



PEEL-HALTON SETTLEMENT PARTNERSHIPS' EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

**IRCC Action Day 2024
Summary Report**

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PURPOSE

The annual IRCC Action Day, held on November 12, 2024, brought together 65 attendees from IRCC-funded settlement agencies from the Peel and Halton regions for a full-day, in-person event.

The purpose of the day included:

1. to reflect on progress in the past year and in the funding cycle;
2. consider current challenges and collaborative opportunities; and
3. to look ahead to changes such as the NAARS DNS and digital transformation needs.

The day opened with a “reflection and sharing exercise,” celebrating the sector’s achievements over the past five years. This sets the stage for aligning stakeholders around strategic objectives and exploring innovative, technology-driven solutions to enhance service delivery. Key highlights for the day included policy updates from IRCC, collaborative discussions on ongoing digital transformation initiatives, and actionable planning for the upcoming year.

The event supported the validation of ways to collaborate including the implementation of a digital transformation roadmap, reinforcing the Executive Council’s and partner organizations’ commitment to adaptability, innovation, and meeting the evolving needs of newcomers in the Halton and Peel communities.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2019-2024



2019-2020

2020-2021

2021-2022

2022-2023

2023-2024

Reflection Themes	Highlights
Program Expansion	- Launch of LINC/ESL/FSL program in collaboration with Halton District School Board (2020). - Addition of a new service point in Mississauga.
Francophone Services	- Initiation of Francophone services at Pearson Airport.
Pandemic Response and Adaptation	- Pivoted to online service delivery . - Improved settlement staff's digital proficiency to enable seamless online and hybrid working.
Women-Centric Initiatives	- Launched programs to reduce isolation during the pandemic , building targeted support networks.
Rural Employment Initiatives	- Initiated rural employment programs to address job gaps in underserved areas.
Staff Development	- Provided mental health training to equip staff to support clients effectively.
Refugee Support	- Assisted over 2,000 Government-Assisted Refugees (GARS) . - Provided tailored support for Ukrainian nationals under the CUAET pathway and Afghan arrivals. - Delivered job coaching and settlement services.
COVID-19 Adaptation	- Supported newcomers through remote working models .
Program and Partnership Development	- Expanded Francophone services with increased funding. - Collaborated with Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), Syrian Canadian Foundation , and others to deliver hybrid services. - Strengthened staff capacity.
Program Launches	- Initiated the RNW program (supporting women's reintegration).
Refugee and Newcomer Support	- Assisted Gazan refugees through food security programs. - Enhanced accessibility with Saturday service access .
Staff and Capacity Development	- Onboarded a Mental Health Specialist . - Focused on staff capacity building and development.
Digital and Regional Innovation	- Completed Peel Regional Accountability Models for Settlement Consultation. - Expanded digital service integration with Avenue.ca .

COLLECTIVE PROGRESS BY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

The report from the 2023 IRCC Action Day highlighted three key strategic recommendations. The following section outlines the progress made since last year.

1. Staff Support and Retention

- Efforts to address staff compensation by leveraging OCASI salary data were carried out, reinforcing – sector’s commitment to fair remuneration.
- Professional development made notable progress, with increased participation in Sheridan micro-credential programs and region-specific initiatives in both Halton and Peel, including the integrating learning on Francophone services.
- Leadership development opportunities for staff were actively fostered, through structured forums that promoted collaboration on professional development.
- Executive Council lunch meetings, facilitated by co-chairs during Dec 2023 under the CFP, successfully identified alignment opportunities and were completed as planned.

2. Advancing Digital Collaboratively

- Engagement with Code for Canada consultants has driven progress on digital transformation.
 - A comprehensive digital maturity assessment and roadmap are currently being implemented; Digital Transformation committee has been formed to implement the roadmap developed with Code for Canada (see Appendix D for member details)

3. Francophone Integration and Client Referrals

- Ongoing efforts are focused on aligning with Francophone Integration Pathway requirements in a client-centered manner, with strengthened collaboration between Réseaux en Immigration Francophone (RIF) and Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) to effectively achieve these goals.
- Discussions on optimizing client referrals and improving service information-sharing strategies remain an ongoing priority at the Executive Council level.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES, AND CITIZENSHIP CANADA (IRCC) UPDATE

Stefany Cutuli, Manager for the Settlement Network for Peel and Halton, shared policy updates, strategic priorities, and her vision for the near term: The last five years featured incredible work in the settlement sector. There has been continuous improvement, identified efficiencies and a pivot to online services through the pandemic and back. The sector has effectively met the surges in demand and managed waitlists. A significant shift was observed in our IRCC gatherings, transitioning from planning to action-oriented approaches.



