Annual Report to Community

GEO
NOVA
SCOTIA
getting everyone online

REFLECTIONS, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING
2022-2023

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♥ Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who is making digital inclusion stone soup together, and working for social justice in Nova Scotia. Together we are greater than the sum of our parts - and none of us could do this alone. We need each other.

Our learning culture allows us to try new things, learn from them, adapt them as needed, and perhaps most importantly, talk about them together as it is happening so we can all learn and do our best. This requires a willingness on all of our parts to give and receive input, feedback, suggestions, and ideas.

We are grateful to everyone who participated in this evaluation process and contributed experiences, insights, perspectives, and wisdom:

- GEO Connects Participants
- Referral Partners
- Digital Champions
- Project Partners
- Supplier Partners
- Government Champions and Partners
- GEO NS Board members
- GEO NS Insight Team members
- GEO NS staff

We are excited to take all of these learnings forward, and to our continuing collective work to transform lives through digital inclusion.

With love,

Cari Patterson

Cari Patterson
GEO Nova Scotia Evaluation & Learning Lead
June 1, 2023

Network Contributions

GEO NOVA SCOTIA — getting everyone online

PARTICIPANTS
- Personal Information
- Experiences and perspectives
- Feedback and stories

REFERRAL PARTNERS
- Knowledge of community needs
- Trusted relationships with participants
- Staff time to refer participants
- Feedback and stories

GEO STAFF TEAM
- Relationship building
- Program delivery
- Evaluation & learning
- Champions for digital inclusion

DIGITAL CHAMPIONS
- Participation in training
- Trusted relationships with participants
- Time helping people 1:1
- Input and feedback on content

PROJECT PARTNERS
- Funding
- Knowledge of community needs
- Trusted relationships with participants
- Staff & volunteer time

SUPPLIER PARTNERS
- Deep discounts
- Enhanced service delivery
- Sector expertise and advice

GOVERNMENT CHAMPIONS & PARTNERS
- Funding
- Sector expertise and advice
- Partnership in program delivery

INSIGHT TEAM
- Expertise, advice, and feedback
- Information and access to networks
- Champions for GEO Nova Scotia

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
- Governance and strategic direction
- Expertise, advice, and access to networks
- Champions for GEO Nova Scotia

Introduction to GEO Nova Scotia

GEO Nova Scotia (Getting Everyone Online) is dedicated to digital inclusion for all Nova Scotians. Working with a growing network of partners in the Public, Private, and Community Sectors, GEO Nova Scotia provides internet access and devices to people and families that cannot otherwise afford them. GEO NS also helps build digital skills so everyone can use the Internet confidently and safely.

BACKSTORY

It all began as a community effort in Dartmouth North called "the GEO Project", launched in the aftermath of the pandemic lockdown in March 2020. A local network of partners moved quickly in response to the severe isolation and lack of access to public education for many lower-income residents that resulted from the digital divide. Together they connected 40 homes to the Internet and distributed 50 refurbished computers.

The model was successful enough to secure funding for a series of regional pilot programs across the province called "GEO Nova Scotia" in 2021. Using an approach they dubbed "stone soup", more and more partners from different regions, sectors, and communities contributed to the work, eventually connecting over 350 homes and distributing over 600 new computers.

Thanks to the incredible contributions from hundreds of people and organizations from all sectors and funding from the Department of Community Services, GEO Nova Scotia was established in 2022.

VISION

Transforming lives through digital inclusion.

MISSION

Advancing equity and well-being through increased access to affordable internet services and devices and the skills needed to use them well.

VALUES

GEO Nova Scotia is committed to leading with integrity, love, kindness, and compassion. Inclusion is at the core of everything we do: we exist to remove barriers to digital inclusion, to design our work directly from the needs and interests of our partners and participants, and to build a team that reflects the rich diversity of the communities we serve.

GEO Nova Scotia Milestones

2020 — **2021** — **2022** — **2023**

2020

Spring
- The "**GEO Project**" began in Dartmouth North

Summer
- A "Digital Equity" Salon was hosted by the **Forge Institute**, building new connections and kicks off a bigger vision

Fall
- The GEO Project won an **Invisible Champions Award**, which included a consultation bursary from **Davis Pier**, further expanding our horizons
- Discovered and met with **Connecting Scotland**, a national program similar to GEO but much bigger

2021

Winter
- Four "GEO Nova Scotia" regional pilots were confirmed
- Program Delivery Partners were established in HRM, Cape Breton, the Valley, and the South West Shore
- GEO Nova Scotia's **website** was launched
- Eastlink officially joined as the primary Internet Service Provider, expanding the quality and reach of service

Spring, Summer, Fall
- A network of Referral Partners grew across Nova Scotia to identity people for the GEO program
- Hundreds of people across the province received free internet and new computers

2022

Winter
- GEO Nova Scotia became an official organization
- The GEO NS Board of Directors was formed
- Funding from the Department of Community Services was received

Spring
- The Executive Director was hired

Summer
- The **Mhor Collective** started working with with GEO NS to adapt and deliver Digital Champions programming
- Staff grew (+3!)

