

Understanding Data Collection Through a Survey of Field Staff

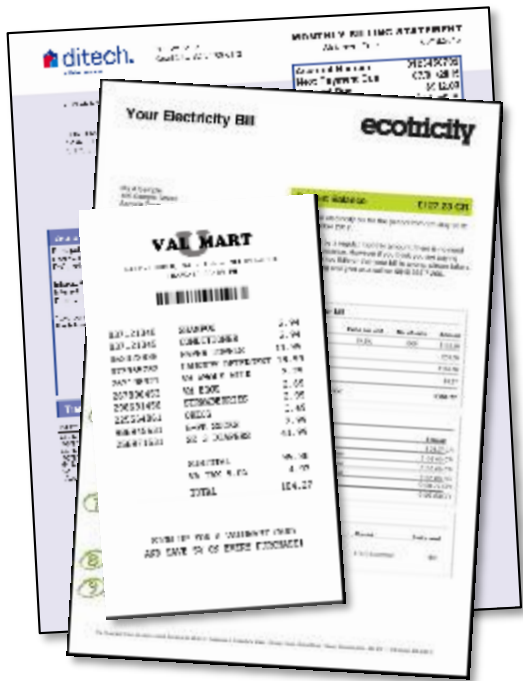
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“We can reduce measurement error if we just _____.”

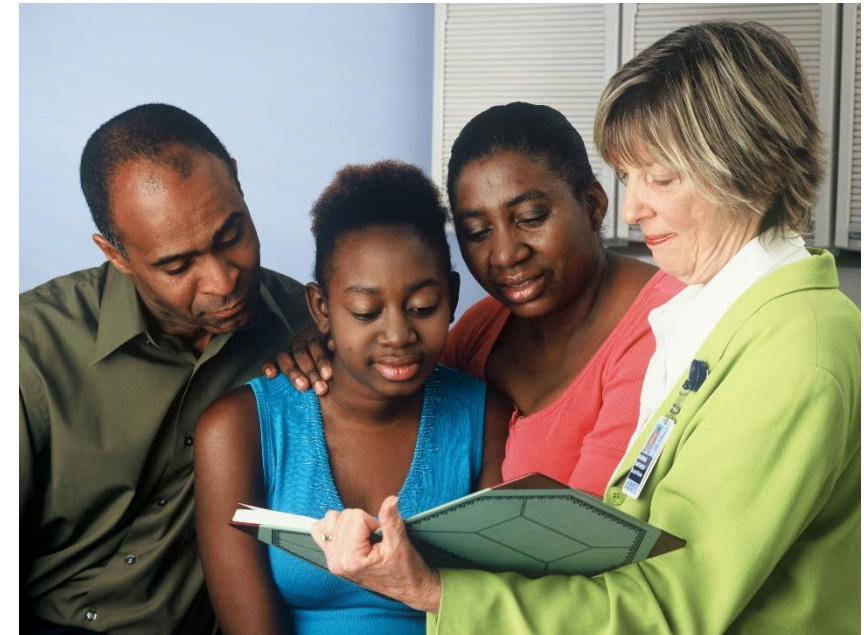
...ask respondents for financial records



...implement mobile web data collection



...ask everyone in a household over age 15 to complete a diary



Introduction

- Over years and decades, these ideas make their way into our surveys
 - ▶ Almost always they are cognitively/qualitatively tested
 - ▶ Sometimes they are field tested
- Interviewers are on the front lines in implementing survey changes/improvements
 - ▶ They can tell us what works and what doesn't
 - ▶ Their buy-in is important for successful implementation



Feedback From Interviewers

- The Consumer Expenditure (CE) Survey at BLS periodically conducts surveys with field staff
 - ▶ Prior surveys were conducted in 2009 and 2011
 - ▶ The focus of today's talk is a field staff survey conducted in 2015
- We ask for feedback on training, specific issues relevant to data collection
- We use this feedback to improve training and data collection processes



Today's Talk

- What insights we (or at least I) gained from the 2015 survey
 - ▶ Who are our interviewers?
 - ▶ What do new CE interviewers think of the training they received?
 - ▶ How burdensome do interviewers feel the survey is for respondents?
- How we disseminate our findings
- Conclusions



The Consumer Expenditure Survey

■ Interview Survey (CEQ)

- ▶ In-person interview
- ▶ Focus is on large, infrequent expenditures
- ▶ Covers a 3-month reference period
- ▶ Average length: 56 minutes

■ Diary Survey (CED)

- ▶ Two one-week, paper diaries
- ▶ Collects all expenditures
- ▶ Focus is on small, frequent purchases (e.g., groceries)

■ Both surveys involve personal visits from field staff

■ Field staff at the Census Bureau collect the data

The 2015 CE Field Staff Survey

Design

- The U.S. Census Bureau collected the data and monitored data collection through Google Forms
- An email request was sent to 1,169 field staff email addresses. This includes some duplication for staff that work on both the interview and the diary survey
- Staff were allowed to charge 1-hour of work time for completing the survey
- The data were screened for PII and delivered to BLS



