Request for Proposals for the Prison Research and Innovation Network
July 2019

Purpose of opportunity	The purpose of the Prison Research and Innovation Network (Network) is to support states interested in researching and improving prison culture, operations, and design to create more humane and rehabilitative correctional environments.
Project goals	The Network will be a community of practice for states interested in leveraging research, data, and evidence to inspire improvements in prison environments. The goals of the Network include the following: ▪ develop a better understanding of prison environments and their relationship to the safety and well-being of those who live and work there ▪ enhance state prisons' capacities for collecting data on prison environments, with the goal of promoting transparency and accountability ▪ design, implement, and evaluate data-driven, evidence-based operational and programmatic innovations to improve prison conditions, including those that support rehabilitation and self-betterment for incarcerated people
Eligibility	This competition is open to all 50 US states, including those with unified correctional systems. The lead applicant must be the state's department of corrections with support from (1) key state government leadership, (2) leadership within one publicly run prison with at least a 300-person capacity that would serve as a pilot site, and (3) a research partner. We will not accept applications that propose private prisons as pilot sites. *We will only accept one application per state.*
Award	Six states will be selected to participate in Phase 1 (12-month project period) of the Network. Based on performance during Phase 1, four states will advance to Phase 2 (additional 3.5 years). Selected applicants will receive the following: • a grant award of up to $100,000 to support the hiring of a full-time Prison Research Innovation Manager to work onsite in the selected prison during Phase 1, with the expectation that the state will assume the cost of employing the manager for Phase 2

	• a grant award of up to $100,000 annually to support the research partner's activities during Phases 1 and 2 • technical assistance (TA) and feedback from experts affiliated with the Urban Institute, Arnold Ventures, and the Network's advisory board; the board will include former state correctional leaders and nationally recognized advocates and researchers, including people who have experienced incarceration • opportunities for peer learning in the Network
Informational webinar	August 21, 2019, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. EST
Deadline for proposals	October 1, 2019, 11:59 p.m. EST
How to submit	Submit letters of interest addressed to Nancy La Vigne, PhD, Vice President for Justice Policy at TransformPrison@urban.org
Notice of decision	December 1, 2019
Project period	Phase 1: January 15–December 31, 2020 Phase 2: January 1, 2021–June 30, 2024

Overview

Prisons in the United States present a challenging and costly problem. They consume a meaningful share of state budgets, house more than 1.3 million people, and employ more than 200,000 corrections officers in state-run correctional institutions. Prisons affect millions of lives, not just those who live and work in them but also the families who are left behind. Yet despite the scale and impact of prisons in the US, they are among the country's most understudied and least understood public institutions. No routinely collected national data exist on the share of people in prison who are subject to violence, serve time in solitary confinement, engage in acts of self-harm, or attempt suicide. Nor are any metrics collected on the share of incarcerated people who participate in work or self-betterment programming. Prisons are uniquely closed systems that lack transparency in operations, performance, and outcomes.

To bridge this knowledge gap, Arnold Ventures (Arnold) partnered with the Urban Institute to launch the Prison Research and Innovation Network. **The purpose of the Prison Research and Innovation Network is to support states interested in researching and improving prison culture, operations, and design to make correctional environments more humane and rehabilitative.** The Network is a core component of the Prison Research and Innovation Initiative, a comprehensive effort to build evidence and spur innovation to make prisons more humane, safe, and

rehabilitative, which could result in greater public safety outcomes. We are seeking states willing to commit to the project's entirety from January 15, 2020 to June 30, 2024. However, support is only guaranteed for Phase 1 (12-month project period); a state's advancement to Phase 2 will be conditional on its progress in Phase 1.

Prison Research and Innovation Network Support and Expectations

The Prison Research and Innovation Network provides states with financial assistance, technical assistance, and a community of practice to understand and improve prison environments. The goals of the Network include the following:

- better understand prison environments and their relationship to the safety and well-being of people who live and work there
- enhance local prisons' capacities for collecting data on prison environments to promote transparency and accountability
- design, implement, and evaluate new evidence-based programmatic and operational changes and innovations to improve prison conditions, including those that support rehabilitation and self-betterment for incarcerated people

Types of Support

The sites selected to participate in the Prison Research and Innovation Network will benefit from the following:

