



Confluence Event 2025 Panel: Reaching Hard-to-Reach Clients through Information Services Best Practices

June 24, 2025, 10:45 AM ET – 12:00 PM ET

Transcript

Introduction of Topic and Facilitator

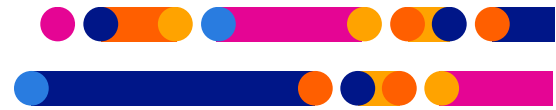
Krysti Neller**moe:** This next panel is extremely relevant for this moment. We're exploring how to reach the hardest-to-reach clients. How do you get information to newcomers that is relevant, timely, sensitive, and sometimes to meet immediate needs? This panel will be sharing insights from the perspectives of their respective organizations. They'll discuss how they're approaching the challenge of reaching those who are hardest to reach and how technology plays a key role in making critical information accessible to people who need it immediately. It's with absolute privilege to introduce Jason Crislip, who is an experienced educator, trainer, and program manager who has worked in the field of refugee resettlement since 2003. As Senior Director of Learning, he oversees Switchboard and other learning initiatives within International Rescue Committee's (IRC) resettlement, asylum, and integration programs. Previously, Jason worked abroad for 15 years at the Resettlement Support Center for East Asia, the overseas processing entity in West Africa, and as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana. He holds a degree in Education from the University of Akron, Ohio.

Introduction of Today's Speakers

Jason Crislip (JC): Thank you. I'm going to start by introducing the panelists one at a time and then have them give an overview of their programs. I'll begin with my colleague, Jenny Lange. She's the Deputy Director of Settle In, a multilingual, multi-platform information services program that delivers accurate, timely, and accessible content to newcomers. She previously led the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange, where she oversaw training and information initiatives tailored both to newcomers and service providers alike. Jenny has 15 years of experience working with newcomers at organizations, including the IRC in Salt Lake City, the Resettlement Support Center in Asia, where she had a job that I used to have, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Jenny holds a Master's of Social Work from the University of Utah. Welcome, Jenny.

Jenny Lange (JL): Thank you.

JC: Next is Rommel Ojeda, an award-winning bilingual journalist and filmmaker based in New York City. As the Senior Reporter at Documented, he focuses on topics affecting the Spanish-speaking, Latinx immigrant communities in New York City. Rommel is the author of several powerful investigations that Documented has recently published. His work can be seen in Univision, Telemundo, The City, and elsewhere. Rommel holds a



Master's degree in Bilingual Journalism with a specialization in documentary filmmaking from Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY.

Rommel Ojeda (RO): Thank you.

JC: Our last esteemed panelist is April Somboun. She is the Education Research and Innovation Officer at the Airbel Impact Lab, the research and innovation arm at the IRC. In her role, she collaborates with global partners, country teams, and educational units overseeing project implementation for aprendiA, which we'll hear a lot more about, an AI-driven chatbot, and the Education Innovation Fund. April's career has been centered on fostering partnerships in the nonprofit and corporate sectors, particularly within the realm of education. Prior to joining Airbel, she was on the IRC's Afghan Priority 2 team, managing teams and large-scale projects for organizations such as Scholastic and the Council for Economic Education. She holds a Master's of Public Administration from Columbia University and a Bachelor's from the University of Washington.

April Somboun (AS): Thank you.

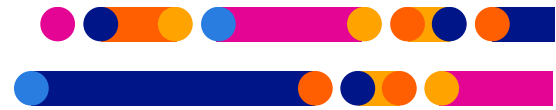
JC: Let's start by hearing a little more about your specific programs.

JL: Settle In is a multilingual, multi-platform information services hub for newcomers. We provide important information so that people can make informed decisions about their lives here in the U.S., and a lot of that is through our website, through social media, a mobile app, and a lot of the two-way messaging. This information allows newcomers to take more ownership of their experience, to make decisions independently, and help support some of the staff and the burden of some of the staff at organizations that are facing a lot of changes right now. We do all of this through multiple platforms. We started the service newcomer provider-facing services in 2017 through a website and the mobile app, and that provides a lot of great introductory information on topics like health, education, employment, rights and responsibilities, and US law. Then in 2021, we expanded to include social media, which came specifically out of Operation Allies Welcome and was to combat misinformation, also to provide a reliable source of information for Afghans directly. As you may already know, we've then used that successful approach to expand to include Ukrainian, Spanish, and are soon expanding into Haitian Creole.

