

TECH -Prep Overview

- The Technology Early Career Preparation Intervention project (TECH-Prep) is a research intervention designed to introduce transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to careers in technology, particularly youth who experience additional barriers to employment. A key component of TECH-Prep is facilitated online training that focuses on exploring careers in technology and developing professional skills needed for workplace success. The online training takes place after school and lasts approximately 10-12 weeks. It is followed by a paid internship aligned with the interests they identify during the course.

Importance of Technology Career Exploration

- Opportunities to learn about different technology-related careers are critical in identifying potential career pathways that match a person's strengths and interests. However, many youth with IDD do not have sustained opportunities to learn about technology-related careers. Often, they are not enrolled in high school courses with strong technology content, and they are directed towards employment options that have been traditionally reserved for people with IDD (e.g., cleaning or food service). However, when youth with IDD have chances to learn about a range of technology-related careers, they may discover new possibilities for employment that had not been considered before.

How TECH-Prep Uses Online Technology Career Exploration

- TECH-Prep participants have multiple opportunities to investigate technology-related careers during the online training part of the study. Within the online course, they complete technology-related career interest assessments, explore different technology related career pathways through videos and activities, and see real-life examples of people with IDD thriving within technology-related workplaces. Here are a few resources that participants have found to be particularly helpful:

- **STEM Careers Coalition Career Finder**
(<https://stemcareerscoalition.discoveryeducation.com/>)

Interactive online technology-related career interest assessment that features a wide range of videos, training and education requirements, and career pathway information.

- **My Next Move** (<https://www.mynextmove.org/>)
Comprehensive website funded by the US Department of Labor that allows users to learn more about specific careers by industry and to evaluate possible careers through the O*NET interest profiler.
- **Day at Work: Graphic Designer Video**
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmBK0_vbYnY)
Short but powerful video that documents a typical day for a graphic designer. Videos that clearly show what specific work tasks are like and what the workplace environment consists of can be effective tools for gauging initial student interest in a range of jobs.
- **Introduction to Handshake Video**
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxgPMj8XBkM>)
User-friendly video that shows students how they can connect with the Handshake network to search for internship and entry-level employment opportunities in their local area. Handshake is specifically tailored for high school and college students.

Considerations for Practice

- Extended opportunities to learn about different technology-related fields and careers within those areas is the first step in expanding employment for youth with IDD in technology. Once a student identifies potential areas or careers of interest, then it is important to develop ways for them to experience what work is really like in those jobs. Informational interviewers, workplace tours, job shadowing, and ultimately, hands-on work experiences within technology-related fields are all ways to help youth with IDD build important skills, make professional connections, and decide if technology is the career path they want to pursue.

Findings from these focus groups were synthesized into five modules for an online course that was delivered to a cohort of research participants in Summer 2026. Important topics included creating and managing an interdisciplinary support team, keeping the process student-centered, and developing and leveraging employer partnerships and community resources. The participants included community and technical college staff and VR professionals, who were recruited in small groups in order to facilitate a Career Network Intervention to support students with IDD. Findings from this cohort will be released in 2027.

- **Learn More** <https://idd.vcurrtec.org/research/rs3.cfm>

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