



Using Technology to Provide Quality Remote Services

By David Hoff

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, day and employment service providers have had to quickly determine how best to provide supports for people they serve. For many this means transitioning to services and supports that can be provided remotely. This brief is one in a series developed to help community providers continue to provide services to those who are currently working, seeking employment, or engaged in community-based day supports.

During this time, we are all learning how to best support the people we serve. We welcome your feedback and ideas as we all work together to provide services that help people to continue to work towards their goals while staying safe and healthy.

ICI COVID-19 resources: covid19.communityinclusion.org

During the COVID-19 pandemic, employment and day service providers are finding new ways to provide support to people with disabilities. Technology has become an essential tool in doing so. Before providing remote supports, direct support professionals need to know what the technology options are for each person and develop a plan to provide services remotely.

This brief focuses on the various options and technology for delivery of services remotely, and considerations in doing so. Topics covered include access to technology, use of technology, security and safety considerations, family and guardian issues. At the end of the brief are a series of resources that can be helpful in addressing technology related issues.

PART 1: Hardware and Devices

What Hardware and Devices are Available?

A starting point is considering what devices people you support have available to them. It is also important to know the operating system as some apps such as FaceTime are only available with one operating system. The following is a general checklist of options to consider. At the end of this publication is a detailed worksheet that can be used to determine technology options.

Types of hardware devices

- ▶ Computer: PC or Mac
- ▶ Tablet
- ▶ Smartphone
- ▶ Cellphone (non-smart)
- ▶ Landline telephone

Hardware capabilities

- ▶ Sound: Speakers and/or access to headphones or earbuds
- ▶ Video camera

Internet

- ▶ Does the individual have internet?
- ▶ Does the individual have sufficient internet strength/bandwidth?
- ▶ Are there any restrictions on the individual's use of the internet?

**PART 1:
Hardware and Devices**

**PART 2:
Technology Platforms and Apps**

**PART 3:
Using Technology**

**PART 4:
Remote Supports When Technology
Options Are Limited**

**PART 5:
Security and Safety Considerations**

PART 2: Technology Platforms and Apps

It is important to choose a technology platform that is readily available to direct support professionals and that provides access to people receiving supports as simply as possible. Ideally organizations should identify the platform that can be used across the agency and for as many people receiving supports as possible. The use of multiple platforms can create confusion and increase the need for technical support at a time when resources are limited.

Choosing Platforms and Apps

Consider the following when selecting:

- ▶ the availability of the technology for both staff and the individual
- ▶ the features of the technology in terms of meeting the needs of service delivery
- ▶ the skill and capacity of the staff and individual in using the technology
- ▶ the cost of the technology
- ▶ the security of the technology
- ▶ the accessibility of the technology specific to the accessibility needs of the user

Video Platforms and Options

If you are going to use live video, in deciding which platform to use, consider the following:

- ▶ Are you just trying to connect with someone via audio and video?
- ▶ Are you connecting with one person at a time or groups?
- ▶ Do you need a chat function?
- ▶ Do you need the ability to share materials?
- ▶ Do you need other features?
- ▶ Are there video platforms already installed on the staff member or individual's computer or device?

Key considerations in technology platforms:

- ▶ Availability
- ▶ Accessibility
- ▶ Features
- ▶ Skill of users
- ▶ Security
- ▶ Cost

There are a wide variety of video options. The following are a few popular platforms:

1. [FaceTime](#)
2. [Facebook Messenger](#)
3. [Google Duo](#)
4. [Google Hangouts](#)
5. [Google Meet](#)
6. [Google Classroom](#)
7. [GoToMeeting](#)
8. [Microsoft Teams](#)
9. [Skype](#)
10. [WebEx](#)
11. [Zoom](#)

The resource section contains articles that provide summaries of these various platforms as well as a number of additional platforms.

Apps

In providing services remotely, consider the wide range of Apps available for computers and smart devices, that can help with accessibility (voice to text, captioning, etc.) as well as supporting learning and sharing. However, staff should be cautious in requiring individuals to sign up for or download apps.

