Settlement Sector & Technology Task Group Preliminary Report

December 21, 2020

Task Group and Project Introduction

The **Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group** (managed by AMSSA, reporting to IRCC's National Settlement and Integration Council (NSIC)) is working to discover, examine, and learn about the settlement sector's needs to successfully implement digital and hybrid service delivery models. Our mandate is to identify multiple digital transformation and hybrid service delivery models (where relevant) rather than aiming at one unique model that may not easily be replicable within our sector.

Our work includes looking at infrastructure, privacy issues (e.g. advice and protocols on how to safeguard information), professional development for staff, including digital literacy, and addressing the digital divide among newcomers and in our communities.

Our core work and approach is to conduct consultations with the Sector to produce an overview of the current landscape while identifying practices, gaps, challenges, risks, and opportunities for service providers in areas such as:

- Equity of access and accessibility issues;
- Security, privacy, confidentiality, and information sharing data management (e.g. existing mitigation strategies and protocols on how to safeguard information);
- Professional development for staff, including digital literacy;
- Specific changes required to support a digital transformation and a hybrid service delivery model, where relevant, with some recommendations on next steps;
- Providing insight into possible overlooked opportunities to support rural and remote placed newcomers via the use of LoFi technologies such as television/radio/telephone, distance learning tools, welcoming packages, pen pal community connection projects, pre-arrival relationship building, etc. when digital delivery is not suitable for all clients or all services.

Currently, our work plan has two main consultation approaches:, a survey, and in-depth consultations (in formats such as one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and other consultation methods, to be determined). Our survey is complete and we have already begun interviews and focus groups. Our goal once this report is disseminated is to continue to conduct interviews and focus groups to ensure that representatives from every sector stakeholder group have an opportunity to contribute to our work. We anticipate conducting at least 20 more interviews and at least 20 focus groups in January/February 2021.

This preliminary report provides a snapshot of our work so far.

Methods & what we have collected so far

In October, IRCC conducted a Delivering Settlement Services Remotely/Online survey with direct service agencies they fund through each contribution agreement. They shared some data with us to assist in our survey design process. We sent out a national bilingual survey to the sector. The survey had two paths: one for frontline workers, one for management/leadership. The survey was made up predominantly of open-ended questions to provide spaces for details and comments.

We received a total of 366 responses:

> English frontline worker - 216
> English manager/director - 113
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> French frontline worker - 15
> French manager/director - 22

Before and while our survey was open we also created an online form with 7 high-level questions to help us understand sector experiences and ideas. We received 26 submissions, many with detailed answers and information. This form will continue to be available for input.

Sixteen interviews involving 25 people have been conducted to date. One group interview was conducted with over 12 participants. One focus group was held with 20 participants (with a follow-up conversation to be held in the near future, due to time constraints with the original meeting).

Interviewees represented a variety of immigrant and refugee-serving sector agencies (settlement as well as language services), from midsize to large, urban and rural, frontline workers and management, from cities across the country. Interviewees also included academics (3) and technology coordinating representatives (4).

This report provides a thematic overview of survey, interview, focus group, online form input to date. It is followed by a number of appendices with additional information:

What is a hybrid service delivery model?

The definition of a hybrid service delivery model is contextualized within digital transformation. A recent report on digital transformation in the public sector[1] suggests that digital transformation "means new ways of working with stakeholders, building new frameworks of service delivery

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[1]
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334028741_Defining_digital_transformation_Results_from_expert_interviews

and creating new forms of relationships." We do not yet know enough about how the sector defines hybrid service delivery in their day-to-day service delivery. Hybrid service delivery has not been defined for the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. It should be. The language side of the sector has worked in a blended service delivery model for some time. We can and should build on their experiences. As well, we should explore other models and definitions.

New Language Solutions provides a language sector definition of blended learning[2]:

> Blended learning describes a teaching and learning environment in which face-to-face (f2f) classroom instruction and learning are "combined or 'blended' with online and other computer-mediated activities." (Kennel & Moriarty, 2014, n.p.).

AlphaPlus, which supports Ontario adult literacy education professionals to incorporate digital technology in their work outlines blended learning[3] as:

> a combination of face-to-face in classroom and technology-mediated learning using devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices with an internet connection. These devices may be provided by programs, or learners may be free to bring their own device. Our position is that blended learning in adult education is not only about the use of tools and resources. Instead, it is a way to think about program and curriculum development, including learning design and delivery.

And the Irish Further Education Support Service provides additional useful context[4]:

> QQI (2018) refers to Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) definition of blended learning as "the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences" (2018, p.3). Driscoll and Carliner (2005) identified four typologies of pedagogy which could be blended learning, namely:
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> a. a mix of web-based technologies
> b. a mix of various pedagogical approaches (for example, constructivism, behaviourism, cognitivism)
> c. a combination of any form of instructional technology with face-to-face instructor-led conditions
> d. a combination of instructional technology with actual job tasks to form an effective mix of learning and working.

More broadly, the European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services provides[5] a useful distinction between four different multi-channel strategies:

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[2] https://learnit2teach.ca/wpnew/reports/Blended_Learning_Exec_Summary%20BLEEDS-1.pdf

[3] https://alphaplus.ca/download/position-paper-on-blended-learning-in-adult-education/
[4] https://fess.ie/images/stories/Blended_Learning/BlendedLearningHandbook2020.pdf

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7087&langId=en

1. Parallel positioning: Services are offered via all channels with citizens free to decide which channel to choose.
2. Replacement positioning: Channels replace one another based on the assumption that one channel is more effective and efficient than another for a particular task/client group.
3. Supplemental positioning: Each channel has its own characteristics that make it suitable for certain services/client groups.
4. Integrated positioning: In this model all channels are integrated in the entire service delivery process. This means that all services are offered via all channels but that the strengths and weaknesses of channels are considered in their design. Users are steered to the best channel and channels integrate seamlessly.

These definitions merely scratch the surface of our understanding of what a future model of hybrid/blended service delivery might look like in our sector. We believe it is important, however, to understand what various stakeholders mean when they use the term. To explore the integration of blended approaches on a more permanent basis, we should be clear about what we are referring to, and how the term is applied across the sector. We will therefore continue to probe these definitions with sector stakeholders.

Observations

Our survey, interviews, and other submissions provided us with narratives of settlement practitioners' interactions with digital technologies and adaptation of remote/digital service delivery. We designed unique survey questions for both types of settlement practitioners (frontline workers and managerial settlement practitioners). For management, our findings emphasize their digital transformation organizational practices which encompass reflection on organizational difficulties and successes, institutional evaluation and measurement on digital transformation, as well as needed training and support in future settlement work.

Importantly, we have developed a comprehensive understanding of digital equity. As many frontline practitioners work closely and directly with newcomers and support their settlement and integration, clients' experiences with digital technologies are closely linked to settlement practitioners' involvement with digital tools and service delivery. Our data analysis pinpoints barriers faced by settlement workers who also confront digital divide dilemmas.

Our findings and data analysis identified the importance of both customization and localization of digital service delivery, along with pan-sectoral strategies. These include ethical considerations and sector standardization on topics such as digital security, digital workplace collaboration and integration, and digital service competencies and policies.

Organizations that appear positive about integrating a digital service framework indicated that COVID-19 expanded their exploration of digital modes of service delivery. These respondents also expressed optimism as serving clients online has allowed them to continue to stay connected with their communities, including newcomers who had previously not accessed their

services, expanded service accessibility, and saved transportation costs. Moreover, informants pointed out that staff may not be comfortable moving back entirely to in-person programming since a blended service model has concretely accommodated many client needs (such as lack of childcare, inability to access in-person service hours, travel time, lack of services in their community (rural and small centre especially), mobility challenges, and client preferences for remote services).

