

Digital Equity Task Force Workforce Subcommittee Town Hall

Summary Notes

June 29, 2023

The Digital Equity Task Force Workforce Subcommittee Town Hall brought together representatives from community organizations, educational institutions, industry partners, and government agencies to address challenges and opportunities in bridging the digital divide and promoting workforce development. The meeting served as an opportunity for ConnectALL to hear from experts, community leaders, and representatives of covered populations about what unified vision for digital equity, barriers and assets, implementation plans, and outcomes should be included in the State's Digital Equity Plan as it relates to workforce and economic development in New York. The nature of work is increasingly becoming more digital, and digital skills and literacy are essential for sustained employment in an increasing number of sectors and roles. People in need of digital skills training are often in need of other services, and the wraparound services provided by CBOs who provide training are also increasingly essential. The sector needs relationships between community organizations and employers to build the necessary bridges and pipelines to job, to support people after they enter into employment, and to consider the needs of people in New York City as well as every region across the State. New York State also needs to make sure people are aware of these offices and efforts, and aware of the opportunities to come. The discussions focused on sourcing diverse talent, industry-aligned certifications, and the role of the state in fostering digital inclusion.

Creating a Unified Vision for Digital Equity: By collaborating across sectors, prioritizing accessibility and inclusion, and advocating for policy changes, stakeholders can work together to bridge the digital divide, empower underserved communities, and create a digitally inclusive workforce for New York's future.

- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Participants emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts among community organizations, educational institutions, employers, and government agencies to address the multifaceted challenges of digital equity. By pooling resources, expertise, and networks, stakeholders can create a comprehensive ecosystem that supports digital skill development and workforce readiness.
- **Community-Driven Initiatives:** Stakeholders advocated for initiatives that empower local communities to drive digital equity efforts. By involving community members in program design, implementation, and decision-making, organizations can tailor interventions to specific needs and ensure that digital resources are relevant and impactful.
- **Inclusive Program Design:** The vision for digital equity involves designing training programs that cater to diverse learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Incorporating

soft skills, mental health support, and culturally sensitive content can create inclusive learning environments that cater to a wide range of participants.

- **Advocacy for Policy Change:** Participants highlighted the role of advocacy in driving policy changes that promote digital equity. By advocating for increased funding, regulatory support, and legislation that addresses the digital divide, stakeholders can create an enabling environment for digital inclusion initiatives.
- **Long-Term Impact:** Creating a unified vision for digital equity requires a commitment to long-term impact. Stakeholders stressed the importance of sustained efforts beyond short-term interventions, including ongoing skill development, mentorship, and access to resources that support participants' digital journey throughout their careers.

Building a Pipeline of Diverse Talent: Participants explored strategies for sourcing and retaining diverse talent for digital skills training programs.

- **Talent Sourcing and Partnerships:** Stakeholders discussed innovative approaches to source talent for digital skills training programs. Partnerships with educational institutions, community-based organizations, and local media were highlighted as effective methods to engage underrepresented communities. Various organizations shared their approaches to sourcing talent, including leveraging existing participant pools, partnering with educational institutions like CUNY's Gutman College, and reaching out to underrepresented communities through community-based organizations.
- **Barriers and Challenges:** Participants highlighted barriers such as substance abuse, legal obligations, and mental health issues that can hinder talent recruitment. The need for financial support during training periods was also emphasized as a critical factor for successful participation. The discussions highlighted various challenges faced by both providers and talent.
- **Supporting Trainees:** The importance of wraparound services, including mental health support, childcare, and stable internet access, was stressed as essential for trainees' success. Partnerships with local media and community tech labs were also noted as effective ways to provide comprehensive support. Providing stable internet access, devices, and extended training hours were recognized as essential for trainee success. Data-driven decision-making and tracking participant outcomes were also emphasized.

Training and Standardization of Certifications & Credentialing: During this discussion, stakeholders discussed the significance of industry-aligned certifications, the disconnect between existing certifications and industry needs, and strategies for ensuring successful completion of training and credentialing.