Fall
- First **GEO Connects** and **GEO Digital Champions** programs are developed and launched
- Staff grew (+3!)

2023

Winter
- A custom, web-based referral system to process all intake and data collection was launched (the "GEO Portal")
- Seaside joined as an Internet Service Provider in Cape Breton
- A **Digital Literacy Exchange Program** grant was secured with four national partners to deliver Digital Champions training for newcomers over the next two years
- The 500th internet account was connected
- Funding for 2023-2024 was secured from the NS Department of Community Services
- Staff grew (+2!)

Our Evaluation for 2022-2023

PURPOSE

GEO Nova Scotia uses a Developmental Evaluation (DE) approach in our work. This means we collect and consider data in real time to help us recognize where we need to pivot and/or make adaptations in our work along the way. DE works well when you are innovating and trying different things to see what works best.

This report also reflects a formative evaluation approach, which means that we are exploring what is working and how it is working, as well as identifying and articulating the impacts of our work so far.

Our purposes in creating this report are to:

- share the story of our digital inclusion work in Nova Scotia
- provide an update on GEO Nova Scotia's work
- describe what is working well, and what isn't
- identify impacts of our shared work for digital inclusion
- share what we are learning together
- outline what we think needs to come next
- stimulate discussion about digital inclusion among everyone involved

METHODOLOGY

We gathered the data for this evaluation from March 30 - May 26, 2023, reflecting back on the past fiscal year (April 2022 - March 2023). We reviewed our documents and files, and invited everyone connected to the work to give input and feedback in the way that worked best for them. This table shows how many people from each group participated in each data collection method.

GROUP	Data Collection Method & Number of Participants				
	INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUPS	SURVEYS	STORY SHARING SESSION	SENSEMAKING SESSIONS
Staff	8				8
Participants	2	22	110		
Board		6			
Insight Team		4	4		3
Project Partners		7			
Referral Partners, Referral Agents, Key People, Digital Champions			46	4	12
Government Champions & Partners		2	1		1
Supplier Partners		2			1

HOW THE REPORT IS ORGANIZED

The core information in this report is organized as much as possible around the six priorities identified in the **GEO Nova Scotia Strategic Plan**: **Connecting**, **Community Building**, **Innovating**, **Telling Our Story**, **Putting Down Roots**, and **Reaching Out**. (Please note that because we conducted the evaluation before the strategic plan was completed, the questions we asked were not directly aligned with these priorities). There are three subsections of information within each of the priority areas: Progress, Missteps, and Looking Ahead, with quotes woven throughout.

You'll notice that we refer to the **stone soup story** throughout the report (we drew on the story to frame our evaluation questions as well). We think it's a beautiful metaphor for describing how we all contribute to making our "digital inclusion stone soup" and how we all benefit from the soup, too.

Future evaluations will be informed by the strategic plan and the **GEO Nova Scotia Story of Transformation**, which has just been published. It tells the story of how and why we are transforming lives through digital inclusion.

Finally, you will notice symbols beside each finding we report. These symbols represent the groups who raised each particular point. For example, all groups supported each of these **three key findings** - which are woven throughout the report - as strong signals of process:

✅ *Creating and holding a space, structure, and framework (**stone soup**) for **shared work toward digital inclusion** in Nova Scotia that facilitates and values contributions from everyone involved*
Ⓑ ⒾⓉ Ⓢ Ⓟ ⓇⓅ ⓅⓅ ⓈⓅ ⒼⒸ

✅ ***Fostering a culture of love and kindness that centres and respects people's dignity.*** *This was an intentional approach from the start of our work. It shows up in inclusive and collaborative processes, in conversations, in the knowledge and lived experience of the team, in a caring and supportive internal culture, through humility and openness and a willingness to learn, and by not being afraid to talk about love.*
Ⓑ Ⓘ Ⓣ Ⓢ Ⓟ ⓇⓅ ⓅⓅ ⓈⓅ ⒼⒸ

✅ *People are starting to grasp that **Internet access is a necessity** (some say a human right), and starting to understand the **actual cost of digital exclusion** in everyday life.*
Ⓑ Ⓘ Ⓣ Ⓢ Ⓟ ⓇⓅ ⓅⓅ ⓈⓅ ⒼⒸ 📋

LEGEND
(GEO Nova Scotia and friends)

Ⓑ **Board**

Ⓘ Ⓣ **Insight Team**

Ⓢ **Staff**

Ⓟ **Participants**

ⓇⓅ **Referral Partners** (Referral Agents/ Key People/Digital Champions)

ⓅⓅ **Project Partners**

ⓈⓅ **Supplier Partners**

ⒼⒸ **Government Champions & Partners**

📋 **GEO NS documents & files**

Transforming Lives through digital inclusion

Together we are starting to achieve our vision of transforming lives through digital inclusion.

PARTICIPANTS SAY THEY ARE …

- ✓ extending financial resources to cover other expenses
- ✓ participating in training and education
- ✓ less isolated
- ✓ pursuing independent learning
- ✓ accessing health/mental health services
- ✓ experiencing improved lifestyles

" P As a single mom and student who migrated to Canada recently, providing some basic life essentials has been difficult …. GEO came to our rescue by supporting us with home internet without any charges. THANK YOU GEO!