Those who were uncertain about future digital service delivery indicated they are unclear about how to restructure and evaluate which programs should be kept online and which ones should be removed from the online environment. This first phase of our work points to more questions than answers. It also suggests that many answers can be found within the sector itself, supported by models, learning, and similar discussions happening in other sectors.

This section provides a thematic summary of our survey, interview, online form, and focus group input to date. We will continue to build on these themes as we conduct more interviews, focus groups, scan for research, and identify promising practices.

To create a central service portal or not to

The question of the "right way" to deliver digital/remote services is one that the sector struggles with. We will continue to explore different models of digital service delivery leading to our final report, as well as how to evaluate hybrid service delivery. This insight from an IT director provides useful insight about choosing technology solutions:

> First of all, the only wrong answer technologically is one that doesn't work. Technology is just the means to the end. If I were in your shoes, I would be telling people, if it's working, it's fine. Because there are a million choices. And one isn't necessarily better than the other, unless you have a specific need, that product A has a product B doesn't… I try really hard to make IT be a non existent thing. You cannot do your job without the tools that we make available. But it's also focused on the idea that our entire job is to make your job easy to do. And to make you not have to pay attention to it as much as possible. You can't ignore it, but the families that need our help need help from people who have early childhood knowledge, who know how to work with families and children, what we're doing is we're providing them the tools to know how to work with those families in the way we want. And then how to go back to their office and do the administrative part of their job. What tools they use, like I said, it's irrelevant, unless they don't work.

The concept of digital transformation can be complicated. It includes the use of digital technologies, knowledge development and mobilization, financial support, as well as internal and external structural change[6]. This process invites all stakeholders to consider what needs to

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[6] Kane, G. C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A. N., Kiron, D., & Buckley, N. (2015). Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation. *MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte University Press*, *14*(1-25)

be changed, what should be continued, and how to make it happen. Given this context, the following example pinpoints related resources and actions that need to be considered to foster a digitally transformative environment.

> We have developed a flexible approach to digital service delivery that brings together a variety of technologies and platforms, so we can have a continuum of client service approaches and service clients based on their access to technology and their digital literacy skills and level. Some of our clients have no access to laptops, tablets, computers, smart phones or internet. And many have low digital literacy skills. However, we have not documented/drafted a model or strategy document/policy that can guide how we do this. There are still many other technological improvements we need to implement, like live chat on the website, clients booking appointments with a Settlement Worker online, building more engaging webinars/workshops for clients and to post on our website. This requires additional funding, resources, expertise, and training, which we are hoping to work towards. Having a national approach, through the Technology Task Group, to modernize settlement services, now virtual settlement services, will be very helpful and is really needed.

We explored if participants' organizations have developed digital policies or protocols or had a strategic discussion on digital technology and skill implementations to enrich our data analysis. One respondent's answer stood out to us as it methodically pinpointed the interconnection between digital transformation practices and principle.

> First, making sure staff have the hardware technology (laptops, scanners, cellphones, etc.) that they need to deliver services remotely. Second, making sure the organization has IT infrastructure (Server, cloud computing, etc.) to be able to manage and deliver virtual services. Third, making sure policy procedures are in place for virtual and on-line service delivery model. Fourth, making sure each service and program has proper platform in places to deliver virtual/ on-line services (e.g. Language training, may need a different platform than youth programming). Fifth, the digital transformation has to have a proper framework to make sure the services are delivered in a manner that the quality of services are not compromised and in fact it should enhance the quality of services.

Like the pre-arrival control group (see section on Frontline worker wellness), there is a broad range of organizations that had already embarked on digital transformation initiatives before the pandemic. It will be worth identifying and understanding these agencies' experiences to tease out promising practices, how their earlier experiences made the shift to remote/digital work smoother, and what lessons can be learned by others in the sector that may not have already been shared.

> Digital transformation is not new to my organization. We are experienced in delivering online service for the last few years. This helped us to advance with online tools and platforms for client services. Keeping this in mind for the last 2 years we made significant effort to build our staff members capacity to use Salesforce/BOT/ERP and so on.

We have established digital integration and adopted technological choices long before the time of COVID-19. Related studies and consultations were carried out to properly prepare the implementation of technological tools.

Organizations are taking concrete actions to respond to the complex implementation of digital transformation and hybrid service delivery. Many of them indicated that they have adopted a range of strategies and technologies to create a supportive and accessible environment to provide service to newcomers as well as for staff coordination and communication. These strategies include providing digital literacy training for employees and clients, hiring digital service specialists or related talent, and forming a digital task group to identify and assess techniques to accommodate client needs best. Organizations' understanding of hybrid service delivery is defined by providing services online and adopting a blended service model for many respondents.

Data stewardship within any model is seen as essential.

I have two recommendations. One is to include the data stewardship part of the technology because you need to do that. And the other thing is, we have to identify the areas where we have common needs, and see if you can address it as a common platform. So I think it would make life so much easier, especially for a smaller agency, because they may not have the capacity to go and spend $15,000 out of their pocket to do something.

At the same time respondents indicated that creating a common portal approach may not take into account unique newcomer and community needs, information and technology practices, and preferences:

"when we are talking about going towards something universal, I just wanted to be careful about what levels of clients we're working with."

Another indicated that creating a common portal for services should also be complemented by common and interoperable reporting systems:

We have different funders. We have different systems that we are inputting data into. So we have iCARE. And our provincial government has a different database. In addition to the iCARE, we have to submit multiple reports to IRCC through other agencies, right.

There are examples of both centralized digital service portals as well as decentralized digital service approaches in the sector and in other sectors. Some are noted in an online spreadsheet that seeks to capture interesting and innovative uses of technology in the sector. These are noted in the interesting case studies appendix of this report. More depth and analysis of these approaches will be provided in the final report when specific hybrid service models/case studies are outlined.

No matter what systems are created, the tools need to be intuitive and user friendly. Both for organizations providing services, and for newcomers.

Organizations are at different stages of digital transformation

Digital transformation is at an early stage in the sector. Its distribution is still lopsided among different organizations. Many organizations are still encountering barriers in adopting digital technologies. For example, our survey and interview data indicates that many practitioners still have to self-purchase digital tools for service delivery. Moreover, participants expressed that their organizations had established collaborative virtual workplace relationships, and several programs were finding it complex to keep every staff person moving in the same direction.

This uneven distribution of the digital transformation between organizations, programs, and individual staff indicates that we have only touched the surface of digital transformation and a hybrid service model. However, this preliminary report can be a positive starting point for us to glimpse into which digital transformation practices can be practical and effective for future settlement work.

Many organizations have been incrementally adopting a hybrid service delivery model. Some have explicit objectives to determine whether to provide services fully online or hybrid services with online and offline blended client support. Many are looking for help to evaluate their experience to date to determine what works and where they need to make changes.

Many clients have shifted from a reluctance to receive online services to feeling more comfortable proceeding with virtual services at home. Organizations have offered online employment development sessions and career fairs, culturally oriented online events, client intake and needs assessment, one-on-one consulting and follow-up meetings, and digital training and online service program information. It is important to note that many organizations provided these types of innovative services pre-pandemic as well. From an organizational perspective, management participants emphasize their progression on planning, launching, or evaluating digital transformation processes and revising their localized practices through everyday experiential learning.