RO: Document.info is a platform that serves the immigrant communities in New York City by providing actionable information that is produced from the input that they give us through our award-winning WhatsApp chat and our Zendesk platform. The idea is to empower people with information that helps them understand the decisions being made as they hire lawyers or other professionals to support them. The goal is for them to know each step of the process, so they can learn to navigate the system themselves. We also provide information in four languages, Haitian Creole, Spanish, English, and French. We're trying to grow our audience by also sending newsletters every week with information that allows them to get free resources, to connect with communities and free seasonal activities. The idea is to help them grow in New York City and make New York their home, which is what they have told us they wanted to do.

AS: I work for the Airbel Impact Lab, which is the research and innovation arm of the IRC. Our mission is to design, test, and scale life-changing, cost-effective products and services for people affected by conflict and disaster. I sit within the education vertical, so my focus is on last-mile learners: children displaced by climate change, war, local conflict, and more. Our team in the research and innovation department is always asking key questions:

- How do we reach these millions of last-mile learners?



- How do we support teachers who have limited resources and unique learner needs?
- What's engaging?
- What's simple tech that people can actually use?
- What's scalable and adoptable by local governments or partners so they can continue the work?

Of course, we aim to respond cost-effectively. Our solutions must work contextually and meet the needs of our clients who are always part of the development process. Our signature project is *aprendIA*—an AI-driven chatbot designed for clients with low-bandwidth access. It's a learning journey for educators, helping them teach children about disaster relief, evacuation during earthquakes, and trauma-informed education. One of our current programs, being developed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria, is *Healing Classrooms*, designed for children who have experienced trauma.

aprendIA is a multi-channel platform that's easy to use. We meet educators where they are, on WhatsApp, SMS, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger. What makes it novel is that the content is bite-sized, digestible, and aligned with IRC's pedagogical practices. We co-create with educators and local partners, and we've integrated OpenAI so users can ask quick questions and get answers from a curated knowledge base. Now, you might be wondering: What does *aprendIA* have to do with refugees and newcomers in the U.S.? I've been learning a lot about IRC's domestic programs. I was speaking with a colleague about budget constraints and staffing shortages. They said, "We still have to serve over 100,000 newcomers—what can we do to bridge the caseworker gap?" I said, "We have a platform that's cross-functional. We can build a bot—not to replace caseworkers, but to complement them."

This bot can help answer basic questions:

What documentation do I need?

- What is housing?
- What does my rent agreement mean?
- How do I get a job?
- How do I write a resume?

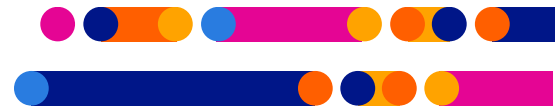
It's simple, linear, and powered by GPT integrated into a knowledge base we've built. We're calling it *AI for Life Mapping and Assistance (ALMA)*. It's launching in mid-August and will be fluent in Dari, Swahili, Spanish, and English. That's why I'm here today, to talk about *ALMA*.

Prepared Questions

JC: How do you ensure that the information that you're sharing on your platforms is accurate, current, and culturally relevant across all large diverse populations?

JL: That's a great question and a huge part of our work is building and maintaining trust with the newcomers who rely on us for important information. Two key pillars of our approach are accuracy and cultural relevancy.

For accuracy, we fact-check everything we post. Much of that work is done internally, and we also collaborate with subject matter experts. We stay up to date on policy changes, program eligibility updates, and other critical information. For cultural relevancy, we take a multi-layered approach. We ensure that the information is created with, for, and tailored to newcomers. That means avoiding unnecessary academic or industry jargon



and making sure the content is easy to understand. We also prioritize translation and voiceover in the languages spoken by our clients. And we make sure the content reflects the everyday experiences of newcomers. We listen to the messages and comments we receive on specific topics, and we incorporate that feedback to ensure the content is culturally responsive.