" P You helped me cut away the last tie I had with my abuser and I will be forever thankful for this program.

" P I have been able to get a job and no longer need social assistance. I'm able to work from home and be able to be with my daughter instead of a babysitter.

" P [GEO is] making it possible to keep living in my apartment.

" P Once I felt less cut off from the world I started to feel a bit of hope, after years of isolation it has taken most of the year for it to sink in, but I see that there are possible paths to rejoining society…

REFERRAL PARTNERS SAY THEY ARE …

✓ better equipped to serve their communities

✓ working with more love and kindness

✓ more involved in strengthening our communities

✓ supporting digital inclusion work with equity-deserving communities in NS

✓ delivering important services virtually (e.g., education, health care) to those who need them

> ❝ *It allows them to maintain connection with family, peers, important communications with employers, school, and all services and programming … it allows students to participate in their education outside of the classroom while at home (Google classroom, virtual assignments, research and presentations).* **RP**

> ❝ *Nothing but positive impacts! Providing participants with the right tools, along with additional support (mental health services online), support groups, research, and overall connecting our participants … to more resources through GEO has been impactful.* **RP**

> ❝ *Our team is very motivated to help our learners use and improve their digital skills. We love having the ability to get new immigrants a Chromebook so they can get started with lessons and online learning, as well as communication with their teachers and fellow students.* **RP**

> ❝ *This program makes it easier to form lasting connections with higher need families that often don't ask for help. Offering them digital inclusion … gives us a chance to tell them about other ways that we can support their family.* **RP**

> ❝ *Having access to a program that can provide free internet and devices to students and their families has provided them a huge amount of emotional and financial relief! The students and families gain more than internet and devices from this program, they have gained their independence as internet access at home means they don't need to rely on others for access or leave their home to access free services at places of business or public.* **RP**

GOVERNMENT CHAMPIONS/PROJECT PARTNERS SAY THEY ARE …

✓ delivering services and programs to more people

✓ co-leading highly efficient and effective participant-centred collaborations

✓ connecting with and appreciating the people they serve

> ❝ *In terms of scope of clients, this was the biggest work activity intake that I'm aware of in my career, and I've been around a long time… Normally with Income Assistance, you might have four or five people at a work activity intake. (we got 29 active participants in this case). And it wasn't us in isolation, there's no way that we could have pulled it off.* **GC**

> ❝ *So we knew our clients and which clients to put forward and GEO knew how to serve those clients and figure out [how to address] the need that we had identified. So it was really working together in a way quite frankly, I hadn't seen before at that point.* **GC**

> ❝ *I was invited to one of their sessions… all I see are these beautiful faces across the screen with their matching headsets on, so engaged. I was blown away. And I mean, I literally got goosebumps…. I shared it with my colleagues, like it was so powerful to see that.* **GC**

Strategic Priority 1: Connecting

The strategies in this priority area include affordable home and public internet access, building flexible and adaptable service relationships, leveraging partnerships and economies of scale, and starting from 'yes'.

PROGRESS:

✔ Through GEO Connects, people who couldn't otherwise afford it now have devices and Internet access. **B** **IT** **S** **P** **RP** **PP** **SP** **GC** 📋

Devices & Internet Accounts Distributed by GEO in 2022-23

TYPE OF DEVICE	# DISTRIBUTED
Chromebooks	501
Headsets	490
Laptops	49
Desktops	5
iPads	5
Total	**1050**

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER	# OF ACCOUNTS SET UP
Eastlink	460
Seaside	48
Total	**508**

GEO Connects Participant Demographics - Highlights

These charts show highlights of the demographic characteristics of the 2022-23 GEO Connects participants. A more fulsome explanation of the data - as well as more detailed data - is attached in **Appendix A**.

PRIMARY LANGUAGE

- **1.9%** other
- **1.6%** Mi'kmaq
- **2.3%** French
- **5.8%** Arabic
- **88.4%** English

AGE GROUP

- **15.9% Youth** (13-21 years)
- **59.7% Adult** (22-64 years)
- **13.5% Senior** (65+ years)
- **10.9% Child** (0-12 years)

GENDER

- **1.9%** other
- **3.0% Non-binary/Gender non-conforming/ Transgender**
- **59.2% Female**
- **35.9% Male**

BACKGROUND

- **20.6% other**
- **7.1% Middle Eastern**
- **7.7% African NS descent/Black**
- **8.5% Indigenous**
- **56.1% White**

PARTICIPANT LOCATIONS

LIVED EXPERIENCE

- **50.3%** Living with a Disability
- **40.6%** Homelessness/ Housing Insecurity
- **25.8%** Single Parent
- **12.5%** Newcomer to Canada
- **9.2%** 2SLGBTQ*

- Formal agreements with 39 Referral Partners who share the work of participant identification and intake based on their knowledge of communities. **B IT S RP PP GC** 📋

- Program partnerships that target funding contributions to specific participants. **B S PP GC** 📋

- Deeply discounted Internet service and devices from supplier partners. **B S SP** 📋

- Integrated device storage and province-wide distribution. **S RP PP SP**

- Participants feel connected and have a sense of belonging. **P RP PP**

- Participants' digital skills and confidence have increased. **P RP PP**

- Creating the GEO Portal for Referral Partners to initiate and monitor the intake process for GEO Connects Participants, and to allocate their seasonal budget of devices and Internet accounts.