(For additional information, see the publication in this series [Assistive Technology and Apps for Individual Supports.](#))

Social Media

Social media can be used as part of remote service delivery. For example, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram can be used for broadcasting video live or sharing prerecorded video.

In general, these tools should not be used to provide supports to individuals or small groups. However, they may be a good tool for community building or helping people you support to connect with each other. Twitter can be used as a message board and for exchange of ideas, and live Twitter conversations can be a way to quickly exchange ideas and thoughts in a group. Also, particularly at a time of physical distancing, social media can be a helpful way for individuals to stay connected and provide peer-to-peer supports.

As with all technology, address any questions or concerns about security and safety. [ConnectAbility](#) has resources on use of social media by people with intellectual disabilities, including how to stay safe. (Note: access to simplified [Facebook](#), which may be easier for some individuals to navigate, is at [https://m.facebook.com/.](https://m.facebook.com/))

PART 3: Using Technology

Once technology has been identified, the next step is to determine how you can use it to provide services and supports.

Skills and Supports in Using Technology

After identifying the technology resources available at home, assess the individual's ability to use those resources. Ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ What are the individual's current technology skills? Which of the devices identified do they know how to use? What are the best ways for them to put their skills to use?
- ▶ Can someone in the individual's home assist them in setting up technology? For example, can someone turn the computer on, and log the individual in for a video conference? This may be all they need in order to receive services remotely.
- ▶ Can someone in the individual's home assist them in using technology while services are being delivered? If so, follow the standard rules of natural supports and minimal intrusion. The person assisting needs to know they are there strictly to provide support in use of technology as needed, and the individual is to be allowed to use the technology independently to their maximum capabilities. The support person should not answer questions on the person's behalf.
- ▶ Is the individual capable of increasing their skills in use of technology? If so, this may be an area to work on as part of service delivery.

Teaching People How to Use Technology

Review the following with individuals when beginning provision of remote services:

- ▶ **The technical aspects of using technology:** how to speak, how to mute, using the camera and video display, how to display items, how to use the chat, etc.
- ▶ **Protocols for using technology:** muting when not speaking, how to "raise your hand" when you want to speak, being in a quiet and private area, confidentiality, etc.
- ▶ **Safety and security:** how to ensure that you are safe when using technology

Getting Others in the Home Comfortable With Technology

If an individual is living with their family, housemate,

or has residential staff, one of the challenges can be the limited knowledge of others in the home in terms of understanding how to use technology. If this is the case, as important as it is to work with the individual in terms of accessing technology, it may be just as important to spend time working with family members, housemates or residential staff to:

- ▶ provide instruction and guidance on how to use technology
- ▶ provide instruction and guidance on how to support the individual in the use of technology
- ▶ provide coaching on how to be effective in a support role (e.g., having them set up the technology and being available to assist as needed, but not sitting with the individual)

Accessibility of Online Platforms and Technology

While some platforms and technology are better designed for accessibility than others, many pieces of technology are neither inherently accessible or inaccessible. It is often a matter of understanding the features of technology, knowing the needs of the user, and offering choices. Consider three basic questions:

1. What are the accessibility needs of the user?
 2. How can the technology being used be made accessible to meet those needs?
 3. Are there technology alternatives that might be better?
- A. Start by considering the accessibility needs of the individuals you are working with. Ask them about their accessibility needs and what would make the experience most beneficial to them.
 - B. Become familiar with the various accessibility features of the technology you are using. You may be surprised to find the wide array of features within existing technology. For example, many computers have text to speech, and PowerPoint has an automatic live captioning feature. In addition, consider possible ways to supplement that technology (e.g., having a sign language interpreter on video, using live closed captioning, using a voice-to-text app or device).
 - C. Help individuals understand their accessibility needs and how to meet those needs.
 - D. Remember there are often multiple ways to make technology and information accessible. Start with the question: "What are we trying to accomplish?" rather than presuming the person needs a specific type of accessibility or accommodation.

