

Video Communications Help Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Meet Its Mission



Challenge - *Maximizing efficiencies in a complex, statewide correctional system*

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, one of the largest correctional systems in the United States, juggles a wide variety of activities critical to protecting the citizens of Ohio. The department supervises more than 43,000 incarcerated individuals and 20,000 offenders in community supervision. It operates 33 prisons throughout the state and numerous Adult Parole Authority offices that supervise offenders in the community. To accomplish its mission, the department must develop ways to increase staff productivity and reduce movement of inmates outside prison walls. Among its challenges:

- Providing appropriate and cost-effective medical care to inmates, including transporting them to medical appointments in the community, which requires staff time and raises public-safety concerns
- Helping inmates when released from prison return to the community, which involves working with employers, social-service providers and other community-support organizations
- Training a large and dispersed workforce, which can be time-consuming, expensive, difficult to facilitate and also pose security risks

Solution

DRC introduced video-conferencing technology into the correctional system. Initially, the department used visual communications to provide outside medical counsel for inmates from physicians and health-care professionals. This "telemedicine" has been expanded to 27 of the state's 33 correctional facilities. Inmates receive high-quality consultations quickly and cost-effectively and from a broader base of medical experts for oncology, pulmonary, and other medical specialties. Today, nearly one in five medical consultations - roughly 5,000 annually - takes place over video.

The department also began using videoconferencing to discuss inmates' often-dangerous mental-health conditions. This brings geographically dispersed psychiatrists, nurses, case managers and outside hearing officers together for these mandatory collaborations. Video communications also serves as a training tool. Using video, DRC employees attend professional-development programs offered by the National Institute of Corrections on such issues as resource management, institutional security, gang activity, and sexual misconduct. Previously, staff members spent four hours on average traveling to each training session. Videoconferences now connect 10-to-15 sites with five-to-six people at each site, instantly - clearly delivering a more productive use of time and money.

DRC officials are especially excited about the use of video communications to assist in the parole-hearing process. Previously, Parole Board members spent hours driving to institutions to conduct hearings at a significant cost for per-diem, travel and overtime expenses. "With videoconferencing, the Parole Board conducts more hearings, more efficiently," says Chris Lizza, the department's videoconferencing administrator. "This system fills the distance gap superbly."

TANDBERG is an expert in visual communication for the judicial sector. It combines sophisticated software; innovative, simple and secure solutions developed specifically for the justice environment, and an experienced technical staff. Its specialists average nearly 10 years of video communications experience each. By law, justice communication must be visual and TANDBERG's systems prove effective because they are seamless and natural, secure and durable, reliable and simple.

An Array of Visual Uses

Countless video-communications applications exist in the corrections sector. DRC now uses it in its PreRelease Program to connect inmates nearing release with experts who help them develop their social skills, conduct mock interviews and help write their resumes. And, through video, inmates meet with potential employers prior to their release. DRC has tracked an impressive 33 percent placement rate. This innovative program improves inmates' confidence, skills and chances for employment upon release - all critical steps to making them productive members of society.