JC: How do you build and maintain trust with a community that may be wary of digital services in general or things that are linked to government services?

RO: We're operating in a time when fear is high, many people are hesitant to share personal information or provide details. That's why we've leaned into collaborations with community organizations doing the work on the ground. Every other week, we show up at resource fairs to introduce ourselves. Because at the end of the day, people want to know who they're talking to. They want to meet us in person before sharing their needs and information. It's incredibly rewarding when someone sends a message and says, "Hey Rommel, I met you at this location, you told me about this resource, and now I want to access it." We remember their names. We recognize where we met them. And we follow through: "Here's the information I promised you." That accountability builds trust. When people can hold us accountable, they know we're truly listening and responding to their needs. Even though it's a limitation that people aren't as comfortable being out in public spaces, it's also an opportunity to invent new ways to engage.

We've started hosting webinars via Instagram Live and Zoom, where people can join from the comfort of their homes and ask questions directly. My face is there. My name is there. We're meeting people where they feel safe and comfortable—not just during moments of crisis, but consistently. One thing we're proud of at Documented is that when someone sends us a message, we respond. Whether it's information we have or a referral to an organization that can help, we answer. That builds trust. We're not here to extract stories or publish headlines. We're here to serve their needs. And over time, that trust grows...organically. People share their experiences with others, and the connection deepens.

JC: Generally speaking, about aprendIA, and I know it utilizes platforms like WhatsApp, SMS messaging, and other tools we've discussed, how does that approach help overcome barriers such as limited internet access, digital literacy, and multilingual needs?

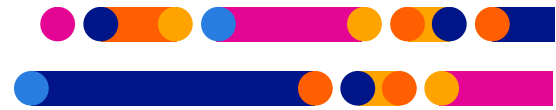
AS: I want to acknowledge that we're working in an environment where the digital divide is real.

That's why, before we begin any project, we go directly to our clients and ask:

- What technology are you using?
- How are you using it?
- Do you have access?

Right now, many of our clients say they use WhatsApp, not only because it's end-to-end encrypted, but also because it's how they stay connected with family members in other countries. Our content is designed to be snackable, simple, digestible, and not overwhelming. You're not required to download a PDF, though you can if you want—for example, if it's a step-by-step guide on how to fill out a Social Security card application. ALMA walks users through those steps in a clear, accessible way. We understand that a bot isn't going to replace a caseworker.

That's why ALMA includes two features I'm especially excited about:



1. Virtual Hotline: Users can instantly call for support.
2. Real-Time Appointment Scheduling: Users can book a time with a caseworker, like 10:00 AM tomorrow, to get their questions answered and prepare to visit their local Social Security office—either in person or online.

ALMA also includes geolocation. Clients can type in their ZIP code and immediately find nearby resources—whether it's housing, legal aid, or employment services. We want to make it easy. As for language access, the four languages supported Dari, Swahili, Spanish, and English and were selected based on data from the resettlement teams. We looked at which languages were most requested by users coming through their lines, and that informed our decision.

JC: What lessons have you learned about user habits or preferences?

JL: We've seen a lot of engagement on specific posts and content. When we share updates, especially around topics like parole or immigration status, we notice a clear increase in questions, social media interactions, and webpage visits. This ties back to what I mentioned earlier: making sure our content reflects the everyday experiences and real questions people are asking. When the content is relevant and timely, people respond. One great idea from our team was to highlight cultural idioms commonly used in the U.S., phrases like "I'm feeling under the weather" don't always translate well. We created content that explains what these idioms mean, how they might show up in school or the workplace, and how they could impact someone's understanding of a situation. By highlighting these everyday expressions, we saw increased engagement. People were interested, they asked more questions, and it sparked meaningful conversations.

JC: Documented is implemented in partnership with a lot of different entities. Would you tell us a little bit more about the role of local contributors and partners and what their role is in shaping content in Documented?

