

## Families express dissatisfaction when in-person visits are discontinued

More and more jails are replacing in-person visiting with video visits, alarming families and the agencies that serve them. Administrators discontinuing in-person visiting will more than likely experience pushback from community and faith-based organizations, families, incarcerated individuals, legislators, and legal advocates who argue it is unjust to eliminate in-person visiting. For example, some American Civil Liberties Union chapters are exploring how best to build cases against facilities that replace in-person visiting with video visiting. Legislators are also getting involved. Washington, D.C., Council Member Muriel Bowser (supported by The American Bar Association) introduced a bill in 2013 requiring the D.C. Department of Corrections to reinstate face-to-face visits at D.C. Central Detention Facility.<sup>58</sup>

### Families say they need in-person visits with their incarcerated loved ones

“Being in the same room is something you can’t replace.”<sup>56</sup>

“We want to see him for real. We want to touch our hands through the window. It makes him feel better. Even just to kiss the window, it makes us feel better.”<sup>57</sup>

In determining whether video visiting should supplement or replace in-person visiting, stakeholders should consider the proven benefits of traditional visiting, the limitations of video visiting, the needs of each facility, the goals of the correctional

administration, and the laws, regulations, and political realities of the region. Visiting cannot replicate seeing someone in-person, and it is critical for a young child to visit his or her incarcerated parent in person to establish a secure attachment.<sup>59</sup> Administrators needing to balance the differing opinions of multiple stakeholders may find a hybrid visiting (in-person and video) approach a viable solution.

## Home-based video visiting has benefits and limitations

Home-based video visiting is becoming more common, and some correctional agencies are planning to phase in home-based video visiting to augment facility-based video visiting. This model is especially conducive to increasing visiting opportunities because it may not require as much staffing at a facility or community-based visiting center. At Washoe County jail in Nevada, home-based video visitors are more likely to be repeat visitors as compared to in-person visitors, suggesting that for some family members, video visiting is convenient and can overcome visiting barriers.<sup>60</sup> However, charging a fee for home-based video visiting is the norm. Families may not have access to a computer or mobile device with an internet connection, so visits could also be offered at a community-based site or at the facility to ensure access for all.

### Undersheriff responds to a petition calling for the reinstatement of traditional visiting

“I’ve read the petition and understand there’s some concern about the system and [that] the quality of visitation will be diminished,” Honea said. “That’s something we looked at very closely when we decided to invest in this technology.

Clearly, inmates being able to visit with friends and family is important. That issue is not lost on me, but we have to continually weigh our various options and approaches. The benefit we’ll gain from this was ultimately worth it.”— Undersheriff Kory Honea, Butte County Jail, California<sup>55</sup>

## Video visiting benefits the technology industry

The rapid expansion of video visiting is partly driven by the technology industry whose presence at correctional conferences is overwhelming. In fact, a 2012 Sentencing Project Report refers to the technology industry as “the newest player in the prison-industrial complex.”<sup>61</sup> Technology companies are quick to emphasize potential revenue streams, but some correctional administrators and technology companies caution that revenue generated by fees is nominal compared to a department’s overall budget. They claim that the real cost benefit of this technology is derived from the reallocation of labor resources.

Technology companies stand to profit from equipment and software sales, ongoing IT support, and revenue sharing contracts from video visiting fees. In fact, some video visiting contracts require that the agency discontinue in-person visiting.<sup>64</sup> Technology companies ultimately gain from this stipulation as visitors then must use and potentially pay for some or all video visits. Correctional administrators should be fully informed and advised before entering contracts and consider how stipulations ultimately affect correctional objectives and families.

## Potential drawbacks for corrections

Video visiting may not be an appropriate fit for every correctional setting. Challenges that may arise include the following:

- Start up and maintenance costs
- High financial risk for corrections’ owned and managed systems
- New technology is still evolving and rapidly changing
- A culture change may be required to obtain buy-in from correctional personnel
- Pushback from families, the incarcerated, and the agencies that serve them when video visiting replaces in-person visits
- Unions and employees may dispute potential staff reductions
- It may reduce the income generated from phone calls

### External stakeholders question if video visiting fees are fair

“... [W]e see clear evidence that the video communications market is currently driven by the same perverse incentives that caused market failure in the correctional telephone industry.”—Prison Policy Initiative<sup>62</sup>

“The outcry of a gouging of prisoners is what caused [telephone calls] to be regulated. They shouldn’t see visitation and communication with people’s families as a potential moneymaking operation.”—Claire G. Gastañaga, executive director of the ACLU of Virginia.<sup>63</sup>

## Additional Uses of Video Conferencing in Corrections

Leveraging technology for multiple purposes increases operational efficiency and return on investment so it is helpful to consider the multiple ways video conferencing can be used in a correctional setting. It is also helpful to glean lessons about the benefits and challenges of using video conferencing to meet correctional goals outside of visiting. While some research finds that video conferencing is as effective as in-person communication, other studies find that video conferencing is less effective than in-person communication. For example, research comparing the use of video conferencing for legal matters, such as bail and immigration hearings, as compared to in-person appearances suggests that credibility is questioned more often when an incarcerated individual appears via video conference. (For more information see Appendix 1A: Additional Uses for Video Conferencing in Corrections).

Departments across the nation are using video conferencing to increase operational efficiencies and strengthen programming in the following areas:

- Legal and Parole Board hearings
- Medical
- Mental health
- Education: video based instruction or tutoring for incarcerated individuals
- Interagency communication, oversight, and staff development

## Concluding Summary: Benefits and Limitations

**Table 1A: Potential Benefits for Corrections**

- Increases social connections for incarcerated individuals, potentially improving institutional adjustment and reducing recidivism**
- Visiting alternative for no contact populations**
- Potentially leads to a voluntary decrease in in-person visiting at the facility**
- May generate cost savings by reducing labor costs associated with in-person visits**
- May decrease movement and visitor processing and scheduling**
- May improve security by reducing movement and the flow of contraband**
- Potentially reduces traffic and congestion in waiting and visiting areas**
- More flexibility in scheduling video visiting hours**
- May improve institutional adjustment of the incarcerated by supporting social connectedness**
- May facilitate reentry planning with social support network**
- Innovative practice**
- Cross-systems collaboration (child welfare, family court, probation, etc.)**
- Allows for beneficial relationships with sustainable community-based partners**

**Table 1B: Potential Benefits for Incarcerated Individuals and Families**

- Removes some visiting barriers for families (e.g. distance, travel costs, etc.)**
- Increases frequency of communication with family and community members**
- Strengthens social support network**
- May be less traumatizing for children as compared to no-contact visits**
- Empowering for children to schedule and initiate visits with their parents**
- Expands communication options for child welfare-involved families**
- Increased visiting opportunities may prevent termination of parental rights**
- Comply with court-ordered visiting**
- Allows for family members with conviction records to virtually visit**
- Potentially allows children to visit when a facility has a "no children" visiting policy**
- Family involvement in reentry planning promotes positive outcomes**
- Builds connections in community for those who have no support system**
- Facilitates linkages with community-based providers prior to release**

**Table 1C: Video Visiting Challenges and Limitations**

**Financial and Logistical Challenges for Corrections**

- Start-up and maintenance costs**
- New technology is still evolving and may become outdated**
- Culture change may be required to obtain buy-in from correctional personnel**
- Pushback from families, the incarcerated, and the agencies that support them when video visiting replaces in-person visits**
- May reduce income generated from phone calls**
- Unions and employees may dispute associated staff reductions or reassignments**

