Building Digital Skills to Advance Economic Well-Being

IRC Economic Programs Digital Literacy Challenge

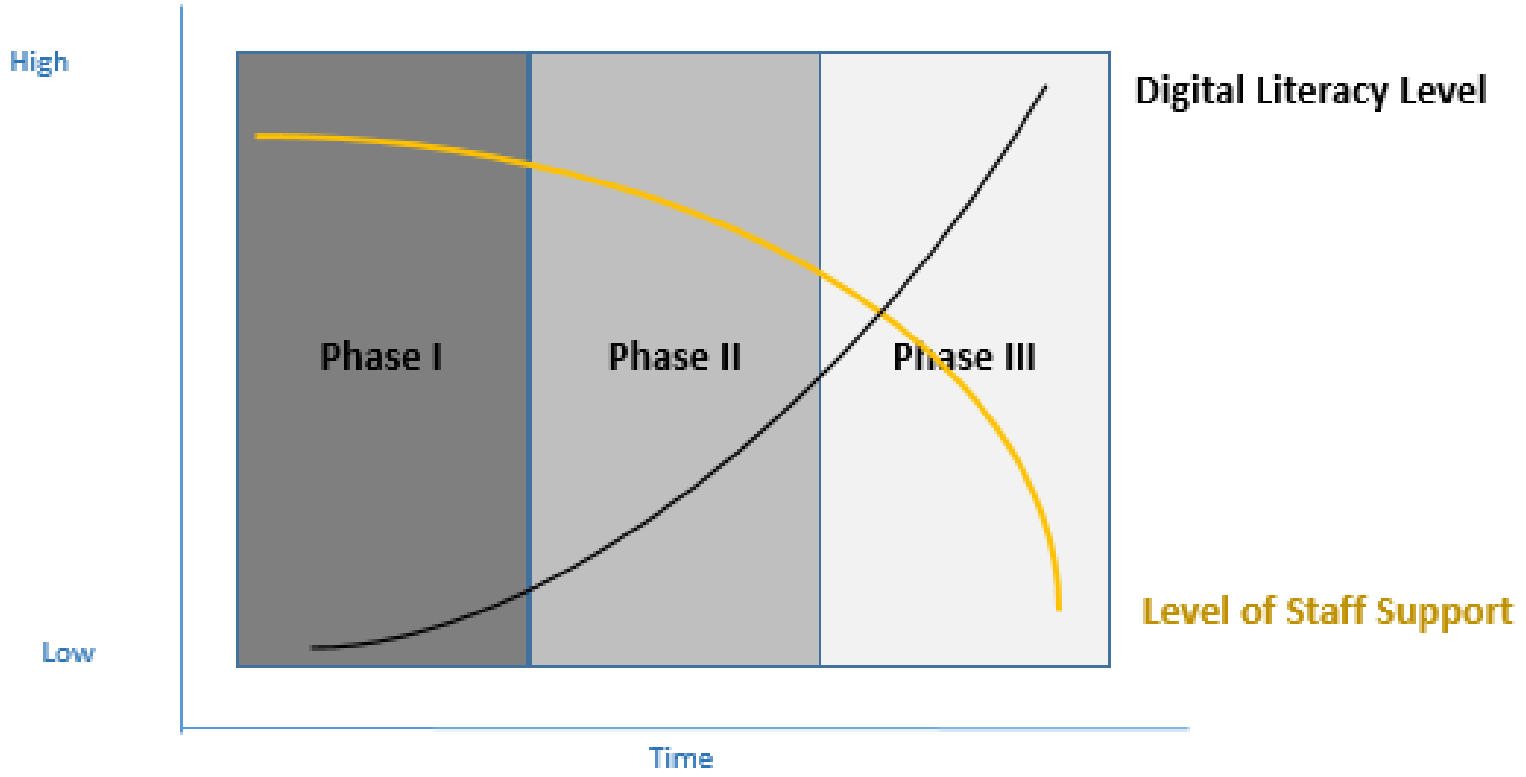
Building client digital literacy skills for economic well-being in the context of a client population that:

- 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