Summary of the Digital Literacy Exchange Program Evaluation - DRAFT
Audit and Evaluation Branch
Senior Management Committee – February 2022

The Digital Literacy Exchange Program (DLEP) aims to equip Canadians with the necessary skills to engage with computers, mobile devices and the Internet safely, securely and effectively. The program supports non-profit organizations that provide, particularly for underrepresented groups, basic digital literacy skills training.

Background: Innovation and technological progress is creating tremendous change, and as a result, digital skills are increasingly relevant —in school, at home and in the workplace. This is true for Canadians of every age, background, education level and employment status, however there are still groups who need help developing their skills to ensure no one is left behind in the digital economy. The DLEP helps address this by supporting the delivery of digital literacy training initiatives for Canadians who need improved skills and confidence in using the Internet.

Three areas were examined in the evaluation using four data collection methods, covering the period from April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2021, as required under the *Financial Administration Act* and the Treasury Board *Policy on Results.*

Relevance: Is there a continued need to invest in developing and supporting the digital skills of Canadians who are underrepresented in the digital economy?

Performance: To what extent is the DLEP contributing to:
(1) Partnerships being formed to deliver training?
(2) Increased access to digital literacy training?
(3) Improved understanding of the digital environment?
(4) Increased confidence and improved Internet skills?
(5) Skills to participate in the digital economy?
(6) A connected and engaged society.

Efficiency: To what extent is the DLEP funding and delivery model an efficient approach for encouraging the participation of under-represented groups in the digital economy in Canada?

Data Collection Methods

- Document and Literature Review
- Virtual Interviews
- Performance, Administrative and Financial Data Review
- Case Studies

Three findings highlighted the relevance for investing in developing and supporting the digital skills of Canadians who are underrepresented in the digital economy.

Finding 1: Basic digital literacy skills are essential to participate in Canadian society and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened their need. Digital technologies have become pervasive in many aspects of life and digital literacy skills are increasingly necessary to access education, employment and government services. However, not all Canadians have basic digital literacy skills and gaps in Internet access exist.

Finding 2: Low digital literacy leads to adverse social and economic consequences for individuals, and therefore the overall economy, necessitating support for basic digital literacy training. There was strong demand for DLEP funding, which filled a gap in the fragmented training landscape by enabling free training on various topics, providing flexibility to adjust content to suit the needs of target audiences, and supporting access to online services during the pandemic.

Finding 3: The DLEP complements other government programs aimed at improving broadband access and affordability of Internet and devices. There is a need for ongoing access to digital literacy training to ensure that all Canadians can keep up with the pace of technological change.

Finding 4: Partnerships were important for the successful delivery of the DLEP. Although partner involvement varied at the project level, they were seen as effective in delivering the training and were key to accessing the underrepresented groups targeted by DLEP projects.

Finding 5: The DLEP has increased access to digital literacy training for Canadians who are underrepresented in the digital economy. The program has been effective in reaching seniors, which was critical in light of the growing demand stemming from COVID-19 confinement measures, with less progress for some target groups. Funded recipients who transitioned to online delivery greatly increased their reach, although there were challenges for performance measurement.

Finding 6: The DLEP was successful in providing training in each province and territory. The number of projects varied greatly by region, as did the number of participants.

Finding 7: The DLEP has contributed to increasing digital literacy skills among Canadians who are underrepresented in the digital economy. Although there were gaps in performance measurement data, the available data and stakeholder feedback demonstrated that DLEP participants increased their knowledge, skills, confidence and Internet use.

Finding 8: Interviewees reported numerous promising practices and lessons learned to support the delivery of digital literacy training to Canadians who are underrepresented in the digital economy. Opportunities for ISED to leverage these, along with the digital literacy resources created with the support of the DLEP, should be explored.

Finding 9: Globally, Canada ranks high in terms of digital skills. Despite this, certain gaps persist among underrepresented groups with respect to Internet use. This suggests that more needs to be done to address the gap in digital literacy skills, including improving access and affordability to the Internet for all Canadians.

Two findings highlighted the operational efficiency of the DLEP funding model.

Finding 10: The DLEP funding model was perceived to be efficient by stakeholders in reaching the various underrepresented groups targeted by the program. Some of the features that contributed to the efficiency were the targeted approach, flexibility and funding duration.

Finding 11: At the project level, the cost per participant varied greatly. Recipients who were able to pivot to online training during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated improvements to operational efficiency by increasing their project reach and decreasing their cost per participant. The pivot to online learning, as well as the leveraging of reallocated funding to successful projects, has helped the DLEP reach almost three times the number of projected participants.

Two recommendations were identified, stemming from the assessment of performance, and supported by at least three data collections methods.

Recommendation 1: ISED's Connected Canada Branch should provide additional guidance to recipients to ensure data is collected consistently across projects, including developing common questions and definitions and exploring the use of an online survey tool, to improve data collection efficiency and provide an anonymous self-identification option which may improve the under-reporting for some groups.

Recommendation 2: ISED's Connected Canada Branch should explore opportunities to share some of the digital literacy resources that have been created through the DLEP to allow partners to leverage these resources. ISED should also explore opportunities for DLEP recipients to connect in order to share promising practices and lessons learned.