

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition

Steering Committee Meeting

2025-04-10

Attendance

Present

- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Sam Mattle; Executive Director; Center for Self Advocacy
- Al Meyers; Connecting Communities in Action

Absent:

- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Steve Heist; VP, Information Technology & CIO; OneBridge Benefits
- Simone Ragland; Bits and Bytes STEM Foundation
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES

Finance Update

- The original Schmidt Futures grant is nearly completely spent down
- Community member stipends are transitioning to the Moving Forward Together grant
- At current burn rate (\$1,250/month for stipends), funding will last approximately 7-8 months
- A potential program-related investment (PRI) or mission-related investment of up to \$30,000 is being explored with the Community Foundation
 - Don needs to determine whether the application would be through the Coalition or Mission:Ignite
 - If through Mission:Ignite, their board approval would almost certainly be required

Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Updates

- Survey consultant RFP has been distributed
 - Several organizations have expressed interest, with six registered for the upcoming webinar
 - Don specifically targeted minority and women-owned business enterprises (MWBE) to comply with state contractor requirements.
 - One potential vendor declined after learning about MWBE paperwork requirements
 - The Q&A webinar is scheduled for April 21st at 1:00 PM. All Steering Committee members are welcome to attend, but it's not required.
- The MWBE waiver for Clear Impact work has not yet been submitted
 - Draft was sent to Simone for feedback (no response yet)
 - Don will send to Mission Ignite for review as they are the contract bearer with the state
- As noted during previous meetings, the lump sum reimbursement structure of the Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant has created cashflow challenges:
 - \$100,000 is tied up for project activities
 - \$30,000 should be available but isn't due to reimbursement structure
 - \$70,000 is slated for re-granting once reimbursed

Working Group Formation

- Recruitment for various workgroups appears complete (surveys, focus groups, indicator development, data dashboard development)
- Don proposed expanding recruitment to the remainder of the New York State Digital Equity Network
 - Would facilitate statewide buy-in on metrics and improve cohesion across the field
 - Approximately 11 coalitions exist across the state (including New York Alliance for Digital Equity, Southern Tier, Central New York, Finger Lakes, Capital Region, Bronx, Mohawk Valley, Adirondack/North Country)
- The goal is to develop common metrics for different fields of digital inclusion:
 - Broadband access
 - Equipment access
 - Digital skills
 - These metrics would enable apples-to-apples comparison of programs across the state

Upcoming Coalition Convening

- Save-the-date email has been sent for July 28th event
- Location: Erie 1 BOCES Education Campus (355 Harlem Road, West Seneca/Buffalo, 14224)
 - Not directly on public transit line but approximately 0.7 miles from nearest stop
 - Accessibility for paratransit users was discussed
- Time is tentatively 9 AM to 3 PM (not finalized)
- The space is available at no cost
- No volunteers have stepped forward to help with planning, so the Steering Committee will need to coordinate
- The statewide convening is scheduled for approximately one week after this event (in Albany or Long Island)
- Focus will likely be on internal coalition capacity building and advancing ongoing work
- The Technical Assistance Grant will be substantially underway by this time

Marketing and Communication Strategy

- AI raised concerns about public awareness of digital equity and the coalition
- Need for better messaging, branding, and identity was acknowledged
- Potential promotional opportunities discussed:
 - Existing connection with Buffalo Bills Foundation
 - Potential connection with Buffalo Bisons
 - Development of promotional items (notepads, pens, etc.)
- No clear elevator pitch or catchphrase has been developed yet
- AI discussed the importance of connecting digital equity to specific community needs:
 - Supporting trafficking victims
 - Assisting fathers who need digital literacy support for employment applications
 - Building confidence in digital skills through guidance and support