**Financial and Logistical Challenges for Families**

- Users are dissatisfied with technological glitches and poor visual and audio quality**
- Families may lack the resources to own a computer and/or access the Internet**
- Families may not be able to travel to a video visiting site in their communities or at a facility**
- Video visit fees and service charges may be a barrier**
- Fee-based video visits may not be accessible to those who do not have a credit card**
- Technology may be confusing for visitors: especially young children, those with developmental delays, or individuals lacking computer or literacy skills**
- Illiteracy may be a barrier to setting up a video visiting account**
- Scheduling instructions and customer service may not be available in multiple languages**
- Video visiting may not be appropriate for individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments**

**Barriers to Meaningful Visiting**

- Video visiting cannot replicate in-person visiting**
- It is unknown how effectively relationships are established and maintained as compared to in-person visiting**
- Young children need contact visiting with their incarcerated parent to establish a secure attachment**
- Families and the incarcerated are dissatisfied when in-person visits are discontinued**
- Families dislike facility-based video visiting because they rather see their loved one in person when they spend time and money to travel to the facility**
- Families may not video visit, preferring to visit in-person**



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## CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter, along with the accompanying toolkit in the appendix is designed to assist with the implementation of video visiting in a correctional setting. Informed implementation will leverage operational efficiencies within an agency and provide a solid return on the investment. Thoughtful implementation will also benefit incarcerated individuals and their families. Video visiting can be a positive enhancement to in-person visiting when implemented in a way that balances the goals of the facility and the needs of incarcerated individuals and their families.

### Video Visiting Models

The variety and evolving nature of video visiting technology make it challenging to define the numerous approaches to video visiting. Regardless of the technology selected, there are basically three models that have emerged in terms of the locations where visitors may access video visits.

Community-Based	Corrections partners with a community, faith-based, or public agency (child welfare, parole, public library, etc.) which hosts video visits in the communities where visitors reside.
Home-Based	Visitors video visit from a home-based computer or mobile device.
Facility-Based	Visitors travel to a correctional facility to video visit.

Partnering with a community-based agency may make it easier for families to access the technology. Choosing a community-based agency that provides supportive services for the incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated, and their families ensures that video visits will occur in a supportive environment close to home. A home-based model is convenient for families, but families may not have the required technology or may not be able to afford the fees that are charged for home-based visiting. The facility-based model has not been well received by family and friends because it does little to make visiting any easier—the time and expense of travel is the same as it is for an in-person visit, with none of the benefits of an in-person visit.

Video visiting technology is still evolving, so it is best to examine current practices to learn whether new models, trends, or lessons learned have emerged since this publication.

## A Hybrid Approach to Visiting

Some facilities use a hybrid model, which combines in-person visiting with one or more of the video visiting models to meet the varying needs of corrections and families. For example, family and friends can enjoy the convenience of video visiting from home while still having the option of going to the facility for an in-person visit. Given what is known about the value of in-person visiting, a hybrid visiting approach is ideal because it ensures that the benefits of in-person visiting are preserved. It also ensures that a family's ability to visit is not limited by the barriers that video visiting may present.

### Contact visiting is best practice

American Correctional Association, Standard 4-4499-1:

"Written policy, procedure, and practice provide that inmate visiting facilities permit informal communication, including opportunity for physical contact. Devices that preclude physical contact are not used except in instances of substantiated security risk."<sup>65</sup>

Listed below are some considerations for determining the best model for video visiting in a particular system or jurisdiction:

- What impact do the proposed video visiting models have on incarcerated individuals and their rehabilitation, and their families and networks of support (positive and negative)?
- How does the location of the facility or facilities affect visitors' ability to visit in-person?
- Can visitors access video visits?
- What model meets the needs and goals of the administration or agency?
  
- What are the perspectives and priorities of the correctional administrators and staff at each facility?
- Can the existing infrastructure (number of buildings, space, layout, etc.) accommodate the model? If not, what changes are needed?
- Do you have the IT capacity to manage the proposed model(s)?
- What are the external stakeholders' attitudes towards the proposed model(s)?
- Are there legal regulations and statutes on visiting in your city or state?
  
- How would video visiting impact current visiting policies in terms of frequency, type of visits (contact/no contact), visitor eligibility requirements, etc.?
- How should the security level of the facility affect decisions?
- What are the other potential uses for the video visiting technology within the facility or system?



## Assessing the Setting: Prisons and Jails

The goals of an administration and the needs of the incarcerated will be influenced by the setting. The average length of stay is shorter for jail populations and turnover is high as compared to prison populations. Jail administrators may often prioritize safety, security and staffing needs over programming and reentry considerations because populations are generally short-term. On the other hand, prisons are more likely to use video visiting to enhance in-person visiting to promote family connections and to facilitate reentry. In-person visiting can be particularly labor intensive for small facilities, particularly small jails, that often have a limited number of staff on a single shift to dedicate to numerous tasks.

The needs of the incarcerated differ depending on the setting. Consider the following:

- Pre-trial vs. sentenced population
- Length of stay
- Population size
- Programming needs, such as mental health, medical, substance abuse treatment, reentry, etc.
- Variations by age, gender, and legal status
- Number of incarcerated parents with minor children

Logistical challenges will also differ across settings. As an early step, conduct a site survey at each facility to assess the building's structure, layout, and space availability. Older buildings may present logistical challenges because the wiring and infrastructure may need to be updated to accommodate the technology. These modification costs may far exceed the potential cost savings associated with video visiting.

The location of a facility will also influence which model is determined to be the best fit. Installing video visiting in prisons often present different challenges than jails, because state prison systems are often comprised of multiple facilities that are scattered throughout a state. If distance is a barrier for families, administrations may partner with community-based agencies to create video visiting centers throughout the jurisdiction, and/or offer home-based video visiting to increase visitor access.

### What are the legal implications of denying in-person visits for detainees?

The majority of the population at many jails are pre-trial detainees, who are constitutionally presumed innocent and are often thought to be entitled to less punitive conditions than those convicted of crimes.

Some argue that discontinuing in-person visits impinges on the rights of those who have not been adjudicated.

For example, York County, Maine's proposal to replace in-person visits drew opposition: "Faunce, who was a member of the state Board of Corrections until May 2011, said in his mind, the negative consequences of the proposal outweigh perceived benefits. He said underfunded courts have led to extended wait times for criminal trials and questioned whether removal of human contact for loved ones who haven't been convicted of a crime can be justified."<sup>66</sup>

## Creating an Advisory Group

An advisory group of key stakeholders can assist a correctional administration in exploring whether to implement and how best to implement video visiting. The group may include the following stakeholders: correctional administrators, officers, civilian staff, public affairs, and IT personnel; incarcerated individuals; family member of an incarcerated individual; adult child of an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parent; community-based partners; union representatives; advocates for the incarcerated and their families; Department of Child Welfare; and representatives from criminal justice system agencies (court, probation, parole, etc.). Collaboration garners respect and buy-in from correctional staff, ensures that multiple perspectives and needs are considered, leverages efficiency, and improves implementation. Advisors should be respected individuals who understand the organizational culture of the correctional agency and its population. Inclusion of incarcerated individuals and their family members also increases credibility for the “consumers” of video visiting.

