

BETAGOV

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Hello Pracademics!



Director's Note: Failing Well

This month we are starting our newsletter with a shout out to pracademics who have “failed forward” with us (you know who you are...). We also want to recognize those of you who have committed to iterative learning, refining what you are doing through test-refine-retest-refine-retest....(More on this in next month’s newsletter). The social challenges pracademics are tackling are too important for complacency. In showcasing continual learning from past



testing.

Warm regards,
Angela Hawken



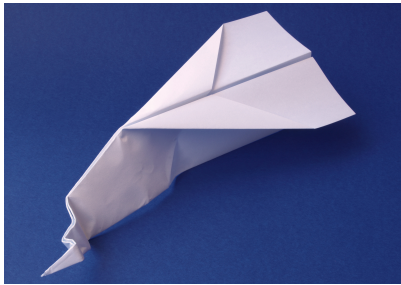
Pracademia in Practice: Pennsylvania DOC Visitation Trials

Reminders are often seen to motivate behavior change, regardless of whether the reminder is about an upcoming dental appointment, a request to pick up a quart of milk on the way home, or an alert to get to a meeting on time. For at least some people the reminder will serve its purpose. This was the idea behind the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' trial to remind prison visitors about visitation policy, including rules about contraband. Two prisons tested a visitation letter sent to people listed on prison residents' visitation logs. Although the two prisons used different populations (one was a [diagnostic center for incoming residents](#) and the other an [established resident pool](#)), the results were the same. There were no reductions in bringing contraband by visitors who received the prison policy letter compared to those who received only general information about the prison, and visitation rates were lower for those getting the policy letter. This unexpected effect on visitation rates was alarming since having visitors is beneficial for residents! These trials show that what we assume may actually be wrong and informed PADOCC not to roll this idea out departmentwide.

Learning Corner: Failing Forward

Our team is in awe of BetaGov Pracademics who have had the courage to “fail forward.” These Pracademics are assets to their agencies and to us all, by insisting on measuring progress and bringing attention to practices that are *not* working. Most public agencies are risk-averse; leadership and staff are happy to showcase successes but quick to circle the wagons if something has not worked the way they had hoped. If more people in the public sector embrace failure as an often-necessary step on a path to success, it will



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News and Updates

How about a little motivation in the form of spectacular fails courtesy of [SpaceX!](#)

Pracademic Spotlight: Kevin Ransom

Meet Superintendent Kevin Ransom, one of our Pracademic partners with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Kevin helped develop and launch a trial to test the benefit of virtual-reality (VR) videos as incentives for good behavior in a prison unit treating mental health conditions. The first trial was terminated early due to changes in the mental health unit and trial-design concerns. Kevin recently helped launch another VR trial at a different prison. Lessons learned from the first trial informed the design and methodology of the second trial. Read more about how Kevin's trial experiences were useful for future trials.

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Have an inspired pracademic day!

The BetaGov Team

**NYU**Marron Institute
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