

**2008 Innovations Awards Program
APPLICATION**

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-E-32PA

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Pennsylvania

Assign Program Category (applicant): Public Safety/Corrections – Corrections (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name.

Program Evaluation Research System (PERS).

2. Administering Agency.

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC).

3. Contact Person (Name and Title).

Gary Zajac, Ph.D.
Chief of Research and Evaluation

4. Address.

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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) Program Evaluation Research System (PERS) leverages and utilizes external expertise and financial resources in support of agency program evaluation research needs while minimizing direct costs to the PADOC. This objective is realized by means of a unique three-way partnership among independent, objective academic researchers, correctional practitioners and external funders interested in promoting evidence-based practice and reducing the causes and rates of recidivism.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008, to be considered.

The PERS was formally codified into PADOC policy 2.1.2 by signature of the Secretary of Corrections, effective May 1, 2004.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

Like many agencies, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has a limited internal capacity to conduct program evaluations. We have neither the staff resources nor the financial capacity to evaluate the multitude of programs offered. Even if such resources were available, program evaluation conducted purely in-house raises questions about the objectivity and independence of the analysis.

At the same time, the PADOC faces ongoing demands from various sources (Governor's office, Legislature, federal government, etc.) for information about the performance (program integrity and outcomes) of its inmate treatment programs. Beyond these external demands for information about program performance, the PADOC also requires this information for internal program planning and policy making purposes. Rigorous program evaluation informs the process of organizational learning, where the PADOC actively and openly seeks information about the operations of its programs. This information feeds inquiry and analysis into the strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness of these programs. This inquiry and analysis informs plans to address program deficits and build on program successes. Such program evaluation is a cumulative process, producing an ongoing cycle of organizational inquiry, learning, and change.

Program evaluation within the PADOC serves the broader agency goal of promoting evidence-based practice, guided by what have come to be known as the principles of effective offender intervention¹. Programs that adhere to these principles have a greater likelihood of being effective than programs that do not. Among other criteria, effectiveness is measured by recidivism reduction. Thus, effective programs reduce recidivism; ineffective programs do not. A broad body of national research indicates that programs that closely follow these principles can see reductions in recidivism of upwards of 30 percent. Programs that do not follow these principles may actually *increase* recidivism rates. Recidivism risk reduction is directly connected to public safety, as lower recidivism translates into fewer

¹ For an excellent general discussion of the research underlying these principles, see: D.A. Andrews and James Bonta. 2006. *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (4th ed.). Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing.

victims. Recidivism reduction also contributes to efforts to control growth in corrections spending, which is one of the major drivers of state budgets.

In light of these concerns, the PADOc implemented a model of evaluation whereby we collaborate with external research partners who have the expertise and interest in evaluating specific programs. We then work with the research partners to identify third party sources of funding to support evaluation projects. Having secured funding, the evaluation then proceeds under the guidance of an evaluation advisory committee specific to each individual project.

PERS has enabled the PADOc to produce the evaluation research that it needs in support of programmatic improvements, without having to do this work ourselves, and without having to pay for it. This process produces high quality research that is responsive to the needs of the PADOc, while maintaining the independence and integrity of the research process. The ultimate utility of PERS itself is evaluated by the extent to which it has enhanced the capacity of the PADOc to become its own agent of positive change. The specific steps in this process are outlined in response to Question 12 next.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The PERS program evaluation model operates in the following sequence of events:

A. Define internally our needs for program evaluation.

The PADOc initiates the evaluation process by identifying evaluation projects that are a high priority to the agency. This is done with active input, and frequently at the direction of, senior PADOc leadership, up to and including the Secretary of Corrections.

B. Identify an outside expert to conduct the evaluation.

Having defined the evaluation need, the PADOc's Bureau of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants (PRSG) works to identify an external research partner with the expertise and interest needed to conduct the study. Such partners generally are found within major research universities or other research institutions. This is done by tapping into existing research contacts of PRSG staff, as well as through networking with existing research partners. On occasion, we have worked with third party funders (see Item E below) to issue an investigator-initiated solicitation to allow interested researchers to submit proposals. One key criterion in our selection of a research partner is their commitment to producing unbiased applied research that maintains the highest standards of scholarship and policy relevance. Our research partners, while being responsive to our needs, must be willing to tell us the "bad news" when a program is not working. Only with such straightforward input can the agency make informed decisions about the future of the program.