- **Grant award**
  - **Phase 1 (January 15–December 31, 2020): two grant awards totaling up to $200,000 from the Urban Institute**
    - One grant award to the state of up to $100,000 to support the hiring of a full-time dedicated Prison Research Innovation Manager to work onsite in the selected prison. If selected to advance to Phase 2, the state is expected to assume the cost of employing the manager beyond the project's first year.
    - One grant award to the research partner of up to $100,000 to support research and planning activities.
  - **Phase 2 (January 1, 2021–June 30, 2024): one grant award of up to $100,000/year from the Urban Institute**
    - This grant will be dedicated entirely to support the research partner's activities.
- **Access to expert technical assistance (TA) and feedback from Urban, Arnold Ventures, and the Network's advisory board.** Each state will be assigned an Urban TA team to provide in-person, virtual, and peer learning support for the duration of each state's

participation. The TA team will work with sites to determine their needs, which may include assistance and guidance with the following:

- facilitating and troubleshooting planning and implementation challenges
- developing performance metrics and data-collection tools with local research partners
- building a collaborative infrastructure
- conducting policy analyses
- identifying and implementing evidence-based practices and innovative programs to improve prison conditions and opportunities for self-betterment in prison
- developing and implementing evaluation methodologies
- developing and delivering foundational trainings (e.g., methodological approaches, Risk-Need-Responsivity principles, effective intervention design)

- **Opportunities for peer learning.** This will include ongoing webinars, a peer exchange listserv, and an in-person meeting during Phase 1 with Network states, selected advisory board members, Urban, and Arnold.

Expectations

Awardees will be expected to:

- **Conduct all Network activities as a committed and engaged partnership among the state government, prison, and research partner.** We expect each state to form the two following committees to coordinate the work:

  o **Executive committee.** This committee should meet quarterly to receive updates from the steering committee on project progress and ensure that work is being coordinated within the broader state-policy context. The committee should include leadership from the governor's office, attorney general's office, department of corrections, and pilot prison; relevant legislative leadership; strong representation of formerly and/or currently incarcerated people; the full-time dedicated Prison Research Innovation Manager; and the research partner. This committee will be responsible for committing to and making policy changes to improve prison environments within the state.

  o **Steering committee.** This committee should meet monthly and will form the core team of the project. It should include leadership from the pilot prison, staff from the research partner organization, the full-time Prison Research Innovation Manager, and a senior representative from the department of corrections. This committee will be responsible for the day-to-day project work and will regularly engage with the Urban TA team on planning, implementation, and evaluation activities.

- **Commit to participate in the Prison Research and Innovation Network for the project's duration from January 15, 2020 to June 30, 2024**, with the understanding that support for Phase 2 is conditional on progress in Phase 1.

- **Engage with the Prison Research and Innovation Network** on an ongoing basis, including:
  - reporting progress on grant-funded activities to Urban on a regular basis, including regular financial reports;
  - sharing information with the other Network participants, and the field, on innovation efforts and lessons learned from them as they develop; and
  - participating in regularly scheduled conference calls with the Urban TA team.

- **Participate in a community of practice convened by Urban.** This will include ongoing webinars, a peer exchange listserv, and an in-person meeting during Phase 1 with Network states, Urban, and Arnold. It is expected that sites will cover the costs of travel for a team of 4–5 participants to attend the in-person meeting, the first of which will be in Washington, DC.

- **Hire and support a full-time dedicated Prison Research Innovation Manager to work onsite in the selected prison in close collaboration with the research partner.** The state will receive a grant award to fund the initial hiring and first year of this position; the state is expected to assume the cost of employing the Manager for Phase 2 of the project. This position will be responsible for guiding planning and implementation work in the pilot facility, facilitating data collection activities, coordinating the work of the local research partner, engaging with the Urban TA team, and ensuring compliance with the subaward and reporting requirements.

- **Participate in a nationwide research study of prison environments conducted by Urban.** The Urban team will collaborate with each state's research partner to assess overall prison climate, perceptions of procedural justice, perceptions of safety, and officer and prison culture in each prison selected for the Network. Major data collection tools will include a climate survey and focus groups with staff, corrections officers, and incarcerated people of the pilot prison. ***For examples of data collection points, areas of analyses, and potentially relevant state policy changes, please see Appendix A***. As part of this commitment, we expect selected states will do the following:
  - Support and use community-based participatory research approaches, including community-led and researcher-guided data collection, analysis, decisionmaking, and an evaluation process that brings science to bear on the prison community's problems, priorities, and solutions.
  - Dedicate resources for repeated administration of routine data collection and dissemination activities.
  - Make aggregated (unidentifiable) data on prison environment and operations available to the public in a timely manner.

