

# BETAGOV

September 2019

## Hello Pracademics!



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### Director's Note: Change

Fall is here (goodbye trusty flipflops)! With the changes that the season brings to our temperatures, trees, and attire, the BetaGov team thought this is a good time to focus on change in your agencies. Testing a novel idea means something is going to change. Some

people embrace change easily—for them, the adage “a change is as good as a holiday” might resonate. But most people gravitate to the status quo (there are great experiments from psychology and behavioral economics that show we are creatures of habit). For them, change is disruptive and they work hard to avoid it. We are



fortunate that we have found many partners who are willing to try something new, and to test it. Several agencies we work with have been testing ways to improve staff satisfaction and wellness. We highlight a recent staff-focused trial that tested the effects of mindfulness training on staff wellness. We also interview the Pracademic associated with this trial and profile some additional examples of change in your agencies!

Best Wishes,  
Angela



## **Pracademia in Practice: Mindfulness**

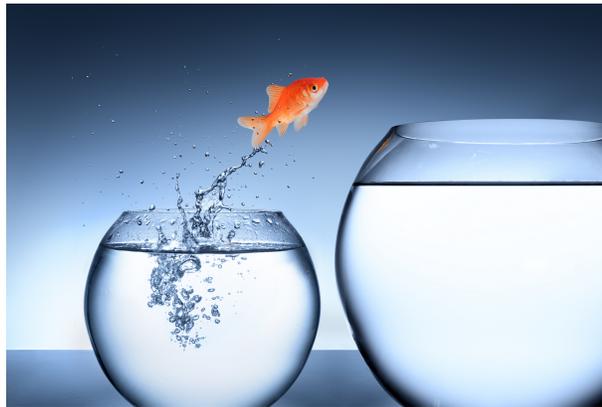
Many agencies resist change, but the opposite is true of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC). This agency has made innovation and testing the new business as usual. Staff are encouraged to try new practices

that might improve outcomes. They created several staff committees to tackle challenges in the agency and to test candidate solutions for responding to them. Their staff-wellness committee elicits suggestions for improving staff safety and mental and physical health, both on and off the job. A recent trial tested mindfulness training for staff working in both prison and community-supervision settings. Results show that, compared to the control group that received no mindfulness training, staff randomly assigned to the training had improved outcomes on fatigue, resilience, and mindfulness. The department is now considering how to offer this training to all staff.

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## Learning Corner: Embracing Change

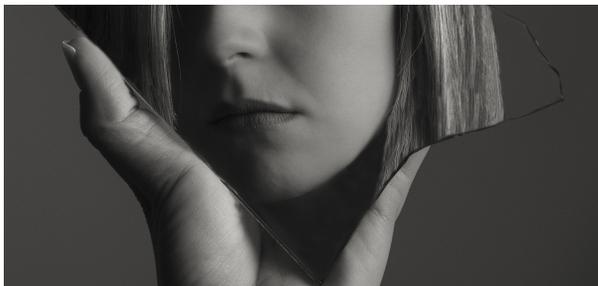
BetaGov encourages practitioners to test promising changes to practice and process that might improve outcomes. We don't expect that all ideas will lead to big changes, but we believe that testing even "small" ideas is valuable for



incrementally moving the dial and for creating muscle memory. Sometimes we are surprised by how a "small" idea (implemented as a modest change) can have an outsized impact. Innovation is possible only when we challenge the status quo and try something new. But shiny and new isn't always better. We love that our partners embrace change and do so responsibly, by testing whether an innovation improves outcomes!

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## News and Updates

As another example of embracing change, the Idaho Department of Correction (IDOC) is assessing ways to improve female reentrants' perceptions of themselves and their

chances for success. Surveys were distributed to women at a community-corrections center to gather feedback about a recent change in how the residents are addressed—from using their last names to their first names. Given the importance of eliminating pejorative and demeaning language when describing justice-involved persons, IDOC wanted to see if eliminating the use of last names would be accepted and lead to better self-perception. Of 47 residents who were surveyed, 89% reported that they were not opposed to being called by their first names. Feedback was also gathered on other topics related to the center. Importantly, IDOC is making changes that are informed by data and will continue to seek and test promising ways to improve outcomes for those they serve.

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## Partner Spotlight: Deb Sahd (PADOC)

Deb Sahd has worked in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for 31 years,

currently as the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Corrections, John Wetzel. Deb also co-chairs the Wellness Committee, charged with identifying potentially beneficial ways to improve the lives of staff. Deb is a strong advocate for change and has led efforts to test a variety of wellness-inspired ideas, from redecorating staff areas to be more serene and calming to testing height-adjustable desks. Recently, she led a trial to test mindfulness training for staff. Considering staff interaction with those in their care as wellness she suggested virtual reality for seriously mentally ill persons, which has been well received and recently completed. The Federal Bureau of Prisons heard of the trial, visited the site, and plans to replicate it. We were able to talk with Deb about her inspiration and experiences.



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Have an inspired pracademic day!

*The BetaGov Team*



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