



**2022 Organization Changemaker Award Winner
The STEM Alliance**

Supported with encouragement from multiple partners, The STEM Alliance earned an Organizational Changemaker Award this year because of their strength of collaboration. "Our work is only achieved through partnership which is one of our most innovative elements. We are experts in STEM education, Digital Equity and high quality STEM Summer Programming. But our partners have deep, trusted, longstanding relationships with the clients. We partner to bring our expertise to their clients." Their nominating supporters included: Jonathan Alvarez, Co-Founder and Executive Director, 914United, Inc.; Anne Bradner, Chief Executive Officer, Carver Center; Robert W. Cacace, Jr., Commissioner of Information Technology, City of Yonkers; Lindsay C. Farrell, President and CEO, Open Door Family Medical Center and Foundation; Allison Lake, Executive Director, Westchester Children's Association; Jirandy Martinez, Executive Director, Community Resource Center; Amy Price, Chief Development Officer, YWCA White Plains & Central Westchester; and, Michael N. Romita, President & CEO, Westchester County Association."

Issue and Case for Change

In 2020, The STEM Alliance had the vision to see that digital equity (access to internet/devices and the skills to use them) is a basic life necessity. At the height of the pandemic, it took the lead programmatically and through advocacy in response to the transition to virtual work and learning stranding low-income families in the digital divide. Based on best practices and advice from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), The STEM Alliance designed and secured funding for *Digital Equity Now* (DEqN), a research-based digital inclusion program that provides a wraparound solution: a free device, internet hotspot, and 15 hours of digital skills training. Since August 2020, DEqN has reached over 1,100 residents through more than a dozen Westchester nonprofit partners, achieving high impact results. The STEM Alliance is now launching a new digital navigator model, *Digital Pathways*, based on national models and NDIA workshops. Digital Pathways makes it possible to screen clients' digital distress and serve those needs in a targeted manner, enrolling them in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program for free or low cost internet. The STEM Alliance has established the case to address digital equity in Westchester, created programs, evolved programs, partnered for success, embedded the work in state and national discussions and tracked metrics to fortify the case for this work. To

achieve this during a time of such enormous uncertainty proves not only that The STEM Alliance's overall leadership is strong but also that they know how to attract funding to our communities.

Awareness

The STEM Alliance is leading the way in creating Digital Inclusion Coalitions at the local and state level in order to ensure that Westchester is represented in critical funding conversations at all levels. It has educated the public, partners, elected officials and other stakeholders on the issues surrounding digital equity while also providing replicable solutions. This work has included: 1) Presenting at two national conferences and two state conferences, 2) Sitting on the National Planning Team for NDIA's Annual Net Inclusion Conference (2 consecutive years), 3) Earning a highly competitive Statewide Digital Equity grant that will enable a much greater expansion of the program, 4) Being a founding member of the newly established NYS Digital Equity Network, 5) Being a founding member of the nascent Westchester Digital Inclusion Coalition, 6) Being awarded one of seven National Science Foundation (NSF)/Us Ignite/Schmidt Futures grants to start the "Y-Zone" project which connects low income people to free internet (and some to tech education and devices as well), 7) Utilizing federal CARES act dollars to extend the Y-Zone initiative for year 2 and growing a model for replication across the County, 8) Advising Westchester Children's Association on their digital equity research instrument, 9) Acting as the lead or primary partner on two additional large scale digital equity grants for Westchester, 10) Earning awards to bring much needed attention to this work including but not limited to: Westchester County Association Leadership Award, Westchester County Board of Legislators Recognition, Lions Regional Club Uplinger Award for Outstanding Service, and Community Resource Center Annual Honoree.

Collaboration

Digital equity is an intersectional issue directly related to poverty; it affects more people of color and is a super social determinant of success in education, employment, and healthcare. In order to address this, The STEM Alliance works not only with clients suffering digital distress and local nonprofits who serve those clients, but also with county, state, and national stakeholders to advocate for legislation, policy and funding. The STEM Alliance's partnership model relies on the fact that it is the expert at STEM, but the partners are the agencies in relationship with residents in need. The STEM Alliance provides the Lead Educator (tech education) and Digital Navigators (digital equity work); partners identify clients with digital distress and provide a location for outreach and classes. The STEM Alliance "trains the trainer," growing the partners' capacity to lead classes on their own. The STEM Alliance's skill at innovating and collaborating with partners while bringing high quality "on ramp" tech education into communities has earned it a reputation as a leader in digital inclusion implementation in Westchester. In this work, The STEM Alliance maintains relationships with

elected officials to ensure that digital equity is always part of the conversation. Its leadership speaks at local, state, and national conferences and is part of a newly formed NY State Digital Equity Network, has provided direct advising to NY State Assemblyman Otis's NY Digital Inclusion grant program, and is part of the Westchester Library System's new movement to create a Westchester Digital Inclusion Coalition.

Disruptive Innovation

The *Digital Equity Now* program transforms lives in a manner that was effectively ignored pre-pandemic. After just 15 hours of tech education, clients show a threefold increase in their comfort on workforce development platforms. Over 80% intend to use their skills to get a job/look for a job online and 45% feel very comfortable on device at program close (compared to 20% at the start). Here in Westchester, this work has never been done to this degree, with this holistic approach, and with this level of success for baseline beginners prior to The STEM Alliance's leadership. This impact has been accomplished through several key approaches pioneered by The STEM Alliance. 1) Ownership: While loaner programs have been helpful, loaner or shared devices do not provide the access needed to achieve tech adoption. Adoption of tech skills takes a regular investment of time and practice that can only be achieved through full ownership. 2) A Three-part Approach: DEqN combines device ownership, internet access, and education because devices alone are not enough to move clients from an analog existence to a digital life (2019 study of Comcast Internet Essentials low-income clients). 3) Partnership Model: Partnering is essential. Nonprofit partners identify the clients; the STEM Alliance distributes the device packages and provides education. In addition, they "train the trainer." 4) Evaluation & Metrics: The STEM Alliance collects and reviews data for continuous improvement. They rely on impact metrics collected from pre-/post-class surveys, uploaded into an impact metrics dashboard (<https://tinyurl.com/yahmf3y4>), updated bi-annually.