



Learning to Name My Work

Claiming My Role as
a Policy Strategist

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Carrying a collection of distinct professional identities.



The Social Worker:
Rooted in human, social,
and business disciplines.



The Civic Technologist:
Building programs and pilots
to solve people problems.



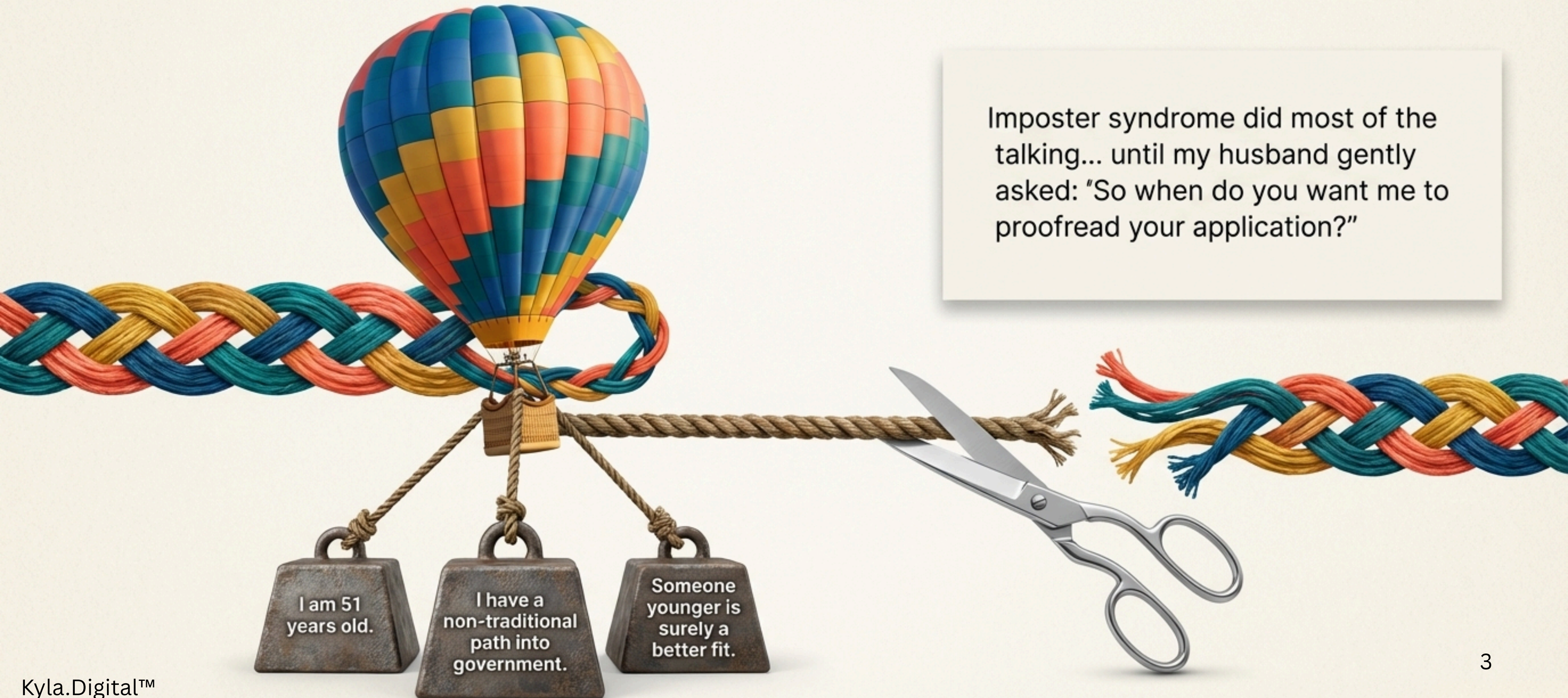
The Data Nerd:
Diving deep into research
and information.



The Storyteller & Poet:
Crafting narratives and
understanding the
human element.

My certifications strengthened project management and human-centered design, but none pointed directly to “policy.”

The heavy anchors of a non-traditional background.



Imposter syndrome did most of the talking... until my husband gently asked: "So when do you want me to proofread your application?"

Reclaiming what it means to be a rising leader.

~~Rising ≠ Starting from Scratch at Age 25~~

**Rising = Energy + Momentum
+ Existing Knowledge**

The word “rising” feels like energy and momentum. It is about building upon an existing foundation, regardless of age.

Navigating the steep learning curve of local government.

The Challenge: Entering a first official government position and actively working to advance AI policy.

The Environment: Cook County

-  **Tenure:** Just past the 3-year anniversary.
-  **Department:** Policy and Practice Team.
-  **Current Priorities:** Leading Broadband, AI, and Digital Transformation.
-  **Future State:** Transitioning from setting digital equity courses to launching multi-priority AI initiatives.

