



Angela Siefer's Remarks for the 2024 Internet Protocol Award

Thank you, Alisa, for those kind words and Public Knowledge for this award.

When I was in college, I came home one weekend and told my dad I had decided to major in Sociology. He nods and says - ok, what do you do with that? I, having no idea, say something about the ACLU or AFL-CIO. I was spouting letters. I had no idea what I would do at those organizations.

Fast forward to nine years ago, and I'm playing with letters to create a new organization. I started out with NDIC - National Digital Inclusion Coalition. I realized that was a bad idea and quickly pivoted to NDIA. The intention was clear – we would create an organization representing community-based organizations that were helping members of their communities get online and understand how to use the internet.

So now I am running my own organization with fancy letters. Returning to my dad's question, what do you do with that? I started thinking - we'll create a space for these local organizations to learn from each other, and we'll bring their expertise and their experiences to policymakers in DC. The first part I knew how to do: build community, hold a conference, and document best practices. I got all that! Plus, Bill Callahan was my partner in crime, and the man lives and breathes community organizing. I didn't really know how to do the second part: bring the on-the-ground experience of local digital inclusion practitioners into the Lifeline proceeding. Fortunately, we were not on our own; we had help. Amina Fazlulah and John Windhausen took me to my first FCC meetings, Sasha Meinrath let me sleep on his futon, and Harold Feld answered all my newbie questions with SO much patience.

The policy work started to take off in 2019. NDIA had accomplished a lot at this point, but the digital equity field was still sorely underfunded, and practitioners were all McGivering funding solutions. But imagine this - at our little 300-person conference in 2019, Senator Murray was just about to introduce the Digital Equity Act, and we had two of her legislative team members discuss the news with our affiliates at the closing plenary. So exciting! A live bill! But, just as I had no idea what I would do with a sociology degree, I had no idea what to do with a live bill. We created a website...?!? Fortunately, NDIA had friends, namely Public Knowledge, who knew what to do when COVID lockdowns drew attention to the digital divide. Many of whom are in this room today.

It feels awkward to me to accept an award as my accomplishments are always group efforts. My family. The NDIA Team. The NDIA Board. NDIA's partners. YOU.

Public interest friends, the digital equity community still needs you. The next big accomplishment for all of us here, as a group, is sustained funding for broadband adoption. We,

collectively, are not finished. The digital divide is not bridged once we have the infrastructure built. Nor after we spend all funds from the Digital Equity Act. The digital divide will be bridged once we have robust digital inclusion ecosystems in all communities where anyone can safely and affordably access the internet on an appropriate device and have, as needed, a trusted digital navigator for support. That is only possible if we have sustained broadband adoption funding.

So, who's in?

Thank you.