- Identify state-level policy changes (administrative, legislative, operational, etc.) relevant to the findings generated by the prison-based research, peer learning engagements, and the project's TA delivery.

- Identify areas for innovation in the Network's pilot prisons, using a data-driven process that draws on the data sources described above, and innovations.

- Expedite departmental processes pertaining to data access and review of research protocols.

- Fully coordinate with research partners to execute project tasks.

- **Engage a research partner that will work with Urban to perform the following tasks:**

  - Design and conduct the climate survey.

  - Develop other data collection tools of interest to the sites.

  - Identify and collect a core set of performance metric data.

  - Assist the sites in articulating proposed innovations and related outcomes to be advanced under Phase 2.

  - All research partners will be expected to obtain Institutional Review Board approval, paying particular attention to [requirements related to vulnerable populations](#).

Eligibility

Applications are invited from any of the 50 states in the United States, including states with unified correctional systems. **The lead applicant must be the state's department of corrections with support from (1) key state government leadership, (2) one publicly run prison with at least a 300-person capacity as a pilot site,**[1] **and (3) a research partner—**preference will be given to states that coordinate with local research partners that are housed in the state and proximate to the proposed pilot prison(s). We will not accept applications that propose a private prison as the pilot site.

The project team has an interest in partnering with a diverse representation of correctional facilities and invites participation from all types of facilities, including women's prisons. Urban intends to select a cohort of six states that together represent variation by security level, size of prison, location (i.e. rural or urban), and population housed (i.e., length of stays, gender).

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[1] We are requesting applications from prisons with at least a 300-person capacity to accommodate quasi-experimental and randomized controlled trial evaluation methodologies.

Project Timeline

Applications for participation are due on October 1, 2019. Successful applicants will be notified by December 1, 2019. Phase 1 will span a 1-year period from January 15, 2020 to December 31, 2020, and Phase 2 will span a 3.5-year period from January 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024.

How to Apply

Please submit your application by email to Nancy La Vigne, PhD, Vice President for Justice Policy, at transformprison@urban.org by **11:59 p.m. ET on October 1, 2019**. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered. Note that any revisions after submission cannot be accommodated. If multiple submissions are received from the same applicant, the most recent submission that meets the application deadline will be reviewed. **We will only accept one application per state. The Urban Institute reserves the right not to issue an award to a state if it determines that qualifications are not sufficient.**

To Learn More

The Urban Institute will host one webinar to confirm details about the competition and application process as well as to answer questions. **The webinar is scheduled for August 21, 2019, from 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. EST.** Applicants are not required to attend the call.

Please register for the webinar at
https://zoom.us/meeting/register/d25365a9336fb0a0cde7dc3c8da9331e

Questions posed and answered during the conference call will be posted online at
http://www.urban.org/transform-prison.

Questions

Should you have any questions about the application process, please e-mail Nancy La Vigne at transformprison@urban.org. We will try to answer your individual questions as quickly as possible. We will also integrate these questions into the conference call. Responses to all questions received will be posted regularly at http://www.urban.org/transform-prison.

Required Application Components

Applications will only be considered if they submit the following outlined components:

- **Joint Letter of Interest and Firm Expression of Commitment from the State's Department of Corrections, State Government, and Candidate Pilot Prison(s)**—The joint letter of interest and commitment should be signed by the lead applicant—the state department of corrections and its secretary—along with the governor, attorney general, relevant legislative leadership, strong representation of formerly and/or currently incarcerated people, and candidate pilot prisons' leadership. The letter should outline the state's interest in researching and improving prison culture, operations, and design in the interests of creating more humane and rehabilitative correctional environments; express a commitment to promoting transparency and accountability within prison environments; and affirm the willingness of the signatories to participate in the project.

- **Letter of Interest and Commitment from Research Partner**—The state's letter of interest should include an accompanying letter of support signed by the research partner outlining that partner's qualifications to support this work, including experience conducting research in correctional facilities, subject matter expertise in prison environments, evaluation expertise (including experience with community-based participatory research methods and randomized controlled trials), experience analyzing corrections data, and knowledge of state and local policy context. Please include CVs for the proposed research team.

- **Project Narrative**—A double-spaced, 12-point font narrative that answers the questions detailed below.

