

WNY Digital Inclusion and Equity Coalition Meeting Notes

2021-03-31

Present:

- Thomas Beauford; President & CEO; Buffalo Urban League
- Dean Bellack; Executive Director; United Way of Orleans County
- Brice Bible; Vice President and Chief Information Officer; University at Buffalo
- Rachel Bonsignore; Director; Liftoff WNY
- Alex Carducci; Real Estate Financial Analyst; City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Ken DeRoller; Legislator; Orleans County Legislature
- Kier Dirlam; Director; Allegany County Office of Planning
- Jim Finn; Administrative Vice President; M&T Bank
- Elizabeth Freas; Assistant Superintendent, Educational Support and WNYRIC Services; Erie1 BOCES
- Jesse Friedman; Fellow; Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- Matt Giordano; President; Villa Maria College
- Kimberly Herrington; Founder; Western New York WiFi Warriors
- Erica Kreutzer; Population Health Manager; Value Network
- Daniel Ljiljanich; Superintendent; Niagara-Orleans School Board Association; Niagara Wheatfield Central School District
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Sam Mattle; Executive Director; Center for Self-Advocacy
- Alan Meyers; Fatherhood Connection Facilitator; Cattaraugus Community Action
- Tanvier Peart; Just Recovery Coordinator; Partnership for the Public Good
- Katie Pieri; Executive Director; WNY Nonprofit Support Group
- Michael Prutsman; Executive Director; Council on Addiction Recovery Services
- Curtis Robbins; Director of Strategy, Research, and Evaluation; John R. Oishei Foundation
- Amber Slichta; Vice President of Programs; Ralph C. Willson, Jr. Foundation
- Andy Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center; University at Buffalo

Coalition Project Updates

- Digital Equity Initiatives Directory:
 - Curtis was able to connect with Ken DeRoller's Microsoft contact, but it appears that Microsoft Teams does not permit macros to be enabled, so the search functionality is not something that's going to be feasible
- Policy Paper:
 - The policy paper team has not had good success in moving this project forward. They have instead opted for a shorter-term, easier to accomplish goal of writing

an advocacy letter focusing on a decentralized decision-making process for use of federal and state dollars.

- This direction is consistent with the policy paper's intent, but will be lighter on details, supporting rationale, and data. Mostly it's something that can be moved fairly quickly.
- Data Dashboard
 - No movement to report. Don needs to schedule the next meeting to get things moving again.

Coalition Care and Feeding

- Moving Forward Together Grant Request:
 - Don is submitting the request to the Moving Forward Together Committee to hire a part-time coalition coordinator. This person will be responsible for keeping the coalition moving and managing logistics. He is requesting funds for a 30-hour weekly position. This includes pay, mileage, equipment, and some amount of training. The position will be year-to-year, so the initial contract would be for one year.
 - The coordinator will also be responsible for managing the national consultant request for proposals that the coalition has been asked to issue. It seemed premature to ask for some arbitrary amount of money to hire a consultant, so that will be part of a future request once we have something scoped out. It does not seem wise to issue an RFP until we have a better handle on what information is already available.
 - Don will also be asking for \$50,000 to be regranted through the Coalition. We saw the value of relatively small dollars when we had the private corporate donor interested in making \$30,000 grants through the coalition, so this could be very powerful at moving some efforts forward. These funds could be very valuable in helping to plan for the significant influx of money that will be coming from the state and federal government.
- Standing and Committee Members:
 - Policy, Advocacy, & Funding: Lauren Picone, Alex Carducci
 - Providers & Infrastructure: Mike Prutsman, Jim Finn
 - Broadband & Equipment: Christine Carr-Barmasse, Jeff Conrad
 - Digital Literacy & Tech Support: Heidi Ziemer, Elizabeth Freas, Dan Ljiljanich
 - Data and Landscape: Kim Herrington, Christine Carr-Barmasse
- We still do not have any community members populating any committees or the Steering Committee. In light of the fact that the Coalition is intended to serve the community, it does seem to make sense that community members have equal representation on the Steering Committee. This could create some issues with ties in the future, but we can establish a tie-breaking process somewhere down the road. We need to do some further outreach on this front.
 - Young Nonprofit Professionals Network has an ambassador program that could serve as a model for creating a pipeline of community members to serve on the

Steering Committee. People apply to be ambassadors, and after are eligible to become board members after two years as ambassador. This is a lower-barrier way of getting people involved and helping without asking too much of them. This is something we should definitely explore.

