

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Steering Committee

2024-08-14

Attendance

Present

- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Steve Heist; VP, Information Technology & CIO; OneBridge Benefits
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Sam Mattle; Executive Director; Center for Self Advocacy
- Jeff Sanderson; Vice President – Strategic Initiatives; People Inc.
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES

Financial Updates

- The coalition's total expenses are approximately \$74,000-\$80,000, with a current balance of around \$115,000-\$117,000.
- About \$70,000 is earmarked for re-granting.
- Recent expenses include approximately \$5,000-\$6,000 for the New York State Digital Equity Network convening.
- The committee discussed potentially using some of the re-granting funds as float for reimbursement-based grants, due to cash flow constraints.

Ongoing Projects and Initiatives

- **Strategic Case Making:** The Committee agreed to prioritize reactivating this project, involving people who previously participated in last year's training. Jeff Sanderson volunteered to work on this project.
- **Digital Equity Stories:** There's interest in starting this project to humanize data and demonstrate the impact of digital equity efforts. Sam Mattle volunteered to work on this project.
- **Digital Literacy Toolkit:** This project, initially led by Heidi Ziemer and Elizabeth Freas, needs to be revisited to see whether there's an opportunity to get it "unstuck."
- **Tech Support Professional Survey:** This project aims to identify recurring pain points and areas where digital skills training could reduce the burden on tech support. Bob Spino volunteered to work on this project
- **Coalition Newsletter:** Amanda is managing this successfully with support from the communications committee.
- **Participatory Budgeting for Digital Equity:** This advocacy piece needs to be revitalized.

Marconi Society Training Opportunity

- Don reminded the Steering Committee to review the Marconi Society Digital Inclusion Training videos before the next meeting.

- After reviewing the training, the Committee needs to decide whether to underwrite a handful of seats for this training to coalition members, considering the per-seat cost of \$500.

New York State Digital Equity Network Convening Debrief

- The event was successful, with all eleven coalitions represented and about 70 attendees (exceeding the expected 40).
- Key attendees included political representatives, NYS ConnectALL staff, and foundation representatives.
- During the event, the Biden-Harris Administration, National Telecommunications Information Administration, and NYS ConnectALL Office announced that New York State was awarded \$664 million for its “Internet for All” proposal to build additional broadband infrastructure.
 - The committee noted the seeming lack of clear statewide metrics for digital equity efforts and the need for accountability in fund allocation and impact measurement.
- Discussions included creating a shared resource portal for the coalitions and the need for oversight on fund implementation and metric tracking.

Grant Applications and Funding

- The committee discussed the challenges of the upcoming competitive grant application due at the end of September 2023, including the need to identify a lead entity and collaborative approach.
- Concerns were raised about the reimbursement-based nature of grants and the 10% match requirement, which will delay the coalition's ability to re-grant funds as initially planned.

Action Items and Next Steps

- Don will add activating workgroups for the Strategic Case Making and digital equity stories projects to the next full-member meeting agenda.
- Steering Committee members will review Marconi Society training videos before the next meeting.
- Don will create a short survey to gather feedback on the New York State Digital Equity Network convening.
- Don will consider approaching Moving Forward Together for additional funding support.
- Everyone should be thinking about what might go on a "wish list" of digital equity projects that could be funded by any remaining state funds after infrastructure investments (even if unspent funds are unlikely).

Miscellaneous

- The FBI offered to provide a cybersecurity presentation to the coalition, which the committee expressed interest in pursuing. This could be a good opportunity for a guest speaker at a fall full-member meeting.