RO: These organizations really know how to address the needs of the communities they serve, and a lot of the times when we include those communities in our service map, which is this interactive map where you can look for in organizations and other services, they really want their services to be reflected correctly. They reach out to us, but at the same time, we're always searching for them. Saying, hey, are you offering new services? What services are you offering now? What communities are you serving now? It changes also with funding as things happen. We're always updating. The same thing with government agencies. For example, the Roosevelt Hotel closed, which used to be this access point for incoming asylum seekers. Our priority was to send an email asking, where do we direct people now if they want to access shelter. It is almost like a dance, I would say, a constant dialogue with organizations and the agencies to really see what they're providing and at the same time what they're not providing. We don't want to send someone to an organization and then just to be told that they're not giving those services anymore, because at the same time, they're going to hold us accountable. We must be always up to date as well.

JC: Aprendi has been rolled out in overseas context in that education space. What lessons have you learned from the implementation and how is that going to influence as you develop ALMA?

AS: One of the things that's great about the Airbel Impact Lab is we have a lot of specialized staff members who oversee and help us with behavioral insights, user-centered design, and best-used resources. We're able to pull from these experts to further help us build a chatbot that is contextual but also meets the needs of the clients. We've tested in Afghanistan just a prototype to better understand how we can reach really rural areas, teachers who just don't have access. What we've learned from that is that SMS is the way to go but also, they don't have the funds to be able to constantly check. We had to lower the bandwidth or the file size of an image



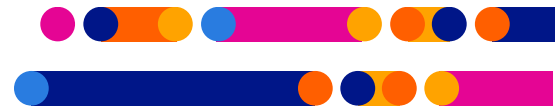
or maybe we don't use images, and we just use audio as a way to get them information without using too much of their internet connectivity. In Nigeria, where we're going to be piloting with the local government this fall, so it's exciting and we're in the Bay States and we're working with our teachers there, they love the nudges. They love that the bot reminds them, hey, you are just halfway through this learning journey on classroom management. Let's finish it, let's get it done. Then at the end, you're going to get a point. You get graded, and they're constantly trying to always achieve 100% because that's motivating to them. They're learning, but they're also applying those practices in the classroom. These prototypes and the pilot that's happening that we've done around the world, we are bringing it to here because they're also the same use cases in terms of how a Venezuelan migrant may use their phone here and what nudges they would like. I don't know if they would want to be reminded all the time about having to maybe fill out their SNAP vouchers, but we can always send very gentle reminders. One thing that we're implementing is sending a gentle reminder 48 to 72 hours that asks, "Have you filled out your SNAP benefits?" This is important because it can help supply their family with food, and it is a public benefit to them, we hope that they will follow through. If not, they can set their own reminders too. There is self-agency, which is something that with ALMA, we want to be able to get with our newcomers is to have that agency to find the information and to really be proactive in how you navigate the very complex US system. I think my mom told me that her refugee settlement person that was helping would call her up every day and be like, "You really need to fill out this form to be able to get housing." What we found out was that my mom just couldn't read English. Then they came over and they helped her fill out the form. The bot isn't going to do everything, but there's always a human also on the other side.

JC: Would you share maybe one example of how you have leveraged feedback from users and how that may have shaped what Settle In does or how it functions?

JL: We get some great feedback. I know one specific example from a few years ago, we were getting a lot of questions about car ownership, driver's licensing. We had put out a few articles and resources on how to obtain a driver's license, but also some of the budget and safety implications of ownership, owning a car, and what that might look like.

JC: Would you tell us a little bit about lessons you may have learned about misinformation and disinformation that's out there and how Documented responds to that?