- Working with nimbleness, flexibility, and willingness to help meet partners' and participants' needs, seeking ongoing feedback and co-creating solutions. **B S RP PP SP GC**

- Reliable, clear, supportive, timely communication and response to requests. **S P RP PP SP GC**

> **" RP** *Partnering with GEO allows [our] program to reach people who would really benefit from internet/ devices, but might otherwise be overlooked or not know where to ask for help. GEO makes the process of getting a device and the Internet easy.*

> **" PP** *Imagine an African Nova Scotian youth who might be living in a rural area. Think about what happens when that young person gets a laptop and Internet access - they can take part in our program, meet other African Nova Scotian youth, and learn about hip hop. Now they are connected to other African Nova Scotians across the province, and they are connected to their culture.*

> **" PP** *Having a portal to login to with all referral information organized has been highly beneficial. The questions in the referral process... have unleashed new conversations & openness for many. It has supported goal development & action plans.*

> **" PP** *[GEO support] allowed the youth to do stuff from home when they weren't able to get to the [venue]. The big thing coming from that, because all of that went so well, they were able to do that experimental dance and music and start that up, which I think will be amazing for them.*

> **" RP** *One strength I have noticed is GEO is very responsive/quick to respond to potential problems/ issues and this is huge in developing good relationships between partners.*

MISSTEPS:

❌ Not enough clarity about roles of Referral Agents in GEO Connects intake process. (S) (RP) (PP) (📋)

❌ Asking Referral Partners to participate in the intake process more than some have capacity to do. (B) (S) (RP)

❌ Moving too fast at times, incomplete communication. (S) (RP)

❌ Deploying new system(s) without robust accompanying instructions/documentation. (S) (RP) (📋)

> **"** *More effective communication between partners and GEO is needed. For example, letting us know beforehand what changes have been made to the portal and intake forms or having an email sent when packages have been shipped.*
> (RP)

> **"** *It is sometimes a challenge understanding the replies received from filling out the forms.*
> (RP)

LOOKING AHEAD:

➡ Address Referral Partners' feedback to clarify roles and continue to improve/streamline the intake process. (S) (RP) (PP)

➡ With Referral Partners, explore alternative models for completing the intake process for cases where organizations do not have capacity to do so; prototype/evaluate/adapt where necessary and scale models. (B) (S) (RP) (PP) (📋)

➡ Ensure the off seasons are long enough and clear enough for staff to take the time needed to carefully consider and implement changes to the intake process. (B) (S) (📋)

➡ Develop clear and complete instructions about new processes, and test them with willing Referral Partners to identify needed adjustments before full implementation. (B) (IT) (S) (P) (RP) (PP) (SP) (GC) (📋)

Strategic Priority 2: Community Building

The strategies in this priority area include growing a strong network of partners, celebrating champions of digital inclusion, and learning to think forward together.

PROGRESS:

✓ Building and nourishing partnerships across the province, across the country, and internationally.

GEO Partnerships 2022-23

50+

\# of Nova Scotia Partners

5

\# of National Partners

2

\# of International Partners

✓ Improving service providers' ability to deliver programs and services by connecting with participants virtually (for example community programs, support groups, mental health programs, health appointments, education programs). **RP PP GC**

✓ Fostering a culture of love and kindness that centres and respects people's dignity. This was an intentional approach from the start of our work. It shows up in inclusive and collaborative processes, in conversations, in the knowledge and lived experience of the team, in a caring and supportive internal culture, through humility and openness and a willingness to learn, and by not being afraid to talk about love.
B IT S P RP PP SP GC

> *I see [love and kindness] any time I interact with anyone that is part of or involved with GEO. It has been inspiring to meet such a caring and considerate group. (Insight Team member)* **IT**

> *I think the love, care and kindness that GEO works with are why I'm so happy to be here once a month. (Insight Team member)* **IT**

> *It shows up in all the little moments … trying to see every moment as an opportunity to see who you want to be in those moments. So if we can hold in our mind that … who we want to be, is, you know, kind and loving and respectful and with dignity, then there's just tiny little ways we do that. (GEO staff)* **S**

> *Love and kindness show up in providing a safe and nurturing environment and being examples of compassion and patience throughout our work together. (Project Partner)* **PP**

> *They are kind and supportive and I feel valued and respected. (Participant)* **P**

✓ Developing and delivering DIgital Champions training so staff and volunteers in community organizations can help the people they support learn how to use the Internet confidently and safely. 🅱 🅸🆃 🆂 🆁🅿 🆂🅿 🅶🅲 ▤

