

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition

Full Member Meeting Notes

October 15, 2025

Attendees

- CJ Banks; Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and Career Advancement; Villa Maria College
- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Megan Battista; Advocacy and Learning Coordinator; Liftoff WNY
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Courtney Deuro; Data Analyst; Center for Self Advocacy
- Katie Earl; Community Recreation Coordinator for the Aging; Erie County Senior Services
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought
- Jeffrey Zane Hansen; Development Specialist; Mission: Ignite
- 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
- Danielle Jackson; Manager, Recruitment and Admissions; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Jelicia Jimenez; Executive Director; KORP Foundation
- Solomon Joseph; Manager of Economic Empowerment; Native American Community Services
- Susan Kirkpatrick; Communications Consultant; Mission:Ignite
- Dennis Lee; Coalition Community Member; Hopewell Baptist Church
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Amy Miranti; Communications & Administrative Coordinator; Liftoff WNY & Nonprofit Support Group
- Emily Oaks; Data Strategist; CCNY, Inc.
- Deborah Porter; Founder & President; YES Workforce
- Simone Ragland; Co-Founder/CEO; Bits & Bytes STEM Foundation
- Abigail Smith; Digital Literacy Program Coordinator; Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES

- Andrew Strohmeier; Integrating Special Populations Coordinator, Clinical and Translational Research Center; University at Buffalo
- Jessica Teng; Technology and Communications Associate; CCNY, Inc.
- Liz Warkentin; Senior Education Manager; Mission: Ignite
- Shannon Wichlacz; Senior Evaluation Associate; CCNY, Inc.
- Heidi Ziemer; Community Investment Specialist; Mission: Ignite

Announcements

Center for Self-Advocacy Healthcare Summit

- The Center for Self-Advocacy (CSA) announced that their annual Healthcare Summit, typically held at this time of year, will not take place in 2025. CSA has been extremely busy this year with various initiatives and was unable to secure their usual venue at the Jacobs Center.
- The Healthcare Summit will return in 2026, and the coalition will be informed of details as they become available.
- The summit typically includes content about navigating electronic medical records and health systems for people with disabilities, which is particularly relevant to digital equity work.

2026 NYS Public Health Partnership Conference

- Amanda Horner announced that the 2026 New York State Public Health Partnership Conference has opened its call for abstracts, with submissions due Thursday, November 13th.
- One of the conference tracks focuses on digital inclusion and equity for diverse populations, with an emphasis on digital health literacy under the broader theme of using data, technology, and AI in public health practice.
- Links to the call for abstracts and conference information were shared in the chat: [Call for Abstracts](#) and [Conference Website](#)

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) Training

- Don Matteson highlighted the Results-Based Accountability training for coalition members that took place over the past two weeks oriented towards understanding and applying RBA methodology to digital equity initiatives.
- He shared a link to the YouTube playlist for the two sessions: <https://wnydec.link/rba-training>

Coalition Initiatives and Project Status

- Don shared links to view current coalition initiatives and their status: <https://wnydec.link/initiatives>
- A form for submitting new initiatives or updates was also shared: <https://wnydec.link/form>
- Project status tracking is available at: <https://wnydec.link/project-status>

Convening Follow-Up: Regional Meetings

Value of In-Person Meetings

The coalition engaged in an extensive discussion about what makes meetings valuable and whether to incorporate more in-person gatherings. Key themes included:

- **Networking and Connection:** Deborah Porter emphasized that in-person meetings provide valuable opportunities for informal conversations and connecting with other organizations face-to-face.
- **Project-Based Work:** Jessica Teng suggested that working together on a specific common project or goal would make meetings more engaging and productive.
- **Hybrid Approach:** Multiple members stressed the importance of maintaining virtual options even when holding in-person meetings to ensure accessibility.
- **Presentation Topics:** Courtney Deuro noted that the presentation topics themselves are valuable and draw participation.
- **Best Practice Sharing:** Ann Battaglia highlighted the value of hearing from subject matter experts who can share best practices and success stories.
- **Working Sessions:** Emily Oaks suggested that in-depth sessions requiring substantial discussion, such as group working sessions to set the coalition's advocacy agenda, would benefit from in-person gatherings.
- **Hands-On Training:** Amanda Horner proposed incorporating hands-on training or workshop elements (not necessarily for the full meeting) to add variety to the agenda.
- **Diverse Perspectives:** Hannah Brecher valued hearing everyone's opinions and getting different angles on various ideas.

Meeting Frequency

- Hannah Brecher suggested maintaining monthly meetings due to everyone's busy schedules, which would help ensure consistent participation.

Geographic Expansion Challenges

The coalition discussed the challenge of engaging rural communities in digital equity work. Key points included:

- **Knowledge Gap:** Jessica Teng and Heidi Ziemer noted that many rural communities "don't know what they don't know" about digital equity resources and opportunities.
- **Potential Venues:** Heidi Ziemer suggested specific locations for rural meetings, including:
 - Prendergast Library in Jamestown (lots of space, accessible to smaller nearby communities)
 - Olean Public Library
- **Educational Outreach:** Hannah Brecher emphasized the need for creating educational tools to teach about digital equity in rural areas.
- **Broadband Alternatives:** Courtney Deuro suggested providing information about alternatives to traditional broadband, such as cellphone hotspots and satellite services like StarLink.

Volunteer Interest

- Jessica Teng, Heidi Ziemer, and Liz Warkentin all expressed willingness to help with rural outreach efforts.

Convening Follow-Up: Advocacy

Current Advocacy Efforts

The coalition discussed how to effectively engage with legislators and advance digital equity policy. Major themes included:

- **Adoption vs. Deployment:** Heidi Ziemer made a crucial point that legislators hear frequently from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) about broadband deployment, but the coalition needs to remind them that adoption of broadband is equally important—perhaps more so. She emphasized that the unique service areas represented by coalition members (health, education, social services) demonstrate how pervasive internet access is in people's lives.

- **Government Services Access:** Many of the people coalition members work with need internet access simply to use local, state, and federal government services.

NY State Assembly Bill 2025-A4102

- Megan Battista mentioned NY State Assembly Bill 2025-A4102 as a legislative priority for the coalition to track.

Definition of Success

Members shared their perspectives on what would constitute a win in advocacy efforts:

- **Relationship Building:** Hannah Brecher emphasized that communication with legislators is a start to building relationships, which is foundational for long-term advocacy success.
- **Legislative Progress:** Courtney Deuro suggested that getting a bill one or two steps closer to being passed would be a tangible win.
- **Policy Landscape Understanding:** Amanda Horner noted that simply getting a clear sense of where digital equity policy currently stands in New York State would be valuable.
- **Public Awareness:** Megan Battista highlighted that increased public awareness of opportunities for families (such as ConnectALL) would be a win, particularly if legislators help get the word out in their communities or highlight digital equity initiatives in their communications.

Advocacy Challenges

- Several attendees expressed uncertainty about how they could contribute to advocacy efforts, noting that while they continue to attend meetings, they're not sure how to help. These comments highlight the need for clearer guidance on how different coalition members can participate in advocacy work.

Resources Shared

YouTube Playlist

- Don Matteson shared a link to a YouTube playlist containing recordings of the 2023 Strategic Casemaking training sessions with The Case Made:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS4JPor4QcHQBYXSfx_TgrT6g2PDgFwXT