### An advisory board was key for the Oregon Department of Corrections

“We believe a key part of successful implementation is a project team with representatives from all the work areas affected.”—Kelley Morton, Operations Division Policy Manager, Oregon Department of Corrections<sup>67</sup>

## Identifying Goals and Determining Feasibility

By identifying and prioritizing short- and long-term goals, sound assessments can be made about whether video visiting meets the needs of an agency and ensures that an appropriate video visiting system is chosen. (See Appendix 2A-1: Identifying Goals, for a checklist of considerations.) This is the time to be creative and forward-thinking in considering the ways that technology can meet current and future programming needs. If the “big picture” is not considered, an agency may be left with an outdated system in a few years. An advisory group offers multiple perspectives and could be tasked with identifying needs and goals.

A feasibility study of each facility/location will help an agency determine whether video visiting is a good fit. A study may include the following:

- Goals and potential uses (e.g., visiting, court appearances, reentry planning, etc.)
- Potential benefits
- Potential challenges and areas of concern
- Analysis of IT capacity and infrastructure
- Cost considerations (e.g., video visiting units, contracted services, IT infrastructure upgrade)
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Funding sources
- Site survey (e.g., facility layout, identification of areas to place units, movement pathways, etc.)
- Approaches to acquiring and servicing equipment
- Model type (e.g., community-based partner, home-based, facility-based, or hybrid)

## Case Example: Idaho Department of Correction Feasibility Study

Idaho DOC conducted a feasibility study in 2011 to determine whether video visiting was a good fit for their prisons. They determined that it would be costly to upgrade the IT infrastructure and that the facilities lacked satisfactory space. They predicted that a request to the legislature for a budgetary appropriation to upgrade the facility infrastructure, solely for this purpose, would likely be denied. Additional staff would be needed to escort incarcerated individuals to the video visiting area and to supervise the video visits. As a result of their thorough study, they decided not to proceed with video visiting. Here is an excerpt from their study:

### Issues / Areas of Concern

#### Security:

- Background checks, screening of visitors
- Verification of visitor identity
- Monitoring of [video visits] (staffing resources)
- Policy/code of conduct standards (managed as a phone call or as a visitor?)

#### Facility challenges (space/location):

- Design/layout issues (current facilities not designed to accommodate this service; noise factors)
- Offender movement and staffing impacts reduced if located in living areas

#### Staffing impacts:

- Security and visiting staff (escorting offenders to/from [video visitation] locations, visit monitoring)
- Background checks (same as contact visitors; charge a fee?)
- Ongoing impacts to IT, investigation, fiscal, and maintenance staff workloads

#### Customer Service:

- Sound and service quality, interruptions, interference
- Dependability may vary by facility and may be limited by available service providers
- Customer service/satisfaction (refund requests if service is not consistent)
- Visitor perceptions (impersonal; lack of physical contact)
- Viable option for family who otherwise could not visit (children, elderly, chronic or terminally ill, out-of-state); reduces family travel costs

### System Options and Variations

#### Types/Service Options:

- Analog system (old technology)
- Digital/IP-based web (newest technology)
- Satellite point-to-point (additional usage charges)

#### Configuration options:

- Facility-to-Facility (on-premise stations within incarceration facilities only; possibility of one shared visiting facility for S. Boise complex)
- Home-to-Facility (from any PC with a webcam and internet service to a facility)
- Station-to-Facility (visitors go to designated remote convenience station)
  - Church, probation/parole office, county jail, nonprofit, police sub-station, etc.

#### Facility terminal options: (includes viewing monitor, phone receiver or headphones, microphone/camera)

- Fixed/permanent stations (phone/video unit or kiosk); cost: \$3,000-\$10,000 per unit
  - Kiosks can also be used for grievances, commissary orders, inmate banking account view, sick calls, offender surveys, etc.)
  - Proprietary and neutral hardware options
- Laptops (least cost and durability; replacement/maintenance issues); cost: \$400 per unit
- Mobile units (for medical and close custody cells); cost: \$4,000-\$6,000 per unit

In January 2014, IDOC began revisiting the possibility of offering video visiting and kiosk-based communication services for the incarcerated through a contracted company. The outcome of their analysis is expected to be known in the fall of 2014.<sup>68</sup>

## Costs and Funding Considerations

An agency must weigh the potential cost savings against the costs of acquiring, maintaining, managing, and operating the video visiting system. Any system under consideration should integrate into existing operations and have a minimal net increase in labor costs. Be sure to differentiate between one-time costs (e.g. internet cabling) and ongoing costs (e.g. Internet data plans). (For more information see Appendix 2A-3: Identifying Potential Costs.) The long-term savings derived through the re-allocation of labor resources and improvements in the incarcerated individuals' behavior may ultimately offset the installation and maintenance costs.

Some video visiting systems can be used for multiple purposes (e.g., sick call, commissary ordering, e-mail, bail lookup, etc.), which potentially increases the return on investment. (See Appendix 1A: Other Video Conferencing Uses in Corrections for more information.)

### Costs can vary widely depending on the level of responsibility that is assumed for servicing and maintaining the system

#### Common approaches include the following:

- Self-owned and operated systems:** DOC purchases the video visiting system and is fully responsible for maintaining and managing the system (ongoing repairs, upgrades, and maintenance). This approach may have high upfront costs (equipment costs, installation, and infrastructure upgrade). This approach poses the highest financial risk to DOC because the agency is responsible for fully servicing the system. On the other hand, if the system generates revenue, then DOC retains 100% of the profits.
- Web hosting contract:** DOC owns the video visiting system and contracts out certain aspects of operation and maintenance. This option should only be selected if DOC has the capacity to maintain and repair the hardware and manage the system. DOC will be dependent on the ability of the video visiting company to provide the contracted services. The company might not provide scheduling services or other software. DOC and the company will likely share the financial risk of maintaining the system. DOC may be required to enter a revenue sharing agreement if revenue is generated.
- Full-service contract:** A video visiting company installs, maintains, manages, and hosts the entire system. DOC may buy or rent the video visiting system, or a company may donate the video visiting system units. This approach may have significant revenue sharing caveats and/or ongoing fees for service, especially if the system is donated. This approach requires less labor input from DOC as compared to the other approaches, but DOC is dependent on the company's ability to deliver quality services. Ensure that the company can respond quickly to service calls because costs can increase when the system is out of order. DOC may be able to package video visiting with other services into an existing RFP process (phone, commissary, e-mail, etc.).

The following funding sources could be considered:

- Government funding streams, contracts, or grants
- Corrections budget
- Foundation or private funding
- Financing (offered by some technology companies)
- Inmate general welfare fund
- Community-based agency partnership

## Developing a Request for Proposal

Numerous video visiting companies have emerged over the past decade and are routinely present at correctional trade fairs and conferences. The for-profit video visiting companies will emphasize the benefits of video visiting. Therefore, it is important to be informed about the potential challenges for corrections and the potential barriers for families. The intent of this guide is to provide an overview of basic considerations and questions to ask companies. (See Appendix 2A-4: Identifying a Company, for a checklist of considerations.)

The technology industry is constantly changing. Video visiting companies are being bought by larger communications companies that offer multiple services. Some telephone companies are now including video visiting as part of their service package as an incentive for correctional agencies to enter a contract for phone service. Overall costs may be lower if bundled services are offered (phone, e-mail, video, etc.).