✓ New funding source to expand Digital Champions program. 🆂 🅿🅿 🆂🅿 ▤

Digital Champion Trainings Offered in 2022-23

TYPE OF TRAINING SESSION	# OF SESSIONS	# OF PARTICIPANTS
Core training sessions (2 hour training session that provides effective tools, tips, and techniques to support people who need help using the Internet safely and confidently)	12	43
Youth-focused training sessions (2 hour core training session that focuses on resources aimed at/relevant for youth)	3	7
Core training for newcomer-serving organizations (2 hour core training session that focuses on resources aimed at/relevant for newcomers)	5	170
Total	**20**	**220**

> " Working with GEO and the Digital Champions training really helped us with making sure we have a set of guidelines to make sure the space is safe and respect is the number one priority. It really made sure we were safe and comfortable as an organization and everything was covered. So I think that was really great. (Project Partner/Digital Champion)

> " We are better able to help our clients find employment--because we can teach them how to look for jobs, write a resume, log in to their email, etc. when we are not around. Having the title 'Digital Champion' also lets our clients know that there is someone in our organization who is knowledgeable and willing to spend time helping them with technology. (Referral Partner/Digital Champion)

MISSTEPS:

❌ We have an uneven distribution of Referral Partners across the province. 🅑 🅢 🆁🅿 ▤

❌ We don't have a complete picture of how well equity-deserving communities are represented among our Referral Partners. 🅢 ▤

❌ Asking more of some Referral Partners than they have capacity when it comes to training as Digital Champions and helping build their participants' digital skills. 🅑 🅢 🅟 🆁🅿 ▤

❌ Not engaging our partners at the Mhor Collective early enough in the process to co-design custom Digital Champion training sessions for particular populations/groups. 🆂🅿

LOOKING AHEAD:

➡ We will conduct assessments of geographic and equity-deserving communities within our Referral Partner network, and recruit Referral Partners to cover and gaps that are discovered. 🅢 🆁🅿 ▤

➡ With Referral Partners, we will explore other intake processes, test and adapt them as needed; and scale them when possible (knowing there is no one size fits all approach). 🅑 🅢 🅟 🆁🅿 ▤

➡ With Referral Partners, we will explore other models for building Participants' digital skills, confidence, and safety; test and adapt them as needed; and scale them when possible (knowing there is no one size fits all approach). 🅑 🅢 🅟 🆁🅿 ▤

➡ Expand work with the Mhor Collective and Referral Partners, co-design/deliver/evaluate/adapt custom Digital Champion modules for specific communities. 🅢 🆁🅿 🆂🅿 ▤

Strategic Priority 3: Innovating

The strategies in this priority area include: creating a culture of learning, scanning the horizon for change, listening to lived experience, and experimenting with new models and approaches.

> " *Facilitators garnered a much better understanding of the plights & challenges that these folks face. (Project Partner)*

> " *GEO is very open to hearing from us what barriers our participants are experiencing to accessing technology and working with us to figure out how to remove some of those barriers. (Referral Partner)*

PROGRESS:

- ✓ Adopting a Developmental Evaluation approach, building in regular reflections with staff, and adapting practices on an ongoing basis. **B IT S SP** 📋

- ✓ Hosting capacity building sessions on various topics (e.g., evaluation, digital inclusion) for all GEO partners. **B IT S** 📋

- ✓ Inviting ongoing feedback from all partners based on their experience with GEO, and acting on it in a timely manner. **B IT S P RP PP SP GC** 📋

- ✓ Building the team's understanding of inclusion, and about the experiences and perspectives of equity-deserving communities in Nova Scotia, and what that means for the work. **S** 📋

- ✓ Scheduling programming off seasons for the team to make changes needed to processes, practices, and documentation. **S RP** 📋

- ✓ Creating a network of Referral Partners who bring knowledge of context, are aware of community needs, and understand the experiences of community members. **B S RP GC** 📋

- ✓ Building a staff team with a range of lived experiences and perspectives. **S RP** 📋

- ✓ Creating opportunities for partners to reflect together, to discuss learnings about the experiences of participants in projects, and explore implications for the work going forward. **B IT S RP PP SP GC** 📋

- ✓ Pilot program for students who need assistive technology (e.g., iPads, special applications). **S P RP PP** 📋

> *"I think we're learning that we don't have all the answers but*
> **S** *that if we keep asking the right questions, ... keep open minds*
> *and communicate, we will keep doing good work and helping*
> *others. (GEO Staff)*

MISSTEPS:

❌ Sometimes using outdated language to describe communities (e.g., for the 2SLGBTQIAP+ community). **S** **RP**

❌ Not scheduling long enough off seasons and/or scheduling too many other activities and tasks during off season. **S** 📋

❌ Not always sharing learnings widely enough. **B** **S** 📋

❌ Pushing to implement new ideas without allowing sufficient, careful consideration. **B** **S** 📋
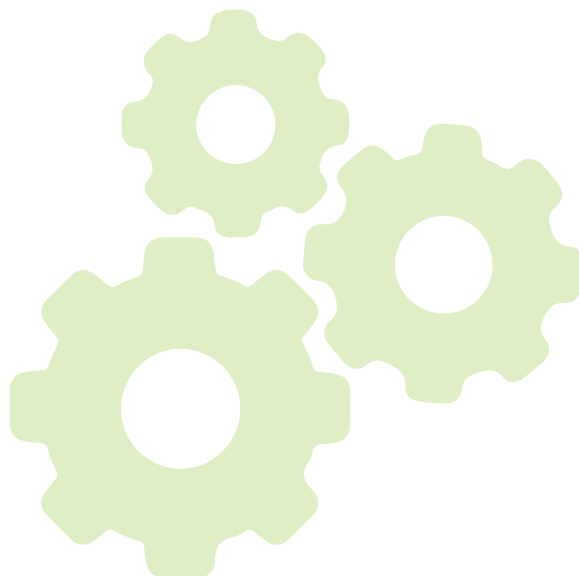
LOOKING AHEAD:

➡️ Actively seek advice from communities about the language they prefer to describe themselves as well as seeking feedback from partners and adapting language based on their suggestions.