- **For CFP 2024, there were no new updates** at this time.
 - Immigration levels influenced the service landscape.
 - All applicants would have received an email. Those who did not were advised to contact their respective IRCC program officers.
 - Efforts were made to prioritize core settlement and resettlement services, as well as services for Francophone minority communities.
 - Final funding decision results were announced in late November, guided by IRCC C.O.R.E principles and the 2023 Outcomes report on the IRCC website.
- **Slippage:** Peel-Halton, as a catchment region in Ontario, has demonstrated efficient use of funds, with the lowest slippage level in the province at 1.8%. Please identify any gaps or opportunities for reinvestment.
- **Annual Immigration Levels Plan:** On October 24, 2024, the new levels plan was released, outlining targets for the next three years to support partner planning. We are in a new context with pressures on housing and infrastructure.
 - For the very first time, the plan included temporary resident levels, such as international students and temporary foreign workers, recognizing the growing pressure on housing and infrastructure.

FINDINGS FROM THE DAY

What might be considered core services for newcomers in Peel-Halton? Each table had a robust discussion about services and led to consideration of how service has evolved over time.



Existing services, such as pre-arrival services, settlement, employment, community connections, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), language training were consistently identified as foundational services across the tables.

- Our shift to digital services should be viewed through the lens of digital literacy and the integration of hybrid service models. Additionally, AI and the growing need for data management skills were highlighted as important considerations.
- Consideration of centralized referral and core competencies for referral were raised.
- “How clients arrive (immigration stream, such as a family, or a newcomer spouse or an international student) will influence what is needed. Service navigation for the very new is important; while integration is more central to those who have been here for a couple of years.”
- Francophone services were emphasized, particularly in relation to support at the airport, resettlement assistance, and language training.
- Mental health and well-being were frequently highlighted as key areas of focus.
- The need for specific programming for children (CNC), youth, seniors, and inclusive services for men and boys was also noted.
- Interpretation services were identified as a key need by one of the tables.
- Opportunities for increased collaboration and community-building, including mentorship and volunteer programs, were also discussed.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND DIGITAL EQUITY

Digital transformation and equity were a strategic priority for the 2020-2025 cycle.

Research conducted with service providers and newcomers offered key insights into the state of digital maturity and equity in the Peel-Halton settlement sector, along with recommendations for a forward-looking roadmap.

Summary of discussion:

Findings from a survey assessing the digital maturity of the Peel-Halton settlement sector, completed by 18 out of 24 respondents, revealed:

- Most agencies exhibit moderate digital maturity, with strengths in structured organizational processes, data management, and cybersecurity.
- Agencies demonstrate adaptability and efficient service deployment through shared technological platforms, but challenges persist in adopting open-source tools, streamlining digital development, and ensuring consistent budget allocations for digital initiatives.
 - Many staff feel equipped to deliver digital services, yet gaps remain in regular training, strategic inclusion of digital roles, and testing digital literacy during recruitment.
 - Smaller organizations tend to have lower digital maturity due to resource limitations.
 - There is strong interest in collaboration, data sharing, and digital transformation within the sector, though differing priorities, resource constraints, and the lack of unified tools hinder progress.
- Addressing outdated systems, fostering trust and communication, and implementing a centralized data-sharing system could significantly enhance service delivery, reduce redundancies, and strengthen sector cohesion.