To avoid committing to services that may not be a good fit, it is prudent to issue a request for proposal (RFP) only when a decision has been made to implement video visiting. Be clear on what services are needed, based on the identified goals and agency capacity, prior to meeting with a company. Becoming informed will help an agency understand the variety of service packages and be in a position to negotiate terms. For example, companies may provide video visiting systems and installation free of charge, but know that this is often in exchange for a revenue sharing agreement and may include conditions.

Part of being informed is seeing the video visiting system in action, which provides the best sense of a system's video and audio quality and software capabilities. Companies should be able to provide client references and to arrange a visit to another facility where the technology is being used.

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**It is important to explore whether the company is reputable, stable, and knowledgeable**

**Consider the following:**

- Is the company financially stable?**
- How many years of experience does the company have?**
- Does the company have industry partners?**
- Does the company have a proven track record?**
- Do they charge fees to video visiting customers? Are there service fees?**
- Do they require the elimination of in-person visiting?**
- Is the company sensitive to the needs of correctional agencies and the incarcerated and their families?**
- Has the company worked with a facility/system similar to yours?**

## Video Visiting Fees

Charging for video visits creates a barrier for many families and, as a result, potentially reduces visiting frequency. When a fee is necessary, it is best to offer some free visits. The price point should reflect the savings and convenience that the department of corrections enjoys, as well as the limited means of most families. Fees should be some portion of a visitor's savings in travel costs, but remain well within the means of families.<sup>69</sup> Consider surveying visitors to determine if and how much they are willing to pay for video visits. The system may be underutilized if the video visits are unaffordable.

Revenue generated by video visiting fees will likely be small compared to a department's overall budget, and they may not be a reliable income generator. Assuming video is widely used, agencies will need to determine how this revenue will be distributed: inmate welfare fund, video visiting company, community-based partner, returned to administration's budget, etc.

### Revenue generated by video visiting fees is often nominal

Minnehaha County Jail, South Dakota, collected approximately \$109,400 in video visiting fees over a two year period. But, "Sheriff Mike Milstead cautioned that the visitation money doesn't amount to much. . . The overall jail budget is approximately \$11 million."<sup>70</sup>

Determining whether a fee will be instituted and identifying a price point can be a part of the RFP process. Facilities usually set a price point in conjunction with the video visiting company that often provides a platform (i.e., website and/or kiosk) to collect video visiting fees. Video visiting contracts often include a revenue sharing agreement. In calculating a price point, determine whether visitors will be charged additional service fees by the video visiting company for scheduling and other services (registration fees, background checks, customer service, etc.). What looks like a good per-minute cost model can look less favorable once additional user fees are factored in. Be mindful that visitors may be required to pay with a credit card, which is a barrier for those who do not or cannot own a credit card. Offering a short-term introductory rate may encourage

visitors to begin video visiting. This rate should be clearly stated in the agreement with the video visiting company. A cancellation policy should be developed to determine whether and how visitors will be refunded when pre-paid visits do not occur, or when the video or audio quality is poor.

In August 2013, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) capped the interstate long-distance prison phone rates, reducing the revenue some correctional agencies receive from phone contracts.<sup>71</sup> Some phone companies are now offering fee-based video visiting services to replace lost phone revenue. Correctional administrators may also be tempted to turn to fee-based video visiting to replace lost phone revenue. Relying on the nominal video visiting revenue is not a long-term solution. Furthermore, existing phone contract benchmarks may not be met if community members begin using video visiting instead of phone calls, and video visiting fees may also be regulated in the future.

Companies may suggest that correctional agencies can generate revenue by selling advertising space to promote goods and services (bail bondsmen, lawyers, etc.) on the video visiting monitors. Some video visiting systems have the capability to sell pre-approved digital media to incarcerated individuals. Carefully explore whether these options are appropriate. At this time it is unclear how much revenue can actually be generated from this new area of commerce.

## Video Visiting System

The section provides a basic overview of commonly used video visiting systems. A video visiting system consists of the video units (equipment/hardware) and software, and requires an Internet connection. This connection may or may not need to be secure depending on the agency's policy. The longevity of any system should be considered because technology is rapidly changing. For example, some technology companies believe that a video visiting unit will be in every cell in the future, suggesting that some systems will become obsolete. Also note that a "state of the art" video visiting system will not be useful if it does not help an agency meet its identified goals.

### VIDEO VISITING UNITS

A standards-based system is the most versatile and connects to any other standards-based video conferencing system. A non-standards-based system that only connects to identical systems is limiting. For example, cell phones that only connect with the same cell phone brand are not as useful as cell phones that can call all other cell phone brands. A standards-based system allows for connections to other state, local, and community-based agencies with standards-based systems. If the video conferencing system is connecting to multiple sites, explore if licensing fees (for equipment and/or software) will be charged for each site.



FIGURE 2: VIDEO VISITING KIOSK

Some video visiting systems on the market today include:

- Video Conferencing Unit (+ monitor, camera, microphone)
- Kiosk (often provides multiple services such as court date schedule, bail, sick call, etc.)
- Self-Contained Video Unit
- Computer-Based Desktop Unit (+ monitor, camera, microphone)
- Laptop or Netbook (+ camera and microphone; may be included or purchased separately)
- Mobile Device, such as a smart phone or tablet
- Voice Over Internet Protocol (i.e., phone with video screen)<sup>1</sup>

Know what operating system is installed on the unit, and determine how often the operating system requires updating. Identify how the updates will be performed and who is responsible (correctional IT or contracted company). This is important because operating systems that require constant updates (e.g., Windows-based operating systems) may increase costs. Some operating systems have inhibitors to block updates, and some operating systems update automatically. (See Appendix 2A-4: Choosing a Video Visiting System, for a checklist of considerations)



**FIGURE 3: VIDEO VISITING AREA FOR VISITORS AT THE D.C. JAIL**

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<sup>1</sup> Phone and video calls are transmitted over an IP network.



## Software

Software applications are another consideration. For example, scheduling, facial recognition, encryption, monitoring, and tracking software are available. Determine whether the software is compatible with or built into the video visiting system being considered. An agency's IT department should be consulted to determine whether it has the resources and infrastructure to fully utilize the software. Make sure that the software is truly needed. For example, scheduling software may not be useful if only a small number of video visits are conducted per month. Software should be flexible and scalable.

Companies should be able to demonstrate software applications in use and provide a guarantee that the software can perform as advertised. For example, some correctional administrators interviewed for this publication stated that scheduling software was helpful, while others stated that some scheduling software is fraught with technical difficulties. Some families also report dissatisfaction with scheduling software.<sup>72</sup>

### Improving data collection and analysis

Software applications which integrate with existing applications, such as case records and/or management systems, are ideal. Data entered into the video visiting application (e.g., number of visits received, names of approved visitors, etc.) can be automatically synchronized with existing applications. This reduces data entry tasks and allows for efficient data collection and analysis.

Determine whether or not software costs are included in the overall video visiting system costs. For example, video conferencing software will likely need to be purchased and installed on computer-based systems (laptop or personal computer). Determine whether the agency or the company will be responsible for the purchase and installation of ongoing updates. (See Appendix 2A-5: Software, for a checklist of considerations.)

