

Western New York Digital Equity Coalition Full Member Meeting

2026-08-19

Attendance

- Ann Battaglia; Executive Director; Healthy Community Alliance
- Megan Battista; Learning and Advocacy Coordinator; Liftoff WNY
- Rachel Bonsignore; Director; Liftoff WNY
- Hannah Brecher; Coalition Community Member; At Large
- Christine Carr-Barmasse; Executive Director; Mission: Ignite
- Trent Hamilton; Coalition Community Member; Entrepreneur School of Thought
- Jeffrey Zane Hansen; Development Specialist; Mission: Ignite
- Amanda Horner; Coalition Community Member; New York State Association for Rural Health
- Jacqueline Hovey; System Adult Outreach Services – TechKnow Lab; Buffalo & Erie County Public Library
- Hex Kleinmarten; Digital Literacy Coordinator; Literacy Buffalo Niagara
- Brett Lawton; Chief Executive Officer; Universal Primary Care / Southern Tier Community Health Center Network
- Don Matteson; Facilitator, WNY Digital Equity Coalition
- Sam Mattle; Executive Director; Center for Self-Advocacy
- Alan Meyers; Fatherhood Connection Facilitator; Connecting Communities in Action
- Katie Pieri; Director; Nonprofit Support Group
- Deborah Porter; Founder & President; YES Workforce
- Mike Rogers; Regional Organizer (Western); Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS)
- Sandra Sheppard; Senior Evaluation Associate; CCNY, Inc.
- 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
- Heidi Ziemer; Community Investment Specialist; Mission: Ignite

Announcements

- Al Meyers (Connecting Communities in Action) announced that September is Trauma-Informed Awareness Month; CCA will offer a menu of trauma trainings, including grief and loss sessions and special in-person events at St. Bonaventure University, plus virtual trainings offering continuing education credits for anyone in the coalition who is interested.
- Hannah Brecher (Self-Advocacy Association of New York State) announced SANYS's statewide conference, October 15–17 in Albany, marking the association's 40th anniversary. Registration is open through September 18; organizations are welcome to table and meet advocates from across the state. Register at: <https://sanys.org/2025-sanys-statewide-conference/>

- Megan Battista (Liftoff WNY) announced that, prompted by a challenge from Don at the coalition's last in-person gathering to articulate how her organization connects to digital equity, Liftoff will host a Learning Network event in November on the early childhood impacts of digital access, screens, and AI (date not yet scheduled). She is looking to collaborate with others interested in the topic, potentially including partners from the University at Buffalo and Buffalo Toronto Public Media. Email Megan at megan@liftoffwny.org if you'd like to get involved.
- Heidi Ziemer shared in chat that the [Digital Inclusion Week \(DIW\) 2026](#) toolkits are now available, offering templates and strategies for nonprofits, government agencies, and individuals planning DIW events.
- Christine Carr-Barmasse noted that Mission: Ignite operates an open Community Resource Center at the Larkin Center of Commerce (701 Seneca St., Suite 601, Buffalo, NY 14210) that holds trainings and cohorts; contact kevin@missionignite.org for more information.
- Mike Rogers shared a [link to a community conversation](#) for the WNY disability community, caregivers, and loved ones on the impacts of the Department of Justice's June memo reinterpreting the 1999 Supreme Court decision *Olmstead v. L.C.*, with an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