It will be important to determine where a hybrid service delivery model may not work. Some frontline workers pointed out that mental health counseling services were less effective in the virtual spaces because of the difficulties of mental readiness. Others indicated that shifting to virtual service delivery created greater access to these services. Language learning sessions can be challenging through online learning, as instructors cannot provide instant educational guidance if it is a large student group. Besides these two types of services, childcare-related programs, food programs, recreation programs, house viewing and related support, and group trip events were challenging to be transferred online.

Despite the fact that digital platforms can provide convenience to online learners, to some extent, some suggested digital services can never replace the interpersonal functions fostered in physical spaces.

Cybersecurity as a core competency

Survey responses illustrate that many organizations have been cautious with cybersecurity and have conducted various practices to ensure client privacy is protected and information is safely stored. For many frontline workers, their ethical considerations on digital service delivery encompass setting passwords for important documents and digital devices, not sharing personal or private information through digital platforms, giving appropriate advice for clients on sending personal information in digital spaces, and providing cybersecurity workshops for clients. Management also has taken a series of actions to promote cybersecurity. Many organizations have started providing training on managing cyber risk and workshops on how to best undertake online privacy and confidentiality.

Cybersecurity is a two-directional practice, in which trust-building is vital.

Organizations have indicated there are more barriers when asking clients to provide personal information in virtual settings, which was not an issue with in-person meetings. Secondly, clients' digital literacy levels intimately influence their procedures for safeguarding information as many of them experienced difficulties opening password-protected documents. It was challenging when guiding clients who were illiterate in their own languages, not to mention those who are intersected with low digital literacy and language proficiency. As such, the complications of cybersecurity are interrelated with language, digital skills, and human-based relationship construction.

Respondents recognize and support the need to have national guidelines or sector-based models to strengthen digital information safety comprehension.

Guidance needed from funders on privacy, security, encryption

Ethical considerations and comments related to online privacy, security, and encryption suggest a disorganized landscape. More needs to be done here to ensure a basic competency and understanding of online security practices, protocols, training, and responsibility within the organization (not only at the level of the individual worker) to adhere to all of these. What are baseline competencies for frontline workers? For managers/directors? What baseline and demonstrated competencies should a funder expect from a funded organization? What investments are necessary to ensure such a baseline?

> One key piece we discussed at the beginning was a plan around keeping participants personal information safe and secure. For the programs I'm involved in, I ensured to spend time educating myself on how to encrypt files and properly secure documents, excel sheets and confidential information although it was hard to find these resources

and maybe having funders themselves come up with tools and trainings that can set an sector-wide standard for privacy/security.

There's not a lot of guidance from the different ministries as to what you're allowed to use and not allowed to use. If you go by the strict rules of privacy and all that there'll be so many things you cannot use. But there has to be some clarity as to given the different circumstances. What can you use, and maybe some sharing of best practices across different folks. But the big thing for me is information. Like we have iCARE information, we have our own information, and they're trying to find different ways to deliver services. And how do you do this in a way that you can leverage existing information without violating any privacy rules or anything like that. And there seem to be also some redundant services from one service provided to the other, which has to be clarified. I'm looking at our mentoring program. We never actually sat down and, and figured out where the line, the delineation of responsibilities? And how do you merge these different modes of delivery together? So there's a lot of discussions and dialogue that has to take place to figure out how we move more and more things online? How do we share data? And how do we delineate what one organization is responsible for versus others?

It was frustrating for us that no federal or provincial bodies were willing to say which online service (Zoom or similar) offered the correct levels of privacy so we had to go with what worked best for us and seemed the most appropriate in the circumstances.

Models of support for agencies

The notion of centralized service portals also led to questions about centralized support structures for immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. In this discussion an important point came up:

> "If I was designing it from the beginning, I would make sure that you had some good direct relationship with someone who was making decisions and informing policy much higher up. Because otherwise, you're just going to be so frustrated if you try to do anything that's in any way provincially or nationally ambitious."

This also connects to the intergovernmental coordination theme (which is explored below). It suggests that previously recommended models of infrastructure and agency support should be revisited. A chronology of this research in the sector was previously done for the Settlement 2.0 project and is relevant in this discussion[7].

It also includes

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[7]

https://km4s.ca/2020/01/a-chronology-of-technology-and-innovation-research-in-the-canadian-immigrant-and-refugee-serving-sector/

> "understanding what infrastructure is already provided within some of those organizations, whether they have an IT department, whether they've got [an] instructional excellence, integration department already. Just trying to understand where you can fit within the range of delivery partners that you're trying to support."

We are just getting at this lay of the land. But, as discussed in the section on change management, it is essential to dive more deeply into models that already exist in the sector, and to evaluate them to determine how the entire sector can learn from, replicate, or scale them.

Building mechanisms of reflective practice in sector professional development led by technology facilitators was brought up as a useful approach to complement typical IT support. On the worker and manager side, working within a community of practice with small cohorts where participants identify and work on specific issues in their work has shown success in other sectors. They use the group as a sounding board, as well as a place to learn from each other and reflect together on ideas and experiences in their workplace.

That coaching approach is also measurable in terms of impact:

> "When it worked, you really could tell that it was working. You could see how they integrated it into practice. In the end it had a significant impact. And that really sort of builds a lot of momentum within our organization. Because otherwise you're just talking to people in a webinar, and you have no idea, no idea what gets made out of it. And it's very difficult to get feedback. I mean, we get that with any kind of resource. You can spend a lot of time putting together some resources and to get feedback on it. Maybe use maybe download it, you can tell people are downloading it, but like, how could you make it better?"

This speaks to the importance of how professional development is approached. Like the sector itself learning to be more agile and responsive in program design during the pandemic (see change management below), how training is approached may need a reset:

> And cyclical training of yourself. And that training does not mean attending a conference face to face anymore or attending a full day online. What we have come across is just in time, short training as applicable, in small doses, flexible just in time training. Localized, customized, and contextualized to meet my needs.

Models of support also need to deeply involve newcomers in service design thinking:

> Wouldn't it be interesting if you had a group in Ontario that was looking at the customer experiences, customer engagement from a service design perspective? So what would this service look like if you designed it from that perspective, as opposed to designing it from the funding perspective… I think health is done some of that flipping. 'Okay, we're going to look at this health service designed from the perspective of the patient, we're

not going to look at it from the perspective of the transaction.' Wouldn't that be interesting if someone could sort of guide us along a service design perspective?

Introducing a service design perspective aligns with an outcomes, instead of outputs, focus. A key part of IRCC's CORE Principles, this is also aligned with the sector's core values.

Change management is essential

Comments from interviewees about implementing digital transformation and change aligns with research and general commentary on what is required at the organizational level. High-level senior support is needed for any type of organizational change management project. The structure and culture of organizations plays a huge role. We have found that a move to hybrid service delivery, like the sudden pivot to remote/digital services, will continue to challenge organizations to take a systems approach. This needs to occur both within organizations, as well as when looking at the role of the organization in the community.

Going digital means changing the nature of the work itself:

> It very much depends on and goes hand in hand with the standard operating processes or procedures that we develop. Whenever we are introducing a new system, we are not just introducing a system, we are introducing a new way of working. It requires a lot of resources.

It's perhaps clearer when looking at it within the organization. New roles, new job descriptions, higher levels of data-driven decisions, new policy structures, different professional development needs, different technical models for different programs, rethinking feedback loops between frontline and leadership.

> "...leadership is not necessarily the managers, a manager is not necessarily a leader. And a leader is not necessarily a manager. Because leadership can come from students, it can come from an individual teacher or a clique of teachers that start innovating and influence the whole program. So encouraging that kind of leadership, I think is essential."