The Questionnaire

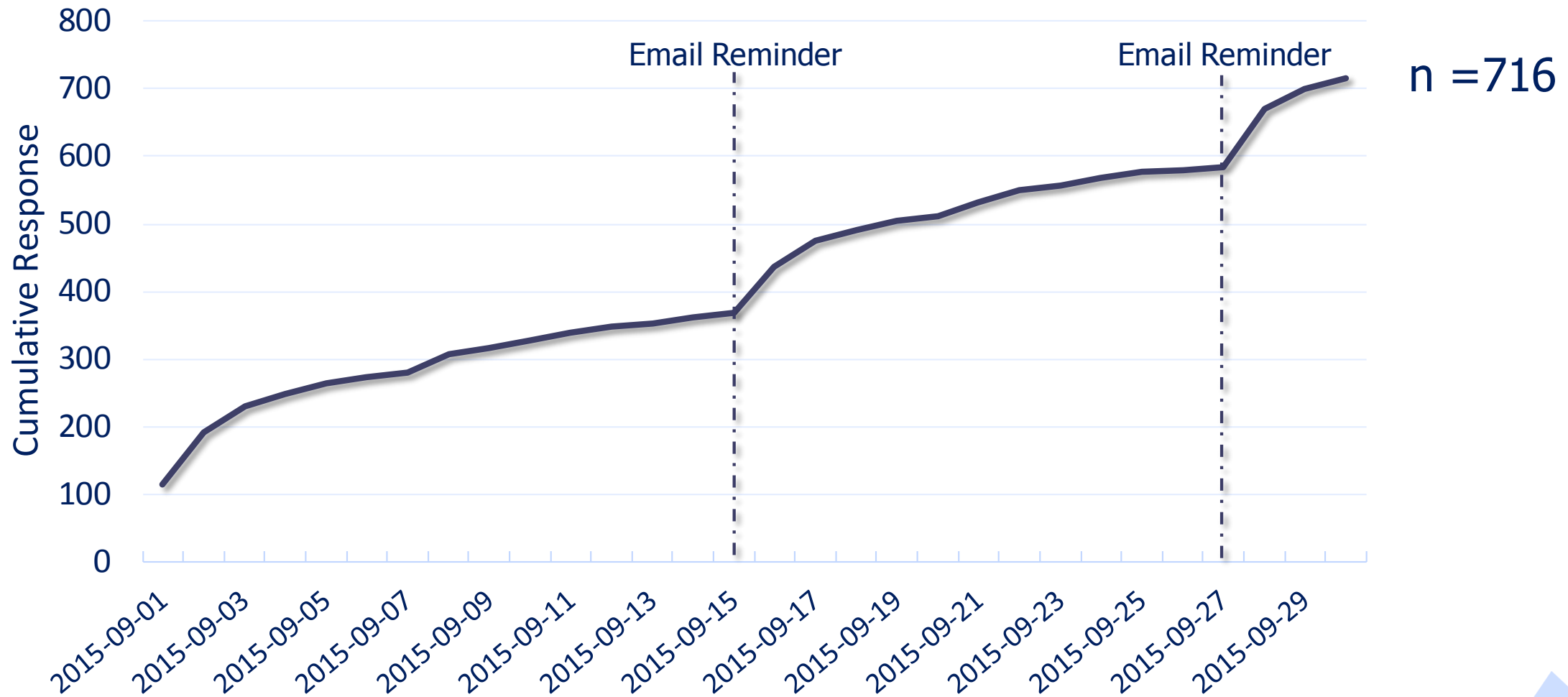
■ 43 Questions

- ▶ 15 Open-ended
- ▶ 28 Close-ended

■ Topics

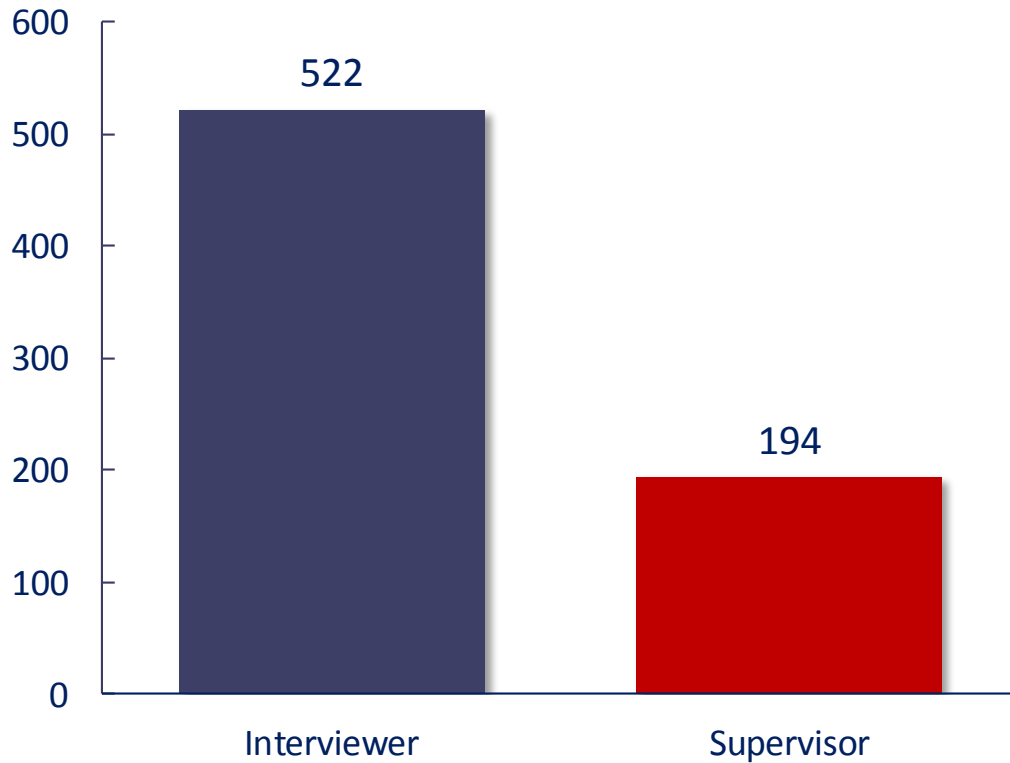
- ▶ Demographics
- ▶ Interviewer Experience
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Respondent Burden
- ▶ Contact History Instrument
- ▶ Neighborhood Observation Instrument
- ▶ Redesign Topics

