

Serving Incarcerated Individuals

A guide that shares effective digital inclusion practices in serving incarcerated individuals

OVERVIEW

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) names incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility, as one of the eight Covered Populations that the Digital Equity Act grant programs are intended to benefit. Every State or Territory may have its own definition of “incarcerated persons,” in accordance with its own laws and regulations, and Digital Equity Plans should address incarcerated individuals as defined by each State or Territory.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)¹:

 **6.9M**






people are on probation, in jail, in prison, or on parole in the United States at any one time

 **600,000**

people are released from state and federal prisons each year

DIGITAL EQUITY OUTCOMES

Investing in broadband infrastructure and digital skills can empower incarcerated individuals and help enhance their chances for success as they re-enter society. In the State Digital Equity Plans, States must present measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital inclusion for each Covered Population in that State. These measurable objectives should impact and interact with the State’s equity outcomes named in NOFO Section IV.C.1.b.i.3. Examples of investments in digital inclusion that align with the [equity outcomes](#)² are listed below.

Digital Equity Outcomes	Digital Inclusion Activities
 Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telehealth and up-to-date electronic records management can facilitate preventative and/or specialty continuity of care when transferred to new facilities• Telehealth in combination with in-person and virtual visits from family and loved ones can result in mental and behavioral health benefits, particularly for incarcerated youth
 Essential Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships with social service agencies to provide devices, digital skills training, technical support, and wraparound services• The digital skills necessary for the reinstatement of vital documents (e.g., driver’s licenses)• Teaching people under pre-trial detention how to use videoconferencing to effectively participate in hearings
 Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training to develop & hone skills needed to re-enter workforce upon release• Workforce re-entry programs to integrate returning citizens
 Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remote learning to fulfill GED requirements and/or receive other certifications• Utilizing a mix of in-person and virtual learning opportunities can provide greater educational attainment
 Civic & Social Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information needs while incarcerated including legal aid, entertainment, news, and education• Support for returning to civic life and community participation and reducing recidivism

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INTERNET
FOR ALL

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GETTING STARTED: RESOURCES

As a Covered Population, incarcerated individuals experience unique barriers to digital equity due to limits placed upon them under correctional control, lack of specialized resources, and environmental barriers such as rurality that drives lack of access to services. The specific laws and regulations that govern serving incarcerated individuals in each state present a critical need for thoughtful and intentional work with trusted advocacy groups and those with lived experiences of incarceration. Identifying a digital equity approach that serves incarcerated individuals in your state starts with:

Understanding Correctional Education



[Building the Technology Ecosystem for Correctional Education](#)³

This brief by the U.S. Department of Education is designed to help education and corrections leaders understand key issues in adopting and integrating technology to support instruction and education.



[Advancing Technological Equity for Incarcerated College Students](#)⁴

This resource by Ithaka S+R explores approaches to technological advancement for incarcerated college students through interviews with Department of Corrections education administrators across the U.S. as well as with active third-party providers in the prison system.



[Five Years of Expanding Higher Education Programs in Prisons, 2016-2021](#)⁵

This fact sheet by the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) explains the benefits of postsecondary education people who are incarcerated, including rates of recidivism.

Identifying Distinct Challenges for Different Communities



[Planning a Reentry Program: A Toolkit for Tribal Communities](#)⁶

The Bureau of Justice Assistance at the U.S. Department of Justice created this toolkit to aid development and improvement of reentry programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives, including developing job training programs that teach technology skills.



[Young Adult Diversion Toolkit](#)⁷

The U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, funded the Young Adult Diversion Technical Assistance Initiative to help diversion programs connect justice-involved young adults with special education, career and technical education, and other workforce development opportunities.

Identifying Existing Resources



[Higher Education in Prison](#)⁸

Alliance for Higher Education in Prison has directory and information of Higher Education Programs in prison. This source provides statistics about programs and contact information to aid states in research and stakeholder engagement.



[The National Reentry Resource Center \(NRRC\)](#)⁹



The National Reentry Resource Center contains a directory of all current Second Chance Act grantees around the country comprehensive reentry grant profiles for each state to identify organizations already working with incarcerated or re-entering individuals.





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EXAMPLES

Key:  Examples of serving those who are currently incarcerated  Examples of programs to support returning citizens



New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP)¹⁰

  NJ-STEP is an association of higher education institutions in New Jersey that works in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJ DOC) and State Parole Board to “provide higher education courses and assist in the transition to college life upon their release into the community.”

Oregon Youth Authority (OYA)¹¹

 OYA partners with local school districts and education service district to provide education to youth on parole or probation who do not yet have a high school diploma or GED with education and vocational training in areas like computer science.

Queens Public Library Correctional Outreach¹²

  The Queens Public Library offers programs and services for those currently or formerly incarcerated and their loved ones. Their programs include "See You on the Outside" which prepares individuals for reentry and "Digital Connect: Technology Reentry Program" which equips people with vital tech resources and digital skills training.



John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity¹³

  The Institute “opens doors and eliminates barriers to success for people who have been involved in the criminal legal system” through creating access to higher education, supporting career pathways, and advocacy.



Launch Code¹⁴

  Based in St. Louis, this tech nonprofit's JusTech program supports incarcerated peoples in developing programming skills via training to land tech jobs. Launch Code partners with the Missouri Department of Corrections, Saint Louis University Transformative Workforce Academy, The Prison Education Project at University College at Washington University and CVC Capital partners.