Having people who have IT, telecom, as well as not for-profit experience may be key. In one region, mental health providers are building a Virtual Care service model. The project coordinator brings telecom sector experience to the project, which has proven to be essential:

> "Every time I was talking with a telco or an account manager with a telco, they always said, you know, you know what you're talking about, like you're using acronyms, and you're referring to things that we know. And I'm like, 'Well, yes, I'm from the industry, I have a background in the industry.' And a lot of them said that they did find it and made the process a lot smoother. It has made some of the more technical conversations a lot easier. I do think that especially a little bit with virtual platforms, but especially with equipment and connectivity, a lot of people feel it's intimidating. They don't know where

> to start. Whereas for me, I knew it was a big project, but I knew where to start. Okay, I'm going to build the path. I'm going to build it here."

Among other things, she has been able to negotiate with technology companies at scale. Instead of paying full or even not for-profit pricing, they've been able to negotiate lower costs for groups of agencies.

Organizations have also seen the value in learning as they go. In many ways, simply being forced into a more agile mindspace because of the sudden shift to remote/digital work has created a new approach to how they do their work.

> "It was iterative, step by step like it was a constant step of evolving, getting feedback, changing, responding."

The approach to service delivery itself is also being revisited from a systems approach. Frontline workers and organizations have seen themselves and been seen as essential services for their communities. Many have moved beyond solely transaction-based service delivery, reconnecting with the sector's community development and popular education roots (summed up by the CCR's Core Sector Values[8]). The concept of "a new normal" post-COVID is typically used to describe digital transformation, online or hybrid service delivery, working from home being more common, etc. However, we have heard that the "new normal" in our sector could, in some ways, be viewed as an opportunity to return to these sector roots (moving from transactional client experiences to more holistic programming), if frequent references to the changes in client service delivery are any indication. There is more to explore. We will continue to probe in our interviews and focus groups.

Infrastructure - IT, devices, & data

Management/director survey respondents addressed the importance of IT infrastructure when delivering service remotely.

> IT infrastructure. Our IT infrastructure was not ready for the digital transformation that we went through. It was very challenging to move to a complete virtual/On-line service delivery model in a very short period of time.

Previous sector research and anecdotal evidence has indicated, for some time, that personal devices have been, and appear to continue to be, in use by frontline workers. More workers are using a combination of personal and work devices than we would have expected at this point in remote/digital work nine months into the pandemic.

The sector continues to grapple with the issue of the use of personal devices. Our survey found that 43% of English survey frontline practitioners use a combination of personal and work devices, and an additional 10% are using strictly personal devices. 66% of Francophone survey

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[8] https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/static-files/standards.htm#CORE%20VALUES

frontline practitioners are using a combination of personal and work devices. The question remains of how this should be dealt with, with appropriate investment for work/agency devices, etc., as soon as possible.

Building infrastructure is connected to both funding/investment as well as organizational knowledge:

> Cyclical upgrade of technology and infrastructure is number one. And that should be built over the years in every single budget you have for your programming.

One interviewee suggested three practical functional areas that need to be addressed for all organizations: technology training and education, increasing cybersecurity competencies is a must, and converting data to action.

> Cybersecurity is a race. There is no way for our agencies to protect ourselves 100%. It's just a matter how much we can reduce the risk? When it comes to data, we are far behind right now. I don't want to compare ourselves with Amazon or Google. But we need basics, and we need to take data and translate it to action. That piece is missing. Even in areas where we have data, we don't have a way of converting that data to action.

Multiple respondents also suggested that data that goes into iCARE can and should be shared with the sector in more meaningful ways. While somewhat out of the scope of our mandate looking at service delivery, this data is essential for service planning and is thus important to consider in a service context.

Ultimately, these comments and observations point to the importance of the sustainability of technology investments, along with flexibility in funding models that take into account the reality of changing technologies and digital priorities.

When it comes to changing technologies and digital priorities and planning, one IT director suggested that long term sustainable technology frameworks and planning needs to be adopted in the sector and by IRCC. Systems change and there needs to be flexibility in funding agreements for organizations to rapidly shift and redesign programs and technology to respond to a changing technological landscape and newcomer preferences and needs.

We have only begun to scratch the surface on infrastructure needs in the sector. We will dive more deeply into this in our next steps.

Digital literacy, professional development, and upskilling

Management participants spotlighted the need to ensure staff have the required digital technology skills to be capable of delivering high-quality online services, and to reinforce clients' ability and capacity to learn.

Maintaining relationships with clients is essential to the work, digital or not. You have to be comfortable with the tools and techniques you're using in order to help clients become comfortable. There are layers to the digital literacy service providers need and support in organizations so that it doesn't all fall on frontline workers whose role is to support newcomers and communities in their settlement.

Frontline workers used digital technologies to educate clients and help them to develop their digital literacy skills. They recognize that newcomers will be expected to have these skills in other areas of their lives. They also recognize that they may be responsible for digital literacy training to minimize gaps in digital service delivery:

"…I know many meetings (doctors, specialists, insurance, teachers, etc.) are done online and one of my roles is to coach and guide them in increasing their skills and comfort with tech. Tech is key to all facets of life now, and so an increase in digital literacy will also increase a client's self-efficacy, confidence, happiness, etc."

However, it is unclear whose responsibility it is to ensure that these workers have the requisite levels of digital literacy. Is it individual workers and their colleagues, or the organization? In a hybrid service delivery model, what does this framework of responsibility and accountability look like?

It is clear that frontline workers and organizations recognize their key role in assessing and addressing digital literacy of newcomers. It is equally clear that training is noted by workers as their responsibility. There is not a coherent or comprehensive sector approach when it comes to professional development.

In many ways, the addition of digital literacy competencies will become a logical extension of expected frontline practitioner abilities. The question is, are all of them able to play this role? And what baseline competencies should they have and be able to pass on and even assess among newcomers they serve? How will they get to this baseline?

Digitally literate frontline workers indicate being key resources for their colleagues. More highly digitally skilled workers train their colleagues in specific tools and online/digital service techniques and approaches. This is important and useful, but it may not take into account capacity limitations within organizations. While self-guided learning empowers settlement practitioners to develop and strengthen their virtual learning environment and digital workplace relationship, it is only one part of the puzzle. And it is incomplete and not sustainable or replicable. It would be useful to continue to probe if organizations have or are developing training for identified competencies needed to effectively provide remote/digital services to newcomers.

At the same time, there has been an increase in virtual learning opportunities during the pandemic. There would be value in curating learning recordings that have been evaluated as

highly useful to share with the entire sector in a structured and meaningful (i.e. connected to their daily work) way to meet previously identified just-in-time training needs.

Educational institutions need to prepare new workers to enter the field. While a sector-wide need, this came up particularly in the context of language services (a recognition, perhaps, of the more credential-based nature of language teaching):

> "Make sure that teacher training is able to proceed for everybody. This is particularly a problem on the French side. But at the moment, it's more of a problem than usual on the English side, because of access to classes that are able to host a teaching practicum. So that's become a huge issue for everybody. And because it's become so clear that remote learning is not going to go away after social distancing goes away. It is something that we have to work into our all of our work as time goes on, because we're going to need teachers on both the English and the French sides, who are capable of moving into the teaching profession, and doing some remote teaching right away. It's no longer going to be an exceptional situation."

Increasing sector skills means looking at what is needed to develop a baseline of digital skills and competencies. It is clear that some workers, and some organizations, were more prepared. The language sector is a clear example. Teachers who were already offering blended learning were able to quickly pivot. Teachers with more limited technical skills struggled,

> ...hence, all the webinars. We also have a live help function, which is an asynchronous chat during office hours. We extended its hours by an hour a day, but the Virtual Phone has been ringing off the hook since March. Some teachers just need hours of hand holding and sometimes it's just a quick question.

