

1. Summary

a. Major Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal was to increase experimental-research capacity in criminal-justice-system agencies to more effectively identify and address problems in justice-system domains and assess responses to them. In particular, the collaborative effort was to provide guidance and support to justice-agency personnel to promote a culture of learning in justice organizations, in order to better apply research approaches that produce useful knowledge about problems and solutions. The approach was responsive to local resources, regulations, agency perceptions of needs and attitudes, and the specific needs of persons involved with the justice system, determined in accord with partner sites.

The principal objectives were to (1) assist collaborating justice agencies and scholars in identifying areas for improvement, (2) collaboratively design and conduct pragmatic randomized-controlled trials (RCTs) to assess the effectiveness of proposed innovations, and (3) promote an enduring culture of learning in collaborating justice organizations in which innovation is encouraged and RCTs and other evaluations are routine.

b. Research Questions

The project did not pose any particular research questions in its design. Rather, it entailed working with stakeholders in partner agencies to identify issues of concern or interest to them that were amenable to, ideally, rapid-cycle RCTs (or to other methods when RCTs were impracticable). These could be established policies or practices that had never been subject to a

rigorous evaluation (if circumstances allowed for random assignment) or, more typically, innovations that merited testing before considering establishing them as policies or practices.

As the project developed, partner agencies were in corrections and law enforcement. Over the course of the project, ideas for RCTs were solicited from all stakeholders and assessed for feasibility, costs, possible benefits and risks, and institutional support. Candidate trials included, in policing, “situation tables” (non-criminal-justice responses for people experiencing a crisis in the community who would otherwise be subject to arrest), an intervention to reduce pretrial recidivism by domestic-violence defendants, officer defensive tactics, an officer-wellness peer-support program, implicit-bias training, communications to officers on the value of research, and improving police-community relations. In corrections, they included an aggression-management training program for prisoners in segregated housing, provision of incentives to reduce misconducts, peer-mentor orientation, and educating both prisoners and staff about the consequences of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). (RCTs that were completed are noted below.)

c. [Research Design, Methods, Analytical and Data Analysis Techniques](#)

The project entailed, principally, conducting rapid-cycle randomized-controlled trials, and, secondarily, employing other study designs and analytical methods, as appropriate to research questions that arose and were developed during the course of the project. While each study varied in its specific design, methods, and techniques, the RCTs all entailed random assignment of individual subjects or larger organizational units, regions, or temporal units to either an intervention (treatment) condition or a control condition. Methods for randomization depended

on the trial. Analytical methods did so, as well, but were typically statistical tests for significance in differences in outcomes between the experimental conditions.

d. [Expected Applicability of the Research](#)

By its design, the process of the project—engaging with practitioners to build capacity and skills in conducting and making use of research—was as important as the findings of the particular studies conducted under it. Creating and nurturing a culture of field-initiated innovation and *local*-evidence-based practices is broadly applicable (in justice agencies and elsewhere in the public sector), and this project demonstrates that doing so is possible but requires careful consideration.

2. [Participants and Other Collaborating Organizations](#)

In its original design, the project was to engage with law-enforcement and corrections agencies. In each partner agency, one or more employees was trained by NYU BetaGov as a “pracademic,” to lead the study effort within the agency; BetaGov worked with many stakeholders in the partner agencies, providing guidance on all phases of research, from design and site preparation to selecting measures and appropriate analysis and evaluation approaches, as well as data management (collection, preparing for analysis, retaining in repositories, ensuring security, etc.) Study participants included, variously, both agency staff and people they engage with.

In particular, in policing, the project trained national National Institute of Justice Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science (NIJ LEADS) Scholars as pracademics in law-enforcement agencies. In corrections, the project was to have worked with facilities in the

Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and with state corrections agencies. Over the course of the project, BetaGov developed study ideas with LEADS scholars in law-enforcement agencies including the Barrie (Ont.) PS, Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) PD, Las Vegas (NV) DPS, Manchester (NH) PD, Newark (NJ) PD, Redlands (CA) PD, Richmond (VA) PD, Sacramento (CA) PD, Vallejo (CA) PD, West Haven (CT) PD, West Vancouver (BC) PD, and Wichita (KS) PD. Other law-enforcement partners included the New York (NY) PD and Seattle (WA) PD. Partner corrections agencies included the Pennsylvania DOC, Idaho DOC, Nebraska DCS, and Ohio DRC.

3. Changes in Approach from Original Design

The basic approach from the original project design was maintained, with notable departures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. After a long process to grant BetaGov researchers access to BOP facilities and data, BOP withdrew as a partner due to closure of its facilities to researchers, from March 2020. State corrections agencies, to different degrees and for different durations, were also closed to researchers and were unable to facilitate research studies; as they reopened, the types of studies that they could entertain changed. And law-enforcement agencies changed their operations and practices during the pandemic, with reduced contacts and fewer opportunities for researcher engagement. Nonetheless, BetaGov continued to conduct (remote) training of pracademics and worked with practitioner partners to design studies that could be implemented without BetaGov personnel traveling to partner sites (as USDOJ and NYU rules barred us from traveling from March 2020 to mid-2022).