Strategic Case for Digital Equity – Final Version

- Don thanked the full coalition for roughly six months of work on the Strategic Case for Digital Equity. After the last meeting he circulated a Google Doc version for comment and received useful feedback. All comments were incorporated, and a final version is now live on the [coalition's Notion page](#).
- Don demonstrated a quick slide deck he built by feeding the finished case into Claude — about 10 minutes of work including a couple of images — to show members how the case can be repurposed and customized for their own stakeholders.
- Don flagged additional strategic case-making techniques not yet built into the written case that the coalition could explore later, including the “yes ladder” — based on the marketing “rule of seven” (a brand needs roughly seven exposures to be recognized) — which builds a sequence of small, easy “yes” asks that make a later, bigger ask psychologically easier.
- Next steps for the case: (1) it will become the centerpiece of an upcoming coalition website overhaul; (2) the coalition will revive a story-collection project (started a couple of years ago, and raised again by Jeremy at the last meeting) to gather more success stories and stories of digital exclusion, since the full written case doesn't cover every use case coalition members encounter; (3) Don is building a directory of elected officials profiled against strategic case-making principles — mapping their public statements and policy positions to digital inclusion; (4) county and regional profiles on the coalition website have been updated with the latest American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2020–24) and results from the coalition's digital literacy survey — Don noted the update relied on AI-assisted drafting that he reviewed and verified to the extent he was able.

Digital Inclusion Week 2026

- The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) has designated October 4–10, 2026 (the first full week of October) as Digital Inclusion Week — a national opportunity to elevate the profile of digital exclusion and advocate for digital inclusion. NDIA's full DIW 2026 toolkit is now available (shared in chat by Heidi Ziemer), with templates and strategies for planning an event.

- Coalition history with the week: a couple of years ago the coalition got the Peace Bridge lit turquoise for DIW; last year the coalition instead focused on a stronger social media presence and shareable collateral.
- This year's goal is to take another step forward by getting Western New York listed on NDIA's national directory/calendar of Digital Inclusion Week events. Listed activities don't need to be exclusively branded as DIW events — any digital inclusion-relevant training or event occurring in the October 4–10 window qualifies, including trainings, panels, or community events focused on broadband access, equipment access, or digital skills.
- Don offered to submit entries to NDIA's directory (which uses an Airtable form) on behalf of any member who has an event or announcement but doesn't have time to fill out the submission form themselves — members should send Don their announcement page or collateral, and he can also post the event to the coalition website.
- Christine Carr-Barmasse asked whether there's a specific date already scheduled within the October 4–10 window. Don suggested the coalition try to arrange one or two open community trainings during that week that any interested community member could join, publicized in advance — noting the goal isn't turnout volume, but visibility for the resource.
- Don's broader goal is for the coalition to build an increasingly meaningful footprint for Digital Inclusion Week, and for digital equity work generally, year over year.

Performance Measurement Work Groups

- Over the past couple of years, Don has been recruiting coalition members to serve on work groups focused on building shared performance measures across three domains: broadband access, digital skills, and equipment access. That work is now ready to begin in earnest.
- Standing up these work groups is a deliverable under the coalition's Digital Equity Technical Assistance grant, with a target of getting the measures defined by the end of October 2026.
- Don will reach out to everyone who has expressed interest to schedule roughly two to three work group meetings between now and the end of October to review candidate measures and settle on a final handful.
- The goal is to identify three to five common measures per domain (broadband, equipment, digital skills) that can be used consistently across all coalition providers — letting the coalition see which organizations have effective approaches worth sharing, and which might benefit from additional support, in order to raise program quality across all of Western New York.
- If scheduling allows, Don will try to bring back Dan Duncan, the Clear Impact consultant who led the coalition's earlier RBA 101 training, to work with the groups directly and help ensure the resulting measures stay grounded in the results-based accountability (RBA) framework.

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) Overview

- Don gave the coalition a condensed overview of the results-based accountability (RBA) framework.
- RBA is described as an “ends to means” framework: define the desired end state (the goal) first, then work backward to the strategies that get you there, rather than starting from a list of activities. It is also “talk to action” — designed to move a group quickly from goal-setting into concrete, specific strategies. Its most powerful feature, in Don's view, is that it connects individual program and organization-level work to community-level outcomes, which many organizations otherwise track separately from the broader community picture.
- RBA rests on three core concepts: population accountability, performance accountability, and “turn the curve” thinking.

