T4PA CENTER

Effective Use of Technology: Thinking Beyond Devices and Professional Development

COACHING GUIDE

This coaching guide will help Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) State coordinators (SCs) coach staff members from local education agencies (LEAs) to think creatively about using funds within the Effective Use of Technology (EUT) category beyond typical activities such as supporting professional learning opportunities and purchasing equipment like laptops or other devices.

Coaching LEAs to Identify Other Allowable Uses of EUT Funds

Schools are rapidly expanding their use of technology to support student learning, and LEAs frequently direct EUT funds toward two primary purchases: devices and professional development for staff. However, by taking this approach, LEAs may not be taking full advantage of the opportunities that Title IV-A funding provides to enhance instruction and help students use technology to effectively support their learning. State Coordinators (SCs) can provide technical assistance (TA) to help LEAs think creatively when identifying activities related to EUT and considering how to use EUT funds to meet a wider range of needs. For example, ways that SCs can use the funds are described below.

Host a Community of Practice (CoP) Among Funded and Fund-Seeking LEAs

A CoP can provide a space for LEAs to exchange ideas around innovative uses of EUT funds and considerations for practice. It can also serve as a space where members discuss SEA priorities around EUT and where LEAs can be encouraged to collaborate and brainstorm on how their various priorities align. By hosting a CoP, an SEA can

» Invite LEA representatives to present examples of successful EUT-funded efforts in their districts.

» Offer prompts (see Facilitating a Successful CoP) to facilitate a discussion as a whole community, in smaller breakout groups, or as part of an online discussion forum.

» Encourage LEAs to engage in brainstorming around a shared challenge or opportunity.

Defining "Effective Use of Technology"

"Effective Use of Technology" (EUT) means the use of technology solutions to improve the academic achievement, academic growth, and digital literacy of all students (Sec. 4109(a)), by meeting the needs of State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs), educators, school leaders, and administrators.

Facilitating a Successful CoP

The Rhode Island Department of Education developed a helpful guide[1] for successfully facilitating CoPs,[2,3] from which the following activities for collective learning have been adapted:

CoP Activities	Examples of Discussion Prompts
Requesting information	Where can I find examples of effective EUT funding strategies?
Seeking experience	Has anyone started writing a request for EUT funding yet? What ideas can you share with those of us just starting?
Coordinating efforts	Who would be interested in sharing responsibility for developing an innovative technology solution for our shared challenge?
Analyzing data	Have any previously funded EUT efforts made a strong impact? If yes, how so?
Solving problems	Can we generate some ideas for innovative uses of EUT funding to meet students' learning needs?
Discussing developments	What have LEAs learned from their use(s) of EUT funding so far? Have they been helpful? Sustainable?
Documenting efforts	Let's document some best practices to support LEAs applying for EUT funding in the future.
Planning visits	Which LEAs could host a virtual or in-person session to share more about a particular EUT funding approach or challenge? Which LEAs would like to connect, visit, or learn more?
Building agreement for action	What EUT funding strategies shall we commit to learn about as a group and share what we learn? What would be a useful way to continue discussing what we learn?
Identifying and addressing gaps	What opportunities and limits have you encountered with regard to use of EUT funds?
Reflecting on group processes	How could we improve our meetings? What practices have been most beneficial for our collective learning?

» Model using digital tools that support learning and engagement, such as a digital whiteboard to support group thinking and discussion.

Work One-on-One or With Small Groups of LEAs That Need Additional Targeted TA

This TA might support LEAs' ability to address some of the following issues:

» Assess availability and quality of technology infrastructure (Sec. 4104(b)(3)(C)(i)(I)).[4]

» Identify technology-related gaps and priorities, opportunities, and barriers (Sec. 4104(b)(3)(C)(i)(I))[5] (see Relevant Resource).

» Consider opportunities to develop or implement innovative solutions.[6]

» Explore existing requests for funding to more clearly understand or articulate what additional or related supports may be needed.

