

2024

# DIGITAL LITERACY GAPS IN THE NEWCOMER SERVING SECTOR

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## TSLIP NEWCOMER SERVICES COLLABORATION WORKING GROUP



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# Presentation Overview:

- Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership (TSLIP) – Newcomer Services Collaboration Working Group
- Critical Necessity – Shifting Programming & Services Online
- Why Digital Literacy? Current Landscape | 2024 Pervasive Gaps
- Methodology – Roundtable | Online Survey Overview
- Challenges/Barriers | Promising Practices
- Recommendations

# A Focus on Digital Literacy

- Newcomer Serving Sector – Forced by COVID-19 Pandemic to rapidly transition programming/services to online formats
- New and Pre-Existing Accessibility issues - Exacerbated
- 2023 Workplan - TSLIP's Newcomer Services Collaboration Working Group flagged digital literacy as a critical area – Focus and Support from Newcomer-serving Stakeholders and Funders
- **What is Digital Literacy:** broad array of skills necessary to effectively and safely utilize technology, such as problem-solving, protecting sensitive information, assessing the credibility of sources, and confidently navigating various digital platforms and technologies

# A Focus on Digital Literacy (*Continued*)

- **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:** Digital literacy involves the **ability to solve problems using technology** in a safe, legal, and ethically responsible manner. With the ever-expanding role of digitalization and big data in the modern world, digital literacy also means **having strong data literacy skills and the ability to engage with emerging technologies.** Digitally literate students recognize the **rights and responsibilities**, as well as the **opportunities**, that come with living, learning, and working in **an interconnected digital world** (2024).



# Current Landscape – 2024 Pervasive Gaps

## **BARRIERS FOR NEWCOMERS:**

- Lack of technology, software, and internet access
- Physical distance from locations that may offer free access to devices and/or programming
- Lack of childcare to that would allow increased access for newcomers to participate in these programs (Huynh and Malli, 2020).

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS/COMMUNITY GROUPS SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS WITH DIGITAL LITERACY:**

- Challenges such as a lack of funding and resources
- Lack of a comprehensive and coordinated sector-wide approach to professional development
- Ambiguity in organizational mandates for providing digital literacy
- Need for ongoing staff professional development and resources for its sustainability (Campana and Lui, 2020).

# Methodology



## Phase 1 – Information Gathering Round 1:

- Review past reports relating to digital literacy gaps among staff and newcomer service users, promising practices, and access to internet/technology
- Organize and convene a Digital Literacy Roundtable with partners to discuss what programming/services and supports are being offered and what gaps are persisting

## Phase 2 – Information Gathering Round 2:

- Learn about what digital literacy programs and supports being offered by partners for newcomer service users
- Develop and share online survey with partners on digital literacy services/programming
- Share questions from Digital Literacy Roundtable with partner agencies who did not attend for additional insights

# Methodology

## **Phase 3 – Data Analysis:**

- Analyze data from Digital Literacy Roundtable and TSLIP Partnership Survey on Digital Literacy Programming Gaps
- Compile key findings and data from past reports for literature review

## **Phase 4 – Draft Report + Recommendations:**

- Create a Working Group Project Subcommittee to draft report and recommendations based on data, key findings, and literature review

## **Phase 5 – Dissemination of Report + Recommendations:**

- Share report and recommendations with relevant decision-makers and stakeholders
- Seek opportunities to enact changes to how digital literacy programming is funded, designed and offered to newcomers

# Findings (Roundtable Highlights)

## Challenges and Barriers in Providing Digital Literacy Support

- Newcomers, including those with higher language levels, are finding that websites and portals essential for their settlement (i.e. IRCC, World Education Services, etc) are difficult to navigate
- Difficulties in applying for funding as grassroots organizations (e.g. eligibility criteria, competition with larger and more established organizations, trusteeship considerations)
- Persisting accessibility barriers (e.g. for seniors and/or folks with disabilities)
- Funder restrictions on who is eligible to access programs/who organizations can design programming for (e.g. international students, refugees, those who may no longer be considered newcomers) leave many without options for digital literacy training and support
- Affordability and access to up-to-date devices and reliable internet continue to be an issue for newcomers



# Findings (Survey Highlights)

**Respondents were from a range of positions from organizations serving newcomers, grassroots/community groups. In total, there were 44 respondents:**

- Almost half were Coordinators or Frontline workers
- A small percentage were Executive Staff (Executive Directors, Senior Management, etc.) Program Directors or Managers and about 20% selected “Other”

**Two thirds currently provide digital literacy programming to Newcomers and the rest do not**

**Staff Access to Digital Literacy Professional Development:**

- Around two thirds were trained on new apps, software, and platforms
- No digital literacy training (Around 20%)
- Received support on how to fill out e-forms (Around 40%)
- Half received or accessed online facilitation skills training
- Two out of 10 received training on using e-signatures and how to use smartphone, social media integration, and cloud computing

# Promising Practices

## **Access Alliance:**

- Digital Equity Screening Protocol Tool – Assess New Intakes in Digital Literacy Skills
- Partnerships with other organizations offering online resources and training
- Large Digital Literacy Library Resources

## **South Asian Community Support Canada:**

- Collaborating with larger organizations for greater access to funding

## **Fair Chance Skills Development:**

- Pre-Employment Module-Based digital foundations programming

## **Newcomer Women Services:**

- Digital literacy coaches providing one-on-one training and developing partnerships with digital literacy support organizations, including access to laptops

## **WoodGreen Community Services:**

- Dedicated digital literacy staff member providing one-on-one sessions with Newcomer clients and group sessions for digital literacy programming

# Recommendations

- Dedicated resources/funding for more **personalized** and **successive** newcomer digital literacy programming with complementary support to access **up-to-date devices, software, and internet hotspots**
- Increased opportunities for **public-private partnerships** to help bridge digital literacy learning and access gaps
- **Open eligibility** for all newcomers **regardless of status** to access newcomer services including digital literacy programming
- Dedicated **professional development** funding and opportunities for digital literacy upskilling and device use tutorials for **Staff** in the newcomer serving sector and **community groups** supporting newcomers
- Create a **Centralized Digital Literacy Programming & Supports** for Newcomer Serving Organizations and community Groups supporting newcomers to partner with (e.g. through public libraries or school boards) to bolster programming, access device lending, and develop curricula
- Increased collaborative **Knowledge Sharing** for and between grassroots and newcomer serving organizations to build, replicate, and complement promising practices around digital literacy support