

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Full-Member Meeting

2025-04-16

Attendance

- Eileen Anderson; School Library System Director and Library Automation Supervisor; Erie 1 BOCES
- CJ Banks; Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and Career Advancement; Villa Maria College
- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Courtney Deuro; Data Analyst; Center for Self Advocacy
- Megan Farry; Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships and Communication; NYATEP New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals
- Noah Goodling; Director of Programs; Nonprofit Support Group
- Vicki Haas; Business Assistance Specialist; Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought
- Steve Heist; VP, Information Technology & CIO; OneBridge Benefits
- Amanda Horner; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Jacqueline Hovey; System Adult Outreach Services - TechKnow Lab; Buffalo & Erie County Library
- Nekia Kemp; Executive Director; Police Athletic League of Buffalo, Inc.
- Susan Kirkpatrick; Communications Consultant; Mission:Ignite
- Hex Kleinmarten; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- 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
- Jake Moskal; Director of Employment Services; Journey's End Refugee Services

- Katie Pieri; Director; Nonprofit Support Group
- Deborah Porter; Founder & President; YES Workforce
- Colleen Reedy; Director of Talent Solutions; Per Scholas Buffalo
- 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
- Heidi Ziemer; Community Investment Specialist; Mission:Ignite

Announcements

Tech Wars

- Steve Heist announced that Mission:Ignite and Dream It, Do It Western New York are hosting Tech Wars on May 14th at the Flickinger Center at ECC's downtown campus.
- The event brings together middle and high school students from across school districts for STREAM competitions and projects.
- Last year featured 720 students from 25 school districts; this year anticipates 925 students from over 30 districts.
- Sponsors include One Bridge Benefits, M&T Bank, Seneca Holdings, and other local organizations.

Disability Community Events - Hannah Brucker

- Developmental Disability Awareness Day is scheduled for May 20th at Niagara Falls Convention Center from 8:00 AM to 5:30 PM, sponsored by the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY).
- Self-Advocacy Network of New York State (SANYS) Western Regional Conference will take place in June at the Niagara Falls Convention Center.
- Disability Pride will be held in July at Buffalo Riverworks (moved from the Canalside location).

AI Summit

- CJ Banks reminded attendees that Villa Maria College's first annual AI Summit will be held on May 2nd from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

- The event will feature keynote speaker Adam Balwan from Trainify (Toronto) and Tom Petros, a Salesforce consultant.
- The free event will include various workshops focusing on AI in education and data tracking for organizations.

Administrative Updates

Mailing List Transition

- Don reminded attendees that the Coalition has made the transition away from Google Groups to a new mailing list platform.
- Members not yet subscribed to the new list were encouraged to provide their email addresses in the chat.
- The goal is to streamline communications and avoid duplicate reminder emails.
- The sign-up link for the new email list is: <https://wnydigitalequity.link/listssubscribe>

Coalition Community Member Paperwork

- Coalition community members will soon receive an email from JotForm Sign requesting updated paperwork.
- Stipend checks will transition from Healthy Community Alliance to Mission:Ignite as Schmidt Futures grant dollars wind down and begin to be drawn against the Moving Forward Together grant.
- Some stipends may still come from the Schmidt Futures grant, but most will shift to the Moving Forward Together grant.

Steering Committee Update

- No significant financial updates as no funds have been spent in the last two months.
- The committee discussed the need for improved messaging and communications for the coalition, including development of an elevator pitch.

WNY Digital Equity Coalition Convening

- The 2025 Western New York Digital Equity Coalition convening is scheduled for July 28th at Erie1BOCES Education Campus (355 Harlem Road, West Seneca).
- The agenda is still being developed, but it will likely be a full-day event (approximately 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM).
- Volunteers were invited to help with planning and building out the day's agenda.

New York State Digital Equity Network Convening

- The statewide convening will take place in the first half of August.
- Location is still undetermined between Stony Brook University on Long Island or Albany.
- Unlike last year, there will be a modest registration fee as WNY Digital Equity Coalition funds (which were used to pay for last year's statewide convening expenses) are now tied up in the Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant.
- Last year's event had 70-75 attendees from across the state, including representatives from the Connect All Office and the City of Syracuse.

Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Updates

Regional Digital Literacy Survey

- An RFP has been issued for a comprehensive regional digital literacy survey.
- The survey aims to gather information about digital skills from those not currently participating in digital skills programming.
- An informational webinar for interested applicants is scheduled for Monday, April 21 at 1:00 PM.
- Four firms have registered for the webinar so far, with a steady stream of questions coming in about the RFP.
- The RFP deadline is in late May or June.

Clear Impact Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises Waiver

- Don will be submitting an MWBE waiver request to New York State for the Results-Based Accountability component of the grant.
- The request needs one more approval step before submission through Mission:Ignite.

Work Groups

- Several work groups need to be populated, particularly for performance measures related to digital skills, broadband access, and equipment access.
- There is good participation in the digital literacy/skills group but limited interest in broadband and equipment access groups.
- The coalition plans to seek help from the New York State Digital Equity Network to ensure statewide coordination of metrics and measurements.

Impact of Federal Policy Changes

- Heidi Ziemer raised a discussion about how recent federal policy changes are affecting various coalition members.
- Literacy Buffalo-Niagara had a contract with Buffalo Prenatal Perinatal Network. lost a community wellness grant with a COVID-19 component when the CDC canceled it mid-grant.
- The Institute for Museum and Library Sciences is under scrutiny, with most staff placed on administrative leave.
- Villa Maria College is reviewing how to maintain their DEI initiatives and student clubs while avoiding potential funding challenges.
- Disability service organizations are concerned about potential impacts on Social Security, Medicaid, and other critical programs.
- Jericho Road (which shares office space with Self-Advocacy organizations) has faced ICE visits, creating additional challenges.
- Public health organizations are experiencing significant job losses, including early termination of the New York State Public Health Corps fellowship program.
- Refugee resettlement agencies like Journey's End have been facing challenges even before recent executive orders.
- The Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation (Don's employer) has suspended regular funding to move toward unrestricted support for organizations in their fields of intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health, and substance use.

Resources and Opportunities

Job Sharing Initiative - Nonprofit Support Group

- The Nonprofit Support Group is collecting job openings to help those affected by layoffs.
- Job postings are listed under "Industry News" on Impact HQ, a free resource for nonprofits across Western New York and Monroe County.
- Impact HQ also provides access to consultants, grant opportunities, tools, templates, and training resources.

Internship Opportunities - Villa Maria College

- Villa Maria College students in programs such as animation, graphic design, business, and digital marketing need internships (130 hours required).

- These internships don't have to be paid positions but should provide meaningful learning experiences under appropriate supervision.
- Organizations interested in hosting interns were encouraged to contact C.J. Banks.
- Don noted that Villa students have strong skills, citing the coalition's logo as an example of their quality work.