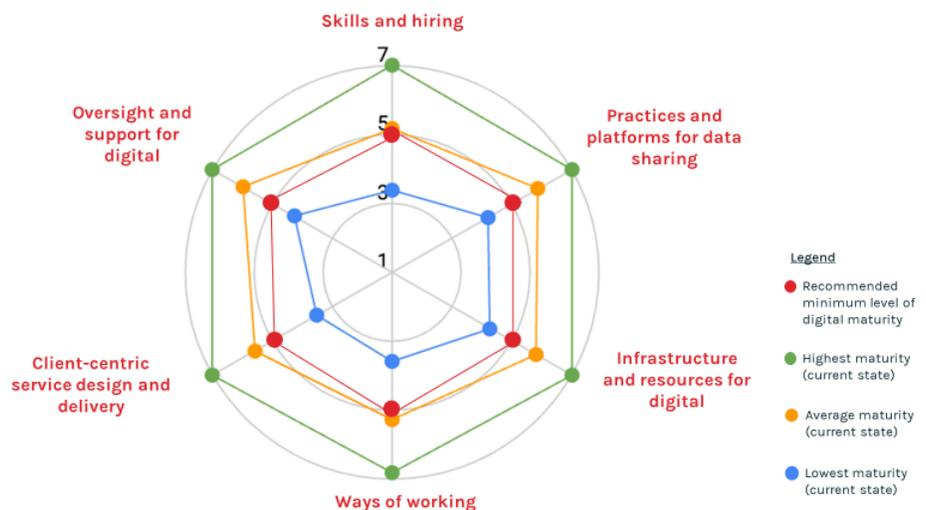
Levels of Digital Maturity

The assessment provides a moment-in-time snapshot of digital maturity based on 7 levels.

Level of Digital Maturity	1 Limited	2 Emerging	3 Developing	4 Moderate	5 Proficient	6 Advanced	7 Leading
What this looks like for an agency	Minimal digital infrastructure, paper-based processes are the norm.	Initial digitization efforts are underway, with limited capabilities. Simple data collection and digital storage systems are in place.	Many processes are digitized, with internal applications used for specific tasks. Basic data management systems with basic analysis capabilities are in place.	Majority of processes are digitized, with integrated systems for collaboration and efficiency. Functional data management systems are in place.	Processes are data-driven, user-focused, and streamlined with technology as enablers. Robust data management systems are in place, with some analytic capabilities.	Digital capabilities are seamlessly integrated into all aspects of operations. Sophisticated data management systems and analytics are in place.	Has transformative impact on the sector through innovative use of digital technologies and data-driven strategies.

Recommended minimum level of digital maturity for the Peel-Halton settlement sector: **Level 5 - Proficient**

Level of Digital Maturity	5 Proficient
What this looks like for an agency	Processes are data-driven, user-focused, and streamlined with technology as enablers. Robust data management systems are in place, with some analytic capabilities.



Note: These results are reflective of the 15 agencies who participated in the assessment.

Digital Equity Research:

Findings from the digital equity research, conducted through interviews and focus groups with both newcomers and settlement service providers, was also discussed revealing significant barriers faced by newcomers in accessing digital settlement services in Peel, as:

