

# Increasing Survey Response Rate

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Presentation to  
NN/LMN South Central Region  
August 17, 2011  
10:30 – 11:30 AM CT



# Surveys give us a description of a group

Demographics    Opinions    Behaviors  
Knowledge    Skills



# Ball State 2010 Alumni Survey

- 94% positive attitudes toward Ball State
- 85% well prepared for career/more education
- 94% well prepared in areas of intellectual and personal growth

Response rate = 11.9%

# Surveys give us a description of a group

Demographics    Opinions    Behaviors  
Knowledge    Skills



# GOAL 3: GET A HIGH RATE OF PARTICIPATION FROM RESPONDENTS (RESPONSE RATE)

## Why?

“A low cooperation or response rate does more damage in rendering a survey's results questionable than a small sample, because there may be no valid way scientifically of inferring the characteristics of the population represented by non-respondents.”

*American Association of Public Opinion Research, 2002, Standards and Best Practices*

# Goal: Maximize your response rate

## An often quoted rule of thumb

- 50% is adequate
- 60% is good
- 75% is very good



iStockphoto

*The Practice of Social Research.* Earl R. Babbie. Belmont, Calif : Wadsworth  
Cengage, 2007.

## Rule of thumb

50% is adequate  
60% is good  
75% is very good

## Reality

Telephone surveys  
RR = 20%-40%\*

Mail surveys\*\*  
Median RR = 57%

Email surveys\*\*  
Median RR = 49%

\* Langer, About response rate, *Public Perspectives*, 2003

\*\* Sue & Ritter, *Conducting Online Surveys*, 2007, Sage

# Survey researchers and researchers who study surveys provide guidance

## 1. How do we boost response rate?

- Distribution plan
- Communication plan
- Questionnaire design



## 2. How do we handle low response rates?



# Strategies for improving response rate



# This is the simplest definition of response rate

## *Equation*

# of completed and partially completed  
questionnaires

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# of eligible participants in your sample

# Dillman has found that social exchange theory predicts response



Dillman, et al., *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Third Edition*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2009.

**Perceived  
cost**



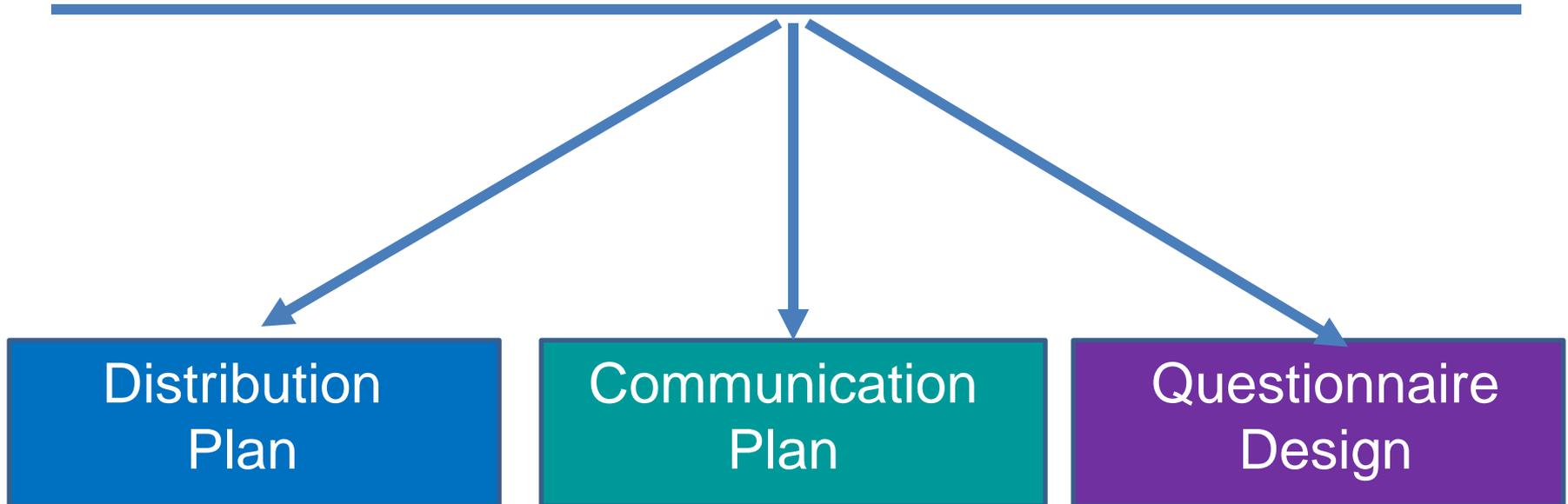
**Perceived  
reward**



**Trust**



**Response  
rate**



# Distribution procedures increase response rate



Dillman's Tailored Design Method is popular because it yields respectable response rates

