

WNY Digital Equity Coalition Meeting Notes

2021-02-17

Present:

- Dean Bellack; Executive Director; United Way of Orleans County
- Rachel Bonsignore; Director; Liftoff WNY
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Alex Carducci; Real Estate Financial Analyst; City of Buffalo
- Ken DeRoller; Legislator; Orleans County
- Kier Dirlam; Director of Planning; Allegany County
- Jim Finn; Administrative Vice President Network Operations; M&T Bank
- Tyrell Ford; Lead Street Team Organizer; PUSH Buffalo
- Elizabeth Freas; Assistant Superintendent, Educational Support and WNYRIC Services; Erie 1 BOCES
- Jesse Friedman; Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
- Matt Giordano; President; Villa Maria College
- David Godfrey; Legislator; Niagara County Legislature
- Kim Herrington; Founder; WNY Wifi Warriors
- Lynne Johnson; Chairman of the Legislature; Orleans County
- Erica Kreutzer; Population Health Manager; Value Network
- Ba Zan Lin; Senior Program Officer; Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
- Michael Marvin; Executive Director; Strength Solutions
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Sam Mattle; Executive Director; Center for Self-Advocacy
- Al Meyers; Cattaraugus Community Action
- Scott Payne; District Superintendent and CEO; Cattaraugus-Allegany-Erie-Wyoming BOCES
- Tanvier Peart; Just Recovery Coordinator; Partnership for the Public Good
- Lauren Picone; Government Affairs Manager; Feedmore WNY
- Katie Pieri; Director; WNY Nonprofit Support Group
- Michael Prutsman; Executive Director; Council on Addiction Recovery Services
- Teresa Quattrin; Senior Associate Dean for Research Integration and Distinguished Professor; University at Buffalo School of Medicine
- Curtis Robbins; Director of Knowledge, Strategy, and Research; John R. Oishei Foundation
- Amber Slichta; Vice President; Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- Andrew Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator; University at Buffalo School of Medicine
- Ivy Diggs-Washington; Director, Workforce Development; Buffalo Urban League
- Heidi Ziemer; Outreach & Digital Services Coordinator; WNY Library Resources Council

- Richard Zink; Executive Director; Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board

Orleans County Highlight

- Ken DeRoller and Dean Bellack shared some of the great progress happening in Orleans County.
- Orleans County has been able to complete a digital literacy/access survey through a grant from the Build Back Better (now Moving Forward Together) which has
- Rep. Chris Jacobs held a virtual press conference in early February to highlight the need for broadband coverage in rural communities. The survey coordinated by the Orleans County United Way featured prominently in the press conference. This press conference garnered significant media coverage and drew attention to rural communities' broadband needs.

Administrative Updates

- Microsoft Teams Update:
 - We are now able to upload documents to Teams, so Don has begun uploading meeting notes and the goals/measures document to the Teams instance.
 - If you are not currently on the coalition's Microsoft Teams instance, please let Don know so he can get work with Lin and the Community Foundation's IT consultant to get you squared away.
 - Lin noted that there are only 25 users registered on Teams, so please let Don know if you haven't already received an invitation. Don will need the email address you want to use to access Teams.

Coalition Project Updates

- Policy Paper:
 - The five co-authors have met and discussed the paper's direction.
 - The focus has shifted from regulating broadband as a utility to a set of recommendations that align with the Governor's State of the State report. The objective is to make Western New York highly attractive as a first stop for any efforts the state makes to address digital equity.
 - An additional element to the paper will involve encouraging New York State not to pursue avenues that have been tried previously and been unsuccessful.
 - A main thrust will be to decentralize broadband planning and implementation and push it down to the local level.
 - If you have any data or anecdote that helps support these themes, please pass them along so that we can incorporate them into the paper.
 - The process is to work in two-week sprints with check-ins between drafts to make sure we're making progress and
- Resource Directory for Gatekeepers:
 - We have some good information about behavioral health provider websites and services, but we don't have anyone working in a dedicated fashion on building out other resource information.

- Digital Equity Initiatives Directory:
 - Community Tech NY's landscape scan will be the foundation for our directory. Their scan covers the eight counties of Western New York as well as Monroe County. There are conversations with Cornell Cooperative Extension to broaden the scope of that scan.
 - Sam Mattle is currently working on this project alone. He would love some company!
 - If anyone knows of any digital equity initiatives, please share them with Sam and me.
 - It will be important to get a clear sense of these initiatives' short- and long-term goals. We ultimately want to foster cooperation and align these efforts to minimize duplication and maximize resources for this work.
 - Curtis has agreed to join Sam on this project. They will develop a framework and share it back with the coalition for feedback.

Other Updates

- Community Wi-Fi Pilot Project
 - Targets Fruit Belt neighborhood in City of Buffalo. There's a grant application in to the National Science Foundation that's a joint effort between University at Buffalo, the Oishei Foundation, Community Tech NY, and other partners. Initial indications are favorable, but it's still not a sure thing.
 - If this is funded through the NSF, there's some interest in running a parallel pilot project in another more rural community in Western New York.
 - Curtis noted that there will be a lot of learning through this process and it can provide a model for a community-driven planning process. The replicability in rural areas will be a crucial aspect of the project.

Coalition Care and Feeding

- Coalition Coordinator: Don has appealed to Clotilde Dedecker (President & CEO of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo) to see about getting some administrative support for the coalition. Drawing on something that's working for another Community Foundation initiative, Clotilde recommends a part-time coordinator, possibly someone who is staff at a mission-aligned organization who is in danger of having their hours cut back. Dollars from Moving Forward Together could be used to make their salary whole. Don asked folks to think about sharing the opportunity with anyone they think might be interested. There's not currently a job description, but Don will be working on that and will share it with everyone when it's ready. This will not be a Don-drive hire; any decisions about personnel will be made by a coalition workgroup. Please let Don know if you'd like to be part of that hiring process. This will be a part-time, year-to-year position. Don does still need to write a request to the Moving Forward Together steering committee before this can go forward.
- External Consultants: Clotilde also recommended that the coalition issue a request for proposals (RFP) for a consulting firm with field expertise to help the coalition chart a course forward. This is an approach being used to great effect by the Moving Forward

Together's food security initiative. Don asked everyone to think about consultant/consulting firm recommendations. As with decisions about the coalition coordinator, the RFP will be created and submissions reviewed by a workgroup of coalition members.

- Data Dashboard and Governance
 - Several people have indicated an interest in working on the data dashboard, and one person has expressed interest in working on governance. Don will be sending out emails in the next day or so to get this work moving.
 - Anyone with an interest in working on governance should get in touch with Don to join in the fun.

Funding Update and Discussion

- Don updated the coalition on the status of the anonymous funding opportunity that was discussed last meeting.
 - The funder expects to have decisions made by early next week and will communicate directly with awardees.
 - There were eight requests submitted for the opportunity.
- From a broader perspective, Don anticipates that as the coalition becomes more widely known, it will be viewed as a place to seed grants and get digital equity work moving.
- There are many initiatives underway already, so it's important to recognize that there are opportunities to integrate our coalition's work to what's already happening. Is there an opportunity to create a small pool of funds to help give existing projects a boost? We've seen from this anonymous funder's \$30,000 opportunity that it doesn't necessarily take a lot of money to advance the work. Don will pitch this idea to the Moving Forward Together steering committee.

For Next Meeting

- Keep thinking about community-wide and systems-level projects and potential quick-wins!