The funded Avenue.ca approach run by New Language Solutions requires a deep evaluative look to see where its strengths can be scaled, as well as replicated in the settlement sector. Their approach of offering "technology-based solutions to assist newcomers and adult learners in achieving their language learning goals… through both the development of Canadian-centric resources that combine traditional face-to-face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities, and by training language educators to engage clients using open-source technologies" is relevant to the sector as a whole (and will be discussed more below).

What is also clear is that increasing sector skills is not simply a technical need. It is also a need when it comes to moving this type of work online, from rapport and trust-building, facilitating groups, different adult education methods and approaches, virtual community development, and more:

> So one thing that my instructors might hedge recently is that we have a lot of research on the technical side, particularly through Avenue.ca on how to teach online. But it's more on the technical piece. And there's a lot about the andragogy of teaching. And we have a bit of a gap there in how to teach effectively in an online format that our teachers

are struggling with. And there's also a relaxed capacity to develop online teacher training tools and resources and real lack of training time for the instructors.

In this project we have actively sought to bring together the language and settlement sides of the sector to ensure knowledge mobilization and sharing. Within each side there are additional nuances within programs, organizations, clients, and communities. However, there has been a much longer structural support system in place for some time for language service providers. Blended service delivery has been formally funded and organized for many years. Like the pre-arrival side of the settlement sector, the blended, and the remote/online through LINC Home Study, language service delivery approaches should be more deeply evaluated with knowledge mobilization, evaluation and lessons learned, and replication in mind.

And we always kind of have the problem of being lumped together with settlement services, which some of them are very short duration service, like information and referral, where as long as you deliver information and refer a client, even if you have to use WhatsApp and do it in Mandarin, you are successful and you deliver the service successfully. You know, as language training trainers we have to do things differently. Our engagement with the client has to be longer term to actually be effective. So we have a different set of issues that we grapple with. And, you know, it's a very fascinating time that we are living through because we've been delivering hybrid programming for some time, but we are now pushed also into fully online delivery. And what we see on our end is a need for PD, for resources, for support, the distractions that our clients face. At home and without all the other set of issues.

But what we also see is, we see a huge shift in language learning that I can only compare to the, you know, the onset of the communicative approach 30 years ago, right off the move from approaches, you know, even earlier, in which the client now needs to learn, not only to be on the computer, on the iPad, on the phone, but actually to take ownership of what they do and understand how they need to live it. So client engagement, for lack of a better word, will be what will make this a success or failure. And it is a huge and difficult transformation for our clients. At the very core of this is the client who needs to actually demonstrate success in language competencies. And we all know how difficult it is to imagine if we were all of a sudden you have to learn Mandarin, Arabic, or Chinese or any other language, how much work you actually have to put into this. So I see this as a huge, huge challenge for us as a sector to be able to engage the learners in the new ways to teach them how to learn in a new way. And we now watch I watch with fascination our clients, logging into Avenue.ca and just clicking and logging time does not really translate to achieving competencies. And one of the colleagues, I think I mentioned that learners are not immersed very often they're at home, in the first language, and they do the mechanics of language learning. They do not internalize this. So this is here yet another bigger challenge for us. So I am bringing in the language, the point of the methodologies that we need to address the andragogy that we need to address and we need to put, it's not just being able to click. A click doesn't mean that they actually made progress in their proficiency.

Supporting new or expanded roles and time

Our data exposes urgent needs in diverse roles and jobs for future settlement workers, including online facilitators, instructional designers and curriculum developers, digital consultants, digital case managers, as well as IT specialists. The following response addresses the roles that organizations need to intensify their service delivery and development.

> Definitely, online facilitators, instructional designers and curriculum developers so we can develop a very strong online curriculum and facilitate it well. We will need these roles to also teach and coach staff. We will need managers who have good skills in managing remote teams and online programs, we'll need evaluators who can help to evaluate online programs. We'll also need innovation coaches and staff with experience in innovation, design, foresight etc. to help integrate innovation through the organization. We'll also need staff who can train and teach digital skills to clients.

Frontline workers indicated they need IT specialists who can immediately assist them in their technology-related concerns, internal technology trainers to provide digital literacy training for frontline workers, online facilitators to help organize online learning, sessions, workshops, and courses, instructional designers and curriculum developers to create and regulate online course materials for online sessions and workshops, as well as digital marketing specialists for digital outreach and workshop advertising.

Due to the changing nature of settlement work in virtual and hybrid service delivery, the most identified digital competencies frontline workers indicated they need to develop are: 1) administration and coordination skills through different emerging digital platforms; 2) digital needs assessment and client needs evaluation, time management and self-discipline; 3) data management-related skills (data cleansing and data handling in database systems); 4) specific digital techniques/skills; 5) public relations and digital marketing; and 6) communication skills.

In some cases, organizations have created an important new role - the Digital Navigator.

> I identified one of the team members that is quite tech savvy. Then she started to develop tutorials for staff and clients. Even the person that is quite tech savvy, she learnt a lot along the way. And she did a lot of research, but also she has passion to work with, with technology.

> She was the program assistant, but also she holds other positions in the organization as an admin assistant and volunteer coordinator. So when these when the whole pandemic fell here, and then we needed somebody with those skills. I already knew what she knew, because she had a cubicle, created a lot of systems, right, that I could see her skills in terms of use in systems and software and technology in general. So when this came out, I asked her because she was going to lose her job, also an administration

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assistant, and realized we need somebody to support us with it. I don't, I don't have the time, I can't really do it myself. So I need somebody that is going to focus on this. So she was the one that I asked her. And then things that she didn't know, a lot she learned so fast. And she developed really all these tools that it was just like she said, I never I never knew how passionate I was about technology and understanding technology from the largest accessibility, you know, or even as engagement. So that was for me, and is a position that I want to keep." It's the type of position that needs to continue to exist post-pandemic in a hybrid service delivery model. And there is value in the fact that she is herself a newcomer, "she also can understand technology from different perspectives, because when you have a different cultural background you also see those things from different perspectives. You experience it, right? I will need a position like this to continue with this work. Definitely, there is no way that we cannot do that. One of the questions of one of the directors is like, do you think that you still need this person? Because now everybody knows, like, when that question came to me, it was for me like, yeah, you really don't know what we're doing? You haven't even heard what we have to say. We've been talking and talking and talking and, and showing and you don't know.

Health researchers recently identified the Digital Navigator role[9] and introduced "a 10-hour curriculum designed to train digital navigators across 5 domains: (1) core smartphone skills, (2) basic technology troubleshooting, (3) app evaluation, (4) clinical terminology and data, and (5) engagement techniques." There is value in looking at models such as these to help inform the sector.

Settlement sector wellness

All survey responses (frontline and manager/director) pinpointed various mental health issues after months of working from home. These digital consequences can be categorized by four major factors: a lack of work-life balance because of heavy workloads, difficulties of transitioning home space to a workplace, isolation, and digital fatigue.

Wellness concerns are not a surprise during a pandemic. However, the sector has a potential control group, pre-arrival service practitioners, who have provided remote/digital services for years before the pandemic sent every agency into digital services. Their experiences are useful and suggest that digital fatigue and other wellness challenges related to technology will persist:

I've been working in the pre-arrival settlement sector for 4 years already and our services are purely online. Hence, transitioning from an office setting to working from home wasn't really hard- but there are two things that negatively affects our work: unreliable home internet access (e.g. we've been delivering webinars for clients and there are times that the webinar is too slow/cut off that affects the quality of the sessions) and digital fatigue. Since we've been online and in front of the screen at least 8-10 hours a day, while still meeting expectations for performance and productivity, there are times

[9] https://www.digitalpsych.org/uploads/1/2/9/7/129769697/digital_nav_training_paper.pdf

that I feel mentally exhausted and want to disengage with my laptop (and even phone, when some of my colleagues contact me there).

