WNY Digital Equity Coalition Full-Member Meeting Notes

2025-11-19

Attendance

- Eileen Anderson; School Library System Director and Library Automation Supervisor; Erie 1 BOCES
- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Jeremy Besch; Managing Director; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission: Ignite
- Courtney Deuro; Data Analyst; Center for Self Advocacy
- 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
- Danielle Jackson; Manager, Recruitment and Admissions; Per Scholas Buffalo
- Solomon Joseph; Manager of Economic Empowerment; Native American Community Services
- Hex Kleinmartin; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- Susan Kirkpatrick; Communications Consultant; Mission: Ignite
- Don Matteson; Chief Program Officer; Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Mike Rogers; Regional Organizer; Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS)
- Abigail Smith; Digital Literacy Program Coordinator; Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative
- Bob Spino; Director of Technology; Erie 2-Chautaqua-Cattaraugus BOCES
- Andy 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
- Heidi Ziemer; Community Investment Specialist; Mission: Ignite
- Simone Ragland; Co-Founder/CEO; Bits & Bytes STEM Foundation
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought

Asset Mapping Initiative

- Don Matteson presented a comprehensive framework for developing a regional digital equity asset map to identify gaps and resources for funding applications.
- The asset mapping framework aligns with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance structure and will require significant coalition-wide buy-in and participation to be successful.
- The asset map will serve multiple purposes: connecting people to resources, informing policy decisions, identifying gaps that need to be filled, and supporting grant applications.
- The framework emphasizes that success depends on broad network participation, not just a small workgroup, with extensive care and feeding from many coalition members required.
- Key requirements for the asset map include usability (simple, accessible, searchable), community-informed design through outreach, and ongoing maintenance as a living document.
- A bootstrapping challenge was identified: the resources listed in the directory are often the same resources people need to access the asset map itself.
- Christine Carr-Barmasse requested simple examples of how the asset map could be used, noting the importance of showing both simple applications and the robust data behind them.
- Don provided examples including using the map to identify digital literacy gaps (password management, government website navigation, patient portal access) that could inform curriculum development and targeted funding applications.
- The asset map will function as a comprehensive directory that allows people to search for specific resources by type and location throughout Western New York.
- Jeffrey Zane Hansen noted in the chat that the asset map could help organizations point to resources for different stages of the digital inclusion journey, both for prerequisites and specialized advancement.
- Susan Kirkpatrick asked whether the asset map would be broadly available to the community or gatekept by the coalition.
- Don confirmed the asset map will be a community resource that is not gatekept, emphasizing that "hoarding knowledge is not useful" and is contrary to the coalition's mission.
- Susan raised the important point that broad community availability will require marketing and promotion efforts, which Don confirmed would be part of the workgroup's role, planned for June 2026 launch.

- Hannah Brecher asked whether the initiative could address home security systems and Ring device training, given the challenges vulnerable populations face with package theft.
- Don clarified that while there wouldn't be dedicated Ring device training, fundamental digital literacy skills training would help people navigate security systems and other digital interfaces through understanding common UI patterns.
- Hannah also asked about helping people learn to log into video conferencing apps and navigate concerns about viruses and clicking unknown links.
- Don confirmed these cybersecurity and video conferencing concerns would absolutely be appropriate topics for digital skills education if they emerge as themes during the landscape scan.
- Don emphasized that basic digital literacy training teaches transferable skills like understanding interface conventions (e.g., three horizontal lines indicating a menu) that apply across multiple applications.
- Hex Kleinmartin volunteered in the chat to help with the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the asset map.
- Don acknowledged that building the asset map is "the shiny part" while ongoing maintenance is "the thankless part" and appreciated the volunteer support.
- **Action Item**: Coalition members interested in participating in the asset mapping workgroup should contact Don Matteson or share their information in upcoming communications.
- Don encouraged members to consider their capacity for this initiative as the holidays approach and workloads potentially ease.

Announcements and Member Updates

- Don shared the coalition's news submission link (https://wnydec.link/submit-news) and encouraged members to submit organizational updates and successes.
- The coalition listserv subscription link was shared for new members: https://wnydec.link/listsubscribe
- Amanda Horner announced the New York State Public Health and Planning Council meeting information and shared the link: https://nysphpc.org/
- Abigail Smith identified herself as being located in Orleans County, relevant to discussions about regional outreach.

- Christine Carr-Barmasse announced that Mission: Ignite's Community Computer Center at 701 Seneca St., Suite 601 offers digital computer essentials classes for individuals and groups.
- Mission: Ignite has trained Digital Navigators and Digital Skills Trainers available to work with nonprofits and faith-based organizations to bridge the skills gap for their constituents.
- Organizations interested in scheduling group training at Mission: Ignite should contact kevin@missionignite.org.
- Christine volunteered Mission: Ignite to help organize regional meetups for the coalition.
- Heidi Ziemer shared a link in the chat to the past WNYLRC (Western New York Library Resources Council) asset mapping project: https://wnylrc.org/services/digequity
- Hannah Brecher mentioned that the Self Advocacy Association has a training series called "TechKnowLedge Me" and shared a video link: https://youtu.be/rj5V1krIgDQ?si=4NzNA7w7LprwpPjo
- Hannah reported connecting with Jacqueline Hayes, Director of the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD - Office for People with Developmental Disabilities), at a Georgetown University cultural and linguistic competence advocacy event.
- Hannah provided Jacqueline Hayes' contact information to Don for potential collaboration on expanding digital equity efforts throughout New York State, particularly for people with disabilities in areas like New York City and Long Island.
- Danielle Jackson from Per Scholas Buffalo reminded members that interested applicants can apply at https://perscholas.org