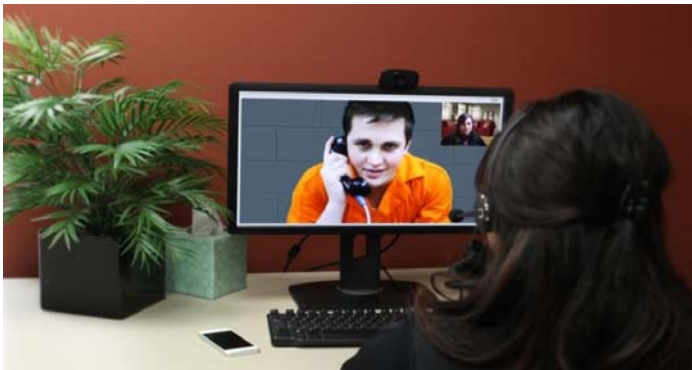


FIGURE 4: HOME-BASED VIDEO VISITING

## Internet Access

An Internet connection is required for the video visiting units (i.e., endpoints) to communicate with each other. It is ideal to use a high speed broadband connection to ensure high quality video and audio. Be mindful that the audio and video quality of a state of the art system will be compromised if it connects to the Internet using a low bandwidth or an antiquated connection, such as telephone dial-up or an ISDN connection. An agency's Internet service provider (ISP) can help determine what infrastructure is currently in place and what modifications may be needed. New cable may need to be installed if security concerns prohibit connecting the video visiting system to the facility's existing network.

Determine what the minimum recommended broadband width is for the system being considered, and be sure to have the required download and upload speeds. Broadband plans often have a higher download speed than upload speed because people primarily use the Internet to download data. However, video conferencing systems send (upload) and receive (download) data simultaneously. If an endpoint is a mobile device, choose video conferencing software that adapts to changing bandwidths, since mobile devices will be used in multiple environments. (See Appendix 2A-6: Internet Access, for a checklist of considerations.)

When the visitor's endpoint is based in the community, determine whether the visitor (home-based model) or community-based partner has the appropriate Internet access required to connect to the visiting system. It is best if home-based video visitors can test their system requirements before scheduling a visit. Consider providing a link on a DOC or contracted company's website for potential visitors to test their home computer and Internet connections to be sure they are compatible with the video visiting system.

## Security

A firewall protects a computer or an agency's network by controlling the flow of incoming and outgoing data, and it can also be configured to prevent certain types of data from being transmitted. The firewalls at each endpoint (the correctional facility, the community-based visiting site, or a personal computer's security software) may need to be configured to allow for information to flow between the endpoints. Generally, if a system is connected to a network, the agency's IT department can configure it as needed. In some circumstances, the ISP must configure the firewall to permit the transmission of video data.

### Automated scheduling may reduce staffing demands

"The result is a system that places the burden on the inmate instead of the officer. Inmates first enter e-mail addresses into the system for the people they'd like to visit with online. These e-mail addresses pass through a jail filter system and, if approved, a generic "visitation request" message is sent to the recipients. If the recipients agree to an online visit, the inmate is notified and the burden is again placed on them to schedule all their own visits using a calendar of available dates provided (online) by the jail . . . one deputy is able to watch over the whole process from a single location."—Sheriff Gary Raney, Ada County Jail, Idaho<sup>73</sup>

A correctional agency's Information Security Officer or IT security staff can be consulted to determine how the security requirements set forth by the agency may influence the type of video visiting system and Internet connection that is needed. Agencies requiring a secure connection may need authorization from their state's chief information officer or Office of Homeland Security. Consult with the video visiting company and the Internet service provider to learn about data encryption options.

Video visits can be recorded and monitored live or retroactively. Some monitoring software can terminate live visits. For example, a visit can be ended when too much skin is exposed or specific words are communicated. A policy will need to be developed to address how privileged communication, such as visits with a lawyer or clergy, will be kept confidential. Software can flag privileged communication so that it is not recorded.

If a recording of a video visit is used in a court proceeding, the defense attorney will likely ask whether the recording was edited or manipulated in any way. Inquire whether the video visiting provider can offer witness testimony about the recording's authenticity. A company may offer a proprietary format that eliminates the possibility of tampering or editing; however, this may become problematic if the correctional agency switches systems or works with a different company in the future.

## Policies and Procedures

New policies and procedures may be created, or an existing visiting policy or procedure can be amended. The advisory group may be tasked with developing new or revised policy and procedure. If you partner with a community-based agency it can be helpful to collaborate with them, especially when they are providing supportive services such as parent coaching or reentry planning. (See Appendix 2A-7: Policies and Procedures, for a checklist of considerations.)

### Key issues outlined in Oregon DOC video visiting policy

"Oregon DOC treats Video Interactive Phone (VIP) calls as phone calls. Oregon has a point system for managing the number of visits each inmate is allowed per month. By treating VIP calls as phone calls, ODOC did not directly impact the visiting system. VIP calls add to the number of ways inmates can make personal contact with friends and family, which is a department goal.

One of the more controversial issues when we first considered the VIP call service was the concern for protecting victims. Because the call recipient must positively accept a call from the [telephone] or VIP system, and can contact [the company] or ODOC at any time to block future calls, our executive leadership elected to allow contact as long as we have access to the audio and video recordings and each and every caller is positively identified. Acceptance of this decision required communication with parole and probation staff, district attorneys, and victims' advocates groups, as well as ODOC staff." — Kelley Morton, Operations Division Policy Manager, Oregon Department of Corrections<sup>74</sup>

## Where to Place the Video Visiting Units

Where the video visiting units are located (endpoints) can affect labor costs, flexibility of visiting hours, safety, privacy, visitor access, and utilization. For example, placing video visiting units in the housing dorm reduces movement, potentially allowing for staff to be dedicated to other tasks. When this option is not possible or desirable, consider placing the video units in a common area that reduces movement as much as possible. A site survey will help an agency assess where best to place the video units at the facility. A visitor survey can help assess where best to place the video units that are used by visitors. For example, a survey can reveal whether visitors may choose not to video visit when they have to travel to the facility or an inconveniently located visiting center.

It is very important to test the camera angles and room lighting upon installation, especially if video conferencing is going to be used for legal purposes, probation interviews, parole board appearances, and video visits with children. Poor audio and video quality may lead to negative perceptions about an individual's credibility, which may negatively influence legal outcomes for those appearing via video conference. (See Appendix 1A: Other Video Conferencing Uses in Corrections). Children may be scared or confused when the picture quality and audio is poor, or when they can only see part of their parent's face on the screen.

Children are most comfortable when video visiting is child-friendly. Consider placing the video visiting unit for visitors in an area that can accommodate toys and books. Consider providing identical toys and books at both video endpoints so incarcerated parents can read to and play with their children. A child-friendly backdrop behind the incarcerated parent is helpful for children who may become distracted or upset by seeing a correctional setting or unpleasant surroundings on the video screen. A community-based partner and/or civilian staff can provide children, the incarcerated parent, and the family with supportive services. (See Appendix 1B: Video Visiting with Children, for more information.)

Privacy is another important consideration at both endpoints. Visitors may see staff and other incarcerated individuals in the background if the video visiting units are located in the housing dorm. Visiting units could be placed in a secure area or partitioned off with a divider to improve privacy. The desire for privacy should not be assumed to indicate inappropriate communications; many incarcerated individuals fear having images of their family members seen by others.