Population Accountability

- Population accountability asks about the wellbeing of an entire population — defined by geography, identity, or shared circumstance — rather than just the people a single program touches directly. Don gave the Tower Foundation's own populations as an example: children with disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or autism, and families affected by mental illness, within specific counties in Western New York and Massachusetts.
- Each population goal (what RBA calls a “result statement” — essentially a goal by another name) is tracked with population, or community, indicators: measures of the population's wellbeing in aggregate. Don's example: the percentage of people without internet connections — the coalition wants to “turn that curve” downward over time.
- The central discipline at this level is contribution, not attribution: no single organization can single-handedly claim credit for community-level progress, or take sole blame for community-level struggles. When outcomes improve, the coalition says it contributed; when they don't, the framing is that the coalition may be contributing, or at least keeping things from getting worse faster.
- The coalition set six regional result statements roughly six years ago through member input, later abstracted from specific populations (e.g., seniors, people with disabilities) to apply broadly to “all Western New Yorkers,” regardless of race, disability status, education level, income, or immigration status: affordable, reliable high-speed broadband connectivity; access to digital devices; and the digital skills and tools to advance one's own goals and interests, among others.
- Population indicators currently draw on American Community Survey data (already reflected in the county and regional profiles on the coalition website) and coalition-collected data, including the coalition's digital literacy survey — whose report was linked in Friday's newsletter and lightly reformatted by Don for readability, with further polish (such as pull quotes) still planned.

Performance Accountability

- Performance accountability occurs at the organization or program level, focused specifically on the people a program directly serves. Program-level goals should point in the same direction as the six coalition-wide result statements, but don't need to be scaled-down copies of them — they just need to be directionally aligned.
- Any performance measure answers one of three questions: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off? Don noted that most existing metrics across the sector cluster around “how much” (e.g., number of people served); “how well” is measured less often, and “is anyone better off” — the hardest and most important question — least of all.
- Don illustrated this with a 2x2 matrix of quantity and quality against effort and effect: quantity of effort (how many people served, sessions held, devices distributed), quality of effort (how well those services were delivered), quantity of effect (how many people improved), and quality of effect (how meaningfully they improved — for example, whether someone who received a device is actually using it for education, employment, or staying in touch with family, versus it becoming, in Don's words, an expensive paperweight).
- This performance-measurement lens is the direct focus of the newly launching work groups: identifying a shared handful of how-much / how-well / better-off measures that can be applied across all providers within a given domain, in order to see who is performing well enough to learn from and who may need more support — raising quality across the whole coalition.

Turn the Curve Thinking

- Turn-the-curve thinking is a continuous-quality-improvement orientation built around five recurring questions, meant to be revisited cyclically: How are we doing? (look at the current data/metrics) What's the story? (interpret the numbers in context — Don's example: in 2021, several Tower Foundation grant partners badly missed enrollment targets, which looked damning in isolation, but made complete sense once the pandemic's effect on in-person programming was factored in) What works? (what strategies are succeeding, what should be tweaked or abandoned) Who are the partners? (who is already helping effectively, who isn't carrying their share, and who else should the coalition be connecting with) What do we do next? (the resulting action plan, which loops back into “How are we doing?” for the next cycle).
- The framework emphasizes progress over perfection and trend over target — the point is consistent movement in the right direction, not hitting an exact number.
- Don noted that if the coalition ran a fully disciplined RBA process, this five-question cycle could effectively become the coalition's standing monthly meeting agenda: who's here, any announcements, how are the programs and the population doing, what's the surrounding context, what's working or needs to change, who are the partners, and what's next.

Discussion

- Mike Rogers said the contribution-over-attribution framing resonated because most organizations simply don't have the resources to solve every problem alone, and connected “doing something” versus “doing nothing” to a broader life principle — that even inaction is itself a kind of action.
- Don agreed and tied the discussion back to the proverb that it's better to light a candle than curse the darkness — framing the coalition's task as taking action while staying disciplined about data and results.
- Big picture: the coalition now has a strategic case (the “why”), six shared population goals, and an emerging measurement framework — together forming, in Don's words, “a really powerful engine” to move the community toward the coalition's vision.