RO: I learned very early on in my career that information is very powerful because it often can dictate an action that a person can take, and the result can be negative or positive. We have been getting a lot of misinformation questions nowadays, and what we try to do is team up with organizations that are serving the communities and that can provide us with their expertise on how to handle this type of misinformation. We create guides and explainers that address their questions. For instance, if someone contacted me from a WhatsApp number claiming that it's USCIS, and we all know USCIS processes do not include reaching out to begin with. Telling people that this happens and not making them feel guilty because we want more people to come forward and report these cases, but it's also this big stigma because they don't want to feel that they were being taken advantage of for a certain reason. Aside from the explainers and fact-checking their questions that they send us; we have been doing webinars. We did one recently with the Envision Freedom Fund about this very intricate scam that was masquerading as an immigration court judge. In this case, this person had been attending hearings online for six months thinking that he was winning an asylum case when his real case was being denied at the courts. The impact is very big. Therefore, we try to, again, empower people so that they know how to follow a case, so that they know how to check if their case is in the courts. At the same time, even if they have a real lawyer, I know we use real lawyers nowadays. If they have a real lawyer, we still want them to follow their case by saying, okay, you're telling me that this is taking this amount of time,



but USCIS on the website is saying this. That's where we can come in and using our journalistic backgrounds as well just to really fact check and provide actionable information there.

JC: Would you share an example of a time that Apendia adjusted its approach, or its content based on a specific cultural or emergency context?

AS: The first one that comes to mind is Afghanistan. We did it in Dari and Pashto audio. As an American, we write from left to right. They were like, it's not right. Justified. Those are the simple cultural contextual things that I, as someone who is based here in New York, didn't pick that up quickly. We had the teachers there who were talking with day in and day out and asking them for their feedback and their input. That's just a very simple thing that you would think you would get. Then for ALMA, I was working through the content with our resettlement team. I was like, oh, I would describe it this way. They were like, too technical. Let's really get it down to a second or third grade level because these people, it's so new to them that there's just some things. We've had to really look at how we write the content. Especially through the linear learning journey on a specific topic to ensure that it meets the literacy level of our clients.

JC: What lessons have you learned about user habits or preferences?

JL: These organizations deeply understand the communities they serve. When we include them in our interactive service map, they often reach out to ensure their services are accurately represented.

At the same time, we proactively reach out to them:

- “Are you offering new services?”
- “What communities are you serving now?”

Services change, especially with shifts in funding, so we’re constantly updating. This applies to government agencies too. For example, when the Roosevelt Hotel closed, which had been a key access point for incoming asylum seekers, our priority was to ask:

- “Where do we direct people now for shelter?”

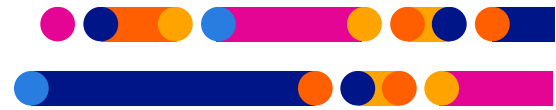
It’s a constant dialogue, a kind of dance, between us, organizations, and agencies. We want to avoid sending someone to a service that no longer exists. That accountability builds trust, and staying up to date is essential.

JC: aprendiA has been rolled out in overseas education contexts. What lessons have you learned, and how are they shaping ALMA?

AS: At Airbel Impact Lab, we’re fortunate to have experts in behavioral insights, user-centered design, and resource optimization.

In Afghanistan, we tested a prototype to reach rural teachers with limited access. We learned that:

- SMS is the most reliable channel.
- Users often lack funds to check messages frequently.
- We had to reduce bandwidth, using audio instead of images to conserve data.



In Nigeria, where we're piloting with the local government this fall, teachers responded positively to nudges:

- "You're halfway through your classroom management module, let's finish it!"
- They earn points and aim for 100%, which motivates learning and application.

These insights are directly informing ALMA. For example, a Venezuelan migrant in the U.S. might appreciate gentle reminders like:

- "Have you filled out your SNAP benefits?"

We send these 48–72 hours in advance, and users can also set their own reminders. This promotes self-agency, helping newcomers proactively navigate complex systems. A personal story: My mom's resettlement caseworker used to call her daily to remind her to fill out housing forms. Eventually, they realized she couldn't read English—and came over to help. The bot won't do everything. But there's always a human on the other side.

JC: [Can you share an example of how user feedback shaped Settle In?](#)

JL: A few years ago, we received many questions about car ownership and driver's licenses. We responded by publishing articles on:

- How to obtain a license
- Budgeting for car ownership
- Safety considerations

This helped clarify expectations and supported informed decision-making.

