

## WNY Digital Inclusion and Equity Coalition Meeting Notes

2021-12-15

### Present:

- Rick Banner, Director of Advocacy and Person-Centered Services, People Inc.
- Ann Battaglia, Chief Executive Officer, Healthy Community Alliance
- Dean Bellack, Executive Director, United Way of Orleans County
- Rachel Bonsignore, Director, Liftoff WNY
- Renee Cadzow, Chair; Associate Professor; Director, Center for Research on Physical Activity, Sport & Health (CRPASH), D'Youville College
- Alex Carducci, Real Estate Financial Analyst, City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning
- Christine Carr-Barmasse, Executive Director, Mission:Ignite
- Jessi Donner, Director of Technology, Tonawanda City School District
- Jim Finn, Administrative Vice President, M&T Bank
- Justin Foster, Website and Communications Manager, Healthy Community Alliance
- Elizabeth Freas, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Support and WNYRIC Services, Erie1 BOCES
- Matt Giordano, President, Villa Maria College
- Anne Haberer, Executive Assistant, Center for Self Advocacy
- Jeffery Hazel, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology, Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District
- Jacqueline Hovey, Librarian I, Branch Manager, Buffalo & Erie County Library
- Ba Zan Lin, Senior Program Officer, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
- Don Matteson, Chief Program Officer, Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Sam Mattle, Executive Director, Center for Self-Advocacy
- Amy Miranti, Administrative & Communications Associate, Liftoff & WNY Nonprofit Support Group
- Tanvier Peart, Just Recovery Coordinator, Partnership for the Public Good
- Lauren Picone, Government Affairs Manager, Feedmore WNY
- Curtis Robbins, Director of Strategy, Research, and Evaluation, John R. Oishei Foundation
- Michelle Roberts, Executive Director, Buffalo Bills Foundation
- Tara Schafer, Executive Director, Literacy Buffalo
- Andy Strohmeier, Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center, University at Buffalo
- Kaylyn Townsend, Project Director, Niagara University Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equality & Mission
- Richard Zink, Executive Director, Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board

## Miscellaneous Announcements and Updates

- Jim Finn mentioned that the M&T Bank Tech Skills initiative is winding down after a great 2021, and is looking for students to enroll for 2022. He's happy to send along additional information if anyone has an interest or knows of folks with an interest. There were just over 1,000 participants in this year's initiatives.

## Committee Updates

### *Policy, Advocacy, & Funding*

- Alex shared that the main point of attention on the government front is the Infrastructure Bill and funding to the state level. Looking for rules and guidelines for how funds will flow.
- The Committee is paying a lot of attention to how the work we've already done and the information we've gathered through the coalition and through other projects can be used to build a case for programming in Western New York.
- Other states have well defined plans for broadband, but New York State doesn't seem to have that. It's not necessarily a problem, since there have been lots of governments and nonprofits that have been working to get a handle on that issue.
- The Committee has agreed that another letter to NY State legislators might be in order to remind them that we've done a lot of work to assess needs and identify opportunities to address them.
- Related to this, Heidi Ziemer has started convening calls with other digital inclusion and equity coalitions from across New York State, which ultimately led to a call with Scott Rasmussen from the NYS Broadband Office. This call confirmed that there is not a statewide broadband plan, but the state is expecting American Rescue Plan Act funds to support planning over the next couple of years and implementation in the years following. There seems to be a strong expectation to do that planning in a highly centralized way across the entire state.
- This is a bit of a problem since needs vary so widely across the entire state. This is one reason that good quality data will be critical. In addition, the statutes will identify key priority populations, and it's unlikely that the state will go out of its way to do more than conform to the statutory minimum requirements. If we have additional high-priority populations that we want to see benefit, we'll need to have good data about them and make lots of noise to get them included.
- State and Federal processes are very slow, so there will be a long lead time before money starts to move, but we'll need to be ready to move quickly once it does begin moving.
- ECC Technologies will be doing the broadband mapping statewide. This is the same consultant that has worked with the City of Buffalo and Erie County for its broadband mapping projects.
- ECC Technologies is setting up a separate website for its survey in Allegany County. They're going to be working to set up a QR code-based strategy to get people to complete the survey. This could involve County staff sitting with residents to complete surveys any time they interact in order to drive up response rates.

- The Partnership Coalition is preparing to field a survey for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their provider agencies to assess their ability to access the Internet.
- Curtis reminded everyone that the [New York State Digital Equity Mapping Portal](#) officially launched last week. There was excellent coordination among Cornell University, Community Tech NY, and the state library system. This will be an excellent resource and could be pivotal in helping communities have more voice and attract state and federal dollars.

### ***Digital Literacy & Technical Support***

- This committee did not meet in November, as the meeting fell the day before Thanksgiving.
- Jeff provided an update on the concept of a curated digital literacy resource portal. There's some concern that it could skew too heavily to a 1990s-style "My Favorite Links" website if not done well, but also the issue that someone without basic digital literacy skills is unlikely to find such a resource to be very useful.
- This lead, after talking to a Niagara-Wheatfield Schools librarian that maybe this would be better structured as teaching resources for digital literacy navigators/coaches/instructors.
- There was also some question about what teaching digital literacy skills looks like. Is it at parent group meetings (required for Title I schools)? Libraries (which are chronically understaffed)? Do we need a Coordinator for this sort of work, analogous to a Community Education Coordinator?

### ***Data & Landscape (Data Dashboard)***

- This workgroup was unable to meet in November. This project is in a bit of a holding pattern until we're able to regroup and meet again in the New Year.

### ***Providers & Infrastructure***

- Don has gotten meeting dates from the committee members so he'll be able to begin scheduling those meetings into the future.

### ***Broadband & Equipment***

- Justin has offered to serve on this committee, so it's now more than one person. That means we'll be in a position to start having meetings in 2022.

### ***Steering Committee***

- Not yet populated, but getting closer once these last two committees become active.

### ***Regranting Opportunity***

- Don shared that the Coalition received ten applications for the regranting opportunity, totaling about \$97,000. This is more than the \$50,000 that was approved in the grant budget.

- The review committee is working their way through the requests and has a rubric to help organize their review process. This has an online component so it should be fairly easy to aggregate and summarize the scores as a starting point for conversations.

### **Moving Forward Together**

- Don reviewed the approved budget for the Moving Forward Together grant:
  - \$45,000 for a Coalition Coordinator
  - \$50,000 to regrant
  - \$5,000 to Mission: Ignite as fiscal sponsor to administer the grant
- Don expressed concerns about hiring an independent contractor as Coalition Coordinator, as it could run afoul of the Fair Labor Standards Act. With this in mind, and considering the large dollars requested for regranting, he feels that it would be a better use of funds to reallocate Coordinator dollars to the regranting budget line.
- This request will need to go to the Program Officer at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo for review by the Moving Forward Together Committee. If approved, this will allow the Coalition to fund nearly all of the regrant requests in full.
- There was general approval amongst the Coalition members present to move in that direction.

### **Schmidt Futures/National Digital Inclusion Alliance Grant Update**

- No word yet, but the expected notification date is December 22.

### **Next Meeting**

- Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, January 19, 2021 at 9:00am.