



HARVARD Kennedy School

**ASH INSTITUTE**

for Democratic Governance and Innovation

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## **ARIZONA'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS WINS INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARD**

***Harvard University's Ash Institute Recognizes Getting Ready: Keeping Communities Safe Prison Re-entry Initiative***

**Cambridge, Mass., – September 9, 2008** – The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School today announced Getting Ready: Keeping Communities Safe as a winner of the 2008 Innovations in American Government Awards. As a successful initiative of Arizona's Department of Corrections, the program facilitates inmate reentry into society by structuring the prison environment like the outside world with real-world job training and educational opportunities. Honored at tonight's Innovations in American Government Awards reception and gala in Washington, D.C., Getting Ready will receive \$100,000 toward dissemination and replication around the country. Governor Janet Napolitano of Arizona delivered the event's keynote address on the unique position of states in generating and spreading innovative practices nationwide.

The Department implemented Getting Ready: Keeping Communities Safe in 2004, as an alternative to conventional correctional systems in which staff exercises complete control over prisoners, affording most inmates few opportunities to acquire and apply basic skills critical to their success. By contrast, Arizona's initiative empowers inmates to take control of their own lives, shifting pre-release preparation from staff to inmates with graduated incentives and privileges to reward good behavior. This opt-in re-entry initiative is available to Arizona state inmates at all custody levels and was developed with no new funds or enabling legislation.

Called a Parallel Universe, the program restructures life in prison to resemble life in the community. Inmates are encouraged to earn high school equivalency diplomas, achieve and maintain sobriety, work full time, and participate in victim-focused volunteer activities during leisure time. To ensure success and sustainable wages after inmates are released, job training and employment behind bars

are aligned with actual Arizona industries. And, just like the real-world, inmates' wages improve with post secondary education and good work evaluations, and their status advances with community service.

Prior to the development of Getting Ready, nearly half (42 percent) of all Arizona inmates released returned to prison within three years. Despite a 17 percent increase in the prison population and operating fund reductions since its implementation, the program reports strong traction within the inmate community and widespread staff support. A study of inmates who participated in Getting Ready prior to their release from prison demonstrated its graduates are 35 percent more successful in the community than inmates of comparable risk. In addition to reduced recidivism rates, inmate-on-inmate violence is down by 37 percent, inmate-on-staff assaults by 51 percent, and inmate suicides by 33 percent. Three quarters of the inmate population has earned high school equivalency diplomas and completed bona-fide jobs training. They have also donated over one million dollars to Arizona crime victim organizations. Plummeting rates of institutional violence and recidivism translate to huge cost savings; the program reports a \$1.6 million reduction in spending that directly benefits Arizona taxpayers.

“Getting Ready fundamentally changes how inmates do time. We operate our prisons like the real world as much as we can with similar rules, responsibilities, and rewards,” said Dora Schriro, director of the Arizona Department of Corrections. “Getting Ready is all-day, every-day, pragmatic pre-release preparation. It keeps communities safe while inmates are incarcerated and when they go home.”

“According to a 2008 Pew Research Center Report, one in 100 adults is behind bars in the US and recidivism rates continue to rise,” said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Program at Harvard Kennedy School. “The Arizona Department of Corrections offers an alternative to the inefficient and costly practices that pervade prisons nationwide. Their groundbreaking yet commonsense approach to reducing violence, curbing recidivism rates, and preparing prisoners to be productive citizens are worthy of emulation around the country.”

Since 1986, the Ash Institute's Innovations in American Government Awards Program at Harvard Kennedy School has honored 187 federal, state, and local government agencies through Ford Foundation support. In highlighting exemplary models of government innovation, the Program drives continued progress in improving the quality of life of citizens and encourages scholarly research and teaching cases at Harvard University and institutions worldwide. Many award-winning programs have

been replicated across jurisdictions and policy areas, and have served as harbingers of today's reform strategies or as forerunners to state and federal legislation.

**About the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation**

The Roy and Lila Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Institute fosters creative and effective government problem-solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. Asia Programs, a school-wide initiative integrating Asia-related activities, joined the Ash Institute in July 2008. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the Institute. Additional information about the Ash Institute is available at [www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu](http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu). Applicants for the 2009 Innovations in American Government Awards are encouraged to apply at [www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu](http://www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu).

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