Data Collection and Response

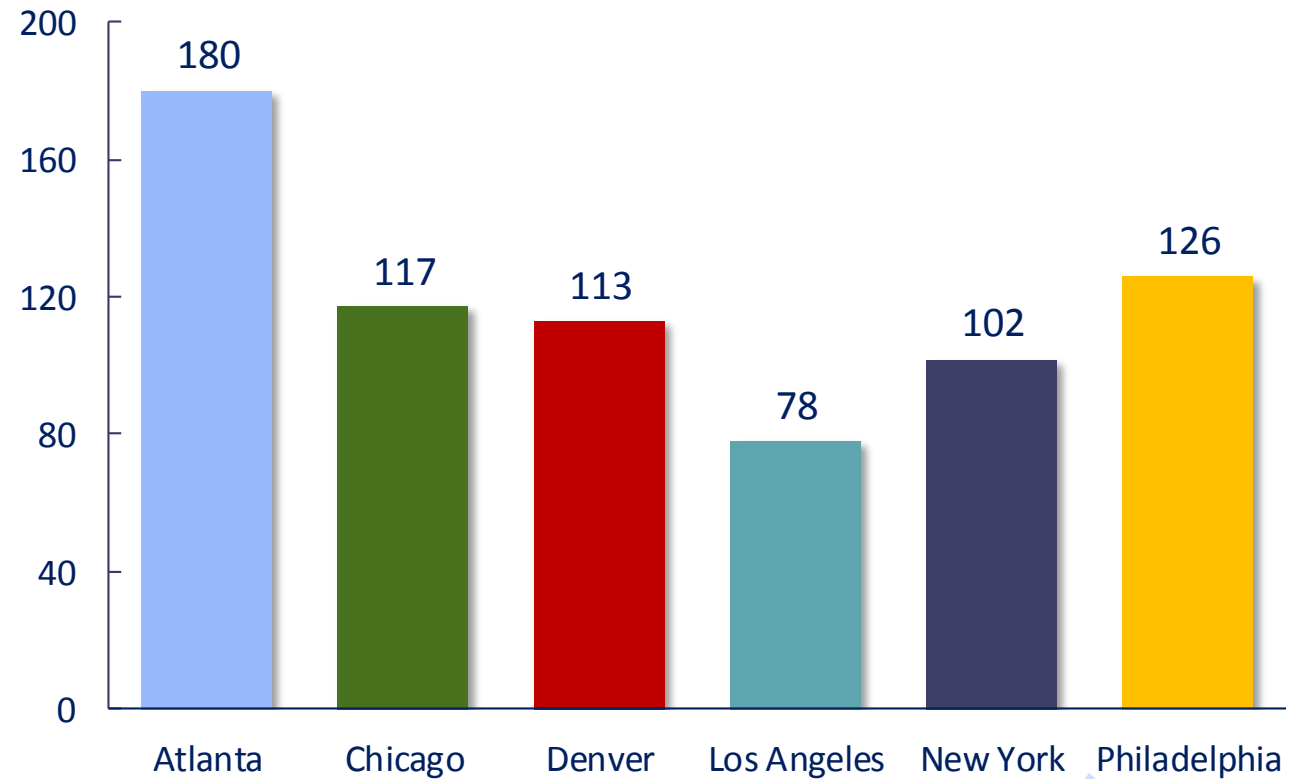


Who were our respondents?