C. Form a research partnership with that expert.

Having identified a research partner, the PADOc works with that partner to develop a plan for the evaluation of the targeted program. One important part of this process is the development of an evaluation advisory committee (EAC) for each project. Such committees are made up of the external research partner and their staff, senior PADOc leadership (up to the Secretary of Corrections for some projects), staff from PRSG, other relevant PADOc Central Office stakeholders (such as staff from the Bureau of Inmate Services, which oversees most treatment programs) and field representatives from the actual program being evaluated. These EAC's serve to guide overall

progress on the evaluation, review research designs developed by the research team, secure necessary buy-in and cooperation from program and other PADOE staff, monitor progress on the study and review project reports. Upon completion of the evaluation, these EAC's are also instrumental in promoting the utilization of the findings (see Item G below). Thus, the EAC serves as the mechanism for the collaborative management of projects undertaken by the research partner. As an aside, some funders *require* the formation of such an EAC, but we typically establish one even absent a mandate.

D. Develop an evaluation plan in cooperation with the research partner.

Working through the project-specific EAC, the external researcher works with PRSG to develop an overall evaluation plan, including a research design and grant application(s). See next item.

E. Partner prepares grant application to a third party funding source.

One key component of the PERS is research support from third party funders. As noted earlier, the PADOE generally lacks the resources to directly fund multiple, large-scale program evaluation studies. Moreover, agency self-funding of such studies inevitably raises concerns about the objectivity and independence of the research. Accordingly, we seek support for these projects from external funding bodies. Common funders have included National Institute of Justice (NIJ), Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and National Institute of Corrections (NIC). More recently, we are working on leveraging funding from private foundations, which will open another avenue of research support for the PERS. PRSG works with the external research partner to prepare and submit grant applications to the third party funders in support of evaluation projects. As part of the PERS model, these grant applications are submitted directly from the external research partner to the targeted funder. Thus, the funding stream does not pass through the PADOE. There are several advantages to this approach. First, with the third party funding going directly to the external researcher, this promotes increased objectivity and independence of the research, and preempts claims that the researcher is financially beholden to the agency to produce "desirable" results. Second, this approach frees us from constraints that would arise from having to adhere to state RFP bidding procedures, allowing us to select our research partners purely on the basis of merit. Finally, by not having this funding pass through the PADOE, we avoid the workload associated with administering a funding stream (e.g. quarterly reports to funders, etc.). This approach also benefits the external researchers, as a funding pedigree is a key marker of success in academia.

To date, we have leveraged over \$2.7 million in external funding through 17 major grant awards to support evaluation. At the present time, we have additional grant applications under review by external funders, totaling over \$2 million in potential additional funding.

F. Conduct evaluation.

Having established a research plan and secured funding, the evaluation is then underway. Following is a list of some of our major current and recent evaluation partners and the programs they have studied on our behalf.

- Temple University (Dr. Wayne Welsh) - Drug Treatment Programs Process and Outcome Evaluations (multiple studies).
- University of Cincinnati (Drs. Edward Latessa and Christopher Lowenkamp) - Community Corrections System Comprehensive Process and Outcome Evaluations; Correctional Program Checklist Process Evaluation of Core Institutional Treatment Programs; Quehanna Boot Camp Process Evaluations; Drug Treatment Programs Process Evaluation; Young Adult

Offender Program Process Evaluation; and Life Skills Program Process and Outcome Evaluations.

- International Association on Reentry (Dr. Linda Smith) - Education/Vocational Programs Process and Outcome Evaluations; and the Community Orientation/Reintegration Program Outcome Evaluation.
- ACES (Dr. David Simourd) - PADOE Offender Assessment System Evaluation.
- Penn State University (Dr. Kimberly Skarupski) - Parenting Programs Process and Outcome Evaluations.
- LaSalle University (Dr. Ariana Shahinfar) - Young Adult Offender Programs Outcome Evaluation; and PADOE Assessment System Pilot Testing.
- Urban Institute (Various Researchers) - Community Orientation Reintegration Program Process Evaluation.
- Vera Institute of Justice (Various Researchers) - Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program Process and Outcome Evaluation.

More detail on our most current evaluation agenda can be found at:

<http://www.cor.state.pa.us/stats/cwp/view.asp?a=384&q=136160>

G. Utilize results.

PERS is successful because the PADOE is committed to utilizing the results of these evaluation studies to inform and refine our inmate treatment programs. These studies have directly influenced decisions to terminate several programs due to poor performance, and expand others due to positive findings (see Item 22 below for more discussion). More commonly, programs are redeveloped based upon recommendations found in the evaluation reports. The PRSG section of the PADOE's website (linked in Item 8 above) provides extensive detail on the utilization of research findings in program developments efforts, as well as completed project reports and project summaries featured in the PADOE's in-house research publication – *Research in Review*.