» Share resources to build staff and student capacity for using data and technology to improve instruction and personalize learning (Sec. 4104(b)(3)(C)(i)(III)).

» Develop a strategic plan for responding to identified needs or opportunities to use technology more effectively.

Effective Practices for Using Technology in Schools

When providing TA or reviewing LEA applications for funding, it may be helpful for SCs to look for the connection between each suggested activity and the corresponding need that the activity will meet. While coaching LEAs on use of EUT funds, have them consider "What student outcome is this use of funds meeting?" Although professional development and purchase of technology infrastructure are viable options for EUT funds, the examples below provide alternatives that SCs may want to encourage their LEAs to consider as they design programming, undertake their needs assessment, and set goals for student outcomes.

Activities to Support Teaching and Learning About Technology

Technology is seamlessly integrated into our everyday lives, from our personal interactions to our learning environments and workplaces. For example, teens commonly use technology to communicate with one another via text, emails, virtual video calls, gaming systems, and social media. A teacher may use technology to track student data, communicate with parents, and develop their professional skills. An employee might use data to communicate with clients, develop a new product, or manage project tasks and timelines. Given technology's prevalence in society, it is critical that educators engage students in learning vital technology literacy skills. These skills allow us to problem solve, foster connections, and increase our productivity.

Students would benefit greatly from both being adept at using existing technology and adapting to technological advances. For example, what technology solutions might ensure that students are college- and career-ready in today's environment? LEAs may wish to pursue programs or activities that help students meet learning goals around employing digital and developing technologies to learn, work, and thrive in our ever-changing, technology-driven society.

Teaching these critical skills might look like

» Teaching digital citizenship[7] to help students use technology responsibly and safely.[8, 9]

» Teaching media literacy[10,11] and how to evaluate media content for accuracy/bias/fairness.

» Teaching technology-focused communications skills,[12] including formal vs. informal or private vs. public communication best practices.

» Teaching students how to use technology tools to budget,[13] track,[14] or plan projects.[15]

Activities to Support Using Technology as a Tool for Learning

When used effectively,[16] technology acts as a complement to lessons delivered by the teacher and enhances the learning experience. Use of technology can never serve as a substitute for the teacher, but it can be used to promote equity in the learning environment, tailor teaching approaches in response to differing student needs, and support teachers' assessment of student comprehension. LEAs might wish to pursue technology solutions that support teachers' use of technology as a tool for learning.

Using technology as a tool for learning might look like

» Providing assistive learning technologies[17] for students with disabilities (Sec. 4109(a)(3)).

» Personalizing learning[18,19] to foster student collaboration (e.g., using digital tools to support simultaneous creating, editing, or discussion) or individualized learning (e.g., offering students choices of different forms of technology to express understanding of a concept: responding to an assignment by creating a video, podcast, or infographic; delivering a presentation using digital presentation tools; or incorporating social media into assignments or discussions) (Sec. 4109(a)(1)(A)).

» Using technology like an app or online polling software to check for content understanding (e.g., short electronic polls can be used to quickly and anonymously check what portion of a class understood the information presented; follow-up instruction can be tailored based on results).

» Connecting students with content experts or guest speakers from around the world (e.g., buying the platform for videoconferencing or other interaction, incorporating videos for skills demonstrations or virtual simulations, or developing a virtual mentoring or career exploration program).

Spotlight on Arizona

The Arizona Department of Education developed online data dashboards to present information on the state's arts education and physical education data, including geographic comparisons, access and enrollment information (which can be broken down by demographics), and enrollment trends over time.

Activities to Support Technology for Administrative or Operations Purposes

Beyond the classroom, technology can be used to improve the functionality of the learning environment — ensuring that administrative processes, from managing student information to complying with school reporting requirements, run efficiently and reduce the burden on staff. LEAs might wish to implement technology solutions that address pain points within district or school operations.

