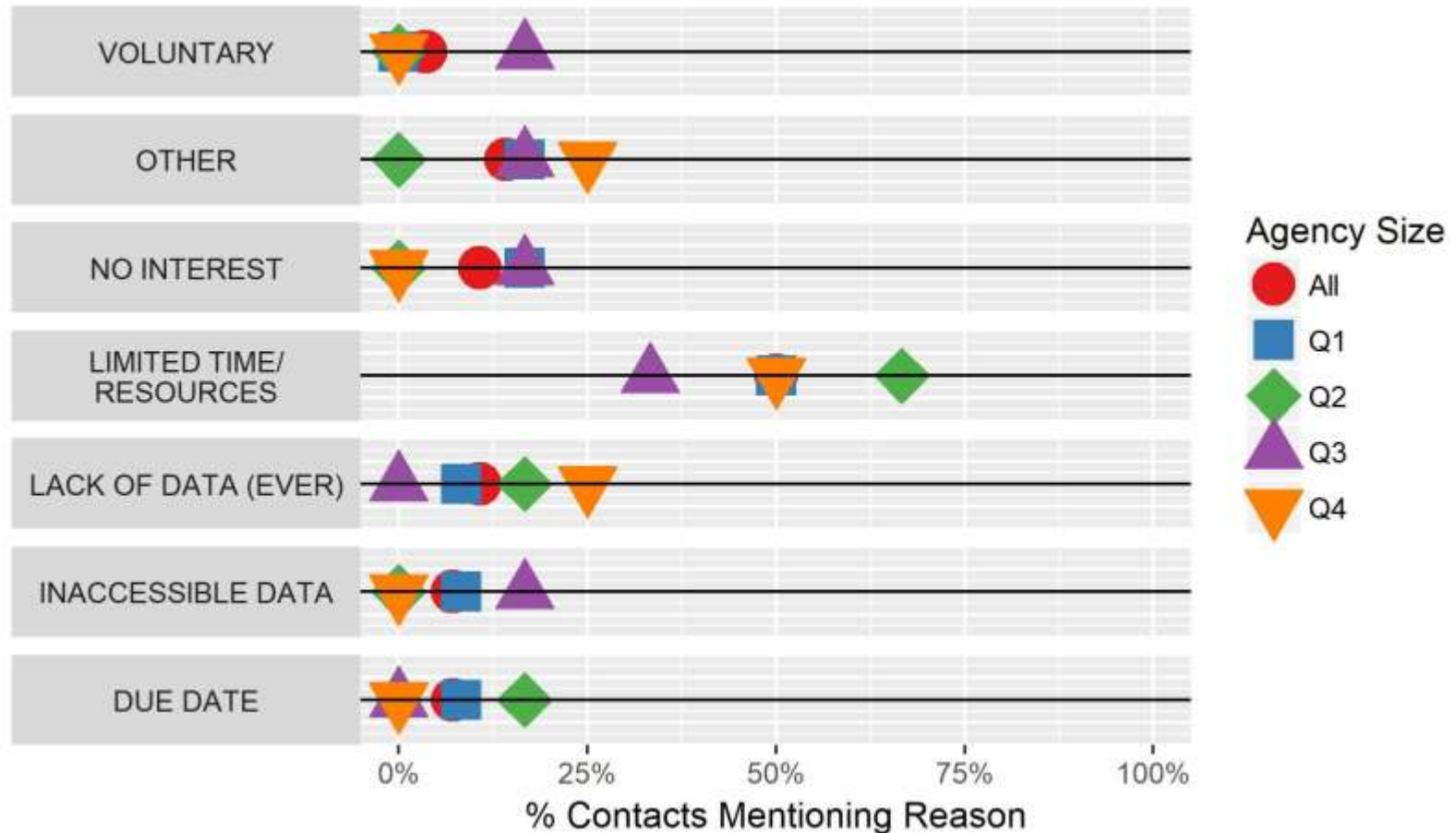
# Findings – APS Late Respondents, by Agency Size