### Privacy is a concern for families

"...[J]ail officials installed them right in the housing units. That means all the other inmates can hear the visits and see the screen. Tracey said when she was talking to her son, she could see other inmates leaning over him to listen in. "Where is the privacy?" Tracey asked. "Everybody is listening. Everybody can see."<sup>75</sup>

## Working with a Community-Based Partner

When partnering with a community-based agency to host video visits in the community, look for an agency that can provide some or all of the following characteristics:

- Is located in communities where large percentages of the incarcerated and their families live
- Is reputable
- Has the technical knowledge and infrastructure needed to access the Internet
- Provides services to incarcerated individuals returning to the community
- Offers supportive services for families and friends of the incarcerated
- Can provide safe and non-judgmental space
- Can provide a child-friendly environment
- Can prepare children and caregivers to video visit, and provide ongoing support
- Has the ability to process visitors and verify identification
- Provides hours of operation which are compatible with families schedules
- Has trained staff to monitor visits when it is required by DOC

A memorandum of understanding or contract is advised to ensure that both parties understand their financial responsibilities for the video visiting system, staffing, and other services provided. For example, who is responsible for upfront video visiting system costs and maintenance at the community-based site? A revenue sharing agreement can be included if fees are collected. (See Appendix 2A-8: Community-Based Partners, for a checklist of considerations when working with a community-based partner.)

### **Community-based partners can provide support to families**

Organizations that provide supportive services and offer safe spaces for families, who are often stigmatized, are ideal partners for video visiting. Hope House in Washington, DC hosts video visiting as well as provides a summer camp for children of incarcerated parents and a reading program in which children receive a recording of their incarcerated fathers reading a book.

The Osborne Association in New York provides supportive services to children before, during, and after each video visit. The Osborne Association also sponsors monthly peer activities for children, runs a youth advocacy program, and transports video visiting children to the facility to watch their mothers graduate from a parenting class. The Osborne Association also provides parenting programs in prisons and reentry services in the community, allowing for a continuum of care for video visiting families once their loved one comes home. Also consider partnering with local community centers, child welfare and human services offices, and communities of faith.



FIGURE 5: CHILD-FRIENDLY VIDEO VISITING ROOM AT THE OSBORNE ASSOCIATION IN NEW YORK CITY

## Develop a Communications Plan

A communications plan can be developed to inform and educate correctional personnel, incarcerated individuals, visitors, and the community about video visiting. Information should be individualized for specific facilities. According to correctional personnel interviewed for this guide, engaging these stakeholders prior to launching video visiting was a key ingredient to successful implementation. Consider developing tip sheets to help visitors prepare for video visits. Preparation is especially critical for children and their parent or caregiver in the community. A community-based partner that has experience working with family members of the incarcerated can help create tip sheets and convey information about video visiting to families. Information about the video visiting launch, rules and regulations, and scheduling instructions can be distributed in the following formats:

- Newsletters
- Department of corrections' website
- Community-based partner website
- Visiting room flyers
- Family handbook
- Frequently asked questions
- Brochures
- Media coverage

Advisory board members can promote video visiting by sharing information in staff meetings and during interactions with visitors, public agencies, and community-based agencies. "Inmate council" meetings are a good forum for sharing information with the incarcerated. Consider creating materials in multiple languages to meet the community's needs.

## Determining a Launch Schedule

Consider beginning with a pilot site if there are multiple facilities or dorms. Consider phasing in one model at a time when implementing multiple models (facility-based, community-based, home-based). Working out problems prior to large scale implementation may reduce pushback from staff, incarcerated individuals, and visitors. A pilot can help identify technological problems and unforeseen challenges. Implementing video visiting in phases may also counter resistance to large scale change.





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## CHAPTER 3: EVALUATING A VIDEO VISITING PROGRAM

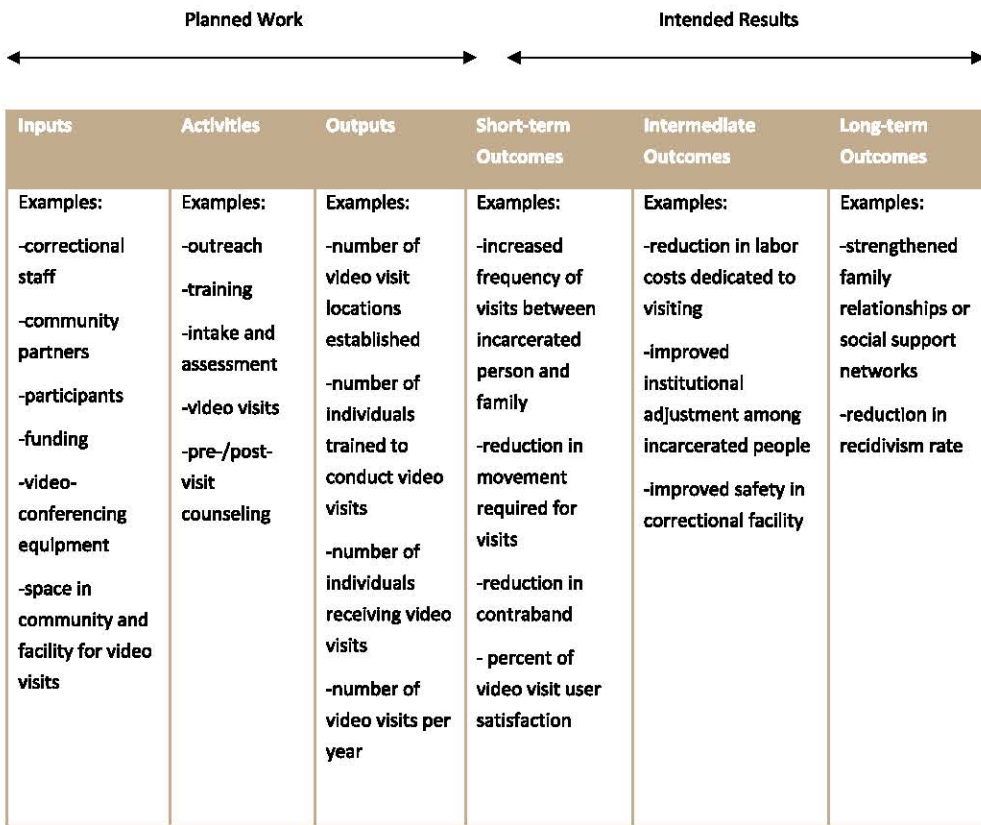
Establishing a video visiting program includes planning for the data that will be collected as the program gets underway. Information about the program will be needed and used for different purposes, which may include conducting quality reviews, providing reports to funders or partners, and making adjustments to the program plan or design. It is best to have a clear plan in place before start-up, including what information will be collected, what tools or instruments will be used to collect it, and who is responsible for managing the data. This chapter is intended to provide some guidance about how to plan and implement the evaluation activities associated with a video visiting program.

### Developing an Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan is a summary of what will be evaluated, how the information will be collected, and how the information will be used to guide decision-making about the program. It serves as a guide for each step of the evaluation process and establishes a timeframe for when information will be collected. It is important to establish an evaluation plan before a program even begins providing services, so that the necessary information is collected from the start.