## Handout One

### *How to Administer Questionnaires*



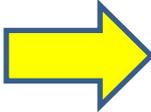
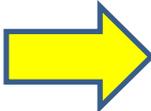
# Internet Access, Early 2010

- Approximately 65% of households have Internet connections
- Where modem access, download time is an issue
- Different people respond to paper surveys than to Web surveys
- When people are given a choice between paper and Web, approx 75% choose paper

# Dillman's Total Design Method (TDM)

Timing (approx)	Activity
Day 1	Pre-notification
Day 5	USPS questionnaire w/stamped return envelope + \$2
Day 18	USPS replacement to nonrespondents (thank-you postcard to respondents)
Day 32	FedEx final replacement to nonrespondents (thank-you postcard to respondents)

# Dillman's Tailored Design Method (TDM)

Timing (approx)	Activity
 Day 1	Pre-notification letter or email
Day 7	Email with link to questionnaire
Day 11	Thank you/ reminder email with URL link
Day 15	Email reminder with URL link
 Day 25	USPS mailing (with self-addressed, stamped envelop) of questionnaire to nonrespondents



Data displayed as of:  
April 27, 2010

National  
**72%**  
Participation Rate

## Example: Census Cost-Benefit Analysis

Pre-notification letter	\$85 million
Response rate boost	6%
Savings*	\$425 million (\$85 million per 1% increase minus cost)

\*Cost for follow-up=\$57 per visit

Source: US Census Bureau web site  
and Atlanta Journal Constitution, March 13,  
2010

# One researcher reported a 79% response rate using TDM

Activity	Response Rate
One week prior: Pre-notification letter	--
Day 1: Email questionnaire	25%
Day 7: Email reminder with URL	46%
Day 11: [Emailed and mailed questionnaire]	68%
Day 15: Email reminder with URL	--
Day 25: 71% response rate	71%
Day 32: 79% response rate	79%

Source: Brashears, M.T. (2003). *Low expense, high return: A bimodal methodology for Internet survey implementation*. Poster presented at the National Agricultural Education Research Conference. December 9-11, 2003.

