

BJS/JRSA Conference Welcome

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On behalf of the staff of BJS, I am delighted to welcome all of you to this year's JRSA/BJS National Conference on the theme of "Data for Decisionmakers: Ensuring Quality and Applicability." I want to make certain all of you know the BJS staff here (BJS staff stand). I want to especially call your attention to the new head of our Criminal Justice Statistics Improvement Programs, Gerry Ramker. Gerry, as most of you know, was the former SAC director of Illinois—a SAC that has been repeatedly recognized for the excellence of its staff and products. Not to mention that they always got their financial and progress reports in on time. I am delighted that Gerry is now a BJS'er. A large thank you for our staff at BJS—I feel as though I am the luckiest person in Washington to be surrounded by such terrific colleagues.

I also want to pass along my thanks to the JRSA staff for all their efforts day in and day out to build a relationship among all of us which culminates each year in this conference. It is this partnership over the last 30 years that has propelled all of us into roles that have helped to shape public policies on crime and the administration of justice. With the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday of BJS coming later this year, I am proud to say that over that entire history, JRSA has been BJS's partner and soul-mate in furthering the cause of building solid data for decision-making.

When we look around the country, some of the changes over this past 25 years are nothing short of amazing. The violent crime victimization rate today is 40% of what it was 25 years ago. The public's exposure to robbery and assault is less than half what it was in 1979. Police officers today are about 3 times as likely to be a female as they were in 1979. Over the same years, there has been an almost 4-fold increase in the number of persons under the custody, care, or control of the justice system. Prison population alone has grown from about 300,000 nationwide to nearly 1.4 million. Spending for justice has grown from about \$36 billion to \$167 billion—in 1979 we spent about \$160 per year for each resident for all justice services; now the criminal justice system costs us about \$600 per year per person about \$200 more per year for each of us after adjusting for inflation.

When I think about where we were a quarter century ago and where we have come, it is also staggering to think about the number of new national statistical series that have been added to our national archive documenting changes in our quality of life.

As you will see from the “Then and Now” card and poster we are distributing, the reach of criminal justice into the daily lives of our citizens has grown immensely. New statistical series we have added over the last quarter century include:

- statistics on victimization of the disabled
- statistics on cybercrime
- statistics on identity theft
- statistics on tribal jails
- Federal justice statistics
- state court case-processing statistics and sentencing statistics
- death in custody statistics
- firearms sales and background check statistics
- surveys of prosecutors and indigent defense offices
- censuses of law enforcement agencies and law enforcement administrative data series
- surveys of state criminal records systems
- civil justice statistics
- statistics on DNA labs and crime labs nationwide
- biennial estimates of school crime
- statistics on law enforcement training academies
- recidivism statistics
- hate crime data
- NIBRS data analyses
- data on sexual assaults in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities
- and a website that has as many as 62,000 users on a single day

What is most amazing, I think, is that BJS has managed to add these two dozen enhancements to an ongoing program of about a dozen and a half series without a net increase in funding—adjusting for inflation, the BJS appropriation today is about what it was 25 years ago. In addition to essentially flat funding, the number of BJS staff is basically what it was 25 years ago. This kind of program growth without real funding to support it is essentially due to the partnership which we have built with the 50,000 places in the US that do something called criminal justice because we have all learned to do so much more with so much less—the cooperation of justice agencies nationwide has been nothing short of fabulous with each new request for data and each new data reporting burden we throw at you and state and local agencies.

I believe that the cooperation is a function of value received back—respondents get added value back on their investment of time and personnel in completing data collection forms. When I see our web use logs showing 62,000 people logging on to the BJS site <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/welcome.html> on a single day, as they did on 9/12/2004. I feel that we are doing something that has substantial value to the public and for which a demand clearly exists.

How does this value enrichment relate to data quality? There are really 3 concepts which for us are the foundation for the concept of data quality at BJS—objectivity, utility, and integrity. To us, our statistical efforts must be governed by objectivity—there is no slanting or spinning of what data are collected,

how the data are analyzed, or how the findings are reported. Objectivity is essential for a statistical agency. Secondly, our consensual view of data quality is governed by the principle that what we collect should be useful to others and should be relevant to public policy. Utility is central to why we collect some information or, more importantly, why we set a priority upon the collection of certain data. In many cases, it is the recurring nature of measurements that make statistics so valuable, as they serve as a description of temporal changes in the quality of our lives or the quality of justice being distributed. Like a museum or archive, data with a high level of utility provide us historical insights into how far we've come or where we were in the past. Utility, as a data quality value, means relevance, accuracy, and timeliness to those using your statistical products. Finally, from my perspective, integrity is the most important value in data quality because once that is violated by a statistics office, it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to regain. Independence and insulation from any appearance of advocacy is critical—trust is a commodity which can easily be lost if a statistics office is perceived as shading, spinning, cooking, or cleverly masking bad news or hyping or exaggerating good news. So when you think about data quality I hope you will consider the three key elements of objectivity, utility, and integrity. Running a statistics office is about both “doing the right things”—the utility of what you collect and report—and “doing things right”—the objectivity and integrity of your agency. I hope you will visit the Data Quality pages on our website <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dataquality.htm> which detail our principles and our commitment to this core value.

Having been at BJS for 22 of its 25 years of life, I am very happy, proud, and honored to have the opportunity to celebrate this milestone anniversary with all of you. Again, I want to extend my thanks to JRSA for co-sponsoring this meeting with BJS. All of us look forward to many more years of this dynamic and exciting relationship which has resulted for all of us in greater recognition of the value of statistics for policy-making.