Finally, the following articles provide some additional discussion of about the early development of the PERS:

Welsh, Wayne N. and Gary Zajac. 2004. "Building an Effective Research Partnership Between a University and a State Correctional Agency: Assessment of Drug Treatment In Pennsylvania Prisons." *The Prison Journal*, 84(2), 143-170.

Welsh, Wayne N. and Gary Zajac. 2004. "A Census of Prison-Based Drug Treatment Programs: Implications for Programming, Policy and Evaluation." *Crime and Delinquency*, 50(1), 108-133.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

While other correctional agencies do conduct evaluations of their treatment programs, to our knowledge no other agency has employed the comprehensive, systematic and objective approach to evaluation embodied in PERS. When agencies do conduct evaluation, it is generally done in-house, or by outside researchers who are being funded directly by the agency being evaluated. As noted in Item 12E above, our approach to funding such projects introduces an element of objectivity and independence not found with self-funded projects that also significantly reduces the cost of evaluation research for the agency.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Given the practice of leveraging third party funding in support of evaluation, there were little or no start-up costs to the PADOc for PERS. No special equipment or other resources were needed. Ongoing staffing needs are discussed in Item 15.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Within PRSG, five regular staff positions support the operations of PERS, primarily as project co-managers/facilitators (along with the research partners themselves) and support staff. The agency budget for these five positions is approximately \$350,000 per year. These five positions are not devoted entirely to managing PERS-related projects, though, as they also undertake smaller in-house research projects and other critical assignments for the PADOc. It is likely that most of these positions would be filled even in the absence of PERS. Thus, only part of the cost of these positions is attributable to PERS.

Beyond these five positions, various other staff from PRSG are used on an as needed basis to conduct data runs and other activities in support of PERS. The percent of effort dedicated to these tasks is not tracked by the PADOc. Again, these positions would exist absent PERS. In addition, various other staff within the PADOc also contribute to PERS-related projects through service on EAC's and by assisting with data collection within programs. This percent of effort is not tracked, and is minimal.

16. How is the program funded?

See Items 12E and 15 above.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No specific legislation was required in support of PERS, although there are legislative mandates to evaluate selected PADOc treatment programs, such as the Quehanna Motivational Boot Camp and the State Intermediate Punishment Program (see PL 885, No. 112, "Act 112 of 2004"), that are served by the research processes embodied in PERS.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

No special equipment, technology or software are required, other than that commonly found within most office settings.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes. The PERS approach was initiated by the contact person for this application, listed in Items 3 – 7 above.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

See response to Item 13 above. Beyond this, perhaps the only other correctional agency that maintains such an active research agenda is Correctional Service Canada (CSC), which is known for its commitment to bridging the gap between research and practice in the pursuit of evidence-based offender intervention. To our knowledge, though, most of the CSC studies are conducted in-house.

We are aware that other states have learned of our success with this model and are interested in applying it to their own agencies on some level. PRSG routinely provides advice and guidance to correctional researchers and administrators in other jurisdictions regarding PERS and related topics such as research methods and design, evidence-based practices and program development. PRSG has provided such support to over three dozen jurisdictions in the U.S. and internationally over the past three years. PRSG staff have provided numerous trainings for criminal justice staff in other agencies on these topics, as well at national criminal justice conferences. PRSG has also hosted delegations from two other state DOCs that were interested in learning more about building research and program development capacity within their own agencies. Thus, there would appear to be strong potential for the PERS model to be replicated within other correctional agencies. Indeed, there is no reason that this model could not be applied in other public service settings where pursuit of evidence-based practice is desired, such as public health and welfare, education and even transportation.