Wellness comments also bring up the reality of the current remote service delivery approach. Things take more time. Whether it is reaching out to clients without access to digital technology, onboarding and orienting clients (and dealing with their tech support issues), as well as the learning curve of digital/online service and facilitation skills, service interactions can take longer than face-to-face interactions. At the same time, it is also clearly important to take this time with clients who may be at-risk, anxious, isolated, or vulnerable in other ways.

Digital Inequity

The most predominantly mentioned concept in our survey was the notion of digital inequity. Digital inequality can be simplistically defined as 'some don't have the technology, or don't have wifi, or they don't know how to use it.' The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (U.S.) defines Digital Equity[10] as:

> a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

> Correspondingly, Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of technology. They include 5 elements:

> 1. affordable, robust broadband internet service;
> 2. internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
> 3. access to digital literacy training;
> 4. quality technical support; and
> 5. applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances.

> Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.

Our survey participants identified that digital inequity both contributes to and is a result of social inequity. They identified four factors contributing to digital inequity and an inability to access digital services: 1) clients had no access to digital devices such as cell phone, laptop, or tablets; 2) clients were living in precarious situations, which limited their digital device access; 3) clients

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[10] https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

had poor internet connections; and 4) clients had low digital literacy skills to use digital devices or online tools. In addition, survey respondents indicate that low digital literacy combined with language barriers produced additional challenges for online service delivery.

It is important for the sector to explore formal definitions of digital inequity and inclusion. How these impact, and can be impacted upon by the sector, is an area that requires additional insight and research so it can be adequately addressed by agencies and funders. There are additional nuances that have come up in conversations as well. For example, a family might have a smartphone and data plan, but that phone is controlled by the husband/father, or is prioritized for children for virtual schooling, etc. There are also issues related to domestic violence and control that impact the ability for workers and agencies to interact securely with clients who are using shared devices, etc.

> My other concern is that, especially for women, it was a really great thing for them to get out of the home and go into a school environment or have a tutor come into their home environment. And now, I was observing classes last night on WhatsApp, because I wanted to see how you use WhatsApp, you know, to teach. And one of the classes oh my god, there were kids, like there was a kid crawling on the woman's head. And then in the other class, the woman just kept turning her head like that every five seconds and was being fed all the information. The husband answers the WhatsApp call and then sets the wife up with the call and then sits next to her and tells her the answers and you know, if you're in the home, you can intervene and have more control. It's just like the classroom. You have much more control of the classroom.

There is a need to

> look at some of the pedagogical outcomes and implications that come up with moving into a hybrid model. There hasn't been a lot of research done in this area. And if this is going to happen, that needs to be done… how does that impact, say people with really low literacy skills? And women, which was another that gender stuff came up again and again, in our research, right? Because and you're, I'm sure you're hearing this, but if you've got a family, who's going to get access to the one device? Yeah, or two devices, the lowest person on that is the mother. So what does that mean for gender equity and equality in Canada?

Comments in the survey also suggest that increasing digitization in business and government are creating and highlighting digital inequality. If online forms and processes are not accessible to all, but clients are expected to use these online forms and processes, there is an inherent digital inequality built in that needs to be reviewed and addressed.

On the one hand, some organizations indicated losing clients who were not willing to participate in online sessions and services. Other organizations indicated they were able to reach clients who previously did not access services. They were able to make their services more accessible.

Some were able to reach clients from rural areas and increased their participation in online sessions.

For example:

> Our clients were probably more tech-savvy than our staff. We did not leave any clients without service and were able to reach a wider geographic area by working online. It took a lot of effort to get staff trained and used to working online and we had to do this very quickly. We used our clinical interpreters to assist our clients in their own language to get set up... We have been able to reach people outside our normal geographic area and we were able to continue to offer counselling to all of our clients. We saw an increase in demand for counselling, primarily after April when it became clearer that the lockdown would be going on for some time. Previous clients returned for counselling and we noticed that people were coming from countries where we usually did not see any or many clients - India and Thailand are two examples. We also provide mental health support, orientation and training to the wider community and we saw a huge rise in demand for this, especially working with large groups of staff and other community group members around wellness during the pandemic. We also launched an online parenting group program specifically for parents and caregivers who are immigrants or refugees dealing with the challenges of parenting through the pandemic. We used Zoom primarily for all our work and were able to train staff quite quickly, using the experience of a couple of our staff who had done a lot of work online before the pandemic. Although online counselling was not the ideal way of working for some of our staff, it became clear very quickly that it was the only way and that people needed mental health support more than ever, so we had to make it work!

Ultimately, the sector has been and needs to come to grips with digital equity and inclusion for larger systemic reasons as well.

> There's an intersection between those who are marginalized from digital technologies, those who experienced systemic racism, those who experience low skills in terms of employability or staying attached to the job market, unless, of course, they're doing totally precarious frontline work, which means that they're probably not in a place… there's a lot of people falling through the cracks there too, as we can see from the COVID, right, I mean, most people don't even have access to the advice, let alone how to keep safe. So I kind of feel that there is certainly you could probably find lots of stuff, on best practices for hybrid service delivery, but it would just be with the knowledge that you're not meeting, you're not going to be you're going to be dealing with a whole new group of people, or you're going to be dealing with people who are already kind of have capacities to be connected.

> The term digital equity, that's even new to us. When we first started this, I don't know, we started calling it virtual programming. But then when I started talking to other groups, before the RFP, I heard this digital equity, which is a bit more of an advocacy issue. And

so we decided internally, strategically, we're going to use that word, because it really is a new barrier to social determinants of health. Like all these other ones, our whole model of care is based on that. So this is just one more we need to start plugging. This is a human right. Really now if in this kind of world, you can't see your doctor, you can't get your groceries, you can't order groceries as a senior if you don't have online capability. You're facing an inequitable barrier that needs to end that cannot be again. At a service individual level, we're trying, we're going to keep doing it. But it's ridiculous that we're shopping for tablets and trying to shop for internet plans for people. That shouldn't be the case, just the way it shouldn't be the case that we're buying food for people and bringing it to them. We should not have that level of, you know, beyond in the emergency response. So I do think, and I think it's pushed all of us to see what's possible. There is this inequity that needs to be dealt with at a systemic level.

Some agencies have been able to acquire digital devices to loan or give to clients. There are never enough. And some agencies are now in a logistics business which is unfamiliar to them:

We were so happy. We got 26 devices. Well, holy, jeez, like, who gets them? How do you decide? How do you help people know even how to turn them on and use them? So then we started trying to find volunteers to kind of come up with like, cheat sheets for clients to use them. Because if someone doesn't have a device, there's a whole bunch of reasons. They don't have the devices. They also maybe don't know how to use a tablet, they might have a phone, they might not have an email account, which means you can't necessarily invite them to a Zoom meeting. So then it was like, hours and hours and hours of staff time and staff for social workers, mental health workers, navigators, trying to help clients in other languages often, yeah, figure this stuff out. And that became this huge time. And we had a lot of success. Our staff are amazing. We don't just need devices, we need staff support, we need support to do this. So then I started writing some grants for that. And we were just starting to get that money coming in. So the first bit of money, I basically just scraped together from slippage, frankly, to hire for that RFP, so we could do whatever we wanted with it. And partly it was to pause and say, Okay, let's get like we're all at this level. Now. Good. We did good. Now we want to get to this level. And one thing we've learned is, devices to clients, and digital equity is complex and time consuming."