Digital Literacy Survey Update

- The coalition's digital literacy survey is underway through the Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant and will run through early-to-mid-January.
- The survey launched successfully at a Clementine Gold event where 30 responses were collected immediately at the kickoff.
- Don noted he did not have updated response numbers at the time of the meeting but planned to request an update from the Clementine Gold team.
- The survey will help identify specific digital literacy gaps in the community, such as challenges with password management, government website navigation, and patient portal access.

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) Training

- The coalition has a subscription to Clear Impact Scorecard for results-based accountability work.
- Four coalition members are currently working on RBA certifications to become RBA-certified professionals, with Don working to complete his certification to bring the total to five.
- The coalition has conducted RBA 101 trainings with playlists available for review at https://wnydec.link/rba-training
- Don has created quick reference guides from the training sessions, with the second guide completed just before the meeting, though not yet widely shared.
- Strategic case-making training materials from previous years are also available via playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS4JPor4QcHQBYXSfx_TgrT6g2PDgFwXT
- The coalition is populating American Community Survey data into the Clear Impact Scorecard system.

2025 Year in Review

- Don presented a comprehensive review of the coalition's accomplishments in 2025.
- The coalition secured and began work on the Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant, which includes multiple components and initiatives.
- In July 2025, the coalition established five core values: collaboration, equitable inclusion, stability, service, and influence.
- These core values will guide decision-making and serve as "North Stars" alongside the mission statement developed in the previous year.
- The coalition identified three strategic pillars for 2026 work: regional meetups/community engagement, advocacy, and asset mapping.
- Progress on these three pillars will be assessed at the 2026 convening.

Communications Achievements

- The coalition successfully transitioned from Google Groups to Mailman for the mailing list, improving email deliverability.
- Materials were developed and shared for Digital Inclusion Week 2025, which was more robust than 2024.

- Don expressed goals for year-over-year improvement with earlier planning for Digital Inclusion Week 2026.
- The Western New York Digital Equity Coalition monthly newsletter completed two full years of publication, facilitated by Amanda Horner and the communications workgroup.
- The newsletter has been valuable for sharing digital inclusion information, resources, and education, as well as highlighting member organization activities, opportunities, and success stories.

Advocacy and Statewide Presence

- Five coalition members attended the New York State Digital Equity Network Conference, with four serving as facilitators, panelists, or presenters.
- The coalition had a significant presence at the statewide conference, representing Western New York across the state.
- A petition supporting the Digital Equity Act was circulated and received approximately 50 signatures.
- Mission: Ignite was instrumental in securing a video from Representative Tim Kennedy recognizing Winnie Deck's work during Digital Inclusion Week.
- Don expressed confidence in building on these advocacy wins in 2026.

Member Organization Highlights

- **Per Scholas**: The first cohort graduated on January 24, 2025, and a remote class option was added to expand technology training access.
- **Niagara University**: Secured a $9.2 million grant through the NTIA competitive grant process under the Digital Equity Act, though Don noted concerns about funding disbursement due to the act being "unilaterally declared unconstitutional."
- **Villa Maria and Corp Foundation**: Launched an AI and Equity Task Force led by CJ Banks.
- **Mission: Ignite**: Hosted Tech Wars with 925 students participating from more than 30 school districts across Western New York.
- Don emphasized the significance of nearly 1,000 students sharpening their technology skills, with some potentially discovering career interests through the program.
- Mission: Ignite partnered with Per Scholas, creating connections between coalition organizations.

Steering Committee Recognition

- Don thanked the steering committee members for their guidance and accountability: Christine Carr-Barmasse, Bob Spino, Steve Heist, Sam Mattle, Simone Ragland, and Al Meyers.

Member Recruitment and Engagement

- Don encouraged all members to share the coalition website and his email address with anyone who might benefit from or contribute to the coalition's work.
- Coalition growth will enable reaching more people and accomplishing more work toward digital equity goals.
- Hannah's example of connecting with the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities was highlighted as the type of networking that strengthens the coalition.

Coalition Support and Workload

- Christine Carr-Barmasse made a direct appeal for coalition members to step up and support Don, noting that much of the work has largely rested on his shoulders.
- Christine emphasized that if many people each take on a small portion of work, the collective impact will be significant while lightening Don's individual load.
- Don acknowledged the appeal but also recognized that members must balance coalition work with their day jobs and are already spread thin.
- Christine emphasized that finding linkages between organizations will help the digital equity "ecosystem" function more effectively.

Next Steps and Schedule

- The coalition will not meet in December 2025 to allow members time with friends, family, or for quiet personal time during the holidays.
- The next full member meeting will be the third Wednesday of January 2026.
- The coalition will "pick up right where we left off" when reconvening in 2026.
- Members are encouraged to review the RBA training materials and Strategic Casemaking resources during the break.