WNY Digital Equity Coalition Full Member Meeting 2024-02-21

Attendance

- Ann Battaglia; Chief Executive Officer; Healthy Community Alliance
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Courtney Deuro; Program Assistant; Center for Self Advocacy
- Vicki Haas; Business Assistance Specialist; Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
- Steve Heist; VP, Information Technology & CIO; OneBridge Benefits
- Amanda Horner; Outreach Specialist; Americorps and Mission: Ignite
- Sheila Kalkbrenner; Digital Literacy and Wellness Coordinator; Ardent Solutions
- Hex Kleinmarten; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- Brett Lawton; Chief Executive Officer; Universal Primary Care/Southern Tier Community Health Center Network
- Dennis Lee; Community Coalition Member; Hopewell Baptist Church
- Richard Marino; Advocacy Support Professional; People Inc.
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Amy Mazur; Director of Operations; Literacy Buffalo
- Alan Meyers; Fatherhood Connection Facilitator; Cattaraugus Community Action
- Amy Miranti; Administrative & Communications Associate; Liftoff & WNY Nonprofit Support Group
- Michael Prutsman; Chief Development and Engagement Officer; CASA Trinity
- Jeff Sanderson; Vice President of Affiliations; People Inc.
- Abigail Smith; Digital Literacy Program Coordinator; Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orleans Digital Literacy Initative
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautaqua-Cattaraugus BOCES
- Andy Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center; University at Buffalo
- Heidi Ziemer; Outreach & Digital Equity Coordinator; Western New York Library Resources Council

Project Updates

Communications Workgroup

- Amanda Horner is the project lead for the Communications Workgroup.
- The primary focus right now is on sending out newsletters via Mailchimp, which are designed to share what's going on in the Coalition, what's going on with our members, and across the Western New York community.
- They'll generally be monthly; the February newsletter went out last Friday.
- Don sent out a subscription link in an email a couple of weeks ago. There are about 20 people signed up right now. If you haven't subscribed to the newsletter yet but would

like to, you can use this link: https://mailchi.mp/wnydigitalequity/wny-digital-equity-coalition-e-newsletter-signup.

- You can submit content to be included in the monthly newsletter at: https://wnydigitalequity.link/submit-news. This can include information about a project you're working on, something that your organization is doing.
- Don will be putting links to back-issues on the website so there will be a bit of an archive of past issues.
- This will not replace the Google Group, as challenging as it is sometimes.

Advocacy

- Heidi Ziemer, Christine Carr-Barmasse, and representatives from other digital inclusion coalitions from around the state were in Albany to meet with legislators earlier this month (around February 7). They met with several representatives to share information about the digital inclusion coalitions across the state and to request that digital inclusion funds rumored to be available be released so people can do their work.
- Legislators in general aren't aware of the coalitions or the NYS Digital Equity Network, that the Affordable Connectivity Program is going away, or about a lot of things important to digital inclusion. In short, many decision-makers are not informed.
- Don has built out three petitions that people can sign using Resistbot. You can complete them using text messaging or Apple Messages. You provide your name and address, and Resistbot sends emails to various elected officials' offices on your behalf. Don will build more detailed instructions on how to do that.
  - Provide Immediate Funding for Digital Equity Programs and Coalitions(NYS Governor Hochul) This mirrors the request from the NYS Digital Equity Network to NYS legislators, asking them to release $25 million in digital inclusion funds immediately; allocate $5 million in the fiscal year 2024-25 state budget to support digital inclusion work; and commit to allocating at least 25% of all broadband dollars to digital inclusion programming.
  - Support HR 6929: Bridge the Digital Divide with ACP Funding (US House of Representatives) This petition urges members of the US House Of Representatives to support a bill that allocates $700 billion to provide continued funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program.
  - Let Community Members Determine How to Spend Broadband Funds (NYS Governor Hochul and NYS legislators) This is the Coalition's original petition, encouraging local participatory budgeting processes to determine how broadband funds are spent.

Governance

Steering Committee

- Don revisited the Coalition's stated goal of having a Steering Committee formed by the end of March 2024, with a stretch goal of having its first meeting by the end of March.
- Currently, Don makes all of the decisions for the Coalition, but it is generally bad practice to have one person in charge of a community-based coalition. Don hopes a

Steering Committee will assume more of the decision making for the Coalition's direction, but he'll stay involved by serving in more of an administrative support role.

- Ideally the Steering Committee will be 50% or more from the community, with the other half (or so) from the regular organization-based membership.
- Don asked for volunteers to serve on the Steering Committee, noting that it will likely be just an hour a month initially, then a bit less as things get more established and meetings move to bi-monthly or quarterly.
- Don also noted that we need to step up our efforts to recruit Community Coalition Members. He needs to respond to an offer from Andy Strohmeier at UB's Clinical and Translational Research Center to help with that recruitment.
- The Steering Committee could get started with four people, but would optimally grow to no more than ten people. It will ideally reflect lots of diversity on many dimensions: geography, race, class, ability, and more. This is critical to ensure that the Coalition's truly working on behalf of all Western New Yorkers.
- Several people volunteered to serve on the Steering Committee: Christine Carr-Barmasse (Mission:Ignite), Steve Heist (OneBridge Benefits), Sheila Kalbrenner (Ardent Solutions), Bob Spino (Erie 2-Chautauqua BOCES). Jeff Sanderson offered to connect Don to someone who could be a Community Coalition Member and possible Steering Committee member.
- Steering Committee meetings will be held on Zoom, given the wide geographic spread of Committee members.

Other Discussion

Legislative Advocacy
- There are some dollars remaining from the Schmidt Futures grant earmarked for a legislative scan by Partnership for the Public Good. Don is still hoping that this will move forward and will get in touch with PPG.
- There was some discussion about the differences between advocacy and lobbying, and where the Coalition fits into that. This is important because, while many nonprofit organizations can engage in limited lobbying, some cannot. Don emphasized the importance of making the distinction between acting as a private citizen versus a representative of your employer because that can cause problems for your employer.
- Christine Carr-Barmasse asked about whether the funds in the Coalition's Moving Forward Together grant that are earmarked for legislative visits can be used to support some of the work that's currently happening on that front. Don indicated that we could look at using it for WNY Coalition members, but that we couldn't use those dollars to support expenses from other members of the NYS Digital Equity Network.

Overview of Coalition Projects
- Don described some of the projects currently in progress in addition to the Communications Workgroup and whom to contact if you'd like to learn more or get involved: * "Digital adulting" skills training to prepare youth for adult "activities of daily living" like online banking, managing medical appointments, and online job/housing

searches. This effort builds on work currently happening in some school districts. (Project leads: Elizabeth Freas and Heidi Ziemer)

- A survey of tech support professionals to determine what common issues can be better addressed in digital skills training, and collecting stories through audio recordings sharing digital inclusion experiences. (Project lead: Don Matteson)
- Advocacy efforts related to participatory budgeting for digital inclusion dollars that will begin flowing in mid-to-late 2024. (Project lead: Don Matteson)
- Developing a library of stories showcasing barriers to digital inclusion and benefits of digital inclusion, along the lines of a "StoryCorps". (Project lead: Don Matteson)
- Finalizing the Coalition's case statement, following last year's Strategic Casemaking training. If you'd like to know more about the Strategic CaseMaking training, contact Don and he can share a private YouTube playlist with recordings of the training sessions. (Project lead: Don Matteson)