PART 4: Remote Supports When Technology Options Are Limited

If there is limited access to technology, consider the following options:

Hardware

- ▶ Is there technology available to others in the home (family member, housemate, staff) that the individual could borrow?
- ▶ Is there any way of getting hardware technology to the person (purchase, contribution, borrowing, etc.)?
- ▶ Does the individual have media streaming/on-demand for their television? If so, you can broadcast live or via taped video over YouTube. Facebook Watch or Instagram TV are also possible alternatives.

Internet Access

- ▶ Is it possible to get internet installed in the individual's home?
- ▶ Is it possible to purchase an internet hotspot device for the individual? Can they use their phone as a hotspot?
- ▶ Does someone else in the home have access to internet (including through a hotspot) that the individual could use?

Alternatives to Internet

If a person's only piece of technology is a land line or non-smart cell phone, or if their internet is limited, assistance and services can still be provided over the phone, with additional resources provided through other means. The following are a few options:

- ▶ **Remote storage devices:** If the individual does not have access to the internet, but has access to a laptop or other device with a USB port, a flash drive or other remote storage device might be an option. You can put materials on the flash drive and drop it at the person's home. The materials can then be reviewed over the phone. Exchange the remote storage device each week so the old one can be updated rather than continually purchasing new ones.
- ▶ **Paper packets:** If the person's only technology is a land line, materials can be printed and delivered to the individual's house.

- ▶ **Email:** If the internet connection is not strong enough to allow for video calls, send the information over email. The information can then be reviewed over the phone, with staff and the individual viewing the information on their respective devices.

If a person is experiencing challenges with food access, drop off a meal or food supplies with any packets of materials.

Finding and Paying for Technology

If additional technology access would be beneficial, and cost is an issue, consider the following:

- ▶ Identify sources for hardware (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.) at low or no cost. Use your local networks (both internal to your agency and external) to identify options in terms of funding or sources of equipment. [Tech Goes Home](#) and [TechSoup](#) have a variety of resources on getting low-cost technology. If equipment is refurbished, be sure it is sufficiently updated and good quality.
- ▶ If cost of internet or data plans is an issue, look into low-cost plans available from service providers. [AllConnect](#) has a listing of low-cost options.
- ▶ **Social Security Work Incentives** (PASS, IRWE, etc.) can be used to offset the cost of technology (hardware, software, internet, data plans) for individuals who are either working or have a work goal.
- ▶ Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services, public vocational rehabilitation, and other funding streams may pay for technology and technology plans. Vocational rehabilitation and other services may also provide technology on a loaner basis during this time.

Before getting into the details of technology, start with: "What are we trying to accomplish?" Then begin considering the available technology options and how to best use them to support individual service goals and objectives.

PART 5: Security and Safety Considerations

Security and Confidentiality in Using Technology

When using online platforms and applications, it is important to consider a variety of security and confidentiality issues:

- ▶ Review the security for the platforms you are considering, and use the platform that allows for maximum security and confidentiality.
- ▶ Review the security settings for the platform, and ensure that security is as strong as possible in terms of controlling who can participate, as well as sharing of information externally including sharing of participant information with the technology vendor and third parties.
- ▶ Be sure that only those individuals who have been authorized/invited are participating.
- ▶ Make sure that everyone is identified by name (no anonymous attendees, phone numbers only, etc.).
- ▶ Do not share direct links to online services publicly. If the event is open to the public, have individuals register to get the link.
- ▶ Do not record any online activities without permission, and make sure you have releases from the individual's parents or guardians if you record.
- ▶ Do not post any recordings that share the individual's personal information, such as their phone number or home address.
- ▶ When working with a group, require permission for individuals to share materials and information through the online platform.
- ▶ Develop guidelines on security and safety and review with participants when commencing with delivery of services online.
- ▶ Provide reminders regarding security and confidentiality requirements and guidelines at the beginning of each session.