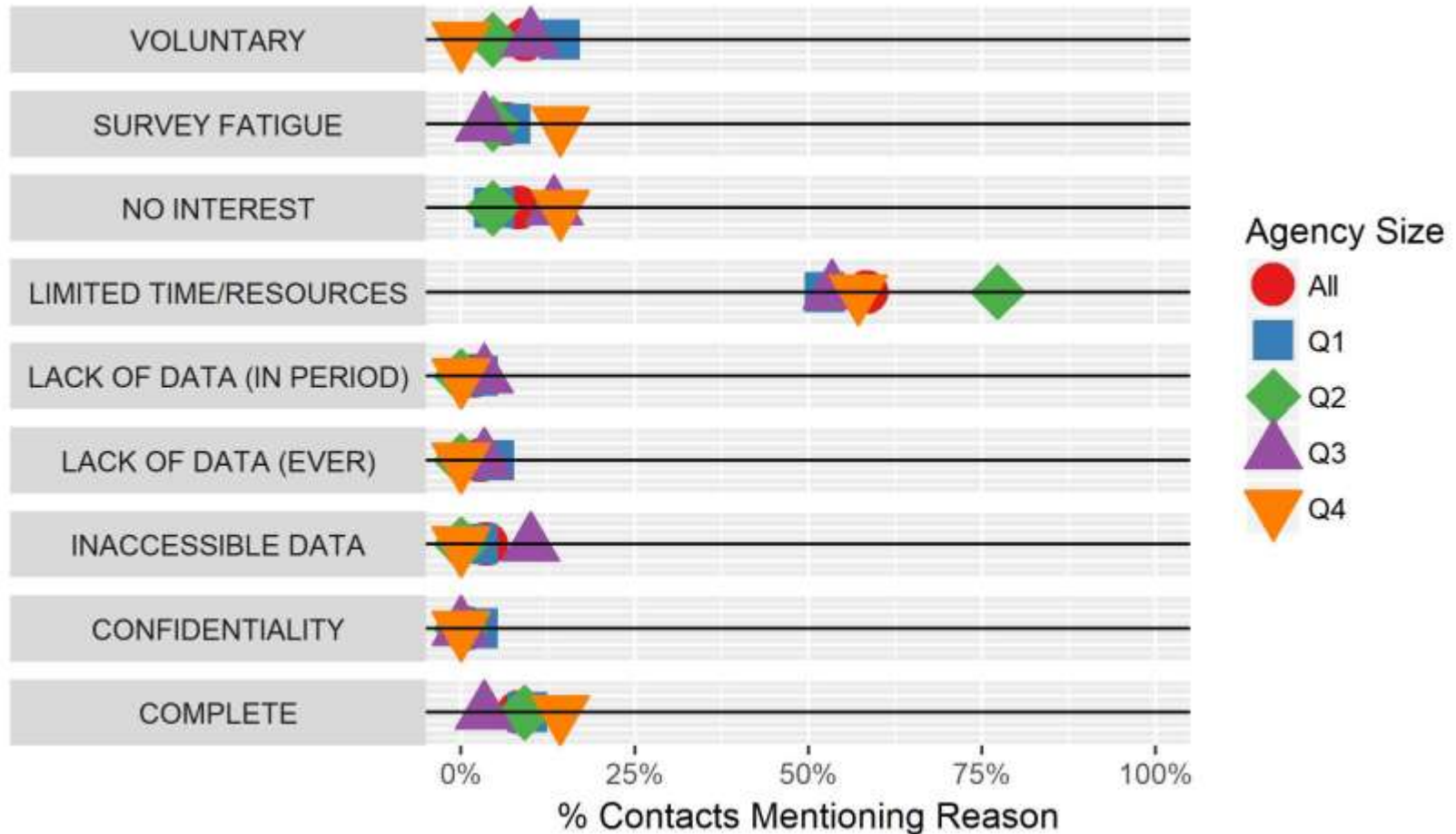
# Findings – LEMAS Late Respondents, by Agency Size