The Last Mile (TLM)¹⁵

  TLM's “mission is to provide opportunities for personal and professional growth for justice-impacted individuals through education and technology training,” including digital skills trainings on web development to incarcerated people in 17 state facilities across 6 states. The Last Mile's workforce re-entry program helps incarcerated individuals find jobs in tech and business.

The Prison Scholars Fund (TPSF)¹⁶

  TPSF is a nonprofit organization that “provides education and employment assistance to current or formally incarcerated peoples.” TPSF Digital Navigation and Workforce Development Reentry Program for Washington residents includes a laptop, free internet access for a year, and job skill training. Participants in the program may be invited to apply for the PSF's coding bootcamp in partnership with Coding Dojo to accelerate careers in tech.

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A story of digital inclusion by James Monteiro



An autobiography of James Monteiro, CEO and Founder of Reentry Campus Program that highlights the importance of digital inclusion

I was incarcerated at the ACI when I was 18 years old. I had dropped out in my first year of high school and only had the equivalent of an 8th grade education.

Needless to say, that upon release I had very little to stand on, could get a dishwashing job or maybe a warehouse job, but never could land anything that would allow me to earn a livable wage and always ended up going back to prison.

The last time I was incarcerated I was provided with an infographic of the correlation between increased education, wages, and employment and what struck me the most was that the more education one had obtained the more money they would make but more importantly, they were less likely to be unemployed.

From there I came up with the concept that, "More Education = More Money = More Freedom," and that's not necessarily physical freedom but more so freedom of choices that having an education brings about.

My \$3 a day job was working in the Employment Resource lab as a TA for the instructor of the class. As a result of me working in that capacity while incarcerated I had access to a computer with Career Scope, O*NET, Winway Resume, and Mavis Beacon Typing tutorial. For the entire 8 years that I was working as a TA while incarcerated I spent every moment I could on the computer first learning how to type, learning career scope interest inventories, researching different careers, pay rates, employment trends, and educational attainment that would enable me to work in the particular field that I had researched that would allow me to sustain myself and a family once I was released.

I built a resume towards the field that I had landed on, because of my research from Career Scope and O*NET, of what I already had accomplished and then planned out the rest of my time of incarceration to fill in the gaps of what I was missing. I had the experience of being lifeline suicide prevention counsel from a previous 3 dollar a day institutional job along with the 3 dollar a day job that I was working as a TA for the employment readiness counselor and some other certifications that I had attained while incarcerated. What was clear was that I had the skills and abilities but was missing the educational credentials that went along with the position.

I registered for the GED program and once I had obtained my GED, I began researching and writing to educational programs that would allow me to obtain the post-secondary educational credentials needed to be able to obtain employment in my field. There were no post-secondary educational opportunities in the prison that I was confined in, so I registered for an online program as if I wasn't incarcerated, had all my assignments mailed up to me, mailed in my papers, called my girlfriend on the phone and had her log into the online platform and proceeded to give her the answers over the phone for the online quizzes. When it came time to take midterms and finals, I begged the GED professor to proctor my exams for me and he would set me off in a room to the side of the GED class and proctor my exams. In a little over 2 years, I had completed all my coursework, had completed my associates degree and began to research BA programs. The cost from AA to BA jumped considerably and as a result I was unable to afford going back to school so I sat around in the prison for another 2 and half years waiting to be released so I could go further. My goal at the time was to at least get a BA for the career that I wanted to do.

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Upon release I worked a full-time job, a part time job, and went back to school full time and in a year and half post release obtained my BA degree in Community Development with Honors from RWU. It was at this moment that I fully began to understand the word FREEDOM. Freedom is not so much physical because it can be just as hard being locked out of society as it is to be locked up in prison. Once I obtained my degree, I began to see a difference in the employment that I was able to obtain and how marketable I became. Its 12 years post release and I can fully say that I have freedom....freedom of choice.

At the same time, with no regrets, I feel as though if I would have had guidance or access to more resources while incarcerated the first time such as programs like Career Scope, O*NET, Winway resume, and mavis beacon I might have not had to ever return to prison in the first place. With more technology at my disposal, I may have even been able to leave prison with a BA degree and go straight into a MA program post release.

Today I am the founder and Director of the Reentry Campus Program. The Reentry Campus Program is a program that focuses heavily on early advice and counseling towards career pathways that are tied into skills, abilities, and interest, along with advocating for more prior learning assessment credit obtainment for individuals entering these college programs. To my knowledge, we are the only program nationally to have online testing center for DSST and CLEP exams inside every facility within the RIDOC. Not only have I, because of the technology that was afforded to me while incarcerated in B-More City Pen, been able to obtain freedom post release, but I am now in a position to advocate nationally and provide the same opportunity to others post release.



James Monteiro and his Reentry Campus Program team

This story was excerpted from a personal testimony by James Monteiro, Founder/CEO of the Reentry Campus Program

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This document is intended solely to assist recipients in better understanding the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program and the requirements set forth in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this program. This document does not and is not intended to supersede, modify, or otherwise alter applicable statutory or regulatory requirements, or the specific application requirements set forth in the NOFO. In all cases, statutory and regulatory mandates, and the requirements set forth in the NOFO, shall prevail over any inconsistencies contained in this document.