Looking more broadly at the impact of PERS, the PADOc has provided advice and guidance to many other jurisdictions and organizations on developing evidence-based programs and related topics, such as offender risk and needs assessment. The PADOc has come to be viewed as an authority on such issues, which is driven in large part by the program evaluation agenda described in this application. One example of such technical assistance on program development provided by the PADOc is the CSG Re-Entry Policy Council's Offender Assessment Process Project. Staff from PRSG attended meetings to provide this working group with advice on offender assessment practices, and hosted a delegation of this group which visited the PADOc's inmate assessment center to observe firsthand our assessment processes. Again, the PADOc's leadership in offender assessment practices is a direct product of research and evaluation conducted under the PERS model.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

At this point, PERS is fully operational. It does remain a work in progress, though, accommodating the dynamic research needs of the PADOc through the pursuit of new partners and funders.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The PERS has several advantages as an approach to building research-based best practices within an agency. These include:

- The ability to tap into a wide variety of expertise that exists within universities and research institutions throughout the country, and indeed even in other countries (one of our research partners is located in Canada).
- Objectivity of the research is promoted by partnership with independent external scholars, thereby increasing the credibility of the final product.

- The ability to produce a large volume of research without the need to maintain a sizable in-house research staff.
- The ability to leverage third party funding in support of such work.
- The ability to promote the dissemination of research findings through scholarly articles authored in cooperation with our research partners.

As with any program or system, there are disadvantages associated with PERS:

- Can be slower than doing research in-house, due to the need to identify research partners, establish relationships with them and secure third party funding.
- The EAC committee management process takes time and attention by agency staff.
- Research partnerships require maintenance and constant coordination.
- The agency is at the mercy of shifts in third party funding priorities; there is no guarantee that funding will be available for future projects.

All things considered, the PADOc has found that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of this model. One novel element, and key strength, of the PERS approach is that it represents a middle ground between a dependent relationship that an external researcher would have if they were paid by the agency to do a specific task, and a more oppositional relationship that often emerges when an outside entity like an Inspector General conducts a program audit. The former would raise concerns of objectivity, whereas the latter risks engendering defensive routines within the agency that impede organizational learning. The PERS approach allows organizational learning to occur in the context of rigorous, independent research.

Looking at the effectiveness of PERS, the most telling outcome is the utilization of the research findings to inform ongoing program refinement within the PADOc, and thus to change the practice of treatment within the State Correctional Institutions (SCI's). The research produced through PERS has allowed the PADOc to eliminate programs that were not working, expand programs that are, and refine programs that show promise. Following are four examples of how the findings of PERS evaluation projects have been directly translated into treatment policy and planning throughout the PADOc.

First, completed evaluations to date have led to the decision to terminate three major programs that could not demonstrate any meaningful impact on inmate behavior. These programs included a drug and alcohol educational intervention that was being delivered to large numbers of inmates, a specialized drug treatment program for parole violators and a parenting program for male inmates. Staff involved in delivering these programs were freed to focus on other programmatic areas, including that discussed in the next paragraph.

Second, the PADOc has undertaken a major expansion of its drug and alcohol therapeutic communities (TC) due to evaluation findings showing a reduction in recidivism of 11 percentage points for inmates completing these programs. Indeed, when our TC research partnership with Temple University began, the PADOc operated TC's in only seven of our SCI's. We now operate TC's in 23 of our 27 SCI's, with some SCI's having multiple TC's. We are preparing to embark on another TC study with Temple that will inform decisions about how long TC treatment needs to be (3, 6, 9 or 12 months). The results of this study will have important budgetary consequences not only for the PADOc, but for correctional agencies across the nation. For example, if one finds comparable outcomes for the six and twelve month programs, we can devote our resources to six month programs and serve more inmates at no additional cost. The TC also forms the basis for our new State

Intermediate Punishment (SIP) program, which is intended to divert low level, drug involved offenders from costly long term incarceration, saving the PADOc money in the long run. Temple University will also be involved in evaluating SIP.

Third, findings from our partnership evaluations also guide the development and refinement of existing programs. Outcome evaluation answers the question “Does the program work?”, and is useful for ultimate decisions about whether to continue or terminate a program, as discussed above. Process evaluation answers the question “How is the program producing whatever outcomes it is producing; what are its strengths and weaknesses?”, and is useful for developing action plans for program refinement. One example of this is found with the PADOc’s Quehanna Boot Camp program. After two cycles of process evaluation, the Boot Camp has been transformed from primarily a military model program with relatively few treatment services to a mixed model employing a variety of interventions, include drug and alcohol treatment, cognitive-behavioral programs addressing core criminal thinking issues, educational and vocational programs and aftercare services. One year post release recidivism rates at the Boot Camp have dropped nearly ten percentage points over the past four years. Similar examples are found with every other process evaluation undertaken by the PADOc.