# Incentives work better when sent before or with the questionnaire



Cost of  
Obligation

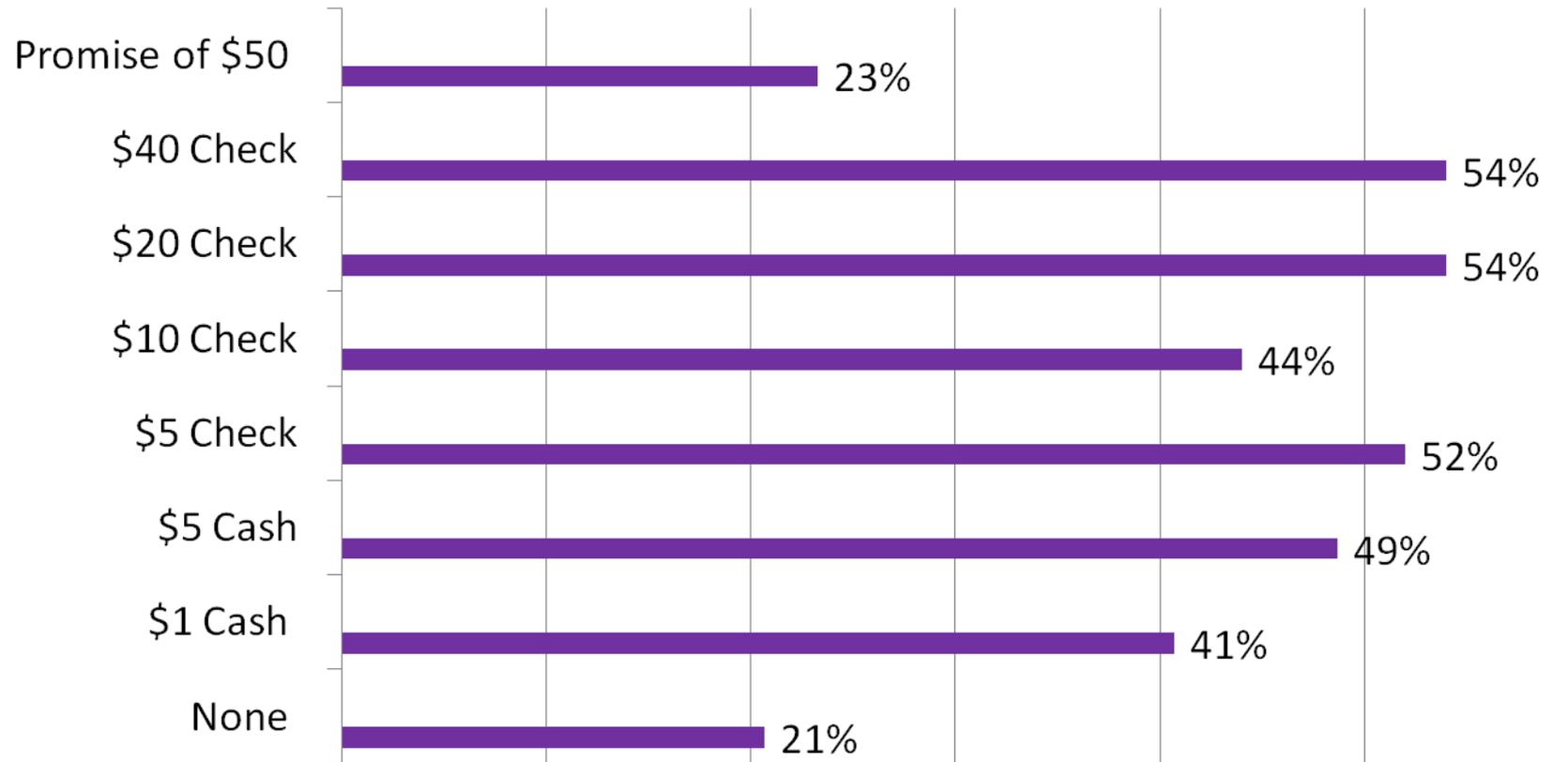


Cost of  
Motivation

*Obligation is cheaper than motivation*

# Send incentives with request, not after participation

## Response rates associated with each type/amount of incentive



Adapted from:  
Don A. Dillman, Washington State University, January, 2010

# Incentives' Effect on Electronic Survey Response Rate

## Study 1 (Social Science Computer Review, 2004)

- Incentives better than no incentives
- Cash better than online gift certificates
- No difference between online and paper gift certificates

[http://www-personal.umich.edu/~danhorn/reprints/Horn\\_2004\\_Web\\_Survey\\_Incentives\\_SSCORE.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~danhorn/reprints/Horn_2004_Web_Survey_Incentives_SSCORE.pdf)

## Study 2 (AAPOR conference paper, 2002)

- No difference between \$2 pre-paid, \$2 post-paid, or no incentives
- Lotteries for two \$50 and four \$25 awards had positive effect (8%-10% increase over other conditions)

[http://www.psyconsult.de/bosnjak/publications/AAPOR2002\\_Bosnjak\\_Tuten.pdf](http://www.psyconsult.de/bosnjak/publications/AAPOR2002_Bosnjak_Tuten.pdf)

## Study 3 – Mixed methods (Millar & Dillman, Public Opinion Quarterly, 2011)

- \$2 incentive sent via mail increased response rate to web survey by 17%

<http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/75/2/249.full.pdf+html>

# Communicate with participants



- Pre-notification letter
- Cover letter
- Reminder notes
- Thank you notes

Handout Two provides communication guidelines

**Handout Two**

*Letters for Questionnaires*



# Build trust through communication

## Pre-notification

- Get endorsement from trusted individual or organization
- Use organizational logos or letterhead

## Notification

- Emphasize confidentiality
- Explain how information will be used
- Provide contact information for questions

## Follow-up

- Use mail and email follow-up contact
- Use first class mail or FEDEX

# Increase reward by generating interest

## Notification

- Offer to send summary of results
- Emphasize their involvement with the issue (they participated in a meeting; they used a service)
- Explain how they will benefit from participating
- Describe how they help the organizations

# Use finesse in your follow-ups

“We have been getting a great response from our members. If you have already responded to the questionnaires, thank you. If you haven’t had the opportunity, please take a moment now...”