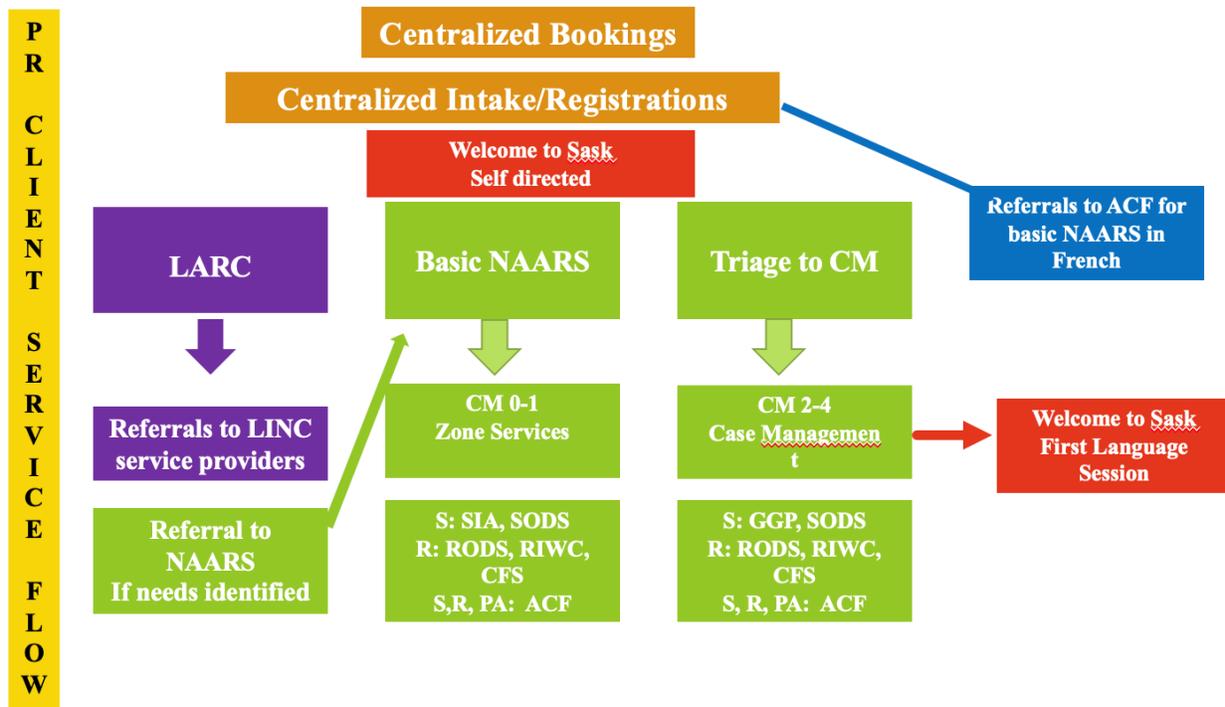
- Key identified group includes—those with limited digital literacy, and individuals not fluent in English, and family members whose settlement needs are met informally through relatives.
- Contributing factors such as—language barriers, lack of access to affordable technology, and limited awareness of available digital services contribute significantly to these challenges.
- Additionally, issues like digital training gaps and inadequate multilingual resources exacerbate inequities.
- 16.7% of service providers did not feel comfortable delivering digital services.

Addressing these barriers through targeted outreach, user-friendly service design, and capacity-building initiatives was identified as an essential step in ensuring equitable access to digital settlement services for all newcomers. To strengthen the digital transformation and equity, the following action items are recommended:

- Increased focus on staff training for digital skills and literacy
- Implementing the Peel-Halton Digital Transformation Plan created by Code 4 Canada
- Participation in the Digital Transformation Committee for Peel-Halton
- Creation of an AI governance subcommittee

NEEDS AND ASSETS ASSESSMENTS AND REFERRAL SERVICES (NAARS) PROGRAM

An example of a **centralized NAARS model** is the NAARS Program, offered by the International Women of Saskatoon (IWS) Inc. This program is designed to simplify clients' settlement journeys by eliminating the need for multiple visits to different agencies. The initiative is divided into two streams: **Basic NAARS and Triage to Case Management**. Basic NAARS is typically for non-refugee clients who do not have acute crises or complex needs and only require some settlement programming to achieve independence.



Key takeaways of the program include its ability to eliminate the client “run-around” and fill gaps in settlement services. A personalized Settlement Action Plan is developed for each client, with referrals to settlement and mainstream agencies for programs and services. Detailed case notes are created to ensure continuity of service, and the program employs a streamlined case management and follow-up process using an in-house Case Management Matrix and referral strategy.

Program activities involve appointment bookings and centralized intake, where client personal information and demographic data are collected. Client interviews are conducted using the NAARS questionnaire, which covers various themes such as family composition, life skills, and employment. Looking forward, the program plans to add a Well-Being Navigator and implement emergency crisis interventions. It also aims to enhance community partnerships to address gender-based violence and develop a Partner Portal.

SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENT (SDI) PROJECTS

This section of the event highlighted key projects and initiatives within the settlement sector across Canada, focusing on projects that stakeholders expressed interest in learning from, scaling up, or addressing challenges and barriers. These initiatives span diverse focus areas, including– employment, language learning, digital literacy, and tailored newcomer support.

Relevant Projects for Learning, Scaling, and Addressing Barriers:

T.Dot Construction Trades

Focus: Enabling newcomers to access opportunities in construction trades.