Finally, as a result of lessons learned through our partnership evaluations, the PADOc now pilot tests all new treatment programs prior to full scale implementation. The pilot tests are accompanied by evaluation, conducted either by an external research partner or in-house by PRSG staff. Programs not performing well during the pilot are either modified or dropped from further consideration. This allows the PADOc to achieve long term cost effectiveness by not committing to new programs that show little promise of recidivism reduction.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

As noted in Item 21 above, we continually adapt PERS to the ongoing needs of the PADOc by partnering with additional researchers and seeking continuing third party funding in support of these efforts.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

The most important requirement for the success of a model such as PERS is the willingness on the part of the agency to use the results of program evaluation to facilitate the process of organizational learning and change. Unfortunately, evaluation results are all too often shelved, largely due to the reluctance of agencies to change established practices or to confront evidence of program ineffectiveness. Agencies that are unwilling to engage openly in organizational learning and change are unlikely to benefit from program evaluation. The agency leadership must be committed to using the results of research to inform program development, and must see the value of doing so. Where program decisions are driven largely by politics, or by bureaucratic inertia, evaluation will amount largely to an academic exercise.

Another challenge to implementing a model such as PERS is staffing within the agency. One primary strength of PERS is that a large internal staff of researchers is not needed. Agencies must, however, employ at least some staff with the education, credentials and experience to establish and manage external research partnerships and to advise agency leadership on how best to use research findings. Ideally, at least one staffer should possess a Ph.D. and have some track record of scholarship in order to be seen as credible by external researchers and funders. Such staff must be both strong advocates

for the mission of evidence-based practice and bridges between the two communities of researchers and practitioners/policy makers. It can be difficult to recruit and retain such staff, especially in situations of tight budgets and in the face of competing employment opportunities at universities and other research institutions.

Finally, as noted above, this model is also susceptible to shifting priorities among third party funders and the availability of interested and qualified external researcher partners.



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February 27, 2008

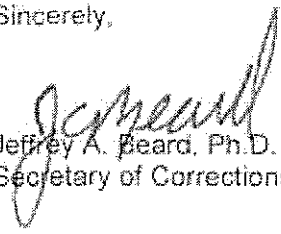
CSG Innovations Award 2008
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive
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Dear Review Committee Members:

I am pleased to submit to you the application of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for the 2008 Innovations Award for our Program Evaluation Research System (PERS). We are particularly proud of what we have accomplished with this system. This program of research and evaluation has contributed tremendously to our efforts to build an evidence-based system of offender intervention that reduces offender risk, enhances public safety and promotes the efficient use of limited correctional budgets and resources. As outlined in the application, our program of research and evaluation has already provided guidance to other jurisdictions in their pursuit of evidence-based practice, and we think it can further serve as a national model if selected as an Innovation Award winner.

We thank you in advance for consideration of our application. Should you have any questions about our submission, please feel free to contact Dr. Zajac as listed in the application.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Beard, Ph.D.
Secretary of Corrections



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February 27, 2008

CSG Innovations Award 2008
The Council of State Governments
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Dear Review Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the application of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Bureau of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants for the 2008 Innovations Award for their Program Evaluation Research System (PERS). The Department of Criminal Justice at Temple University was the first major research partner for the DOC under the PERS, and we remain an active partner. I'm very pleased that our partnership has served as a foundational model for the many partnerships that the DOC enjoys with other researchers. Through this partnership, we have undertaken some of the most rigorous and extensive evaluations of prison-based drug treatment programs in the country, and continue to embark on new studies. A R01 research grant application to NIH is currently pending; another is in preparation.

Through our work together, I have come to deeply appreciate the high esteem in which the DOC holds research. As a university-based scholar, it is gratifying to see that research is used to make high-level decisions that have significant impacts upon the agency's programs, clients and its budget. I have never worked with another agency where research and evaluation play such a prominent role in policy making and program planning. As psychologist Kurt Lewin once asserted: "Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice." Lewin coined the term *action research* to describe an intentional process of change whereby social science research intentionally and explicitly informs and shapes social action (including organizational and public policy decisions), and evaluates the results of that action. This is precisely the goal of the PERS model.

I am aware that the PERS used by the DOC has served as a model for other criminal justice agencies that are looking to develop their own capacity to build research into practice, and I have promoted this model in my own work as an exemplar to be followed. Accordingly, I offer my strongest endorsement to the DOC's PERS as a candidate for the 2008 Innovations Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne N. Welsh'.

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C: Dr Gary Zajac, PADOCC