The launching point for an evaluation plan is a clear program description which articulates the target population, the purpose and goals of the program, and a service delivery plan. A logic model is one tool that can be helpful in defining a program's planned activities and goals. It provides a graphic representation of what an agency plans to do as part of a program as well as what it intends to achieve in terms of results or outcomes. It is useful as both a program design instrument and as a program evaluation tool. There are many online resources that describe the process of developing a logic model, along with samples of logic models (See appendix 1X: Resources).<sup>76</sup>

**THE ILLUSTRATION BELOW SHOWS THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF A LOGIC MODEL:**



There are different kinds of evaluations, and developing an evaluation approach depends on a number of factors, including the developmental stage of the program (i.e., is it just starting up or has it been running for a while) and the purpose of the evaluation (i.e., how the information will be used).

A process evaluation is focused on the first three components of a logic model—the inputs, activities, and outputs. It is different from an outcome evaluation in that it looks at how the program is being implemented and/or delivered, rather than focusing on program results or impacts.

Questions that can be part of a process evaluation include:

- What services are being delivered?
- Are the services being utilized?
- How are services or program implementation different from what was planned?
- What barriers have been encountered in implementing the program?
- What is going well/not so well in the program?
- How are participants responding to the program? Are they satisfied with the services?

It makes sense for new programs to start with a process evaluation because it helps to determine whether or not the program is being implemented as expected and if there are any program quality issues that should be addressed. The information gathered through process evaluations can help to identify changes or improvements that should be made to the program before an outcome evaluation is conducted.

As the name implies, an outcome evaluation is designed to assess the results or outcomes of the program. It focuses on the last three components of the logic model—the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes of the program. An outcome evaluation is appropriate for programs that are relatively well established and stable, once wrinkles in the process have been largely ironed out. If an outcome evaluation is conducted too early in the life of a program, the results may indicate that the program is having little impact and it will be difficult to know whether this is because the program is truly ineffective, or because services are not being delivered in the way that was intended, or because it is just too soon to expect the kind of impact desired.

Outcome evaluation questions for a video visiting program depend on the goals of the program and could include:

- Is the program reducing contraband in the facility?
- Are people who are incarcerated building stronger support networks through video visiting?
- Are children developing stronger relationships with their incarcerated parents through video visiting?

When conducting outcome evaluations, evaluators use specific, defined measures to investigate achievement of some or all outcomes defined in the logic model. For example, evaluators of a program that aims to improve parent-child relationships through video visiting could select a survey that asks respondents to report on the quality of their relationship. If administered over time, i.e., pre- and post-participation in video visiting, the results could demonstrate an improvement in connectedness. Samples of surveys and research instruments can often be found online, which can be useful as references when establishing outcome measures.

Throughout the process of developing the program framework and evaluation design, it is helpful to seek the input and suggestions of multiple stakeholders. If an advisory group assisted in developing a video visiting program, then they may be very useful in also providing guidance on deciding evaluation goals and approaches. Using a participatory process that involves correctional staff, incarcerated individuals, families, and community members ensures that different perspectives are included in the program and evaluation design.

## Developing Data Collection Tools

Once it has been decided what information is needed about a program, the next step is to develop the tools or instruments to collect it.

**Forms**—Intake and assessment forms can be used to collect information about the participants in a program, including demographic, contact, and family information.

**Service Logs**—Paper-based service logs can be used to capture information about services, such as when video visits are scheduled, when they take place, and the duration of visits. Software is also available to schedule and track video visits, which eliminates the need to collect information on paper and then enter it into a data system. A video visiting system used by Washoe County Jail in Nevada, for example, allows for visits to be scheduled, logged, and reported on automatically (Campbell 2012).<sup>77</sup>

**Surveys**—Information about participants' experiences with a program can be gathered through surveys of incarcerated people and visitors, including what they like and do not like about the program, what suggestions they have for program changes, and if/how they feel they have benefited from video visiting. Surveys can also be used to collect information about staff experiences with a program, particularly if there are a large number of staff involved in the program or there is a desire to collect feedback from staff anonymously.

**Interviews**—Interviews can include one-on-one interviews with participants, staff, or other stakeholders, as well as group interviews such as focus groups. Interviews can provide useful qualitative information about a program and provide the opportunity to probe a question or issue more deeply than a survey might allow.

**Administrative records**—Facilities may already be collecting information about their ongoing operations that is relevant to evaluation questions and useful to include in an evaluation plan. For example, reports on contraband seizures can be used to track whether there are significant changes in the amount of contraband found over time and to evaluate if a reduction in contraband might correlate with the introduction of a video visiting program. An evaluation of a program that has a goal of reducing personnel costs associated with visiting might include fiscal records as part of the data collection plan, in order to compare costs before and after the start of the program. If a goal is to increase the number of individuals who have visits (virtual or in-person), then these contacts can be measured before and after the introduction of video visiting.

**Observational Tools**—Some video visiting programs observe visits and collect information about the interactions between the incarcerated individual and the visitor using observer rating tools. This approach is particularly relevant for video visiting programs that are intended to help strengthen relationships among family members and between parents and children. Researchers from the University of New Hampshire, for example, use observational tools that were adapted from a child welfare home visit checklist to observe and rate a parent's affect and confidence level during video visits conducted from two New Hampshire prisons. Parents are given feedback about the observations, in order for parents to understand how they can improve the quality of their interactions with their children.

## Data Systems

Collecting data for evaluation purposes does not necessarily require expensive or sophisticated data systems. In many cases, a simple spreadsheet in Excel can track the necessary information. Microsoft Access is a relatively simple database system that many organizations already have as part of their software tools. Online tools can also be very helpful, and some are free or low cost. There are a number of online survey tools that can be used for tracking survey results (even if the survey is administered on paper and data entered online, tools such as SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang can allow for useful analysis and reporting). Integrated video visiting systems that collect data automatically can reduce the amount of labor dedicated to the physical entry of data.

## Making Use of Evaluation Results

Evaluations should be designed to inform administrators about a program's performance and to collect data that can be used in decision making about program operations and development. An evaluation is a futile effort if it produces information that is never used. Therefore, it is important for an evaluation plan to include specifics about how data will be analyzed, shared, and utilized, including who is responsible for each aspect of the work. This might include scheduling monthly reviews of how service levels compare to targets or planning for how survey results will be discussed during staff meetings, so that an action plan can be developed to address any identified issues or challenges. Evaluation results may also be useful to administrators of other video visiting programs, so you might include strategies for disseminating information or "lessons learned" to others in the field, as part of your evaluation plan.

## Preparing to Assess Impact and Outcome

Developing a good data collection system and conducting a process evaluation to examine how well the program is being implemented lay the groundwork for preparing to assess program impact. The data reviews and quality checks that are part of your initial evaluation efforts will help to determine if there are any data collection protocols that need to be adjusted or improved before launching an outcome evaluation. For example, if information is consistently incomplete on service tracking forms, then training and follow-up can be provided to improve data collection and quality. A data collection plan is a good way to prepare for an evaluation that will assess program impact; it includes the measures that will be used, the source of the data, the frequency that data will be collected, and the people responsible for collecting and reviewing the data. A sample data collection plan is included at the end of this chapter.