➡️ Reboot capacity building sessions for all GEO partners. **IT** **S** 📋

➡️ Scheduling enough time and space during off seasons for staff to carefully reflect and focus on the adjustments and changes needed. **S** 📋

➡️ Prepare clear documentation and communication about new/adapted procedures for partners. **S** **RP** 📋

➡️ Develop a Communications Plan that includes mechanisms and audiences for sharing learnings. **B** **S** 📋

➡️ Create an ongoing group of Participants with a variety of lived experiences to act as a sounding board for ideas. **S** **P** **RP** 📋

➡️ Create opportunities for GEO partners to reflect regularly on our shared digital inclusion work and to explore any adjustments needed. **B** **IT** **S** **RP** **PP** **SP** **GC** 📋

➡️ Continued willingness to hit pause on new ideas if additional time, thought, input or advice is needed - and acknowledging this to partners. **S** 📋

Strategic Priority 4: Telling our Story

The strategies in this priority area include understanding where we want to go, learning as we go, and sharing stories about our impact.

PROGRESS:

✓ Through a collaborative and iterative process engaging all types of partners, developing our *Story of Transformation* to describe how and why we are transforming lives through digital inclusion. **B IT S RP SP GC** 📋

✓ Through a collaborative and iterative process engaging all types of partners, developing the *GEO Nova Scotia Strategic Plan* to provide direction about our strategic priorities and inform our operational plan. **B IT S RP SP GC** 📋

✓ Collecting and documenting stories from staff on a regular basis. **B IT S** 📋

✓ Opening monthly Board meetings with a new story from staff. **B IT S GC** 📋

MISSTEPS:

✗ Not always collecting stories when they happen. **B S GC** 📋

✗ Not sharing stories about our work widely for fear they could trigger a demand for supports that exceeds what GEO can currently offer. **B S GC** 📋

LOOKING AHEAD:

→ Updating our Evaluation & Learning Plan to align with the *Story of Transformation* and *Strategic Plan*. **B IT S**

→ Launching the *Story of Transformation* at our June 2023 AGM and subsequently using it as a tool for communicating about our work, and, along with the *Strategic Plan*, use it to inform work and evaluation planning. **B IT S**

→ Developing a systematic approach for collecting and sharing stories. **B IT S**

Strategic Priority 5: Putting Down Roots

The strategies in this priority area include relying on stable long-term funding and support from partners, creating and nurturing a talented staff team, and putting inclusion at the core of our work.

PROGRESS:

- ✓ The Department of Community Services (DCS) recognizes the critical importance of digital Inclusion work, providing funds for GEO Nova Scotia's operations. **B** **IT** **S** **GC** 📋

- ✓ Building/expanding relationships across government departments and building awareness of digital inclusion, diversifying potential funding sources for expanding operations. **B** **S** **GC** 📋

- ✓ Assembling a strong and talented staff team with complementary experiences and areas of expertise. **B** **S** 📋

- ✓ Building a caring organizational culture, contributing to relationship building and mutual support, respect, and effectiveness among staff.

- ✓ Staff working well as a team, communicating well, and feeling supported by each other; new staff feeling like they are part of the team right away. **S** 📋

- ✓ The intentional learning culture creates space for staff to acknowledge areas where they need to grow and develop, and support is provided for that (e.g., the Executive Director has support from an Executive Coach). **S** 📋

- ✓ The staff team benefitting tremendously from the expertise, resources, connections, and strong engagement of the Insight Team members, with regular opportunities for thought partnership and brainstorming with members interested in specific areas of work. **B** **S** 📋

> **IT** *There is a stronger connection between government, business and community sectors and people to improve digital inclusion. (Insight Team)*

> **IT** *GEO cultivates relationships by taking the time and using processes to hear the voices of everyone. GEO prioritizes a culture of inclusion, equity, in all aspects of the initiative. (Insight Team)*

MISSTEPS:

❌ Sometimes yielding to the sense of urgency inherent in digital inclusion work before sufficient foundational policies and processes are in place. **B S** 📋

LOOKING AHEAD:

➡️ GEO and government champions will continue to work together to build the strongest possible collaborative relationships with long-term, diversified funding as a component. **B S GC** 📋

> **P** *My challenge would be how long does the GEO program exist for me because I am on Income Assistance and cannot afford Internet or cable. (Participant)*

➡️ Continue to access professional expertise to develop necessary policies and processes. **B S**

➡️ Examine and address the magnitude of potential growth and the implications for GEO. **B IT S GC** 📋

Strategic Priority 6: Reaching Out

The strategies in this priority area include helping everyone understand the importance of digital inclusion, creating space for everyone to contribute their best and to get what they need most through their connection to GEO, and monitoring and influencing policy.