Staff Position



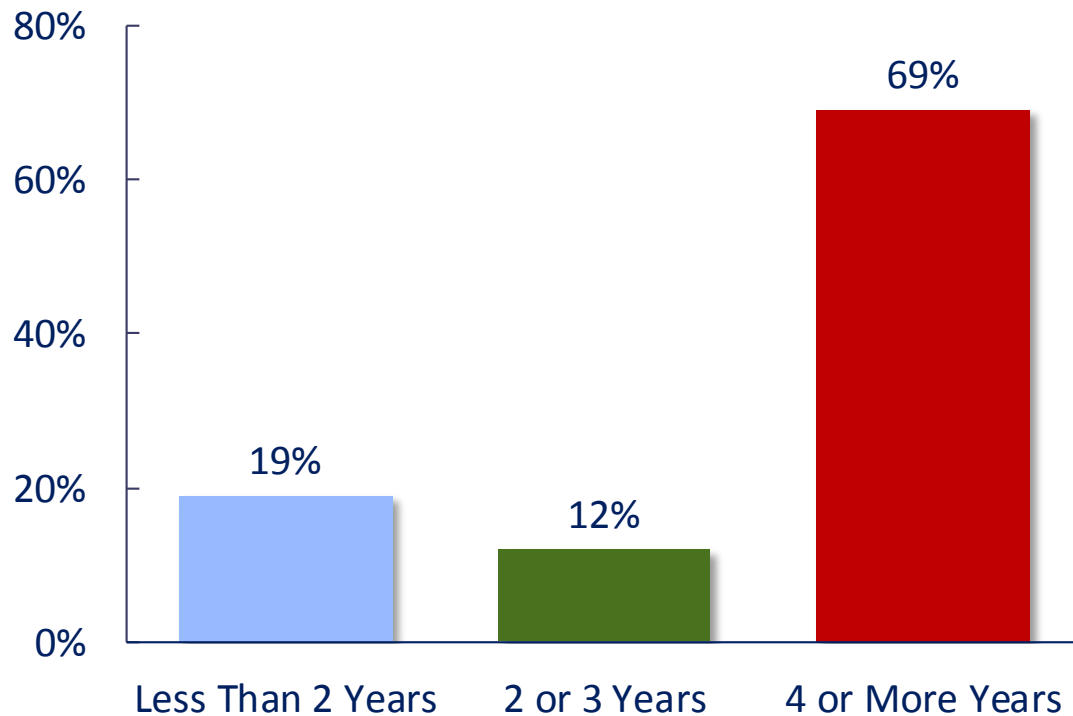
Regional Office



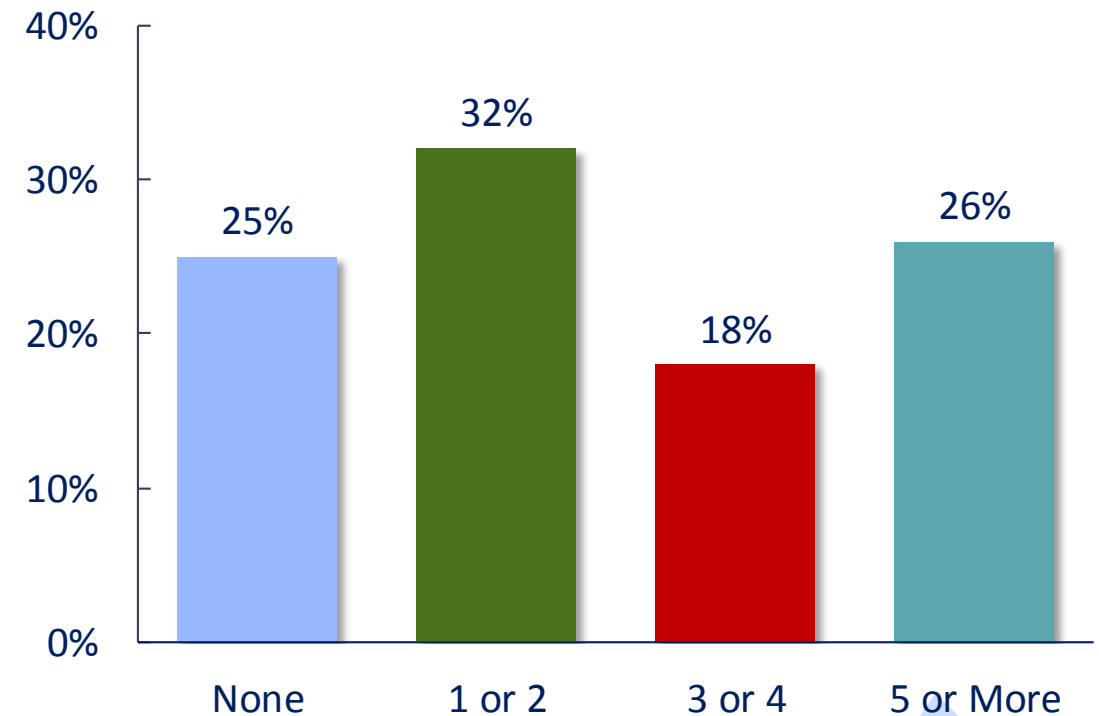
Overall Interviewer Experience

■ Interviewers have a wealth of experience outside of CE

Years of Interviewing Experience

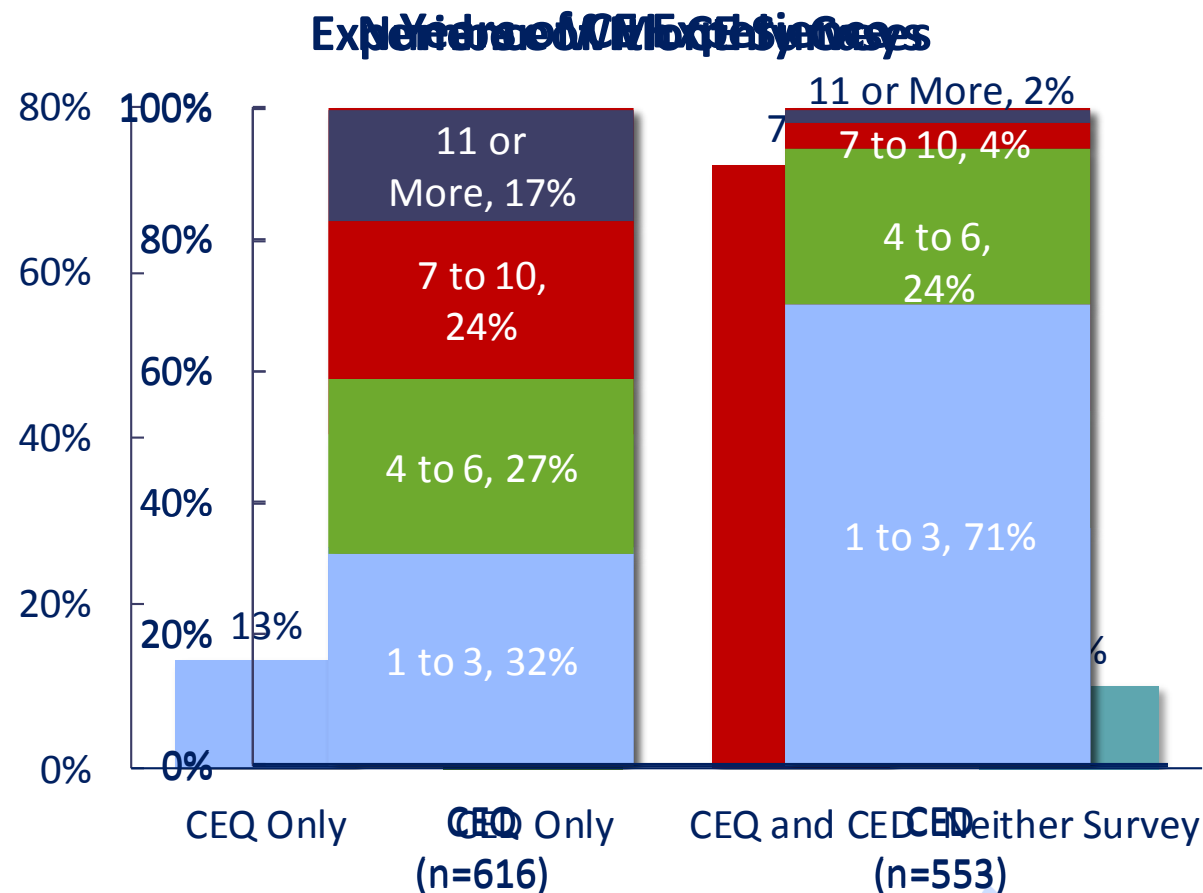


of Other Surveys Currently Working



Experience With CE Surveys?