JC: [What lessons have you learned about misinformation, and how does Documented respond?](#)

RO: Early in my career, I learned that information is powerful and it can lead to positive or negative outcomes. We've seen a rise in misinformation. To respond, we:

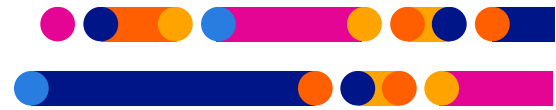
- Partner with community-serving organizations
- Create guides and explainers based on real questions
- Host webinars, like one with Envision Freedom Fund, exposing a scam impersonating an immigration judge

One case involved someone attending fake hearings for six months, thinking they were winning asylum—while their real case was being denied. We empower people to:

- Check their case status
- Ask informed questions, even if they have a lawyer
- Compare what they're told with official USCIS timelines

Using our journalistic background, we fact-check and provide actionable information.

JC: [Can you share an example of aprendIA adapting to cultural or emergency contexts?](#)



AS: In Afghanistan, we created audio content in Dari and Pashto. One simple but important detail: We initially formatted text left to right, but it needed to be right justified. That feedback came directly from teachers on the ground. For ALMA, we worked with the resettlement team to simplify content. What I thought was clear was actually too technical. We revised it to a second or third-grade reading level, especially for linear learning journeys. This ensures content is accessible and meets the literacy levels of our clients. Would you like this compiled into a formatted panel summary, stakeholder report, or presentation deck? I can also help with visual design, accessibility tagging, or multilingual versions.

Audience Questions

Participant #1: Right now, we're seeing laws say one thing and enforcement look different the next day. When trust with communities is the currency, how are you managing that? And when working with large populations across the country or globally, how do you handle the need for very specific local information?

JL: We aim to provide information that covers the entire nation. When we share localized content, we cross-check it before posting. We also partner with local information services, like Documented. If someone asks for hyper-local details, such as about New York City, we can offer general national or regional resources. If the situation is more nuanced, we refer them to trusted local partners.

Participant #2: It sounds like all the platforms are multilingual and allow users to ask questions to a real person. Can you share how your staff structures work? Is someone monitoring the chat 24/7? Do you have staff who speak the users' languages?

RO: We have five moderators. Two in Spanish (our most common language) and one each in Haitian Creole, French, and English. Our response time is usually within an hour. We balance human interaction with automated support, our website provides answers for non-urgent needs.

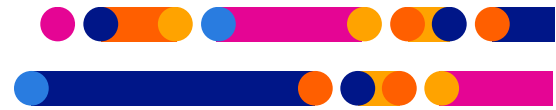
Cultural understanding is key. That's why the human-in-the-loop model remains essential, even as technology helps automate time-consuming tasks.

JL: We have six team members with linguistic and cultural expertise who monitor messages. We're not an emergency or crisis hotline, so our response time is typically within a few hours or by the next business day (Monday–Friday). Users can ask nuanced questions and engage in back-and-forth conversations with our digital community liaisons.

Participant #3: How do national platforms navigate safety concerns when serving rural areas or culturally diverse communities, especially in red states?

JL: Safety is a top priority. We ensure users know what information is available and connect them to local community resources. For sensitive topics like legal advice, we refer users to pro bono or low-cost legal services. For hyper-local needs, we rely on community partners to support education and outreach.

AS: We do **not collect personally identifiable information**. At the start of the user journey, all data is anonymized, numbers are hashed, and no contact info is stored. If a user escalates a concern, like saying "I think I'm going to be deported" we refer them to a local partner. We're clear: "We don't serve that population directly, but here's who you can contact."



Concluding Remarks

JC: Thank you, everyone.

KN: Let's take a moment to reflect on the goals of this panel and what we're taking away:

- Access to information helps newcomers navigate complex systems.
- Despite language differences or digital gaps, technology—when used thoughtfully—can bridge those divides.
- Trust builds engagement, and accountability builds trust.
- When communities trust the source, they're more likely to engage, follow guidance, and share resources.
- Cultural and contextual relevance matters. Information must be accurate *and* tailored to the linguistic, cultural, and situational realities of the people receiving it.

That's central to how we design. We must understand these realities to create meaningful, effective tools. Thank you again to everyone.

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