"Lo-fi" approaches to service delivery

Some who determined that digital service was not appropriate (eg. clients cannot access digital devices, clients' low digital skills, feeling disconnected with clients through online service delivery, frontline workers own digital literacy skills were low or who prefer face-to-face and found online difficult to build rapport with clients) adapted to working with clients who might not be able or want to engage in formal digital services. They leaned heavily on phone contact, using technologies in a more one-on-one way, or physically distanced approaches such as mail, dropping off/curbside pick-up of materials, even physically distanced meetings in parks, etc.

Other examples included:

- Families creating and delivering colouring books for other families to teach how COVID-19 spreads;
- Go Fund Me pages to raise money for food and rent supports;
- Community members taking turns to create and deliver food boxes to families;
- No-contact book exchanges in parks;
- Learning packages for children and adults;
- Phone call check-ins: How are you doing? (one of the most low-tech, highly effective strategies participants reported);
- Creating and sharing summaries of government benefits available in different languages; and
- An arts and crafts class for women who invited family members from their home countries to sew together.

Promising practices to respond to Digital Equity

Digital equity continues to be a significant challenge in the sector. In some ways, it is an issue that is being formally addressed because of the shift to remote/digital work during the pandemic. While not new, it is newer to many agencies that had not previously utilized technology in service delivery at their current scale. It is an issue that occurs both within organizations as well as in the context of their service delivery to newcomers and communities.

This significant contribution to social integration can be attributed to settlement workers' self-directed promising online practices. In the early stage, settlement workers gradually acquired digital technology knowledge and integrated digital skills into community outreach.

Particularly, they obtained digital marketing competencies to create online newsletters, establish social media client groups, and promote their services through diverse digital platforms. They constituted virtual learning spaces for clients by providing interactive and dialogical blended services and educating their digital literacy skills and cybersecurity practices. These virtual social relationships were associated across different geographic locations (within and outside of Canada), supporting vulnerable and marginalized social groups such as immigrant mothers, refugees, international students, seniors, youths, and unemployed skilled immigrants to construct an inclusive virtual community.

Though hybrid services effectively alleviate the digital divide, this social inequity still exists between both clients as well as settlement workers. According to our data, we find that refugees, senior immigrants, those with low digital literacy skills and language proficiency, and individuals from disadvantaged areas are the most susceptible social units. For settlement workers, they experience purchasing work-purpose digital devices on their own, sharing computers within a household, as well as issues with internet connections for service delivery. In this preliminary report, we hope survey responses provoke our thinking not simply regarding who did not have the access or are low in digital skills but to examine why this can happen and

how to better support these multidimensional vulnerabilities. We also expect to answer some of the raised questions through data collection from our interviews and focus groups, developing a clear vision of digital inequality implications in our final report.

Understanding clients is essential

Client accessibility of digital devices and online platforms was indicated as a major reason for choosing specific technologies and channels. To be more specific, client accessibility can be defined as "easy to use," "user-friendly, "flexible," and "convenient." Frontline workers followed clients' digital habits and tailored services to these habits and preferences.

Both frontline staff and management are clear about the importance of using a variety of technologies, based on their understanding of client technology use.

> The tools used depends on the groups of newcomers served by the newcomer settlement advisor. For example, the majority of newcomers who arrived from Syria prefer to communicate using WhatsApp. Therefore, our Newcomer Settlement Advisor serving Allophone newcomers uses WhatsApp to provide services and programs. Anglophone and francophone newcomers tend to use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn. Therefore, newcomer settlement advisors serving in English and French promote their programs using the above tools. In short, some social media/comms tools are used more in some cultural groups than in others. Identifying this is helpful.

> Facebook reaches our working families. Instagram reaches youth/young adults. Email and Zoom - contacts with partnering organizations. Posters put up at local shopping - vulnerable/seniors who don't or can't use technology. Radio/Newspaper - seniors and businesses.

Who could benefit from a hybrid service model?

> Many clients are enjoying the benefits of having more personalized teaching from the literacy staff. Specific clients that have sensory needs or trauma related avoidance of crowds are also feeling and doing better in class.

> You've got different clients for whom virtual is almost better. Because it just removes a whole bunch of barriers they used to face though getting somewhere and in the winter, and with the cost or transit, all that stuff. They've got kids, they've got response (sic). So to just hop on a call is easier, but that then there's another group where no, it's always going to be in person is going to be what they want and need and will thrive in and will otherwise probably be at high risk of falling between the cracks… I think we've learned quite a bit because in the past, some of these questions really didn't come to surface for us. You had an appointment, I knew that their travel and getting used to the city and all those were barriers and challenges. But there were life skills coaches that we could connect the clients to in any way and would take the bus with the clients and they would

show them how the bus system works. And he would show them where our clinic is. So there were ways that we got around things. And the whole concept of this digital world really didn't, weren't too much involved in the client care that we provided. All of the services that we provided were touch points of in person services with the exception of the interpretation services, that we have the option for remote interpretation services, but most of the other services they were, and they continue on majority of them actually to be still in person. But we never considered the aspect of this digital world to be able to deliver some of these services almost as effectively or maybe even sometimes better for the client. So that has been a huge learning curve, because it just wasn't on our radar in the past."

In order to explore degrees of frontline workers adopting digital technologies to capture client needs, we were also interested in exploring if frontline workers have started intake or needs assessment on technology, digital literacy, and communication preference. A much higher percentage of respondents indicated that they have started intake or needs assessment on technology, digital literacy, and communication preference than previously understood.

Depending on how formally these agencies are collecting and storing this data, there is an opportunity for data analysis to further the sector's understanding of the digital literacy and communication preferences of newcomers they serve. It would be useful to capture nuances here, as well as to address this comment indicating that collecting this information suggests an immediate requirement to offer services using that technology, which is not necessarily the case for collecting data:

> Not yet, because it is a team approach, and it wouldn't be wise to offer services to the clients in the workshop I facilitate if the other facilitators did not feel comfortable with that particular communication option preference.

Also interesting to note is that assessments were not conducted when workers assumed low client digital literacy. This is equally important data to collect. By collecting it, agencies can both note the digital divide, as well as actually confirm their assumptions about client digital literacy and use of internet and digital devices.

Digital client interactions take more time

Frontline workers report that it is more time consuming to connect virtually. There are challenges using different technologies and platforms. Establishing new relationships and trust between staff and clients (and other stakeholders) in the virtual space can be very challenging.

> We're hearing from the sponsor, and the newcomer perspective that some newcomers are putting their settlement goals on hold, while virtual. While it is virtual. We've heard of folks, especially language classes, not cutting it for them. And so they're basically

saying, I'm gonna wait till this is all done. And then, you know, go back. There is an increased feeling of isolation among newcomers.

It takes a lot more time to administer language assessments online/virtually versus in-person. An average in-person assessment (one service visit) can take 1.5 to 3 hours. An online assessment, due the series of steps that need to be covered, can take 2 to 4 days (multiple contacts). Funding and assessment targets need to take this into consideration. Current annual assessments targets are not attainable in an online assessment context."

There is still a lot to learn from clients on this topic and more comprehensive research needs to be done with clients.