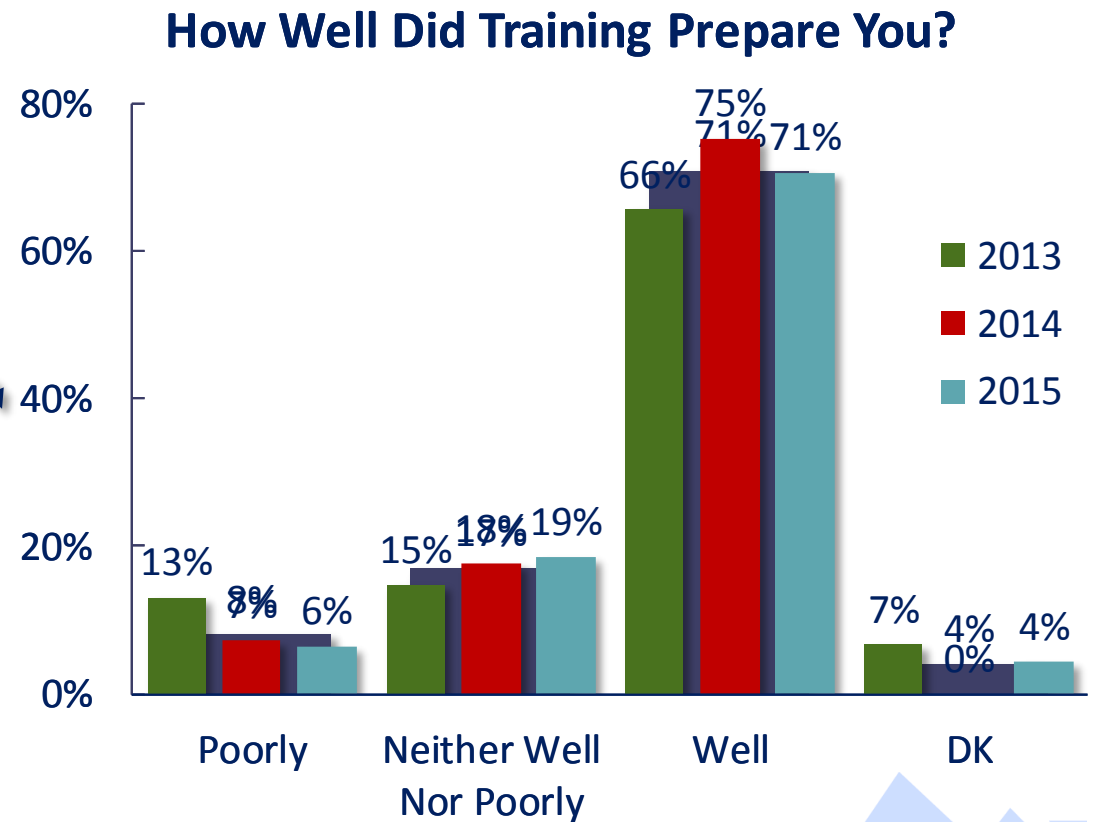
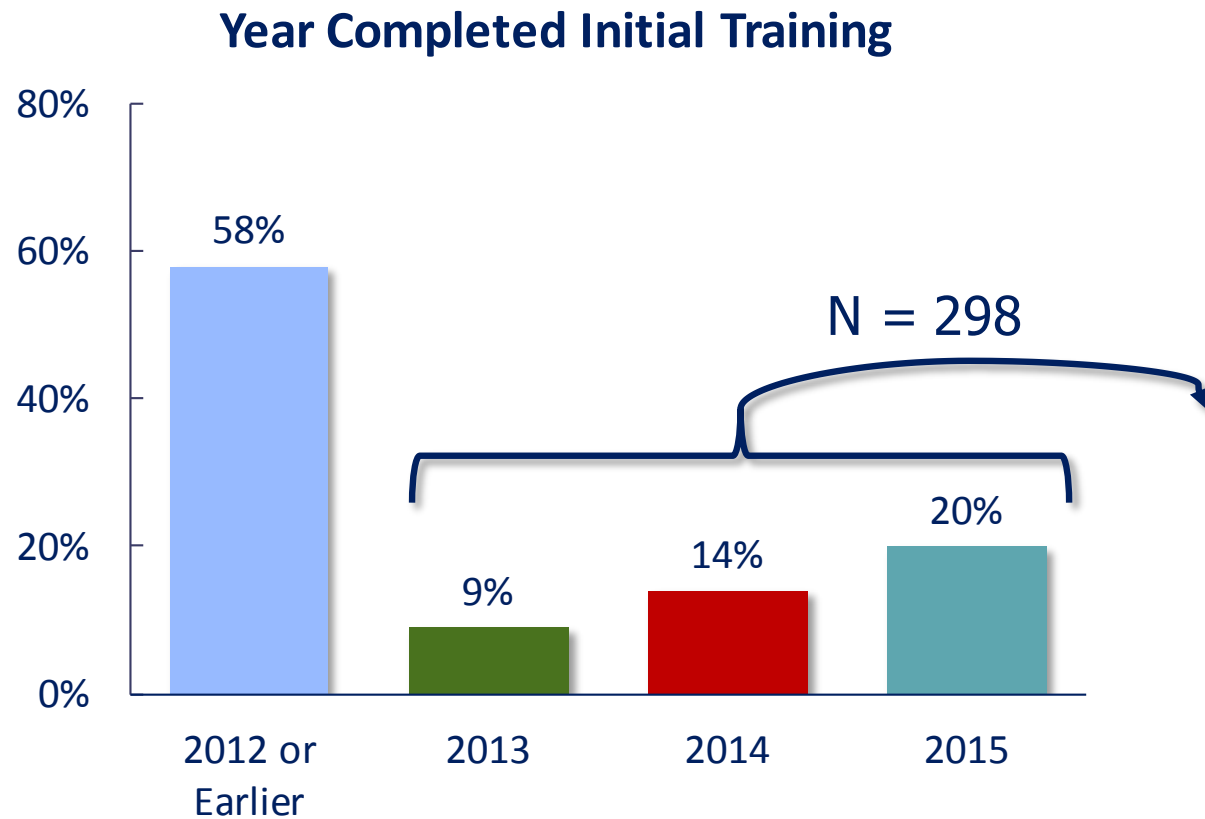
- 73% of Field Staff have experience with both the CEQ and CED
- Nearly half have 4 or more years of experience, 30% have less than 1 year
- There are more CEQ cases worked per month