# Findings – APS Nonrespondents, by Agency Size

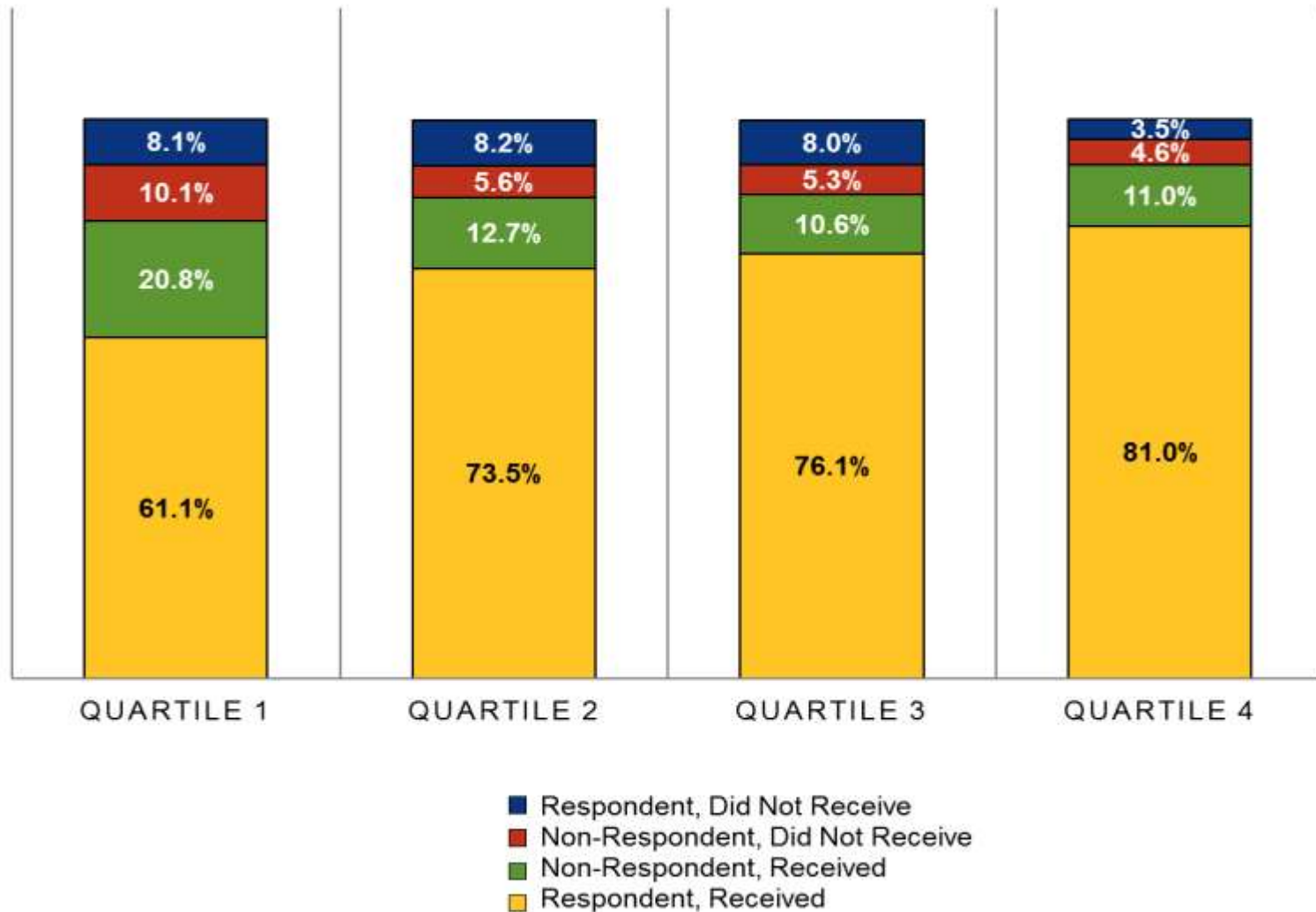


# Findings – LEMAS Nonrespondents, by Agency Size





# Findings – LEMAS - Did Not Receive Survey Request, by Agency Size



# Summary

- APS and LEMAS demonstrated differential response rates by agency size
- Many experiential/anecdotal reasons for nonresponse are not borne out by evidence (e.g., no benefit, confidentiality, federal role)
- Reasons for late response and nonresponse vary by agency size
  - Large agency late respondents often report data availability
  - Small agency late respondents often report staff resource limitations
  - Frame address quality did not influence response, even though LEMAS agencies (especially small agencies) often reported not receiving survey materials

- Test data availability when defining survey content
- Communication should stress flexibility/support for due dates and mode of data submission
- Confirm receipt of survey materials early

# Limitations

- Data are from only two specific kinds of government agencies
- Data on reasons restricted to those contacted
- Analysis to-date only related to agency size
- Solutions are undefined/untested
  - Restricted survey content
  - Tailored survey correspondence/communication
  - Interviewer procedures/materials

# Next Steps

- Identify/analyze additional characteristics
- Develop tailored communications strategies
- Conduct randomized tests
- Investigate with other establishment/agency populations

# More Information

Tim Smith, Director

Security and Resilience Program

RTI International, Survey Research Division

[tksmith@rti.org](mailto:tksmith@rti.org)

919-316-3988

Information on RTI data collection on criminal justice projects:

[https://www.rti.org/sites/default/files/brochures/rti\\_data\\_cj.pdf](https://www.rti.org/sites/default/files/brochures/rti_data_cj.pdf)