Settlement Services through Social Media

Focus: Leveraging social platforms to engage and deliver services effectively.

Virtual Reality

Focus: Exploring VR tools for immersive learning experiences, including cultural orientation or job training.

Labour Market Assessment for Employment

Focus: Evaluating current labour market gaps and aligning newcomer skills to those needs.



Newcomer Support Program for 2SLGBTQ+ Immigrants and Refugees

Focus: Tailored programs to address the unique settlement and integration needs of 2SLGBTQ+ newcomers.

Immigrants Working Centre Trades Gateway Project (Hamilton)

Focus: Offering a gateway for newcomers to enter trades through targeted programming.

Together Project (GAR Matching)

Focus: Leveraging technology to match Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) with mentors for six months.

Barrier: The six-month commitment might be unrealistic; consider exploring shorter, more flexible alternatives.

Online Language Learning During COVID (Calgary / Edmonton)

Focus: Reviewing the challenges and successes of online language learning programs developed during the pandemic.

AI in the Settlement Sector

Focus: Understanding and integrating artificial intelligence to enhance service delivery.

Support for International Medical Graduates (IMGs)

Focus: Comparing the effectiveness of generic vs. specialized training programs to support IMGs in their career pathways.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023-2024, both the Halton Newcomer Strategy (HNS) and the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) prioritized their professional development programs delivery to equip service providers with the skills and knowledge needed to address the evolving challenges faced by newcomers. Through a series of workshops and training sessions, **HNS focused on the following key themes:**

- **Newcomer Rights and Responsibilities:** Workshops on the Employment Standards Act and the Residential Tenancies Act to help newcomers navigate employment and housing systems.
- **Newcomer Safety:** A session in collaboration with Halton Regional Police Services, promoting discussions around hate crimes and fostering relationships with cultural groups to enhance safety and community integration.
- **Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Strategies:** A training session by a registered psychotherapist to enhance service providers' ability to recognize trauma and deliver tailored strategies for front-line workers assisting newcomers who have experienced trauma, ensuring culturally sensitive support.



PNSG focused on the following key themes:

- **Community Legal Education and Advocacy:** Sessions on housing law, disability support, and other legal topics, equipping service providers with the knowledge to support newcomers in legal matters.
- **Government Services and Benefits:** Sessions that enhanced staff understanding of key government programs, including services offered by Service Canada, enabling effective guidance for newcomers in accessing benefits and resources.
- **Technology and Innovation in Service Delivery:** Discussions on artificial intelligence (AI) and its role in transforming settlement services, helping providers leverage technology to improve service delivery.
- **Professional Networking and Collaboration:** Annual forums, networking events, and sector-wide knowledge-sharing sessions that fostered collaboration and mobilized insights among partner organizations to amplify collective impact.
- **Newcomer youth mental health and cultural safety:** Dedicated sessions addressed the mental health needs of newcomer youth, emphasizing culturally safe approaches to care and support. These training opportunities included a combination of webinars and in-person sessions, featuring interactive live simulations with standardized patients to provide practical, hands-on learning experiences.

HOW DOES THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LOOK?

Insights from PNSG’s Annual Survey 2024-2025 — As part of our continuous improvement efforts, PNSG conducted an annual survey, receiving 101 responses from settlement industry staff. The survey provided valuable insights into potential future topics of interest, as outlined in the table below.

IDENTIFIED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS FOR 2025-26

Annual Survey 2024-25 Responses: 101 Participants

S.NO	TOPIC OF INTEREST	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE	RESPONSE COUNT
1	Artificial intelligence and transformation of settlement sector	63.36%	65
2	Leadership development and support	43.56%	44
3	Legal Services and laws (different topics like housing law, divorce law, etc)	42.57%	43
4	Crisis support and emergency training	39.60%	40
5	Career management for staff	37.62%	38
6	Conflict resolution (de-escalation, active listening)	37.62%	38
7	Support newcomers with disability	35.64%	36
8	Service Canada Programs and benefits	34.65%	35
9	Case management technique (e.g., time management, case notes, privacy, confidentiality, records management, data tracking)	33.66%	34
10	Digital service delivery: how to support clients remotely	31.68%	32

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Participants at the event were actively engaged in generating potential topics of interest through a collaborative brainstorming activity. Team PNSG enriched this discussion by sharing insights derived from their professional development evaluations report—highlighting the impact of delivered sessions on the settlement staff, as captured through participant feedback. One such reflection included:

“This training educates and makes us be more aware of the things happening around us.”

