

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Full-Member Meeting

February 19, 2025

Attendance

- Eileen Anderson; School Library System Director and Library Automation Supervisor; Erie 1 BOCES
- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Jeremy Besch; Managing Director; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Katie Earl; Community Recreation Coordinator for the Aging; Erie County Senior Services
- Megan Farry; Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships and Communication; NYATEP New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought
- Nestor Hernandez; Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; People Inc.
- Amanda Horner; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Jacqueline Hovey; Librarian I, Branch Manager; Buffalo & Erie County Library
- Matthew Hubacher; Vice President for Research; Invest Buffalo Niagara
- Hex Kleinmarten; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- Karen Kwadrans; Vice President for Government and Community Relations; Niagara University
- Dennis Lee; Coalition Community Member; Hopewell Baptist Church
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Alan Meyers; Fatherhood Connection Facilitator; Cattaraugus Community Action
- Amy Miranti; Communications & Administrative Coordinator; Liftoff WNY & Nonprofit Support Group
- Deborah Porter; Founder & President; YES Workforce
- Simone Ragland; Co-Founder/CEO; Bits & Bytes STEM Foundation
- Colleen Reedy; Director of Talent Solutions; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Sherry Sherrill; Coalition Community Member; Covington Associates
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES
- Andy Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center; University at Buffalo
- Rolanda Ward; Director; Niagara University Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equality & Mission
- Tracy Zachariah; Director of Services; Native American Community Services
- Heidi Ziemer; Outreach & Digital Equity Coordinator; Western New York Library Resources Council

Announcements

- **Per Scholas Buffalo Update:** Jeremy Besch announced their first cohort graduation on January 24th, after launching October 15th. They are working to create pathways between communities and tech employment opportunities.
- **East Side Collaborative Partnership:** Sherry Sherill announced success in challenging the NYS Department of Transportation's Kensington Expressway project, with the court ordering a full environmental impact statement.
- **Mental Health Webinar Series:** Amanda Horner announced a new series of webinars starting tomorrow through the NY State Public Health Association, covering topics like mental health, burnout, and resilience. More information available at: <https://nyspha.org/events>

Steering Committee Updates

- Current grant balance is approximately \$116,000
- Planning another in-person convening
- Potential venue identified at Area 1 BOCES (355 Harlem Road, West Seneca)
- Seeking volunteers for convening planning committee
- Previous convenings were held at Villa Maria College and St. Bonaventure University

Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Update

- Working through MWBE (Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise) requirements
 - Need to apply for waivers for some proprietary services
 - Digital literacy survey (~\$60,000) must be bid out as it doesn't qualify for waiver
 - Don will work with Simone Ragland on waiver applications
 - Some suggested vendors to consider that might meet MWBE requirements:
 - Megan Farry Suggested [Center for Regional Strategies](#)
- Seeking volunteers for various workstreams including:
 - Community-level indicators identification
 - Dashboard population
 - Common metrics development for digital literacy
 - Survey design assistance
 - Focus group participation
 - Engagement strategies for covered populations

Featured Presentation: Niagara University's NTIA Digital Equity Grant

Guest Speaker: Karen Kwadrans, VP for Government and Community Relations

Grant Overview

- \$9.2 million grant secured in partnership with City of Niagara Falls
- Three main components:
 - Digital equity (community participation capacity)
 - Digital inclusion (Internet-enabled devices)
 - Digital literacy (education and training)

Key Implementation Points

- Will provide 24-hour device access through public library system
- Five WiFi kiosks/hubs throughout Niagara Falls

- Educational programming ranging from basic digital literacy to AI certification
- Targeting various populations including seniors, students, immigrants, and refugees
- Partnerships with multiple organizations including:
 - Niagara Falls School District
 - Memorial Medical Center
 - Jewish Family Services
 - Independent Living Center
 - M&T Bank

Grant Development Insights

- Quick turnaround: First team meeting August 22, due September 23
- Challenges included:
 - Complex NTIA portal requirements
 - Grid-based application format
 - Binding letters of commitment requirements
 - 20% matching funds requirement (~\$1.85 million)
 - Infrastructure cost considerations

Lessons Learned

- Importance of existing partnerships and relationships
- Value of comprehensive community data and needs assessment
 - Levesque Institute's Niagara Falls [Mapping Tool](#)
- Need for strong internal support (grant writers, legal, IT, etc.)
- Benefits of having trusted community partners
- Importance of understanding technical requirements and deadlines

Project Impact

- Will serve most areas of Niagara Falls except three higher-income neighborhoods
- Focus on covered populations as defined by grant requirements
- Infrastructure limitations led to strategic decisions about WiFi access points
- Continuing discussions about broader broadband access solutions