

COSTS RELATED TO THE PURCHASE OF LAPTOPS, CELLPHONES, AND TECHNOLOGY DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SUMMARY

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IRCC and the sector continue to explore approaches to providing expanded and more flexible supports to clients, especially for those who are more vulnerable and for whom continued service delivery would be important to support their health, social and economic well-being.
- We have heard that some Recipients may need to purchase additional laptops for their staff to increase online service delivery; some Recipients may also need to loan laptops, or to purchase or loan cell phones to clients to support online service delivery where possible.
- In response to this, IRCC has recently issued guidance to Program Officers to confirm it can support Recipients with shifting some of their services to online technological platforms in order to ensure that clients continue to receive settlement services.
- For the duration of COVID-19 pandemic, the following costs are eligible under the Settlement and RAP Programs:
 - Purchase of cell phones or laptops for use by Recipient staff;
 - Purchase of cell phones or laptops for loan to clients, including shipping costs where relevant;
 - Increased use of technology (e.g., Skype, Google hangouts, Zoom, Wi-Fi lending hot spots, internet and data costs);
 - Top-up of up to \$30 per month for IRCC-funded program staff in order to assist with additional connectivity costs of working from home (i.e. cost of internet, cell phone data plans).
- Recipients should discuss costs and approaches to support on-line delivery with their Program Officer, as they are subject to IRCC approval and need to align with requirements in the Contribution Agreement, such as privacy and security.
- Recipients are also encouraged to leverage community resources where possible (e.g., device or Wi-Fi lending programs offered by schools or libraries) to support continued service delivery.
- Direct payment to clients, such as internet subsidies, are not eligible under the Settlement program (except under RAP-Income Support – all RAP clients receive the utilities installation allowance and the communication allowance that may help to cover internet/phone installation and internet/phone plans).

Additional information about this guidance

Purchase/Loan of Laptops and/or Cell Phones

Settlement Services

- As per the Settlement Program Terms and Conditions direct financial assistance to clients for the purchase of laptops and/or cell phones, including internet costs or related subsidies are currently ineligible.

- To ensure a continuum in service delivery, **Recipients may purchase additional cell phones (pre-paid/burner phones) or laptops that could be used by their own staff or loaned out to clients** to support online service delivery.
- Recipients should prioritize temporary reassigning mobile devices from non-critical staff to critical staff, if and when possible.

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) services

- The purchase of cell phones for Resettlement Assistance Program clients staying in RAP temporary accommodations is an eligible cost that can be covered through RAP Contribution Agreements (CAs).
- For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, if needed, RAP Recipients may purchase cell phones for RAP clients to use, under the following conditions:
 - There is not already a landline or cell phone available in their immediate vicinity in the temporary accommodation where clients are staying;
 - Only one cell phone is purchased per family; and
 - The purchase of a cell phone for the family is deemed necessary for the delivery of RAP services.
- As some clients may arrive with their own cell phones, eligible costs under the RAP CA also includes the cost of SIM cards and phone plans, as per RAP Terms and Conditions [Section 5.2 \(B\) \(n\)](#) *“n. Any other justifiable expenditure deemed appropriate to support the eligible services.”*
- RAP Recipients should discuss with their Program Officer which option should be considered between lending or purchasing cell phones for RAP clients who need them. RAP Recipients and their Program Officer should also discuss when it would be best for RAP clients to return borrowed phones (e.g. at the time of move out or other) for other RAP clients who may need them. It should be noted that under RAP Income Support, all RAP clients receive the utilities installation allowance and the communication allowance that may help to cover internet/phone installation and internet/phone plans.

Loan of laptops/cell phones: Parameters that apply to Settlement and RAP Services

- Recipients who purchase devices may loan these to clients to enable access to RAP or Settlement programming, delivered through online platforms. Clients need to be actively participating in IRCC programming; only usage related to IRCC service delivery is eligible for funding.
- Recipients are reminded to:
 - Instruct clients on how to care for and protect these devices, and reiterate that usage of devices is restricted to receiving IRCC Settlement or RAP services.
 - Develop a tracking system that supports proper monitoring (e.g. return date when client’s training or program is complete), including general guidelines to prevent misuse, damage, theft or loss of devices. Damage or theft of these devices would fall under the Recipient’s responsibility. Article 5.5 of the CA regarding purchase of insurance for capital assets should be considered.

- Ensure that protected/personal information is erased from devices, before they are loaned to new clients. Program Officers should remind Recipients to review Privacy and Security obligations in their CA.
- If Recipients can no longer meet clients to recover laptops/cell phones, the Department could cover the shipping cost to clients, if it presents a barrier to service delivery.
- Recipients can also purchase devices with built in data plans. A pre-paid plan for up to 6 months may be the most reasonable option to avoid costly data and/or long distance charges. After this time, the needs can be reassessed to extend ongoing costs according to the COVID-19 situation. Recipients are responsible for monitoring usage of these plans.
- Where possible, Recipients should consider coordinating requests to telecommunications companies for possible bulk deals and ensure offering one coordinated point of contact per Telecommunication Company.
- In addition, Recipients should have a pre-established plan to re-purpose the additional devices (laptops and/or cell phones) purchased after COVID-19 (upon returning to a regular service delivery). Please refer to Article 11 of the CA that speaks to capital assets that have been purchased with IRCC funds, it is important to note that if devices (laptops and/or cell phones) are not retained by the same Recipient for the use of future program participants, they must be sanitized prior to disposal. This plan must be presented and approved by IRCC Program Officer.

Technology Costs

- Only incremental costs required as a direct result of program delivery should be included under the Program Delivery cost category, otherwise it should be funded under the Administrative cost category.
- These costs must be supported by relevant documentation (bills, invoices, etc. including those from staff to support top-up). Prior approval from IRCC Program Officers is required to ensure these are reasonable to address via online technology.

Funding Source

- Due to COVID-19 pandemic and possible reduction / limited service delivery to clients, Recipients may be projecting slippage from FY 2020-21 and could use this slippage towards costs listed above.
- If no slippage is available in the agreement and resources are needed, the Recipient should contact the Program Officer to discuss available options.

For costs that fall under Capital, please be reminded of the following:

- The recipient must have a line item under the Capital Cost category in FY 2020-21. For those agreements that do not currently have an existing line item under the Capital Cost category, the Recipient should seek IRCC approval to transfer funds from Program Delivery to Capital.
- Capital expenditure must not exceed the thresholds outlined in both the [RAP](#) and [Settlement Program](#) Terms and Conditions.

- Per the definition of Capital, any assets costing more than the equivalent of \$1,000 CAD should be included in the capital category – multiple items of one kind (e.g., laptops, phones) costing more than \$1,000 CAD are to be considered capital, even if less than \$1,000 CAD individually.
- Section 11 of the Contribution Agreement should still be adhered to, in particular the inventory and disposal aspects of these items.