Addressing Safety Concerns

There are often concerns about individuals safety in online platforms. As a result, individuals are sometimes limited in their use of the internet, or not allowed to get online at all. Given how helpful internet access can be in receiving services remotely, consider the following:

- ▶ Allow supervised access to the internet while receiving services.
- ▶ Use safety (parental) controls on the internet.
- ▶ Train the individual on safe use of the internet. At the end of this publication, there are a number of resources on internet safety that can assist with training.

Summary

Using technology to provide services remotely requires a systematic and thoughtful approach. There are a wide range of options available, as well as a series of issues to consider in terms of the capabilities of individuals to use technology, as well as safety and security. There are also creative ways to bridge the “digital divide” that impacts people with disabilities.

Building capacity to use technology to provide services remotely will not only be beneficial during the pandemic, but can help develop new and more efficient mechanisms for service delivery over the long term.

On the following pages is an Assessment Worksheet, for identifying options for technology for remote supports. This worksheet address many of the issues addressed in this publication. Using it will ensure a systematic approach to identification and implementation of technology for remote service delivery. Included is a blank worksheet as well as a completed sample. [A fillable MS Word version of this worksheet can be found on ICI's web page for COVID-19 materials.](#)

RESOURCES

Technology Organizations

- ▶ [AbilityNet](#) – Organization focused on accessible technology for people with disabilities
- ▶ [Tech Soup](#) – Organization focused on tech support for non-profits
- ▶ [Tech Goes Home](#) – Organization focused on bridging the digital divide
- ▶ [National Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance and Training \(AT3\) Center](#) - Assistive technology information and links to state assistive technology programs.

Technology Articles

- ▶ [Accessibility in Video Conferencing and Remote Meetings](#) (Drake Music)
- ▶ [Low Cost Internet Options](#) (AllConnect)
- ▶ [Keeping the ME in Media: Thoughts, Ideas and Tips for Supporting People with Intellectual Disabilities to Use Social Media](#) (Vita Community Services)

Video Platform Articles

- ▶ [Best video conferencing software 2020: free and paid solutions for business](#) (TechRadar)
- ▶ [The Best Video Conferencing Software for 2020](#) (PC Magazine)
- ▶ [How to Choose a Free Videoconferencing APP](#) (The Verge)
- ▶ [Best Video Conferencing Apps and Software for Accessibility](#) (The Big Hack)

Staying Safe Online: Articles and Resources

- ▶ [Staying Safe on Social Media and Online](#) – Booklet for people with disabilities (Mental Health UK)
- ▶ [Internet and Mobile Device Safety Tips](#) (Youth Organizing! Disabled & Proud)
- ▶ [Online Safety and Social Media](#) – includes video on internet safety (ConnectAbility Canada)
- ▶ [Staying Safe Online: Tips for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Their Loved Ones](#) Webinar for professionals and families (Arc of NJ)

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www.communityinclusion.org | www.employmentfirstMA.org

Technology for Remote Supports

Assessment Worksheet

Name:

Staff member:

Date:

Information provided by and relationship to individual:

Instructions: Record information on the charts below regarding technology available in the household. For each item, indicate whether it is available (Yes or No). For those items that are available, indicate the individual's ability to use the item (Yes, Limited, or No), and whether the individual needs support to use the item if it's an option (Yes or No). Add comments in the comment field. In conjunction with completing the chart, answer the questions below the chart.

DEVICES							
		For Items In Home				Comments	
Computer	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use				Needs Support (Yes/No)
			Yes	Limited	No		
PC Desktop							
Mac Desktop							
PC Laptop							
Mac Laptop							
Chromebook							
		For Items In Home				Comments	
Tablet	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use				Needs Support (Yes/No)
			Yes	Limited	No		
iOS–Apple (iPad)							
Android–Google							
Windows–Microsoft							
Blackberry–RIM							
		For Items In Home				Comments	
Smartphone	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use				Needs Support (Yes/No)
			Yes	Limited	No		
iPhone							
Android							
Windows Phone							
		For Items In Home				Comments	
Other Phones	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)		
		Yes	Limited	No			
Cellphone (non-smart)							
Landline							
		If In Home				Comments	
Television	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)		
		Yes	Limited	No			
Streaming T.V.							

