

Digital Inclusion/Equity Coalition Meeting Notes

2020-09-30

Present:

- Brice Bible; Vice President and Chief Information Officer; University at Buffalo
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Kier Dirlam; Director of Planning; Allegany County
- Alex Carducci; Real Estate Financial Analyst; City of Buffalo
- Jesse Friedman; Fellow; Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
- Matt Giordano; President; Villa Maria College
- Paul Hogan; Executive Vice President; John R. Oishei Foundation
- Ba Zan Lin; Senior Program Officer; Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Michael Prutsman; Executive Director; Council on Addiction Recovery Services
- Curtis Robbins; Director of Knowledge, Strategy, and Research; John R. Oishei Foundation
- Amber Slichta; Vice President of Programs; Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
- Richard Zink; Executive Director; Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board

Key Definitions

Both of the following definitions are taken from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance.

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies. This includes 5 elements:

- affordable, robust broadband internet service;
- internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
- access to digital literacy training;
- quality technical support; and
- applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

What brings people to the table?

- Desire to ensure telehealth access for mental health and addiction services

- Desire to mitigate/eliminate inequity of device and internet access across WNY
- Need to get access to everyone in significantly underserved regions
- Need to get *sustainable* access to people in significantly underserved regions
- Recognizing that digital life (education, healthcare, arts & culture, community engagement) is here to stay; making sure it's accessible to everyone
- Ensuring access to telehealth services for mental health and addiction, especially for rural communities
- Involvement in other digital inclusion/equity work and desire to ensure that efforts are complementary
- Long-standing focus on the "three-legged stool" — equipment, broadband, digital literacy
- Digital access/equity is a major issue that affects quality of life in many domains
- Figuring out how to ensure that digital connectivity is available to students at all levels; wants to be part of the solution
- Concern for how school and out-of-school-time closures and new digital service delivery have affected kids
- Making sure that students are able to have good quality devices, internet, and space to learn effectively
- Awareness that broadband access challenges and digital inclusion/equity are important things to address

What would you address first?

- Needs/assets analysis (conduct and/or compile existing analyses)
- Recognize that there are many initiatives happening in our communities. Involve everyone wherever we can and do complementary work.
- Identify high-need areas (tiered approach; begin with high-need areas and build out from there)
- Build broadband infrastructure (get service to people with no existing access)
- Get equipment and knowledge into the hands of community members; get companies to do what they need and ensure they're paid reasonably; we can't overlook digital literacy
- Determine who makes decisions about where services are provided; how public policy affects access to services
- Catalog existing efforts and make sure they're coordinated and communicating with each other
- Hone in on who's already doing work and identifying opportunities to leverage state/federal funding that could be pulled down into the community with better coordination
- Thinking prospectively about where education, health, arts, and other fields are headed with respect to digital access post-Covid
- Ensure that all kids have access to virtual education and learning, which will also create access for everyone else in the household

- Make sure that broadband service is not just available, but of sufficient quality to support practical usage
- Assemble a representative group of community members to work with City of Buffalo to identify where resources are and where there are particular needs/concerns

Who Else Needs to Be Included?

- Broadband providers (e.g., Charter/Spectrum, Verizon, others?)
- Disability services providers/advocates (e.g., Center for Self Advocacy)
- Senior services providers/advocates (e.g., People Inc.?)
- Community organizations and community-based networks (e.g., Partnership for the Public Good, ANCHOR, WNY Nonprofit Support Group)
- Public schools (e.g., Buffalo Public Schools)
- BOCES (all counties)
- Health insurers (e.g., Independent Health, BlueCross BlueShield, Fidelis Care)
- Behavioral health services providers (e.g., WNY Chemical Dependency Consortium, WNY Regional Planning Consortium)
- Workforce development (e.g., Catholic Charities)
- Business (e.g., tech sector businesses)

Administrivia

- We will meet for one hour on Wednesday mornings at 9:00am every other week (beginning September 30, 2020).
- Communications will, for the moment, occur via email, but we anticipate moving to a more centralized platform that can also serve as an information and communication hub/repository.

Next Steps

- Identify and contact individuals from identified stakeholder organizations/fields; invite to future meetings
- Determine best mechanism for ongoing communications and project management (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack, something else?).
- Identify a mechanism for aggregating and organizing information about existing digital inclusion/equity efforts throughout Western New York.

For Next Meeting

- Be prepared to discuss:
 - Communications/project management platform preferences
 - Ideas for consolidating information from existing assessments and digital inclusion/equity projects across all of WNY