Government Learning Curve

Office of the President

A dedicated space to learn, practice, and name the work.

The Catalyst: Applying to the Rising Civic AI Leader Initiative
(Aspen Digital & Aspen Policy Academy)

Accessible:

Free, part-time, unpaid, and virtual.

Intensive:

A three-month immersive sprint.

Exclusive:

21 government employees selected nationwide for the inaugural cohort.

The Mission: To level the steep learning curve for AI professionals entering government and cultivate a national mentorship community.

Mastering the complex intersection of government impact.

People: Centering human needs and understanding the community impact of emerging tech.

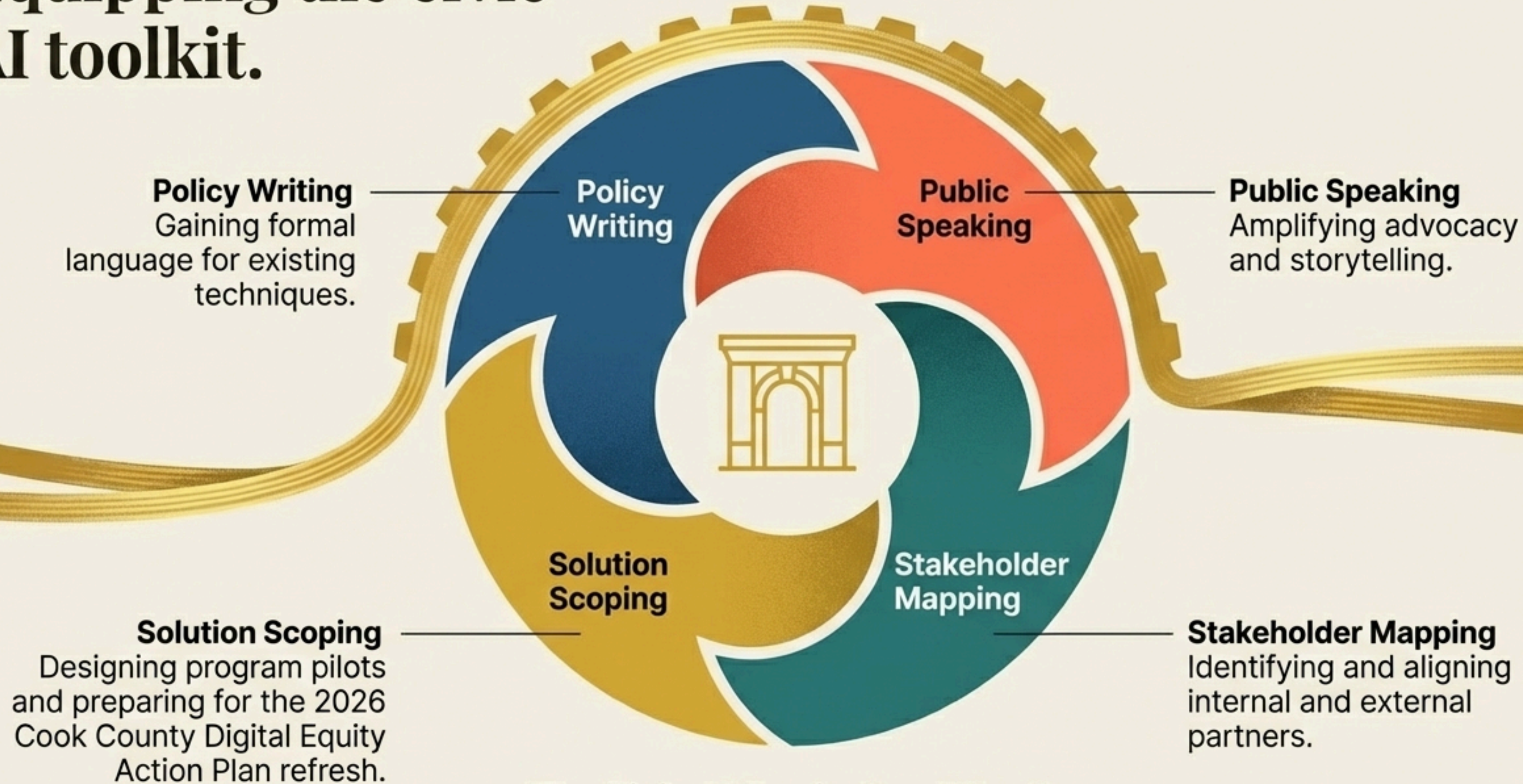
Power: Mapping stakeholders and navigating the structural dynamics of local government.



Civic AI Leadership

Policy: Crafting the rules, roadmaps, and equitable systems that govern digital tools.

