

WNY Digital Equity Coalition Full-Member Meeting Notes

June 18, 2025

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
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission:Ignite
- Courtney Deuro; Data Analyst; Center for Self Advocacy
- 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; System Adult Outreach Services - TechKnow Lab; Buffalo & Erie County Library
- Susan Kirkpatrick; Communications Consultant; Mission:Ignite
- 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
- Jake Moskal; Director of Employment Services; Journey's End Refugee Services
- Deborah Porter; Founder & President; YES Workforce
- Colleen Reedy; Director of Talent Solutions; Per Scholas Buffalo
- 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

- Rolanda Ward; Director; Niagara University Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equality & Mission
- Heidi Ziemer; Community Investment Specialist; Mission:Ignite

Announcements and Updates

AI and Equity Task Force Launch

- CJ Banks reported that the AI and Equity Task Force has officially launched with a preliminary meeting held the previous week.
- The task force is headed by the Korp Foundation with Villa Maria College participating through CJ's involvement.
- Several other community organizations are participating, including Per Scholas (represented by Colleen Reedy).
- Next meeting scheduled: July 10th (virtual) - invitation details will be shared through the Task Force Newsletter.
- The official kickoff meeting will provide more detailed information about the task force's objectives and structure.

Self-Advocacy Association Events

Hannah Brecher shared multiple upcoming events for the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State:

Regional Conference

- Date: End of this week (late June 2025)
- Time: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Format: One day instead of the previous two-day format due to economic considerations
- Registration: Available on the [SANYS website](#)

Disability Pride Event

- Date: July 26th
- Location: Buffalo River Works
- Major sponsors: Evergreen Health and Western New York Independent Living Services
- Details: [Facebook event link](#)

State Conference

- Date: November 6th, 7th, and 8th
- Location: Albany, NY (Wolf Street area - specific venue to be confirmed)
- More information will be shared as details become available

Save Our Services Virtual Rally

- Date: June 23rd
- [Registration link for Save Our Services Virtual Rally](#)

- Purpose: Advocacy effort to prevent looming Medicaid cuts
- Notable speaker: Bernard Carabello, founder of SANYS (30+ years ago)
- The rally represents continued advocacy efforts to protect essential services for the disability community

New York State Digital Equity Network Convening

Heidi Ziemer announced the second annual statewide convening:

- Date: August 5th, 2025
- Location: Stony Brook University, Long Island
- Registration: Available online at <https://nysden.link/convene2025>
- The network will rotate convening locations around the state (Syracuse last year, Long Island this year)
- A future convening will likely be in Buffalo
- Coalition members encouraged to attend to strengthen statewide network connections
- Carpooling arrangements being considered for Western New York attendees

Senior Services Digital Literacy Initiative

Hex Kleinmartin reported on a recent collaborative meeting with Erie County Senior Services:

- Participating organizations included Mission: Ignite, DART, Literacy Buffalo Niagara, local libraries
- Focus areas: Digital literacy support in senior centers and in-home services for homebound seniors
- Key challenge identified: Providing digital literacy education to homebound individuals
- The meeting established networking connections between organizations and clarified available services
- Andy Strohmeier noted potential collaboration opportunities with UB's Center for Translational research work with seniors

WNY Digital Equity Coalition Convening

Event Details

- Date: July 28th, 2025 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Location: Erie 1 BOCES Education Campus, West Seneca
- Registration: Available online at <https://wnydigitalequity.link/convening-registration>
- Current registration: Approximately 9 participants (as of meeting date)

The convening will be organized into two main segments:

Morning Session: Coalition Development

- Focus: Care and feeding of the coalition itself
- Primary objective: Develop organizational values statement

- Building on last year's mission and vision statement work
- Values clarification will help define membership criteria and organizational direction
- Clear values alignment essential for effective coalition functioning

Afternoon Session: Collaboration Opportunities

- Focus: Identifying and developing collaborative partnerships among member organizations
- Context: Many organizations facing funding cuts and program reductions
- Objectives:
 - Leverage existing resources more effectively
 - Develop new collaborative approaches
 - Create sustainable partnership models
- Networking time built into the schedule for relationship building

Pre-Work Preparation

- July newsletter will focus primarily on convening preparation materials
- Content will include: Limited reading materials and a personal values exercise
- Completing the values exercise in advance will accelerate the morning session work
- Materials designed to be concise and focused rather than extensive

ConnectALL Digital Equity Technical Assistance Grant Updates

Regional Digital Literacy Survey

- RFP Timeline: Issued in March, consultant submissions received in May
- Current status: Interviews completed, consultant selection in final stages
- Expected timeline: Contract signing by end of June, immediate project launch
- This represents the largest single component of the grant funding

Clear Impact Partnership

- Contract status: Signed and executed
- Service provider: Clear Impact (corporate face of Results-Based Accountability)
- Deliverables include:
 - Community-level digital inclusion indicators scorecard
 - Performance measures for digital skills, broadband access, and equipment access subdomains
 - Results-Based Accountability (RBA) training and certification

RBA Training and Certification

- Certification slots: 4 people (increased from 2 due to timing of "buy one, get one" promotion)
- Current status: 3 of 4 slots confirmed, one pending confirmation

