Introduction

This tipsheet is the second in a series of three NDTAC Tipsheets that aim to address Transition for Youth Who Are Incarcerated During COVID-19. The tipsheet may be especially useful for transition coordinators, probation officers, and/or guidance counselors within state and local agencies. Under the U.S. Department of Education Title I, Part D program, funds can be used to support technology access, literacy, and can also be used to aid in successful youth transition to further education and employment. Please additionally see Tipsheet #1: Effective Transition Back to School During COVID-19 and Tipsheet #3: Youth Who are Incarcerated: Transitions and IEP Implementation for additional information.

The Title I, Part D program addresses the needs of youth who are incarcerated to facilitate their achievement, successful re-entry into the community, and likelihood of graduating from high school and abstaining from criminal activity. Youth who are incarcerated can experience challenges during re-entry as they navigate the transition into further schooling or employment. With the increased use of technology due to COVID-19, youth—and their support systems—must simultaneously navigate additional challenges and potential benefits of this new reality. This resource considers how the use of technology can serve as a bridge or challenge to a successful transition and shares tips on how key stakeholders at state and local agencies (e.g., transition coordinators, probation officers, and/or guidance counselors) can support the effective use of technology.

Common Transition Challenges

Youth who are incarcerated experience challenges that can impede successful re-entry. Youth with disabilities, youth who are limited English proficient, Black, or Hispanic are not only overrepresented in juvenile justice settings, but also face systemic and structural inequities that can compound existing challenges. Common challenges for youth who are re-entering include:

- lack of education or employment preparedness
- return to home environments that are not suitable for productivity
- return to community environments that can lead to recidivism
- mental health challenges stemming from social and disciplinary isolation (e.g., separation from family and friends, solitary confinement) and other traumatic experiences prior to and during incarceration
- delayed, restricted, or revoked privileges or benefits (e.g., license, health insurance, mental health services, food assistance)
- limited education and employment opportunities due to stigma and federal, state, or employer restrictions

The increased use of technology to aid in social distancing during COVID-19 can help to address some of the challenges that youth face during re-entry but may also exacerbate existing challenges or introduce new
challenges. The next sections consider the bridges and challenges posed by use of technology, and strategies for states and local agencies to promote the effective use of technology.

Transitions and Use of Technology

Bridges

Technology use can be a convenient tool for accessing needed services and supports.

1. **Access to education and career resources:** Youth may have inadequate access to a quality education or career training opportunities while in a facility, which can impede smooth transitions due to a lack of foundational knowledge, inadequate preparation, or not knowing what to expect. Use of technology can promote access to learning materials and accommodations, college preparation, or career and technical education. Additionally, use of technology can support one on-one interactions for more in-depth support and guidance such as through tutoring or informational interviews with employees in fields of interest.

2. **Flexibility of technology platforms:** Because of issues such as access to transportation or location of providers, visiting providers or adhering to appointments can be difficult. However, use of technology during COVID-19 has better equipped providers and recipients to engage virtually. For youth, virtual engagement can aid in continuation of services via telehealth or improve access to high-quality services.

3. **Access to support networks:** Use of technology can facilitate connection to networks that might have previously been inaccessible, such as with peers also navigating re-entry or with mentors who have achieved education or career goals following re-entry. Connections with peers or mentors can help youth to expand their social networks, practice prosocial skills, and develop supportive relationships. Building such support networks can counter experiences of social isolation and disapproval and strengthen emotional support following re-entry.

Challenges

Issues related to the accessibility of technology and how it is used have the potential to impede successful transition and re-entry.

1. **Limited or no access to technology at home:** Youth who are incarcerated are more likely than other student populations to be in communities where access to resources, like the internet, is limited, with approximately 59% of parents with lower incomes reporting that their child will face at least one digital obstacle (e.g., using cellphone for school work). COVID-19 has illuminated the digital divide in such communities, with challenges around device access, internet connectivity, and physical spaces with limited privacy to support productivity and learning.

2. **Ineffective use of educational software or platforms:** When youth have limited access to technology, they most likely have limited familiarity with technology. Even with technology access, youth may not be adept with navigating its functionality or effective use. Unfamiliarity or limited
skills may lead to frustration and disengagement, which underscores the need for technology and digital literacy.

3. **Safety and risk**: Use of technology can expose youth to a range of risks such as safety and privacy concerns. For example, maintaining confidentiality may be challenging for providers of virtual counseling or health services in cases where youth lack privacy in the home. Youth may also be exposed to websites, activities, or networks that compromise their safety, serve as a distraction, or place them at risk of recidivism. Additionally, though youth may be familiar with and prefer to engage with transition coordinators or other service providers via social media platforms, these and other unsecured platforms pose risks to confidentiality.