Additionally, throughout the year, participants of the professional development sessions were encouraged to provide input on potential training topics—aimed to equip them with the necessary tools to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of the settlement/immigration sectors.

The screenshot below highlights some of the key topics that generated the most interest among our PD participants, showcasing the areas they identified as most relevant for future sessions

SUGGESTED TOPIC OF INTEREST: POST-SESSIONS FEEDBACK BASED

<p>1 Healthcare and Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health training • Imposter syndrome • Emotional regulation • Prevention and response to violence • General mental health support and wellness for newcomers 	<p>3 Social Support Programs & Legal Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidized housing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing applications • housing subsidy • financial assistance for low-income families • emergency housing and homelessness support • Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) • Childcare benefits • Conventional refugee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work permit • PR application processes and support services
<p>2 Youth engagement and empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governmental support and resources for newcomer youth • Cultural sensitivities in youth communication • Resources for newcomer youth (e.g., legislative regulations for minors arriving alone) 	<p>4 Workplace and Team Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team management • Leadership development and support • Crisis support and emergency training • Conflict resolution (de-escalation, active listening)

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To conclude the day, participants took part in an interactive Slido activity—providing real-time insights and recommendations, offering a valuable opportunity to capture several important topics, including:

- Mental health training for boys and men, focusing on improving well-being and reducing domestic violence.
- Collaboration between IRCC programs and Employment Ontario (EO) to create a coordinated, client-focused approach.
- Employer training resources to support the hiring and successful integration of newcomers.
- Enhanced training for French-speaking workers, addressing the gap in resources currently available primarily for English speakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STEPS AHEAD

As we look forward, the settlement sector must adopt an approach that fosters collaboration, collective growth, and innovative solutions to address the evolving needs of newcomers. In the words of Lorna Davis, from her TED Talk—A Guide to Collaborative Leadership:

“We don’t need heroes—we need radical interdependence.”

This profound insight emphasizes the need for interconnected efforts, where no single organization or individual works in isolation. Instead, success lies in creating a unified, community-driven ecosystem that leverages the strengths and expertise of all stakeholders.

Key recommendations for moving forward include:

- **Exploring service delivery improvement projects for learning and potential implementation:** Executive council co-chairs will review the SDI projects highlighted at each table from IRCC Action Day, and they will consider how to share more of the findings/lessons learned with Executive council members, (e.g. future presentations; potential to be integrated into practice).
- **Staff support:** Peel and Halton to collaborate on professional development, particularly related to the themes raised on pages 10 and 11.
- **Digital transformation committee** to meet and consider how digital requirements can best be resourced for the sector to meet the minimum ‘proficiency’ standard for digital maturity.
- **AI subcommittee forming** – please let Jessica Kwik (jkwik@uwgt.org) know if you are interested in joining to share guidelines, organizational policies, and promising practices.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Action Day Agenda

IRCC Action Day 2024

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

8:30 am – 4:00 pm

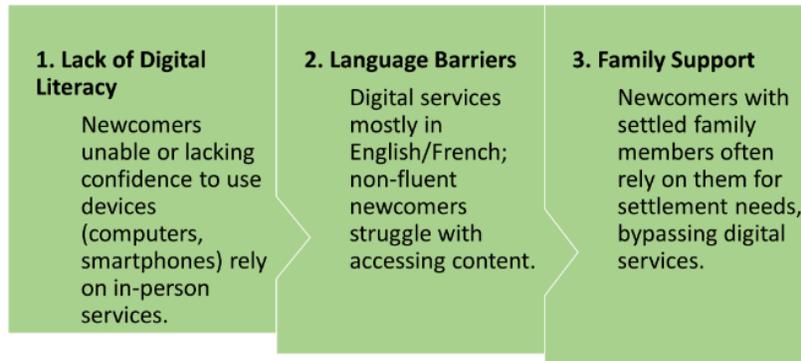
Purpose: To bring together IRCC-funded settlement agencies in Peel and Halton:

1. To reflect on progress in the past year and in the funding cycle;
2. Consider current challenges and collaborative opportunities; and i
3. To look ahead to changes such as the NAARS DNS and digital transformation needs.