Project Narrative

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT (not to exceed 4 pages)
   a. **Why is your state interested in becoming part of the Network?** Please address the following:
      i. Why is this the right time for your state to take on this work?
      ii. Please include any information on relevant prison and related state policy reforms recently or currently under way.
      iii. Please describe leadership's commitment to change and innovation.
   b. **What do you hope to achieve from participating in the Network?**
      i. What type of work have you already done to create more humane and rehabilitative correctional environments? What type of work have you done to improve transparency and accountability of prison environments? How do you see your participation in the Network building upon this foundation?
      ii. What innovations do you envision implementing in the selected pilot prison?
      iii. What types of policy changes do you envision implementing in your state?
      iv. What are the major challenges you anticipate in taking on this work in your state? What types of support do you need to address these challenges?

2. PROPOSED PARTNERSHIP AND QUALIFICATIONS (not to exceed 6 pages)
   a. **What is the nature of the proposed partnership for this project and who is involved?** Contributions from many organizations and agencies within your state will be necessary to foster and execute this initiative successfully. Similarly, committed leadership will be absolutely essential. Please address the following:
      i. Describe the leadership of your initiative and your strategy for recruiting key partners who are not yet engaged.
      ii. What influence does the leadership of your proposed effort have to move a statewide effort forward despite the barriers and challenges that will be encountered?
      iii. How does the membership of the partnership represent the interests of the stakeholder community and provide support in the many areas that touch upon prison environments (union leadership, families of incarcerated people, prison reform advocates, etc.)?

   b. **How do you plan to hire and/or select a Prison Research Innovation Manager? How do you plan to support that position in Phase 2 of the project?** Please address the following:
      i. What characteristics and experiences are you seeking in the Manager position to support successful execution of this project?

    ii.   If you have you already identified someone to assume this position, please describe their experience and include a current résumé.

    iii.   What funding source do you anticipate will support this position in Phase 2?

c. **In which prison(s) do you propose piloting this work and why?** We encourage applicants to propose up to three facilities; Urban will work with successful candidates to select the pilot prison. Please fill out the attached table for each proposed prison and describe the following key components:

    i.   Accessibility to the community, including community organizations and volunteers who enter the prison and activities supporting visitation;

    ii.   Governance structures and organizations led by incarcerated people; and

    iii.   Programs, activities and opportunities available to incarcerated people (including jobs and education)

d. **What prior national or regional corrections initiatives (including technical assistance) has your state or department of corrections participated in?**

    i.   How do you see this project building upon that prior work?

e. **How do you envision expanding this work beyond the selected pilot site, and what are your strategies for sustaining this work beyond the project period?**

3. DATA AND RESEARCH CAPACITY (not to exceed 1 page per proposed prison)

a. **What is the data and research capacity of your agency? What is your experience working with external researchers?** Please address the following:

    i.   In what capacity, if any, have you worked with external researchers previously?

    ii.   What is your research review and support infrastructure?

        i.   Does your DOC have an Institutional Review Board or formal research review process?

        ii.   What is the typical review period for research proposals?

        iii.   What is the size and capacity of any DOC research and data analysis staff?

    iii.   What are your existing formalized relationships with research universities?

Please complete as much of the table below as possible for each proposed prison. We don't anticipate that each applicant will be able to provide every data point, but we do expect that if selected, these baseline metrics will be collected routinely.

Prison Population Data (numbers for a single year, unless otherwise indicated; CY2018 data preferred.)	
Admissions and releases	
2018 yearend population	
Annual releases to the community	
Average time served	
Population by gender, age, race, etc.	
Number of housing units (pods, wings, tiers, etc.)	
Rated prison capacity	
Number of people in restrictive housing[2]	
Number of people in protective custody	
Incidents	
Total number of incidents	
Number of inmate-inmate incidents	
Number of inmate-staff incidents	
Number of staff-staff incidents	
Number of use-of-force (staff on inmate) incidents	
Number of use-of-force (inmate on staff) incidents	
Number of assaults (physical, sexual)	
Number of grievances filed by inmates	
Number of PREA incidents filed by inmates	
Number of PREA hotline calls received	
Percentage of grievances sustained	
Number of disciplinary actions against inmates	

b. **What is your willingness to make unidentifiable prison data public?** Please provide a statement of commitment on your willingness to make prison data public in a timely manner and the level of aggregation you envision to ensure both anonymity and transparency.

