Building Digital Skills to Advance Economic Well-Being
IRC Economic Programs Digital Literacy Challenge

Building client digital literacy skills for economic well-being in the context of a client population that:

• Is more than 90% English language learner (ELL) – nationwide 67% of ELLs report no or limited basic digital skills

• Is entirely low-income, with half reporting less than $12,000 in earned income, amplifying access issues including devices and internet access – nationwide nearly half of low-income families do not have a computer or broadband internet at home

• Due to COVID-19, is facing significant reduction in access to traditional digital literacy classes and supports that were already insufficient at precisely the time when these skills are critical to economic, educational, and personal resilience
Building Digital Literacy: A Three Phase Model*

Three Phases Distinguished By:

• Individual’s level of digital literacy
• Level of ‘touch’ & staff time needed
• Format
• Content focus
• Device focus
• Expectations for progress

*Developed based on learnings from IRC’s 2019-20 Microsoft-funded Digital Literacy for New Americans initiative, recent COVID-era learnings from remote service delivery, and a survey of IRC economic empowerment managers conducted in July 2020
Phase I

- **Client Profile**: Minimal digital literacy skills, limited comfort using digital device
- **Level of ‘Touch’ (Format)**: ‘High-touch’ individualized support (1:1 tutor relationship)
- **Device Focus**: Smartphone-focused
- **Content**: Foundational skills, device understanding, basic device navigation, use of basic apps, communication
- **Expectations**: Progress at this stage is the slowest, most resource intensive, and developing comfort with the device is key. Focus on specific skills and communication tools
- **If Remote Delivery is Required**: Video calls on basic platforms
Phase II

- **Client Profile:** Basic comfort with device but lacking specific skills and confidence
- **Level of ‘Touch’ (Format):** ‘Medium-touch’ built around small cohorts and classroom environment
- **Device Focus:** Smart phone and laptop
- **Content:** Specific knowledge/skills (i.e. job readiness/job seeking), building core skills (typing, searching, troubleshooting), intro to common software
- **Expectations:** Progress is quicker given foundational skills but still time consuming to promote sufficient exposure for mastery. Focus on real-world assessments and comfort/confidence
- **If Remote Delivery is Required:** Cohort instruction on multi-functional video conference platforms, home practice with variable support from tutor
Phase III

- **Client Profile:** Comfortable with digital devices and pursuing specific skill development

- **Level of ‘Touch’ (Format):** ‘Lowest-touch’ distance-learning focus, instructor in coach role

- **Device Focus:** Laptop and smart phone

- **Content:** Digital skills aligned with interests/goals (e.g. occupation-specific skills), certifications (e.g. Microsoft Suite), connection to outside resources and systems to continue learning

- **Expectations:** Faster progress due to base digital literacy, more independence/self-guided, open-ended

- **If Remote Delivery is Required:** Mix of self-guided through learning platform, cohort-style video conference classes, and coaching relationship
Activating the Three Phase Model: Resources Needed

- Initial learnings suggest cost per participant for skill development ranges from $250-600 if delivered in an integrated model with other economic empowerment programming
- Supporting access (e.g. tablet, subsidized internet) increases costs
- Limited sources of federal funding dedicated to digital skill development though opportunities to use adult education, workforce, and some block grant funds