Reflection visual interactive exercise: What has been accomplished over the past 5 years	8:30am – 9:00am
Welcome and land acknowledgement EC cochairs (<i>Kim Jenkinson and Dev Maharaj</i>) Progress since last year	9:00am – 9:15am
Video icebreaker (<i>Kim Jenkinson</i>)	9:15am – 9:40am
IRCC update (<i>Stefany Cutuli</i>)	9:40am – 10:00am
Core services discussion and role of EC in strategies ahead (<i>Kim Jenkinson and Dev Maharaj</i>) Report back on small group discussions	10:00am – 11:00am
Break	11:00am – 11:10am
Digital transformation committee presentation and discussion (<i>Jessica Kwik and Committee</i>)	11:10am – noon
Lunch	Noon – 12:45pm
NAARS DNS pilot (Video call) <i>Ijeoma Nwamuo, Executive Director, International Women of Saskatoon (IWS)</i>	12:45pm – 1:30pm
SDI gallery exercise and report back	1:30pm – 2:30pm
Break	2:30pm – 2:45pm
Professional Development with LIP support (<i>Richard Cloke and Jessica Kwik</i>)	2:45pm – 3:00pm
Next steps – looking ahead (<i>Kim Jenkinson and Dev Maharaj</i>) Key actions for next cycle and fiscal year - Guided conversation	3:00pm – 3:30pm

Appendix B: Digital Equity Survey Results

Which groups are not accessing digital settlement services?



Barriers faced by Newcomers



Digital Literacy

- Lack of digital skills.
- Complex tasks (e.g., screensharing).



Language Barriers

- Limited English/French fluency.
- Prefer in-person services with native-language staff.



Awareness & Privacy Concerns

- Unaware of digital service options.
- Concerns about data privacy, camera use, and online scams.



Dependence on Family Support

- Newcomers rely on settled family member, bypassing digital services.



Human Interaction Preference

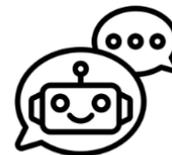
- Preference for face-to-face support for reassurance and clarity.



Technology & Cost Issues

- High costs and outdated devices.
- Technical difficulties.

Service Provider Experience with Providing Digital Services



73% of SPOs reporting frequent use of digital services by newcomers

60% of providers received digital service training

Despite high levels of use by and high levels of training for providers, **16.7 % still feel uncomfortable with tools.**

Appendix C: Professional Development Session Survey Results

BREAKDOWN OF SESSIONS INTO KEY THEMES

THEMES	# OF ATTENDEES	# OF SESSIONS
Community Legal Education and Advocacy	218	4
Government Services and Benefits	253	4
Technology and Innovation in Service Delivery	649	4
Professional Networking and Collaboration	257	2
Cultural Competency	101	2
Newcomer youth mental health and cultural safety	220	4
Economic Abuse	23	1
Conflict Resolution	38	1
Developmental Services	70	1
Countering Hate in Community	35	1
Total	1964	24

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Appendix D: Digital Transformation Committee

Name	Organization
Aimee Holmes	ACCES Employment
Marsha Parry Folkes	Achēv
Arif Iqbal	Brampton Multicultural Centre (BMC)
Lisa Loong	Catholic Crosscultural Services
Art Rekhtin	Caledon Community Services
Janet Hallett	COSTI
Meryem Taleb	Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto
Kim Jenkinson	HMC Connections
Judy Labelle	Indus
Faisal Cheema	Punjabi Community Health Services (PCHS)
Lisa Hill	Peel District School Board (PDSB)
Dev Maharaj	Peel Career Assessment Services
Naveed Chaudhry	Peel Multicultural Council (PMC)
Jessica Kwik	Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG)
Nadia Sokhan	Polycultural
Jean-Claude N'Da	Réseau en Intégration Francophone (RIF)
Maria Wong	TCCSA