## Working with Researchers and Professionals in the Field

The research units within corrections departments can be a valuable resource for developing process and outcome evaluations. Many community-based video visiting programs do not have funding to support an evaluation specialist or researcher on staff. If the budget will allow, it may be worthwhile to engage an evaluation consultant to provide support on developing the evaluation plan and guiding its implementation. Evaluation consultants can be found through networks like the [American Evaluation Association](#), which maintains a list of professional evaluators throughout the United States. Local colleges and universities can also be great resources for interns, student consulting teams, and/or graduate students or faculty members who would be interested in collaborating on a small-scale program evaluation. There may also be opportunities for Technical Assistance (TA), training, or consultation through research organizations and professional networks like the Council on State Governments, the Corrections Technology Association, or the IJIS Institute.

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## APPENDIX 1A: ADDITIONAL USES FOR VIDEO CONFERENCING IN CORRECTIONS

### Legal, Probation and Parole

Correctional agencies are using video conferencing for the following purposes:

- Arraignments
- Bail hearings
- Court hearings (family and criminal)
- Immigration hearings
- Misconduct hearings
- Witness testimony and depositions
- Child support hearings
- Probation interviews
- Parole Board hearings
- Legal counsel visits

**Video conferencing has the potential to increase efficiency**

“Westchester County Jail has a bail expeditor. This person uses video to interview all new admissions. If they qualify for the program, the interviewer will phone relatives and friends to help the inmate arrange bail. This process saves us anywhere from 200-300 jail days per month. Video has made this process exponentially more efficient.”—Captain Mark Reimer, Westchester County Jail, New York<sup>78</sup>

“It once took two weeks to arrive at a [parole] decision, and now it takes two days.”  
—Lynette J. Holloway, Michigan Department of Corrections<sup>79</sup>

Video conferencing is a potentially efficient and cost-saving alternative to in-person court and parole board appearances, probation interviews, and legal counsel visits. Video conferencing can reduce transportation costs and costly per diem rates that prisons pay to county jails to house individuals who must travel long distances to attend court hearings. The Michigan Parole board conducted 13,000 parole hearings in 2007 using video conferencing, reporting that video conferencing reduced decision making time, increased capacity to process cases, and reduced transportation costs.<sup>80</sup> Using video conferencing for attorney-client communication and probation interviews potentially increases efficiency and reduces congestion at facilities, especially jails. Note, however, that attorney-client video conferences should not be monitored or recorded because this privileged communication is confidential.

However, video conferencing may negatively affect one's perception of an incarcerated individual's credibility, questioning the fairness and due process of using video conferencing for legal and parole appearances. Research on the use of video conferencing in legal proceedings is scarce, but this credibility issue has been prominent in immigration hearings. One study found that individuals applying for asylum via video conferencing were half as likely to be granted asylum compared to those appearing in-person.<sup>81</sup> Some studies found that non-verbal cues may be harder to interpret or be over exaggerated when video conferencing is used to communicate.<sup>82</sup> Attorneys and observers that participated in another study said that judges in immigration proceedings were less likely to be empathetic due to the emotional disconnect that video conferencing creates.<sup>83</sup> An evaluation of bail hearings in Cook County, Illinois, found that bail was set higher for individuals appearing via video conference as compared to in-person hearings.<sup>84</sup>

An incarcerated individual's credibility may also be questioned when the video and/or audio quality of the video conference is poor.<sup>85</sup> Even poor camera placement can give the impression that an interviewee is not looking the judge, jurors, parole board commissioners, or a probation officer in the eye. Therefore, video conference participants could be advised that the technology may lead to false impressions of visual and verbal communication. Consider providing opportunities for individuals to become comfortable with video conferencing before they appear via video conference for important legal matters.

## Medicine

Physicians and psychiatrists use video conferencing ("telemedicine") with incarcerated individuals to meet many medical needs, including the following:

- Triage, assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and follow-up
- Prescribing and monitoring medication
- Managing infectious disease
- Delivering urgent care
- Post-release treatment planning
- Medical consulting with correctional medical staff
- Training for nurses and physicians based in a correctional facility

As early as 2004, "over 50% of state correctional institutions and 39% of federal institutions [were] using some form of telemedicine."<sup>86</sup> Telemedicine has the potential to leverage efficiency in health delivery and reduce costs (doctors billing for mileage and travel time). "In 2007, MDOC [Michigan Department of Corrections] conducted more than 1,000 telemedicine visits, producing an estimated savings of \$125,000 in transportation costs alone."<sup>87</sup> Telemedicine also has the potential to deliver quality and specialty medical services to incarcerated individuals in remote prisons who may not otherwise have access to these services. Facilities that are located close to a hospital or clinic are better positioned to transport incarcerated individuals for in-person medical care at a low cost.



In exploring whether telemedicine is an appropriate supplement for physical examinations, consider the following:

- Can telemedicine meet the medical needs of the incarcerated individuals in the facility?
- Is it appropriate to the severity and types of illness typically seen in the facility?
- Is it difficult for physicians and specialized providers to access the facility?
- Can you identify any doctors or companies who specialize in telemedicine?
- Can you provide adequate privacy and confidentiality to satisfy both patient concerns and HIPAA?

## Mental Health (TMH)

The American Telemedicine Association recommends using interactive video conferencing with individuals who cannot otherwise access quality in-person mental health services.<sup>88</sup> One study found that incarcerated individuals participating in telemental health sessions (TMH) reported that they were able to establish a therapeutic relationship with the clinician, suggesting that TMH is a viable way to deliver mental health services.<sup>89</sup> More research is needed to determine how effectively, and under what conditions TMH meets an individual's mental health needs. TMH has been successfully used in a correctional setting to provide the following services:<sup>90</sup>

- Psychological and psychiatric assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and follow-up care
- Therapeutic counseling
- Forensic evaluations<sup>91</sup>
- Consultation with correctional clinical staff

The American Telemedicine Association's (ATA) review of evidence-based practice found that TMH is frequently used in jails, specifically for pre-trial detainees with an elevated risk of suicide and substance withdrawal.<sup>92</sup> TMH reduces costs and safety concerns associated with inmate transfers and may increase the likelihood that individuals in crisis receive urgent care when an on-site mental health provider is not available. However, ATA warns that TMH should not be implemented solely as a cost saving measure due to the vulnerability of incarcerated individuals. With the recent increase in suicides in jails reported by the Department of Justice, an on-site clinician may prove especially critical during a crisis.<sup>93</sup>

## Education: video-based instruction for incarcerated individuals

Interactive video-based instruction and online learning has the potential to increase an incarcerated individual's access to educational programming, particularly for incarcerated individuals in remote locations. Education is a key ingredient for successful reentry. The Rand Corporation found that incarcerated individuals participating in educational programs had a 43 percent lower likelihood of recidivating and a 13 percent higher likelihood of obtaining employment post-release compared to incarcerated individuals who did not participate in educational programming.<sup>94</sup>

### Communication, oversight, and staff development in corrections

Interagency communication and operational efficiency can be improved with video conferencing. Prison systems stand to gain the most because of the necessity to oversee multiple sites from a central location. Staff meetings, supervision, and professional development trainings can be conducted from the central office and delivered to multiple sites without incurring travel costs. Video conferencing can facilitate communication between corrections and other city and state agencies, such as departments of health, mental health, social services, child welfare, and labor. For example, video conferencing has the potential to assist child welfare agencies in meeting mandates requiring communication with incarcerated parents and court-ordered visiting between incarcerated parents and their children.