

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Steering Committee Meeting

2025-02-12

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
- Al Meyers; Connecting Communities in Action
- Simone Ragland; Bits & Bytes STEM Foundation

Excused

- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES

Financial Updates

- The budget incurred just over \$780 in expenses in January for various operational costs including Canva, Jotform, Zoom, and two months of Mailchimp.
- Total expenditures since 2022 are just under \$80,000, leaving a balance of approximately \$116,000.
- The coalition has sufficient funds to front the \$100,000 required for the Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant, though this will leave finances tight.
- The Schmidt futures grant is nearly depleted, requiring stipends to be shifted to Mission:Ignite, which will necessitate new paperwork for Coalition Community Members due to IRS thresholds.

Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Updates

- The contract has been fully executed and signed, allowing spending to begin.
- The grant must comply with Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) requirements, presenting several challenges:
- A \$60,000 community survey through Buffalo State University requires MWBE consideration and cannot be waived
- Some proprietary services (like Clear Impact Scorecard and RBA training) may qualify for waivers
- Approximately \$7,000 in consulting for performance measures development needs to be evaluated for MWBE requirements

- The grant structure requires full expenditure before reimbursement in a single lump sum at the end.
- The timeline may be affected by MWBE compliance requirements and the RFP process.

Coalition Convening

- There is interest in organizing another Western NY coalition convening event.
- Estimated budget would be \$3,000-5,000 for a full-day event including food, venue, and swag.
- Potential venues discussed included:
 - St. Bonaventure (previous location with positive feedback)
 - Seneca One (free space but parking costs)
 - Larkin building (low cost at ~\$90 with available parking)
 - Holiday Valley (non-responsive when contacted last year)
- Planning needs 3-4 volunteers to help with coordination, venue research, swag selection, and other event preparations.
- The event typically draws 35-50 attendees from across Western New York.

Administrative Updates

- Hannah Brecher has joined the coalition and completed paperwork for stipend participation.
- Karen Kwadrans from Niagara University will present next Wednesday about their NTIA Digital Equity Competitive grant partnership with the City of Niagara Falls.
- The Digital Equity Stories meeting was postponed.
- The Strategic Case Making meeting needs to be rescheduled.
- Don is exploring ways to reduce administrative costs by moving from using Bitly to YOURLS as a URL shortener, along with possibly Dadamail as a Mailchimp replacement. Both YOURLS and Dadamail are bundled with the Coalition's web hosting service, so would have no added cost.

Next Steps

- An RFP process needs to be developed for the community survey component of the Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant.
- A MWBE waiver application needs to be prepared for proprietary services. Don will work with Simone on this, as she has experience putting these together from her time at UB.
- Don will call for volunteers to help with convening planning at next week's meeting.