Training

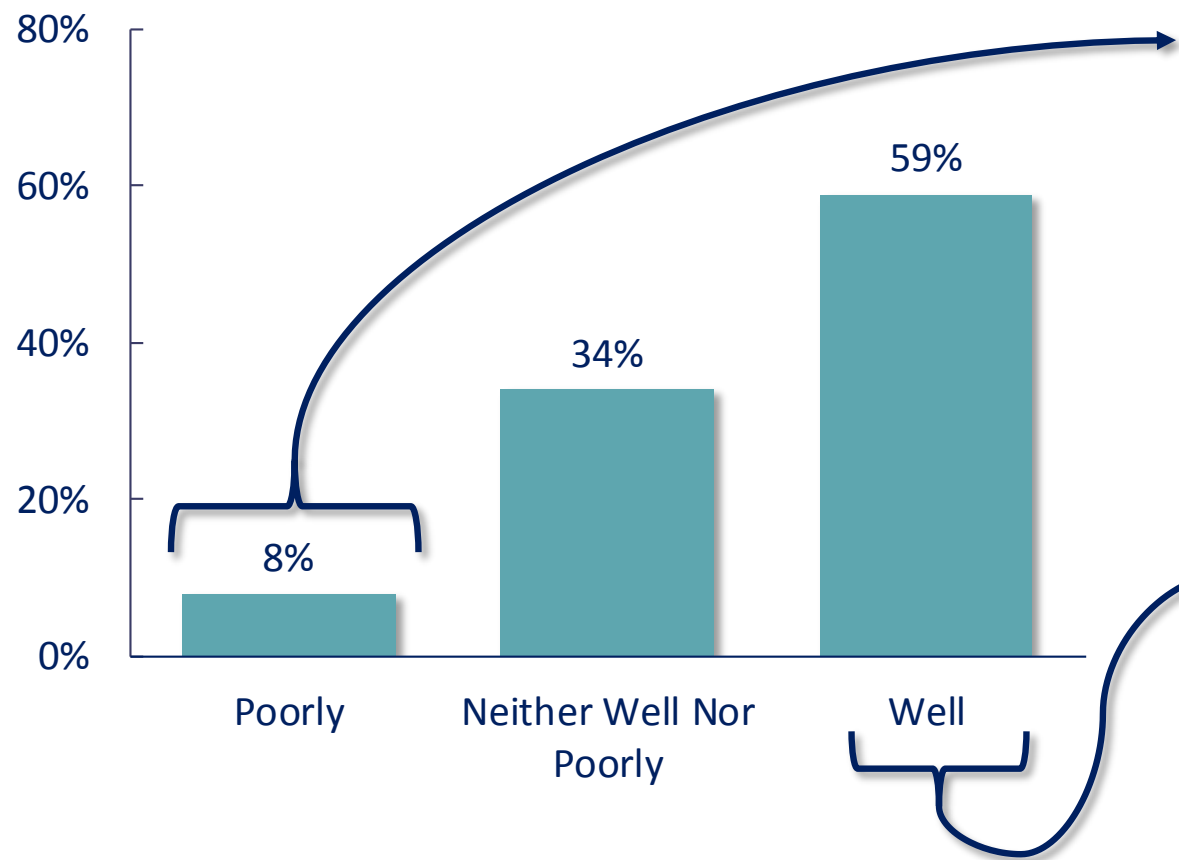
Training

■ Most interviewers are satisfied with the training they receive



Paired Practice Interviews

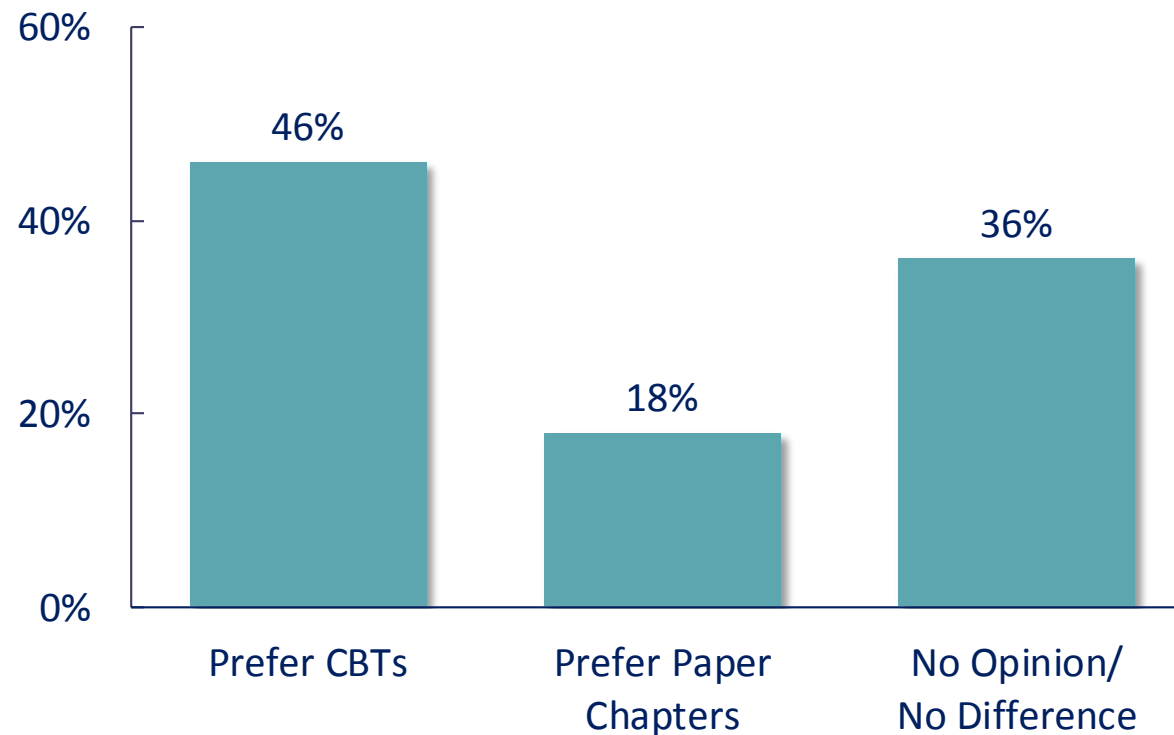
- How well did paired-practice interviews prepare you for CE respondents? (n=119)