**Example**

Consider a rising 9th grade student, Dallas, who is transitioning home after being detained in a residential juvenile correctional facility. Prior to entering the juvenile facility, Dallas attended a middle school in person but will now be attending a high school virtually due to the COVID19 pandemic. With changes in school and grade level already a major adjustment, the new virtual learning format only compounds transition challenges. To adjust to the new school experience and academic rigor, Dallas may benefit from additional support with learning and navigating the technology needed for his new school. Dallas is also trying to stay in compliance with requirements that are part of his release from the juvenile facility, but limited internet and transportation access makes this difficult. Dallas is serious about not returning to a juvenile facility but is feeling a bit defeated because there are not many other peers that have been through a similar situation. In cases like Dallas’, technology use has the potential to both support and impede successful transition and re-entry. Here is how Dallas’ transition team bridges technology gaps:

- identifies community-based program that provides portable internet modems and laptops
- connects Dallas with the school psychologist and office of career guidance
- school psychologist offers mental health support via telehealth
- guidance counselor finds a mentor who meets with Dallas biweekly via videoconferencing to discuss personal and professional goals
- guidance counselor locates a digital literacy class at the local community center that Dallas joins remotely once a week
- probation officer connects with Dallas via smartphone or computer videoconferencing

**Strategies for Effective Use of Technology**

Key state and local educational agency personnel (e.g., heads of State correctional facilities, heads of local educational agencies) can anticipate the challenges and benefits of technology use and draw upon Title I, Part D program funds to implement strategies to support technology access, strengthen technology and digital literacy skills, and optimize monitoring probation and parole compliance and service delivery as part of transition planning and aftercare.

**Technology Access**

State and local agencies can support youth in identifying ways to access technology if technology is not readily available. In addition to utilizing TIPD funding for provision of devices and increasing access to broadband or other technology supports, agencies can also seek out partnerships, such as with libraries,
community centers, or faith institutions that may have computer labs, for example, that youth can access during dedicated timeframes.

**Technology and Digital Literacy Skills**

State and local agencies can support youth in developing their technology and digital literacy skills, such as basic use of devices, understanding digital environments, or exploring and researching. Additionally, a focus on digital citizenship more broadly can help to address other concerns such as online safety and awareness of risks to privacy and confidentiality. States can work with school systems to develop a plan for helping students to strengthen these skills or partner with community organizations to provide training to youth.

**Monitoring and Service Delivery**

State and local agencies can strengthen efficiencies in monitoring compliance of youth probation or parole requirements and service coordination and provision through technology use. Technology can be used by aftercare coordinators to manage large caseloads and prioritize those at higher-risk for recidivism for more intensive or in-person monitoring. Technology use can also help with coordinating and delivering services prior to and following re-entry, such as connecting with facility counselors, involving families, and building rapport with and engaging youth. Because youth may experience screen fatigue due to using technology and virtual platforms for a number of needs\(^{\text{xii}}\), particularly during COVID-19, monitoring and service delivery activities should take this into account (e.g., timing, frequency) to increase likelihood of engagement.

As agencies strategize on how to support youth, they might also consider developing a context-specific resource or repository for youth to access trainings and commonly used resources, answers to frequently asked questions, and information about accommodations that they are entitled to receive from educators and employers. The following tables share ways that digital tools, partnerships, education and planning can be used to build bridges and minimize challenges related to technology use.\(^{\text{1}}\)

**Table: Example Pathways for Use of Digital Tools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Examples, Suggestions, and Resources</th>
<th>Type of Assistance Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection to resources</td>
<td>A web-based phone application with a list of community resources along with available services, eligibility, contact/location/hours information</td>
<td>Resources, Flexibility, Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral, treatment, coaching(^{\text{xiii}})</td>
<td>Evidence-based re-entry programs that reduce recidivism and provide wrap-around services</td>
<td>Resources, Flexibility, Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision, caseload management</td>
<td>Smartphones (e.g., videoconferencing, text messaging, speech-to-text messaging), artificial intelligence-enabled smartphones to facilitate reentry (e.g., monitor risky behaviors and compliance), kiosks(^{\text{xiv-xv}})</td>
<td>Flexibility, Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table: Example Pathways for Partnership and Funding

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<th>Goal</th>
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<th>Type of Assistance Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with libraries</td>
<td>Libraries with funding to support statewide reentry program (e.g., online learning, digital skills)</td>
<td>Resources, Support, Access, Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community coordination</td>
<td>Federal, state, or local resources that offer free or low-cost internet and devices, such as for HUD-assisted housing residents</td>
<td>Resources, Support, Access, Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate partnerships</td>
<td>Corporate and community partnerships to increase digital literacy of youth and adults who were formerly incarcerated</td>
<td>Resources, Literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Example Pathways for Education and Planning

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<th>Type of Assistance Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital citizenship</td>
<td>Free lessons and curricula to support K-12 students’ digital citizenship</td>
<td>Literacy, Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology preparedness</td>
<td>Expose youth who are incarcerated to advanced technology</td>
<td>Literacy, Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and risk assessment</td>
<td>Chief Information or Chief Privacy Officers</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
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Suggested Citation

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3 Barnert, E.S. Perry, R., Azzi, V.F., Shetgiri, R., Ryan, G., Dudovitz, R., Chung,
Youth Who Are Incarcerated: Transitions and Technology Use