PROGRESS:

- ✓ Digital inclusion is on the radar and multiple groups are talking about it. **B IT S P RP PP SP GC** 📃

- ✓ People are starting to grasp that Internet access is a necessity, and starting to understand the actual cost of digital exclusion in everyday life. **B IT S P RP PP SP GC** 📃

- ✓ Creating and holding a space, structure, and framework (**stone soup story**) for shared work toward digital inclusion in Nova Scotia that facilitates and values contributions from everyone involved. **B IT S P RP PP SP GC**

> ❝ *Digital exclusion is a problem right* **SP** *around the globe. (Supplier Partner)*

> ❝ *People and organizations can see a solution to a wicked problem -* **B** *effectively solving the challenge of delivering e-programs and e-services to people who would not otherwise be able to access them. (Board)*

> ❝ *Again, GEO benefits by its 'whole' being greater than the* **IT** *sum of its parts, and through very inclusive processes that invite many voices to the table. (Insight Team)*

> ❝ *The stone soup approach is ideal for this work. Everyone* **PP** *can do what they do best. Every partner's commitment was equal and we never felt alone. Working through challenges (which were mostly just hiccups) together builds strong relationships. (Project Partner)*

Collective Contributions to digital inclusion stone soup in NS

- ✓ Partners' staff and volunteer time

- ✓ Knowledge of local needs

- ✓ Relationships with community members

- ✓ Linkages among government departments

- ✓ Funding to support digital inclusion

- ✓ Devices and Internet services

- ✓ Technical knowledge/expertise

- ✓ Lived expertise

- ✓ Connections to community based organizations and networks

Conclusions

Just like with **stone soup**, everyone is needed to contribute what they can to digital inclusion, and everyone benefits from it. None of us can do this alone.

In the evaluation, people talked about three strong signals that show we are making progress together on addressing digital inclusion in Nova Scotia:

① We have created and are holding a space and structure for our **shared work on digital inclusion**, and we have a way of talking about it that we all understand in a similar way (the **stone soup story**). Having these things in place facilitates and values everyone's contributions toward achieving digital inclusion.

② Together, we are **fostering a culture of love and kindness that respects human dignity**, and we are not afraid to talk about it. Everyone involved in this digital inclusion stone soup work is aspiring to treat each other with love and kindness, which in turn inspires generosity and trust. This raises the bar and lifts all of us - it helps us all to be our best selves and contribute the best we have to offer, and it makes us appreciate each other. This approach helps us build strong relationships, and a shared willingness to try our best to make things work. It helps us think about things in new ways and from other perspectives, makes us better problem solvers, and keeps us flexible and nimble.

③ Collectively, we are starting to recognize that **having access to the Internet and knowing how to use it safely and confidently is a necessity of everyday life** for virtually everyone. We are highlighting the **unbearable costs of digital exclusion**, and we are taking real steps together to close the digital divide. We are actively working together to reach people who are often excluded, and creating paths to make sure everyone in Nova Scotia experiences digital inclusion.

What's Next?

GEO Nova Scotia will continue to support our shared work by holding the story of digital inclusion stone soup, talking about digital inclusion and keeping it on the radar, and consciously weaving love and kindness throughout everything we do.

Over the next year, GEO Nova Scotia aspires to improve and do our best work yet, particularly in the areas identified through this evaluation process, including:

- **Expanding our network of Referral Partners** so that we can connect people in more areas of Nova Scotia, and connect more people who are currently excluded

- **Innovating and testing new solutions** and approaches to connecting everyone

- Actively **seeking feedback from our partners** about how to make our shared work the best it can be

- Amplifying the **voices of people with lived expertise** to inform our work

- Strengthening and nourishing our **national and international partnerships** with others working for digital inclusion

- Enhancing and strengthening our **information systems** and improving and streamlining our **intake process** - as well as exploring alternative referral models

- Building on our **Digital Champions program** to create more Digital Champions and work with partners to co-design and deliver custom training modules for specific groups, and explore alternative support models

- Deepening our **internal reflection and learning processes** and cultivating opportunities for shared learning and reflection (such as our digital inclusion conference, and ongoing discussions)

- Continuing to **strengthen our internal systems** and processes

- Developing a **Communications Plan** that facilitates ongoing story sharing

- Developing and implementing an **Evaluation and Learning Plan** that is aligned with our new Strategic Plan and our Story of Transformation

- **Nurturing and strengthening our relationships** and digital inclusion engagement across government departments

- Diversifying **sustainable funding** for our work

Reflection Questions

We respectfully offer these reflection questions for your consideration, and for everyone contributing to and nourished by digital inclusion stone soup in Nova Scotia. We welcome your questions and reflections. **Please click here to share your thoughts.**

Do you find the stone soup story useful as a metaphor for digital inclusion work in NS? Why or why not? If you were going to add a new chapter to the story of digital inclusion stone soup, what would it say?