Another tip:  
Include “*reply by*” dates

Questionnaires designed for high  
response rate



**K.I.S.S**

# Lower cost of participation

## All questionnaires

- Make questionnaires as short as possible

## Online questionnaires

- Make first questions easy to complete
- Describe computer actions at point of usage
- Use scrolling rather than screen-to-screen format
- Show progress bars
- Don't require responses to items

# How not to start your questionnaire

## Survey on [www.savingwater.org](http://www.savingwater.org)

Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) are mandatory.

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1 \* Do you use the Internet to find information on (check all that apply):

- Water conservation
- Gardening

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2 \* Have you ever visited [www.savingwater.org](http://www.savingwater.org)?

YES  NO



# First questions create first impressions

What is your annual income?



What is your gender, profession, zip code?



Please write your recommendations for improving our program



What if response rate is low?



# Response rates have been declining

## Pew Research Center Experiment\*

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Rigorous</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5-day</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 21 weeks</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1997: 36%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1997: 61%</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2003: 25%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2003: 50%</li></ul>

\*Telephone Survey

# Finding: very little difference in findings



Standard



Rigorous

77 out of 84 comparable items, responses differed, on average, by 2%

\*Telephone Survey

# We need to validate responses regardless of response rate

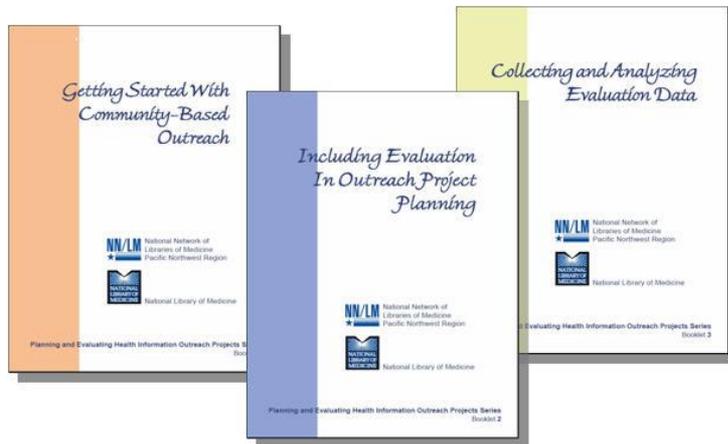
## Analyze for response bias

- Compare demographic statistics of your respondents against your sample
- Compare responses of subgroups
- Compare responses of early and late responders
- Call a percentage of non-respondents with a few select questions from the survey and compare

# For More Information:

## *Planning and Evaluating Health Information Outreach*

– Series of 3 booklets:



1. Getting Started with Community-Based Outreach
2. Including Evaluation in Outreach Project Planning
3. Collecting and Analyzing Evaluation Data

– <http://nnlm.gov/evaluation/booklets>

# References

- Langer. About response rate, *Public Perspectives*, May/June 2003, 16-18.  
[http://www.aapor.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PollampSurveyFAQs/DoResponseRatesMatter/Response\\_Rates - Langer.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PollampSurveyFAQs/DoResponseRatesMatter/Response_Rates_-_Langer.pdf)
- Sue & Ritter, *Conducting Online Surveys*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007.
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[http://www-personal.umich.edu/~danhorn/reprints/Horn\\_2004\\_Web\\_Survey\\_Incentives\\_SCORE.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~danhorn/reprints/Horn_2004_Web_Survey_Incentives_SCORE.pdf)

# References

- Bosniak & Tuten. Prepaid and promised incentives in web surveys. 2002. Paper presented to the 57<sup>th</sup> American Association of public opinion Research annual conference, St. Pete Beach, FL.  
[http://www.psyconsult.de/bosnjak/publications/AAPOR2002\\_Bosnjak\\_Tuten.pdf](http://www.psyconsult.de/bosnjak/publications/AAPOR2002_Bosnjak_Tuten.pdf)
- Millar & Dillman, Improving response to web and mixed-mode surveys. *Public Opin Q* .2011; 75(2): 249-269.  
(Abstract: <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/05/17/poq.nfr003.abstract>)

# If you need help planning evaluation, give us a call

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