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[2] We use the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) definition of "restrictive housing," codified in 2013: https://asca.memberclicks.net/assets/2013%20ASCA%20Restrictive%20Housing%20Guidelines.pdf

Applicants are not required to submit a budget at this time. However, if selected as a finalist, the applicant will receive a budget template from the Urban Institute to complete for further consideration.

Appendix A

Example Data Sources, Analyses, Policy Impacts, and Outcomes

Data type	Analytic inquiry	Prison reform	Policy reform	Outcomes
Literacy levels and pre-prison GED acquisition of incarcerated people	Inform opportunities and identify likely students for educational programs	Align availability and type of educational offerings with need Build tailored education into case plans	Incentivize educational attainment through earned credits	Higher rates of educational attainment Higher rates of employability
Employment history, participation, and readiness	Identify need for job skills training	Expand prison industries, provide for "real world" wages, engage with outside employers aligned with skills and training of residents	Provide tax incentives, subsidize wages for businesses that employ people exiting prison	Shorter time to employment Higher rates of employment Higher rates of job retention
Risk and needs assessment and programming	Assess how well programs and treatment are aligned with needs and are sufficient to meet demand Identify which programs are evidence-based	Realign programs with risk and needs of population Discontinue programs not supported by evidence	Require all programs to be assessed for evidence-base Appropriate sufficient resources to ensure program supply meets demand Prescribe public dissemination of risk assessment tool Mandate racial impact statements	Improved recidivism reduction ROI More accurate, less biased assessment tools Reduced racial bias
Physical, behavioral, and mental health	Inform alignment of medical services capacity and housing unit placement decisions	Audit health care provision; establish units dedicated to specific health needs	Require continuity of medication following release Mandate public reporting of deaths in custody Allow compassionate release for terminally ill residents	Improved access to health care Reduced recidivism Fewer deaths in custody

Data type	Analytic inquiry	Prison reform	Policy reform	Outcomes
Victimization and self-harm by age, gender, unit, security level, and confinement type	Assess who is most at risk and identify opportunities for prevention	Adjust corrections officer rounds Institute changes in prison design Change housing unit assignments Reduce or abolish solitary confinement	Mandate public reporting of victimization Hold prisons accountable for high rates of violence Restrict/prohibit use or period of solitary confinement Establish prison safety oversight entity	Reduced victimization rates in prison Reduced use of solitary confinement Lower rates of officer injury/victimization
Visitation and phone calls from friends and family	Assess existence and extent of support networks and opportunities to harness, complement, or supplement them	Increase visitation hours or opportunities Complement visitation with video conferencing Create child-friendly visitation rooms Allow for conjugal visits	Appropriate resources for video conferencing Mandate cap on collect phone call fees Appropriate resources for mother-child housing units Mandate housing prisoners within x miles of home	Increased frequency of family contact Lower rates of disciplinary infractions Lower rates of recidivism
Infractions and use of force by unit, security level, and officer	Identify problem areas and officers who are more likely to issue infractions or engage in use of force	Establish intervention protocols for problem officers; institute de-escalation training Launch experimental collaborative community units	Require public reporting of use of force data Hold prisons accountable for high rates of use of force	Reduced rates of infractions Reduced rates of use of force

Data type	Analytic inquiry	Prison reform	Policy reform	Outcomes
Corrections officer use of overtime and sick days	To assess and address officer physical health and mental well-being	Launch officer wellness campaign Develop protocols to identify officers at risk of burnout, connect with services/treatment	Restrict excessive use of overtime Appropriate resources for officer wellness programs	Reduced rates of sick leave Reduced attrition or longer retention of officers High levels of officer job satisfaction Lower rates of infractions issued and use of force
Proxies for motivation levels of incarcerated people	Assess differential outcomes by motivation; identify degree to which readiness to learn yields greater benefit from program offerings	Experiment with motivational interviewing, coaching, and other methods to increase motivational levels	Incentivize participation in self-betterment programming/treatment through earned time credits	Higher rates of participation in program Lower rates of recidivism
Post-release outcomes by age, race, length of incarceration, nature of offense, criminal history, and SES demographics	Assess degree to which rehabilitation efforts were successful	Revise program and treatment offerings based on results of recidivism analyses and outcomes	Mandate routine reporting of recidivism data by risk level Hold prisons accountable for high (risk-adjusted) recidivism rates	Lower rates of recidivism Higher rates of post-release employment