What does digital inclusion mean to you/your organization? Has your understanding changed through your involvement in this work? How?

How do you/can you cultivate love and kindness in the way you work, and inspire others to do the same?
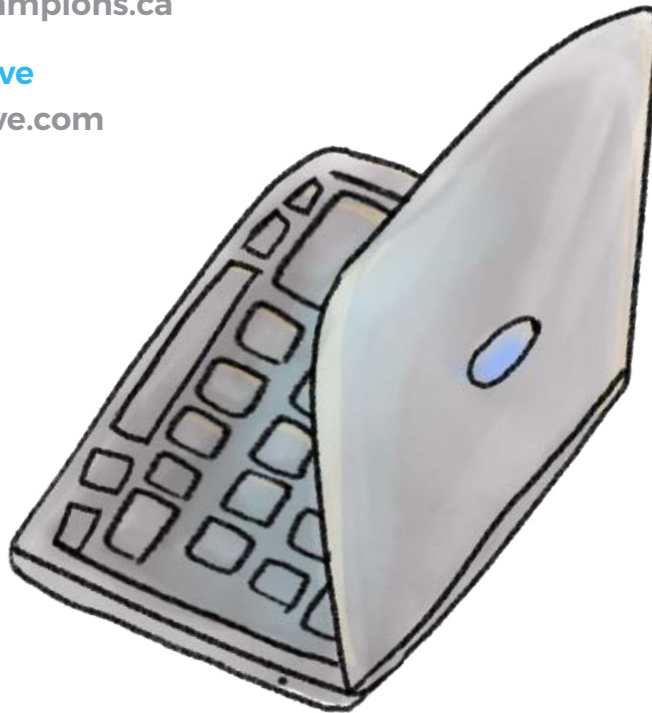
Links

GEO Nova Scotia
geonovascotia.ca

Our Story of Transformation
geonovascotia.ca/geo-nova-scotias-story-of-transformation

Our Strategic Plan
geonovascotia.ca/our-strategic-plan

GEO Digital Champions
geodigitalchampions.ca

Mhor Collective
mhorcollective.com

Appendix A: GEO Connects Participant Demographics

This table summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 2022-23 GEO Connects participants. There are **1,133** records in Salesforce, the system we use to manage our information. We do not have all data points for every participant, either because they are a 'legacy' participant from before GEO NS was formed and different data were collected at that time, or because we have changed our information management system and manage data differently than we did previously, or because people chose to skip a question in the intake process and did not indicate 'prefer not to say'. The table is based on the responses we have for each area.

The language we use to describe different groups is continually evolving as communities provide us with feedback and we learn what works best. Finally, the way we ask people to respond to questions is also evolving; for example for one characteristic people may be able to check off as many options as they wish in a single response (which is much more difficult to analyse), and in other instances they indicate primary and secondary characteristics in separate lists (which is what we are working toward).

We invite anyone who would like to dig into this more deeply with us to let us know - we would be pleased to have a conversation, hear your feedback, and apply what we learn to improve our intake process.

Age Group
Child (0-12 years) **94** (10.9%)
Youth (13 - 21 years) **136** (15.9%)
Adult (22 - 64 years) **512** (59.7%)
Senior (65+ years) **116** (13.5%)

Gender
Female **545** (59.2%)
Male **330** (35.9%)
Non-binary/Gender
non-conforming/Transgender **36** (3.0%)
Prefer not to Say **9** (1.0%)

Background
African Nova Scotian descent **53** (6.3%)
African NS descent or/
Black+ another **14** (1.7%)
Black **12** (1.4%)
East/Southeast Asian **2** (0.2%)
Indigenous **72** (8.5%)
Indigenous + another **5** (0.6%)
Latino **5** (0.6%)
Middle Eastern **60** (7.1%)
Middle Eastern + another **4** (0.5%)
South Asian **8** (0.9%)
White **476** (56.1%)
Other **15** (1.8%)
Unknown **61** (7.2%)
Prefer not to say **61** (7.2%)

Primary Language
Arabic **37** (5.8%)
English **565** (88.4%)
Farsi **2** (0.3%)
French **15** (2.3%)
Hindi **2** (0.3%)
Mi'kmaq **10** (1.6%)
Russian **1** (0.2%)
Spanish **2** (0.3%)
Ukrainian **5** (0.8%)

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Homelessness/Housing Insecurity
Yes **327** (40.6%)
No **457** (56.7%)
Not comfortable answering **22** (2.7%)

Living with a Disability
Yes **394** (50.3%)
No **339** (43.2%)
Not comfortable answering **51** (6.5%)

2SLGBTQ*
Yes **71** (9.2%)
No **659** (85.0%)
Not comfortable answering **45** (5.8%)

Newcomer to Canada
Yes **97** (12.5%)
No **664** (85.2%)
Not comfortable answering **18** (2.3%)

Single Parent
Yes **203** (25.8%)
No **564** (71.8%)
Not comfortable answering **19** (2.4%)

GEO NOVA SCOTIA

getting everyone online

Thank You!

Contact us

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