HARDWARE FEATURES						
		For Items In Home				Comments
Video	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
		Yes	Limited	No		
Video camera on device						
		For Items In Home				Comments
Sound	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
		Yes	Limited	No		
Speakers						
Headphones or earbuds						

INTERNET			
	Yes	No	Comments
Available in household			
Sufficient strength			
Personal restrictions on use			

1. Technology platform to be used by agency:

2. Preferences of individual:

3. Accessibility considerations:

4. Restrictions on time of day that technology is available/can be used:

5. Summary of how technology will be accessed/used:

6. Additional notes:

Completed Sample Technology for Remote Supports

Assessment Worksheet

Name: Susan McCauley

Staff member: Jose Perez

Date: 4/10/20

Information provided by and relationship to individual: John McCauley (brother)

Instructions: Record information on the charts below regarding technology available in the household. For each item, indicate whether it is available (Yes or No). For those items that are available, indicate the individual's ability to use the item (Yes, Limited, or No), and whether the individual needs support to use the item if it's an option (Yes or No). Add comments in the comment field. In conjunction with completing the chart, answer the questions below the chart.

DEVICES							
		For Items In Home					Comments
Computer	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
			Yes	Limited	No		
PC Desktop	No						
Mac Desktop	Yes			X			Uses for simple games
PC Laptop	No						
Mac Laptop	Yes				X		Belongs to family member and used for work. Not available.
Chromebook	No						
		For Items In Home					Comments
Tablet	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
			Yes	Limited	No		
iOS–Apple (iPad)	Yes	Yes	X			Yes	Belongs to family member who can assist
Android–Google	No						
Windows–Microsoft	No						
Blackberry–RIM	No						
		For Items In Home					Comments
Smartphone	In Home (Yes/No)	Connected to Internet (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
			Yes	Limited	No		
iPhone	Yes	Yes		X			Uses only for telephone and to access maps online
Android	No						
Windows Phone	No						
		For Items In Home					Comments
Other Phones	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)		
		Yes	Limited	No			
Cellphone (non-smart)	No						
Landline	Yes	X					
		If In Home					Comments
Television	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)		
		Yes	Limited	No			
Streaming T.V.	Yes		X		X	Not a good option in general as only allows one way video. Possibly consider as a back-up.	

HARDWARE FEATURES						
		For Items In Home				Comments
Video	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
		Yes	Limited	No		
Video camera on device						On iPad
		For Items In Home				Comments
Sound	In Home (Yes/No)	Ability to Use			Needs Support (Yes/No)	
		Yes	Limited	No		
Speakers						
Headphones or earbuds	X	X			X	Will need assistance to use with iPad initially

INTERNET			
	Yes	No	Comments
Available in household	X		
Sufficient strength	X		
Personal restrictions on use	X		Is limited on access to internet, due to safety concerns.

1. Technology platform to be used by agency: Agency ABC plans to use Zoom for small group meetings for community-based day support.

2. Individual preferences: Susan is interested in trying services online.

3. Accessibility considerations: Sue has very limited reading and writing skills. Limit use of any chat function.

4. Note any restrictions on time of day that technology is available/can be used: None

5. Summary of how technology will be accessed/used: Discussed with family member. If notified in advance brother will get Sue set up with an iPad and headphones and will help her get on Zoom and will work with her to make sure she understands how to use it. Please email brother with the schedule in advance so he can manage with his work schedule. Sue has seen family gatherings on Zoom and has joined in to say hello. Not sure if she will want to participate in remote services on Zoom. Will give it a try.

6. Additional notes: