

CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH THE COVID-19 LENS:

HARNESSING INNOVATION AND MOBILIZING BEST PRACTICES FROM THE PANDEMIC



FOCUS AREA: LANGUAGE



COVID-19 CONTEXT



The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a dramatic shift in the delivery of language courses in the settlement and integration sector. Virtual programming created the capacity for instructors to teach remotely, catering to the diverse needs of students. However, there have been many logistical barriers that highlighted the pre-existing vulnerabilities of newcomers. From administrative challenges including technological access, digital literacy, and a growing concern over cyber security.



PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Organizational level

- **Need for more professional development** to improve staff capacities in adapting to virtual programming
- **Waitlists** for language courses and initial language assessments

Client level

- **Technological barriers** (e.g., access to appropriate technology such as laptops, sufficient and affordable internet service, digital literacy)
- Appropriate workspaces for clients to engage in course work (e.g., quiet place to study, childcare)
- Low **digital literacy** has been highly correlated to those with low literacy in their home language

BEST PRACTICES

- **Hybrid courses** that derive benefits from both virtual programming and in-person delivery
 - Initial intake of students' preferences and digital literacy levels allows for organizations to properly allocate resources
 - Self-directed services for students to access based on their individual needs
- Consistent teacher-student engagement and interaction, as well as peer engagement both online and in person
- **Laptop lending libraries**
 - Increases accessibility to technology to fully participate in language courses

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- What are the barriers related to low literacy and low digital literacy learners in relation to COVID-19?
- What have been the best practices and approaches utilized to combat the barriers associated with low literacy and low digital literacy?
- What have been the best practices in language service delivery that have been more successful through virtual programming over traditional in person delivery?
- How have agencies navigated pre-existing or emergent barriers pertaining to language services amidst the public health context?
- What learnings from the COVID-19 context of language service delivery are worthwhile to leverage into organizational capacity building and professional development?
- What approaches across agencies can strengthen the network of language services and develop sector-wide capacity to support newcomers with emergent needs in relation to language?
- What approaches have been developed to ensure effective language service delivery to newcomers with complex needs or those who have traditionally been underserved?
- What specific issues have emerged from COVID-19 that have prompted you and your partner agencies to develop collaborative responses pertaining to language services?