- “Practice interviews were ‘perfect case’ scenarios not real world situations”
- “...you can get all the jitters out about how you are going to get the interview and what to say to the respondent”

Pre-Classroom Materials

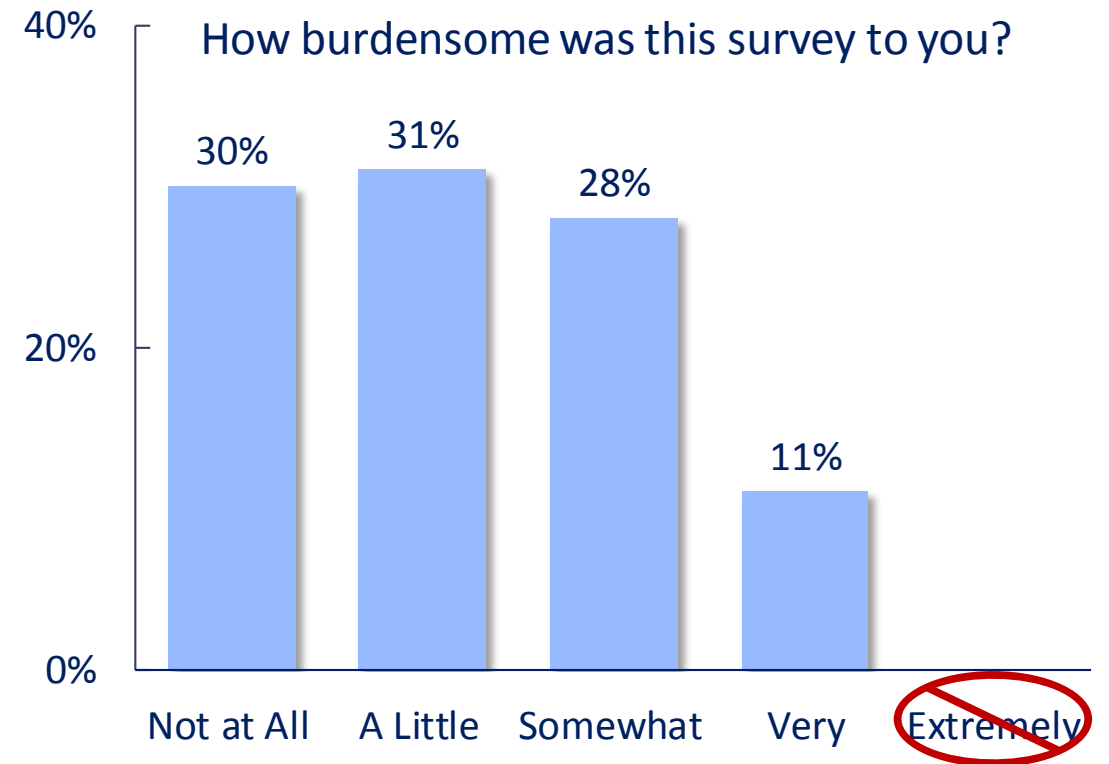
The current pre-classroom self-study for CE initial training contains some material in computer-based training modules (CBTs) and some material in paper chapters. Which do you prefer? (n=140)