- **Industry-Aligned Certifications:** Participants delved into industry-aligned certifications necessary for key sectors such as telecom, tech, and construction. They emphasized the need for standardized and portable credentials that reflect evolving industry needs. Participants shared insights into necessary certifications, such as Google Suite certifications and IT support certifications, that indicate job readiness to employers. The challenge of constantly evolving industry needs and the importance of granular skills like Excel, Tableau, and SQL were also highlighted.
- **Standardization and Portability:** The need for standardized and portable credentials that are recognized across industries was emphasized. The role of public workforce development boards in facilitating standardization and supporting trainees through wraparound services was discussed.
- **Supporting Trainees:** Participants highlighted the significance of stable internet connections, devices, extended training hours, and data tracking tools for trainee success. Data-driven decision-making and the importance of collecting and analyzing data on participant outcomes were also stressed.

Connecting with Existing Programs: This discussion focused on the resources, partnerships, and programs that support talent development and digital inclusion.

- **Wraparound Services:** Discussions highlighted the importance of comprehensive wraparound services, including mental health support, housing, and access to devices and stable internet. Bridging the digital literacy gap between introductory training and deeper technical skills was emphasized.
- **Community Partnerships:** Stakeholders underscored the significance of community-based organizations in supporting digital skills development and job placement. Partnerships with industry representatives, unions, and vocational schools were explored as models for scaling successful programs.
- **Funding and Marketing:** Participants expressed the need for increased funding, stipends, and accessible marketing campaigns. Community-driven initiatives, multilingual outreach, and engagement through trusted partners were identified as strategies to raise awareness.

Implementation

- **Increased Funding for Wraparound Services:** Participants emphasized the need for expanded funding to support wraparound services such as mental health support, childcare, transportation assistance, and access to stable internet and devices. These services play a vital role in ensuring trainees' successful completion of training programs.

- **Industry-Recognized Certifications:** Stakeholders underscored the importance of partnering with industry representatives to develop and promote industry-aligned certifications and credentialing programs. This collaboration can help bridge the gap between existing certifications and the skills demanded by employers, enhancing trainees' job readiness.
- **Digital Inclusion Initiatives:** Participants highlighted the significance of collaboration between community-based organizations, educational institutions, employers, and government agencies to design comprehensive digital inclusion initiatives. These programs can provide training, mentorship, and resources to underserved communities, thereby enabling them to fully participate in the digital economy.
- **Accessible Marketing and Outreach:** To ensure that training opportunities reach all segments of the population, stakeholders recommended improving accessible marketing efforts, including multilingual campaigns and partnerships with community-based organizations. This approach can raise awareness about available programs and empower individuals to pursue digital skills training.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Leveraging data analytics and tracking tools was suggested to monitor program effectiveness, measure outcomes, and identify areas for improvement. Collecting and analyzing data on participant success rates, employment outcomes, and training impact can inform evidence-based strategies.
- **Support for Nonprofits:** Participants emphasized the need to allocate resources for nonprofits to build data competency and track program outcomes effectively. Funding for data infrastructure and capacity-building can enable organizations to refine their approaches and enhance their impact.

While the Digital Equity Task Force Workforce Subcommittee Town Hall revealed several common themes across the three breakout sessions, each session also showcased distinctive elements that contributed to a comprehensive understanding of digital equity.

Breakout Session #1

- Emphasized the importance of trauma-informed care and support for both participants and staff.
- Highlighted the challenge of retaining diverse talent and the importance of creating supportive workplace environments.
- Noted the need for improved coordination and data-sharing between workforce development organizations to provide a clearer picture of available training programs.
- Focused on sourcing talent from marginalized communities and addressing specific barriers faced by individuals with disabilities.
- Identified the issue of paying individuals during training periods as a barrier to recruiting Covered Populations to participate in workforce development programs.

Breakout Session #2

- Discussed industry-aligned certifications and credentialing as essential for key industries like telecom, tech, and construction.
- Emphasized the importance of certifications and other credentials for diverse populations, particularly those who have experienced adversity that has limited opportunities to complete formal education (K-12, higher education).
- Explored the challenge of adapting certifications to rapidly evolving industry needs and ensuring their portability across sectors.
- Highlighted the significance of supporting trainees with stable internet access, devices, and wraparound services to ensure successful completion of training.
- Addressed the issue of funding disparities for different types of workforce development programs.

Breakout Session #3

- Explored partnerships with labor unions as a potential model for addressing workforce development needs and creating industry standards.
- Highlighted the role of nonprofit organizations in providing wraparound services, including mental health support, housing, and community resources.
- Discussed the challenge of making programs accessible through transportation, childcare, and other essential services.
- Explored the need for improved marketing and outreach strategies to promote awareness of available programs and resources.