Using technology for administrative purposes might look like

» Automating tedious tasks to save time for teachers (e.g., implementing QR code attendance tracking, or purchasing and customizing platforms to manage assignments and grades).

» Improving or communicating schools' acceptable use policies to help parents and students understand how school-issued devices should be used in order to protect students' data and privacy.[20,21,22,23]

» Developing data dashboards (see Spotlight on Arizona) to help educators and school leaders analyze and respond to student achievement data.[24]

» Implementing virtual office hours for district information technology (IT) departments to support students and families in their use of school-issued devices.

» Improving district communications (e.g., investing in technology that meets parents' and families' communication needs, or translating communications into multiple languages).

Activities to Support Professional Development via Technology

LEAs often use EUT funding to provide professional development on various skills needed to provide effective instruction via technology-supported

personalized learning, blended learning, or flipped classrooms. Ideally, these skills would allow them to properly integrate technology to improve student outcomes and achievement (Sec. 4104(b)(3)(C)(v)). However, SCs can also support LEAs in expanding access to high-quality digital learning opportunities for rural and remote schools (Sec. 4104(b)(3)(C)(ii)).

Using technology to expand access to Professional Development might look like

» Increasing engagement and attendance by offering virtual or hybrid professional development options (see Spotlight on Montana).

» Providing educators in rural and remote areas access to high-quality digital learning opportunities (e.g., recording and making in-person professional development content available asynchronously for those who cannot attend in person).

» Fostering communication and collaboration among district educators and community partners — with school staff input on what's most feasible and useful — using technological platforms like virtual bulletin boards and discussion forums.

Spotlight on Montana

Montana's Office of Public Instruction developed an online Learning Opportunities Portal to share approved professional development opportunities available online and across the state.

How Does EUT Overlap With Other Title IV-A Funding Categories?

It's important to remember that EUT funds have some limitations. For example, there is a 15 percent cap within the EUT category on funding for technology infrastructure, which includes devices, equipment, software applications, platforms, digital instructional resources, and other one-time IT purchases. However, some technology-related expenses might fall under multiple relevant funding categories, and SCs can help LEAs consider how various funding categories might support technology-related activities and solutions (see Advice for SEAs When Activities Address Multiple Priority Content Areas). Here are a few examples:

- **Safe and Healthy Schools**
  - » Parent-family engagement[25] (using email and videoconferencing at flexible times to discuss student progress or concerns with their families or guardians).
  - » Telehealth (offering virtual, confidential options for students to address physical and mental health needs).
  - » Chronic absenteeism or dropout (using data dashboards to track attendance data and early warning indicators that students may be at risk of chronic absence or dropping out; establishing or improving school dropout and reentry programs using virtual counseling, tutoring, coursework, or office hours [Sec. 4108(5)(C)(vi)]).

- **Well-Rounded Education**
  - » Distance learning (which relies on technology to connect with those consuming the learning program).
  - » Science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics (STEAM)-related after-

school programs, interschool partnerships, or student competitions (emphasis on technology, a core curricular component).
  - » Language labs to support foreign language instruction or English language learners (improving access to foreign language media, such as radio, television, or newspapers; facilitating listening, speaking, and pronunciation practice[26,27]).

> **Advice for SEAs When Activities Address Multiple Priority Content Areas**
>
> There may be certain activities an LEA wishes to fund that could fit into more than one Title IV-A priority content area. In such cases, the LEA should explain in the application how the activity fits more than one content area. The SEA will ultimately approve or disapprove the activity through its application approval process consistent with relevant statutory application requirements.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities for SCs to support LEAs in creatively and effectively using technology approaches and solutions to meet school and student needs in their state. This coaching guide provides examples of strategies already in use by LEAs and SEAs and may guide other SCs to work with LEAs to implement similar funding allocations. SCs can share these suggestions with LEAs through TA (in response to reviews of funding applications or through routine meetings, conferences, and communities of practice), newsletters, and other modes of communication.

ENDNOTES

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