Respondent Burden

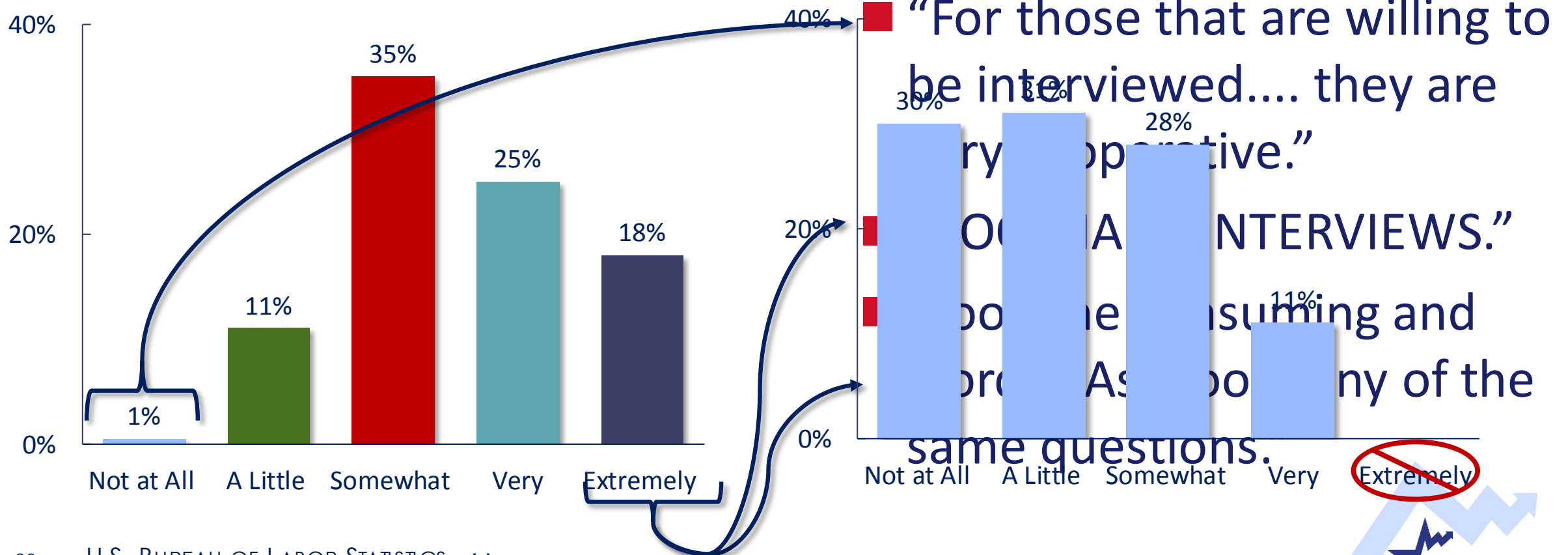
Burden

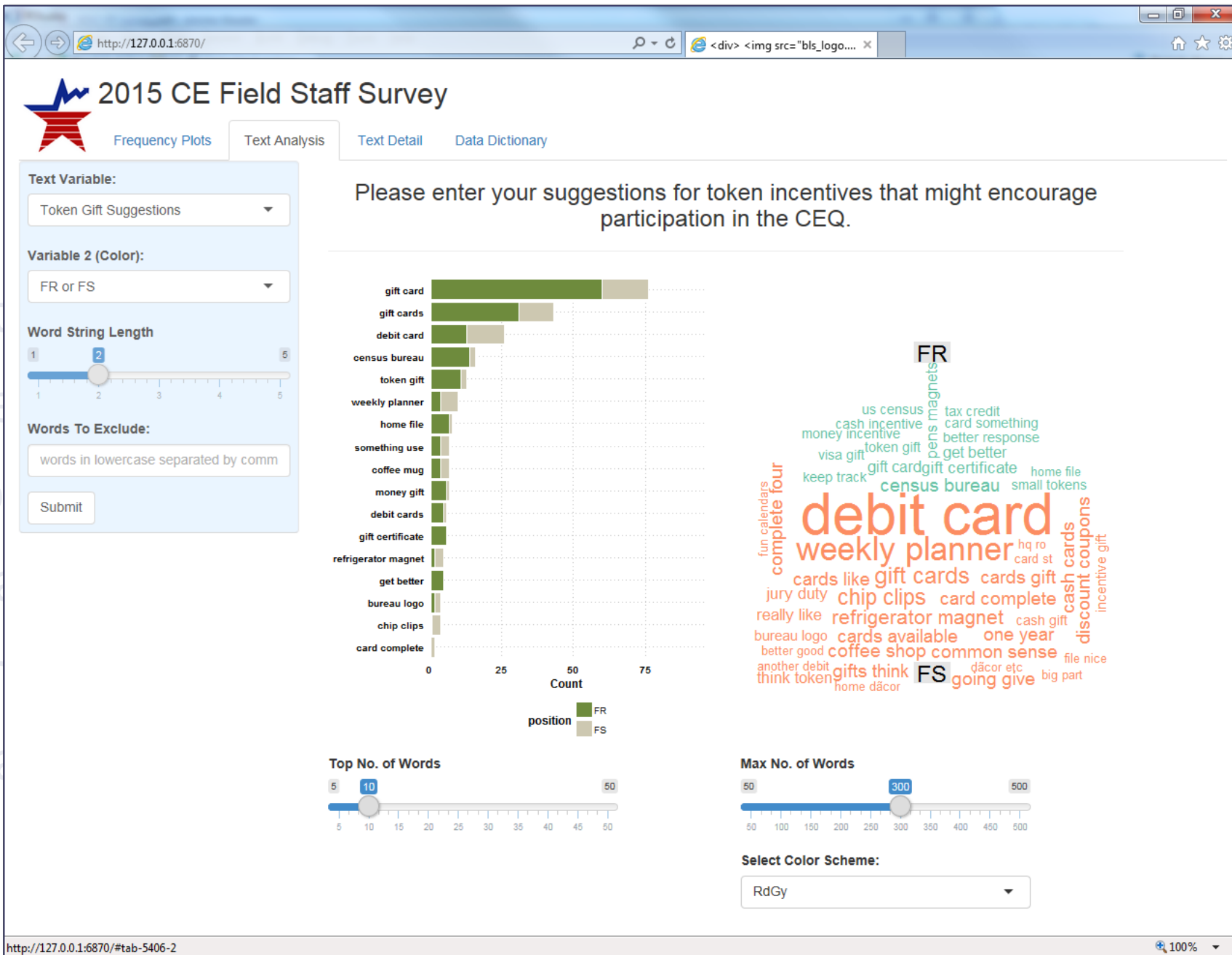
- The subjective feeling of discomfort or unease that respondents have during the interview
- We have directly asked survey respondents about burden and have seen mixed findings
- Interviewers hear directly from respondents, they see non-verbal behaviors, they witness varying levels of effort



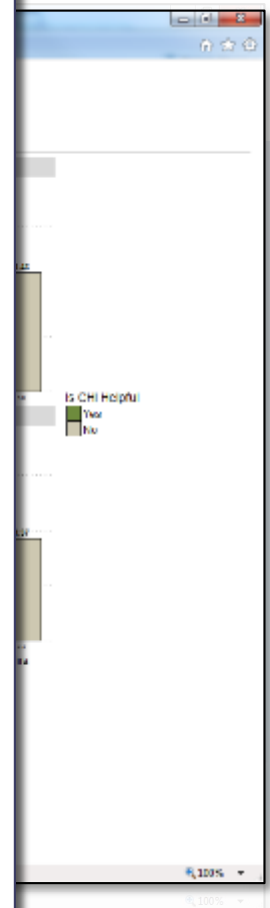
Burden

■ How burdensome do you feel the CEQ survey is for respondents? (n=624)





- Report
- Google
- Memo
- Intern
- Confer
- Intern



Conclusions

- Regular communication between survey administrators and field staff can lead to higher data quality through improvement of procedures and through interviewer buy-in
- Field staff can serve as an early warning system for potential issues
- Open-ended questions are necessary to capture those issues you don't know to ask about
- It is important to show field staff when/where their recommendations are incorporated into data collection



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