

# Field Notes on Digital Inclusion | Part 5 | Reflections from the Field

*[Originally published October 10, 2025 on LinkedIn](#)*

When I began this *Field Notes* series, I did not set out to write about broadband, fiber, or devices. I set out to write about people, about the ways we connect, imagine, and build belonging in a digital world still learning how to include us all. Each note was an attempt to listen more closely to the field itself, to the stories under the data, the pauses between progress, and the quiet work happening in neighborhoods that rarely make the headlines.

Digital inclusion, I continue to learn, is never abstract. It is lived, felt, and local. It shows up in church basements and library corners, in job-training labs and living rooms where a new device connects a family for the first time. It is less about megabits per second than about the moments of recognition that follow: *I can see you. You can see me. We can begin from here.*

## Looking Back: What the Field Revealed

**Part 1 — Beyond the Baseline** The journey started with data, the kind that counts connections but misses people. I learned that numbers can tell us who is online but not who feels seen. We need both kinds of visibility, statistical and human. The divide is never just technical; it is emotional, historical, and deeply cultural.

**Part 2 — When Efficiency Meets Equity** Then came the question of pace. Systems built for speed often miss the soul of inclusion. We are quick to measure outputs, devices distributed, trainings completed, but slower to measure trust. Efficiency has its place, but equity requires patience, relationships, and room for learning to move at the speed of people.

**Part 3 — When Infrastructure Meets Imagination** That reflection reminded me that innovation does not begin with equipment; it begins with imagination. When we treat imagination as infrastructure, we expand what is possible. Broadband becomes more than access; it becomes a canvas for creativity, storytelling, and community voice. Imagination is what turns connection into culture.

**Part 4 — Quantum for All** Most recently, I found myself thinking about the future and how easily opportunity can repeat old mistakes. The rush to fill the quantum talent gap echoes the coding boom's false promises of quick credentials and instant success. If we

want a truly inclusive future, we have to prepare the future for the people, not just the people for the future. That means grounding every innovation in equity, belonging, and truth.

## **This Week: The Field in Motion**

This Digital Inclusion Week, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) invited us to imagine *Community Driven Digital Futures*. Here in Cook County, that future is already taking shape, not as a concept, but as community in action:

- in the Council of Digital Equity (CODE) collaborations (*thank you [Cecilia Benitez](#) and Chicago Techies Podcast for the interview*)
- in the incredible work of [Christian Taylor](#), the **Chicago Digital Equity Coalition**, and its sub-committees
- in the **Digital Equity Action Committee (DEAC)** and the regional co-chairs (*shout out to [Martha Karavitis-Hemmati](#) and [Kimberly Harris](#) )*
- in the more than **125 Digital Inclusion Week events** happening across the County in partnership with organizations, libraries, schools, institutions, small businesses, corporations, community developers, students, and other curious individuals
- in the inaugural **Access Amplified** learning symposium and Amplifier Awards
- in the **Digital Navigator Network** in partnership with [Reaching Across Illinois Library System \(RAILS\)](#) and suburban libraries
- in the **IMPACT Small Grants Program**, centered on storytelling with [City Bureau](#), community-based organizations, and media outlets
- in the **Comprehensive Broadband Planning Initiative** with partners like [The QUILT Corporation NFP 501\(C\)3](#)
- and in the more than **100 people I have met this week** who had no idea there was an ecosystem waiting for them to be seen, valued, and supported.

These are the architects of access. They remind us that digital equity is people work, care work, built one trusted relationship at a time.

## **Reflections and Invitations**

After five field notes, I realize that the field itself has been my teacher. It continues to teach me that belonging is the truest form of bandwidth. That progress without participation is only performance. And that the work of inclusion begins long before the grant cycle and continues long after the celebration ends.

So, as this series closes, I offer not conclusions but invitations:

To policymakers, listen beyond the metrics.

To educators, teach curiosity as a civic skill.

To technologists, build tools that honor the hands that will hold them.

To communities, keep leading, because every equitable system starts with lived experience.

## **Closing: The Ongoing Field**

The field is still writing. There are more stories to tell, more bridges to build, more ways to listen. Digital inclusion is not a finish line; it is a practice, a rhythm of connection, care, and co-creation that keeps unfolding.

In the coming months, I will be turning more deeply toward the evolving intersections of digital equity, technology, and community, and challenging every sector, including policymakers, educators, employers, cultural institutions, and community networks to see themselves inside this work. True equity will only emerge when every sector takes ownership of its digital role and sees inclusion as a shared public good.

As artificial intelligence continues to shape how we learn, work, and connect, we have a chance to model what equitable digital governance can look like: transparent, accountable, and rooted in trust. AI will test not only our infrastructure but our values. We must ensure that algorithms serve people, not the other way around. I will also be dedicating focused attention to artificial intelligence through my engagement with the **Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP)** and the **Aspen Rising Civic AI Leaders cohort**.

Digital Inclusion Week 2025 has added an extra battery or two in my back.

**I am charged up. Let's go!**

Kyla Williams Tate - ***Thought Leader, Advocate, and Storyteller***