- Waitlist opportunity: Available for interested coalition members
- Coalition-wide training: RBA 101 sessions planned (two 3-hour sessions, virtual format)
- Proposed timing: October 2025 (avoiding summer scheduling conflicts and major holidays)
- Training considerations: Exploring recording options for private coalition use

Focus Group Development

- Focus groups will complement the regional survey data
- Launch timeline tied to Clear Impact indicator development
- Will provide qualitative data to support quantitative survey findings

Project Timeline and Constraints

- Contract completion deadline: December 31st, 2025
- Funding structure: Reimbursement-based grant
- Reimbursement timeline: Minimum 60 days after expense submission (state contract standard)
- Extension possible but not preferred to ensure timely reimbursement

Performance Measures Working Groups

Current needs:

- Strong interest in digital literacy/digital skills working group
- Additional volunteers needed for broadband access and equipment access working groups
- Bob's colleagues still being contacted about potential participation
- Statewide expansion opportunity: If insufficient local participation, invitation will extend to statewide network
- Strategic goal: Achieve consistent statewide measurement standards for maximum effectiveness

Communications Committee

Newsletter Development

Amanda Horner leads the Communications Committee responsible for the monthly newsletter:

- Meeting schedule: Last Friday of each month
- Meeting duration: Typically under one hour with efficient agenda management
- Content quality: Newsletter has evolved into a well-balanced, relevant publication
- Volunteer opportunities: Additional committee members welcome

Newsletter Submission Process

- Event submissions: Digital equity-focused events encouraged

- Resource sharing: Relevant tools, research, and materials welcome
- Submission link: <https://wnydigitalequity.link/submit-news>
- Newsletter signup: <https://mailchi.mp/wnydigitalequity/wny-digital-equity-coalition-e-newsletter-signup>
- Archives: Past issues available on the [coalition website](#) under Resources/Member Resources (<https://wnydigitalequity.org/>)

Special Focus: July Newsletter

- Primary content: Convening preparation materials rather than general announcements
- Future newsletters: Will return to regular format with announcements, resources, and updates

Discussion Topics and Emerging Issues

Digital Privacy and Biometric Security

Courtney Deuro raised important concerns about biometric privacy rights:

Legal Developments

- Recent court ruling affecting biometric privacy protections
- Key finding: Use of biometric login methods (fingerprint, Face ID) may constitute waiver of certain privacy rights
- Law enforcement implications: Police may compel biometric unlocking of devices during traffic stops or arrests
- Protest safety consideration: Common advice to disable biometric login before attending protests

Workplace Authentication Challenges

- Example case: Employee reluctant to install authentication apps on personal device
- Core issue: Blurred boundaries between personal and professional device use
- Employer dilemma: Balancing security requirements with employee privacy preferences
- Broader implications: Two-factor authentication adoption barriers for various user groups

Digital Equity Connections

- Authentication complexity creates barriers for some users
- Privacy concerns may deter adoption of security measures
- Need for education about digital privacy rights and options
- Potential newsletter topic: Exploring authentication options and privacy implications

Disability Community Media Coverage

Hannah Brecher highlighted excellent journalism by Emyle Watkins, reporter for Buffalo Toronto Public Media's (WBFO) Disabilities Beat

- Focus: Dedicated disability news coverage for Western New York
- Recent coverage highlights:
 - Interview with newly confirmed OPWDD Commissioner Will Aubert
 - Investigation revealing 6-month gap in Buffalo/Erie County ADA Coordinator position
 - Coverage led to hiring of new ADA Coordinator Brittany Montgomery

Digital Inclusion Opportunity

- Suggestion: Explore Emyle Watkins's interest in covering digital inclusion issues affecting disability community
- Context: Pandemic highlighted severe digital isolation in group homes and care facilities

Action Items and Next Steps

Immediate Actions

- Don Matteson: Contact Emyle Watkins about digital inclusion coverage for disability community
- CJ Banks: Share AI Equity Task Force meeting invitation (July 10th)

Upcoming Deadlines and Events

- June 18, 2025: Digital literacy survey consultant selection
- June 23rd: Save Our Services Virtual Rally
- July 10th: AI Equity Task Force Meeting (Virtual)
- July 26th: Disability Pride at Buffalo River Works
- July 18, 2025: Newsletter publication with convening preparation materials
- July 28th: WNY Digital Equity Coalition Convening
- August 5th: NY State Digital Equity Network Conference
- October 2025: RBA 101 training sessions (tentative)
- November 6-8th: SANYS State Conference in Albany
- December 31st, 2025: ConnectALL grant completion deadline

Ongoing Initiatives

- Communications Committee seeks additional volunteers
- Performance measures working groups need broadband and equipment access volunteers
- Statewide measurement standards coordination effort
- Coalition values development for July convening
- Regional survey and focus group preparation

Contact Information

- Amanda Horner (Communications): ahorner@wnydigitalequity.org
- Andy Strohmeier (UB CTSI): awstroh@buffalo.edu
- Self-Advocacy Association of NYS Website: <https://sanys.org>