I would say the big one is the time that virtual takes. I don't think it is just about skill. I think it's just it is more labour intensive, you can have the possibility of reaching a wider group of people who might have faced transportation barriers, ...but it often does take a lot more time than an in person where you just have a weekly group people show up, you got the food. That's our sense anyway, to do a group virtually, it's like, it's like being a teacher, you have to like almost plan a curriculum, you have to plan a workshop, it's every week you have to content you have to create content that's engaging, it's different than than an in-person, you know, let's all get together and cook. And I'll talk to you about nutrition, I don't have to think about it. I know I'm a nutritionist, but now I have to present this information in a way that's plain language level so there is a lot of detriment to building engagement into it.

The main challenge is that when you're in person, or with group activities, you will have 20 people or 25 in one room, and then you manage with support from volunteers and frontline workers. With online services you cannot do those large groups, you will not engage them. And they may say yes, the first time, but they will not be able to participate in future activities. How do we report it? We have targets. For example, we have 26 group activities that we have to do a year. But now we are doing hundreds of them. Because the 25 number of clients, for an in person meeting, you have to split them for between five to 10 depending [on the] level of you know English and understanding and digital literacy. So those have been some of the challenges that we faced. We are still working on that.

Intergovernmental coordination to foster intra-sector coordination

The sector is looking for leadership and guidance from funders. In particular, they see possible synergies for different levels of government to work better together. The possibilities of technology interoperability require better government interoperability.

It would be really great to understand the safety, the confidentiality and security of different applications and purposes, so that we know what's acceptable, what's not in our funders in case some cases is IRCC, and the provincial funder for ESL, for example, you know, what's acceptable to them as well.

They can also foster better sharing within the sector.

The funders are funding pockets of innovation, which is perfect, because it's localized, it's contextualized. But then they're not sharing. You know, if you give me $10,000, in developing, you know, 20 hours of content, I'm not obligated to share with BC and why the hell is that? Across Canada IRCC has been investing heavily, because they're very pro innovation. And they're very pro technology, which I commend them for. But the contents are developed in pockets, which are perfect because they're localized, but they're not shareable. And this is ridiculous. Many good things have been developed. But they're all in pockets.And that's it. I mean, compartmentalization doesn't work anymore. You know, if you go online, you have access to Chrome, you have access to zoom, you have access to IE, you have access to edge. You can Google this, you can do that, you know, everything is in one place. Not so in our sector. You know, because everyone's interest is developing in their own pocket and putting their name on, which is nice, they can still have their name on, there's nothing wrong with that. Shareability is missing.

For technological development, we need huge investment in digital content. Ongoing, we need huge investment in training people on how to use but also make them user friendly and accessible. But we also need resource sharing. If that's the condition for me to develop, and get some funding from my funder, I have to make sure I comply with some tools and checks and balances to make my content shareable to that platform. Otherwise, if I build something, and then as an afterthought want to make it shareable. Guess what, it's not gonna work. And time has proven to us that this ends up being a lot more expensive.

Are we leveraging similar promising practices? Are we leveraging similar technology, from a user perspective. The more consistency there is across the sector, the easier they'll be able to pick up on some of those pieces. And I'm a little bit afraid that we're all heading off in our own direction during the pandemic. So I think that's an opportunity there. I'm also really concerned that many of us are talking about, you know, post COVID, and a new way forward. But what we're not talking about is the culture shift that would actually make that successful. So if our language programs continue to be blended, and if you are interested in what data, we have some amazing feedback from faculty and students with over 700 students participated. And I can tell you, the bottom line is current students want hybrid models. That's what it definitely comes down to. But new refugees and newcomers coming into Canada, depending on their previous experience, may actually think a blended one isn't a best model.

And referral agencies and settlement services have their own biases, as do our frontline people, I always hear our navigators tell students online learning isn't the best, it's better face to face. On the IRCC website, it actually states that online learning isn't a replacement for, you know, face to face. And I agree with that. But it goes on to say that that's actually not ideal, either. So are we going to take some of these promising practices, and ensure that we're highly educated in awareness around the benefits? Because I think, and I know, from our own experience, we're reaching target groups we've never reached before. And yes, we still do have learners who are saying, I'm gonna wait till there's a face to face class. But I think we can live in the best of both worlds, we can make sure those face to face classes come back in the way that students want. And we can extend our services and those together. So I think there's an underlying bias control, we're going to need to control.

Often people say, I want to know what other people are doing. But it's often trying to figure out well, how do you communicate what one teacher is doing to another teacher? So it's trying to figure out what that communication methodology would be. How do you translate it? It's about resource development, curation, you know, knowledge mobilization kind of ideas."

Defining success in digital services - evaluation and data

We asked our participants if there was any support they would consider vital to proceed with their measurement process. Three primary resources were highlighted: 1) financial and educational resources; 2) governmental support and guidance; and 3) learning from other organizations.

We analyzed if the pandemic has generated new approaches to engaging newcomers and communities. Both English and French surveys demonstrate that COVID-19 has created spaces for organizations to interact with newcomers and communities. A crucial success was management workers' comprehensive approaches to expand their services to clients in rural areas. One respondent stated that clients from rural areas were the most vulnerable social group with low digital literacy. After identifying client situations and difficulties, they provided needed support to increase their online service participation. Apart from expanding online service delivery to remote areas, informants indicated that they had created service solutions as strategies that vitally led to digital transformation successes.

So when you're when you're talking about social service, offerings, to families in need of assistance, regardless of what the need is, your focus has to be on what service you're providing, on evaluating that service, and just notating the manner in which the service was delivered… How are you defining success? Last year? Because how you would define it this year is really the same. Yeah, you just need a couple of different checkboxes for this visit [which] was done via zoom, or this visit was done via telephone, right? That's really the only difference in what we're measuring. We're measuring how

the service was delivered, instead of just what service was delivered. So again, going back to my early years in it, one of the first things we were taught was, figure out what you want to do, and figure out what products will do what you want to do, before you decide what product you want to buy.

And if you're doing a good job as a service delivery organization, part of doing a good job is evaluating whether your services are working. And however you're evaluating that, whatever it takes to evaluate that. It's critical, because funders don't want to serve to help you do it. If you're not proving you can do you know, get the outcomes that you need. Yeah. And you've got to have the knowledge and the tools to do that evaluation.

Tracking client digital literacy became essential. Those with adequate performance management systems and data approaches were already set up to collect useful data, including adding questions to their intake and needs assessment processes.

There were multiple models within hybrid service delivery that were used across the country, which need attention, but I just want to make one point that in some I was having a very interesting meeting with, with some coordinators and home visitors this last week, actually, and they said that. So what's the indicator for success for us in terms of a digital device being in the home? Is it that that digital device is being used for home visiting or to deliver the program? Or is there a broader agenda in place? Or is it...that those children who are in school who are you know, who have learned how to upload their things onto their school portal? Is it that a mother who is able to navigate transit or find things online and then go to the right place to get those things? So there's a so I think the settlement sector as a whole, we need to be conscious about what's the what's what's the success indicator, like it might still be very successful, even if the device or the phone or the internet is not being used for, you know, just doing one thing."

Perceptions of service transferability to a digital model

Our survey found that over 25% of frontline workers indicated that challenges of working with clients come from some of the nature of working remotely and are not part of working in a physical office space. These non-transferable features are threefold:

1. disconnection with clients through the online-only service delivery approach;
2. missing immediate response and support from colleagues;
3. and, inability to access office supplies and facilities.

This raises questions worth exploring. Are these actually non-transferable features? Are these insurmountable? Or are they internalized barriers and bias towards technology? Are the barriers made up of moving offline practice into online spaces without modifying them to fit the medium? Does it require a shift towards more one-on-one support than group for some types of services and client groups?

It would be worth exploring both the barriers as well as the rich and growing landscape of facilitators and trainers who are learning, sharing, building communities of practice, and researching these questions.