

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Meeting

2025-03-19

Attendance

- CJ Banks; Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and Career Advancement; Villa Maria College
- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Jeremy Besch; Managing Director; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Rachel Bonsignore; Director; Liftoff WNY
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Courtney Deuro; Data Analyst; Center for Self Advocacy
- Kelly Dylag; Chief Operating Officer; Journey's End Refugee Services
- Megan Farry; Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships and Communication; NYATEP New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals
- Vanessa Gazard; Senior Grants and Finance Manager; Journey's End Refugee Services
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought
- Erin Hanratty; Employment Program Manager; Journey's End Refugee Services
- Steve Heist; VP, Information Technology & CIO; OneBridge Benefits
- 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
- Nekia Kemp; Executive Director; Police Athletic League of Buffalo, Inc.
- Hex Kleinmarten; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- Brett Lawton; Chief Executive Officer; Universal Primary Care/Southern Tier Community Health Center Network
- Dennis Lee; Coalition Community Member; Hopewell Baptist Church
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Alan Meyers; Fatherhood Connection Facilitator; Connecting Communities in Action

- Amy Miranti; Communications & Administrative Coordinator; Liftoff WNY & Nonprofit Support Group
- Katie Pieri; Director; Nonprofit Support Group
- Sherry Sherrill; Coalition Community Member; Covington Associates
- Abigail Smith; Digital Literacy Program Coordinator; Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES
- Andy Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center; University at Buffalo
- Robb Szczesniak; Senior Vice President - Technology Manager; M&T Bank
- Heidi Ziemer; Mission:Ignite

Announcements

Social Security Administration Updates

- Courtney Deuro from Center for Self Advocacy reported on recent changes to Social Security Administration services.
- The SSA announced they were not cutting phone services completely but removing the ability to update banking information over the phone to reduce fraud risk.
- Changes like these can create accessibility barriers, especially for elderly and disabled individuals who cannot easily access in-person services due to office closures and staffing reductions.
- This highlights the need to retain low-tech options while we simultaneously build digital skills for seniors.

Upcoming Events and Initiatives

- CJ Banks announced an AI conference focusing on AI in education on May 2nd at Villa Maria College, featuring a Canadian organization providing training on AI implementation.
- Hannah Brecher shared information about Developmental Disability Awareness Day on May 20th at the Niagara Falls Convention Center, seeking vendors, sponsors, and speakers.

- Jeremy Besch from Per Scholas Buffalo (www.perscholas.org) announced the opening of admissions for their June 9th cohort, offering free IT workforce development training.
- Amanda Horner mentioned an ongoing mental health webinar series through the New York State Public Health Association, with the next event scheduled for the following day. More information available at: nyspha.org/events.

Newsletter and Communication Updates

- Amanda Horner reminded members that she compiles the coalition newsletter and encouraged everyone to submit announcements via the form: <https://wnydigitalequity.link/submit-news>.
- Newsletter signup is available at: <https://wnydigitalequity.link/newslettersignup>.
- Don announced plans to transition the coalition's email list from Google Groups to Mailman to address delivery and accessibility issues. Coalition members can expect to see an email from the list in the next few days asking them to confirm their subscription.
- Don also mentioned creating a public-facing coalition member directory with basic contact information (name/organization/email) and asked members to opt out by Friday (March 21) if they preferred not to be included.
- For email correspondence, Don can be reached at: dwmatteson@wnydigitalequity.org.

Steering Committee Update

- The coalition has approximately \$115,000 remaining from their Moving Forward Together grant.
- \$100,000 is effectively encumbered for the Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant work as it operates on a lump-sum reimbursement at the end of the work.
- The coalition is exploring a "Program Related Investment" (low-interest loan) with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo to provide additional working capital until state reimbursements are received.
- Plans for the 2025 coalition convening are underway, likely to be held at BOCES in West Seneca during July or August. Don will distribute a poll about available dates.

Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Updates

- The coalition is applying for a Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) waiver for Results Based Accountability work due to Clear Impact's sole source designation.
- An RFP for the regional digital literacy survey has been prepared and will be distributed on March 24, pending final feedback from the Steering Committee. This survey is subject to MWBE requirements, so must be sent out for bid.
- Don outlined several project areas needing volunteer assistance, including:
 - Data dashboard development (Clear Impact Scorecard)
 - Performance measure development for broadband and equipment access
 - Digital literacy survey and focus group planning
 - Covered population engagement training planning
- Information about the eight covered populations under the Digital Equity Act is available at: <https://www.ntia.gov/other-publication/2024/digital-equity-act-at-a-glance>.

Misson:Ignite Grant Collaboration

- Christine Carr-Barmasse from Misson:Ignite discussed their application for the New York State competitive grant, inviting coalition partners to participate.
- The project would provide approximately \$20,000 worth of product and services per 50 people recruited over a two-year period, plus \$5,000 for implementing organizations.
- Letters of support have been secured from the coalition, WNYRIC (Western New York Regional Information Center), and southern tier counties. (ConnectALL limits the number of letters of support to three.)
- Heidi Ziemer confirmed that organizations can apply for their own grants while also participating as partners in the Misson:Ignite initiative.
- Digital Equity Capacity Grant Q&A information is available at: <https://broadband.ny.gov/connectall-digital-equity-program-capacity-grant-rfa-qa>.
- Those interested in the Mission:Ignite collaboration can contact Heidi at: heidi@missionignite.org.

Administrative Updates

- Don will be sending new stipend forms to Coalition community members as fund management transitions from Healthy Community Alliance to Misson:Ignite.
- Don is beginning work on redesigning the coalition's website (wnydigitalequity.org), which was originally built "in a weekend" about four years ago.