Other Updates

- Heidi Ziemer has shared that the Federal Communications Commission is soliciting feedback from the community about broadband services. This is, ironically, being done online meaning that people without broadband access are unlikely to be able to offer input. Don suggested that everyone spend some time learning about the barriers to broadband access from community members and submit a comment on their behalf. The FCC link is:
- If anyone's interested in learning more about survivorship bias (related to the problem of using the internet to get feedback on internet access), take a look here:

National Science Foundation/US Ignite Grant Award Update

- Christine, Curtis, and Brice shared the news about the National Science Foundation/US Ignite grant award.
- The grant will allow for the installation of a community wi-fi network in the Fruit Belt neighborhood of Buffalo.
- The project must be completed within 12 months. The plan is to install wi-fi 6 and CBRS antennas on the hospital campus to feed signal over several blocks (ideally up to a mile). Homes will need receivers installed, and this could reach up to a couple of hundred households.
- This project is one of a half-dozen across the country, and they will be able to tap into the knowledge and experience from the other grant awardees.

Moving Forward Together: Rural Telemedicine for Behavioral Health Grant

- Mike Prutsman shared the work that Council on Addiction Recovery Services (CARES) is doing as part of __, supported through a grant from the Moving Forward Together initiative (formerly Build Back Better Buffalo).
- CARES received two Health Resource Services Administration (SAMHSA) for network planning and opioid response to create the Appalachian Recovery Coalition, comprising substance use disorder, mental health, and public health providers, along with a rural health network and a Federally Qualified Health Center.
- For this project, CARES (located in Cattaraugus County), Allegany Council on Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Clarity Wellness Community (a mental health provider), Souther Tier Health Care System, and Strength Solutions (another of the WNY Digital Equity Coalition member agencies) are working together with county government, Cattaraugus Community Services, public health, Allegany Community Services, and Allegany public health.
- Providers have been pushing for Telehealth for years, but with the COVID-19 pandemic, the regulatory barriers to Telehealth were largely removed. This turns out not to have

solved access issues. There was still a need to enhance access to computer equipment and digital literacy.

- The grant involves a collaborative, integrated three-part approach to addressing Telehealth access:
 - Enhance agency Telehealth technology
 - Enhance staff and client training (digital literacy)
 - Enhanced rural infrastructure
- The project will involve hiring a coordinator (who has been difficult to find) to manage the project and then working with municipalities (likely schools) to determine where there are gaps to fill and then fill them.
- Confidentiality, particularly for substance use disorder services, is a major concern for creating more community locations to offer access to Telehealth services. Part of the plan is to build more private spaces in public areas (e.g., libraries, schools) where people can go to obtain services.
- First goal in terms of working with municipalities is finding out where access is lacking most.
- Cattaraugus County has Olean and Salamanca as its population centers, and Wellsville is Allegany County's population center. Outside of those areas, it can be a challenge to get service. It will be some real work to figure out who will be top priority for getting service.
- Mike will continue to keep the Coalition updated on the project's progress.
- People with substance use disorders and mental health issues seem to struggle even more with telehealth. Isolation is a risk factor for relapse, which was borne out early on in the pandemic. Telehealth has been a help, but it's still not as well-liked as in-person. Accountability — urine tests — are also a challenge, since they're not readily done via telehealth.
- Curtis shared that the Jamestown Community Learning Council has a program called "Parents as Teachers," which was able to secure funding from the COVID-19 Community Response Fund to underwrite broadband access and provide training/digital literacy programming. This has been very successful, and might be something to look at for the CARES project.
- Don asked whether there's funding available for telehealth for behavioral health. There has been plenty of funding available for physical health in the past, but this hasn't always been true for behavioral health. Mike indicated there are funding streams to support telehealth implementation for behavioral health, largely in response to the opioid epidemic.

For Next Meeting

- Keep thinking about community-wide and systems-level projects and potential quick-wins!
- Alex Carducci will provide an update on the City of Buffalo's Internet Connectivity and Broadband Assessment.