Equipping the civic AI toolkit.



The Civic AI Curriculum Wheel

Discovering what was actually missing.

Technical Validation

Not needed: Already possessed deep experience in data, storytelling, and program building.



Philosophical Grounding in Playfair Display

Needed: A safe place to practice policy, gain formal language, and unapologetically claim the work as my own.



Forging a unified title from diverse experiences

Input: Scattered expertise
lacking a central identifier

- Social Work • Human-Centered Design • Civic Tech • Storytelling



Output: Emerging with the
confidence to fully claim the title:

Policy Strategist

Process: 3 months of deep immersion
in People, Power, and Policy

Career Mindset Shift

| | Before Aspen | After Aspen |
|-------------|---|---|
| Age & Stage | Fear of being “too old” for a rising initiative. | Realizing momentum builds on existing foundations. |
| Identity | Fragmented (Social Worker + Technologist + Poet). | Unified (Policy Strategist). |
| Core Need | Seeking external technical validation. | Achieving internal philosophical grounding. |
| Career View | Intimidated by a non-linear path without mentors. | Embracing an intentional, equitable, and self-directed journey. |

The credential that provided structural integrity.



This specific credential provided the affirming structure needed to lock a diverse background into a definitive policy career.

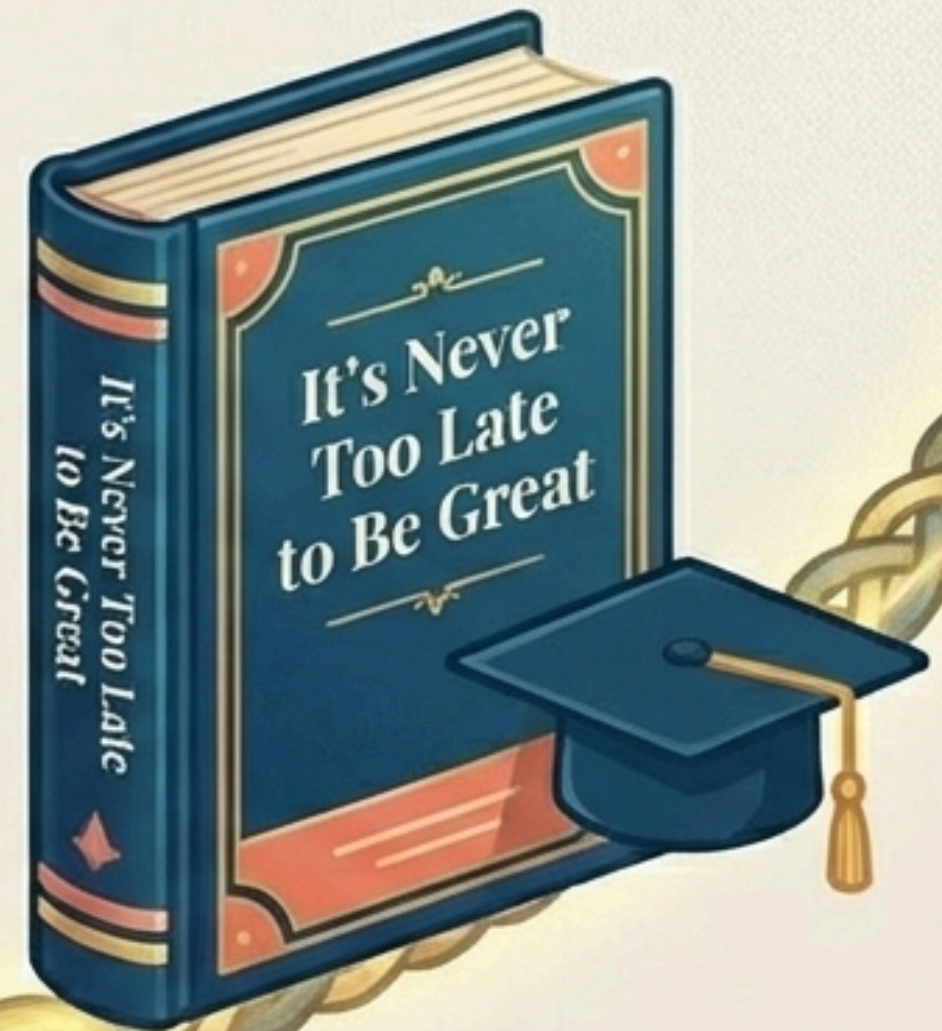
Evolving and learning do not stop at age forty.

The Inspiration

My cousin, Felicia White, self-published *It's Never Too Late to Be Great*, chronicling her journey of earning her GED at age 40.

The Proof

She has since gone on to receive her bachelor's degree and is now a teacher.



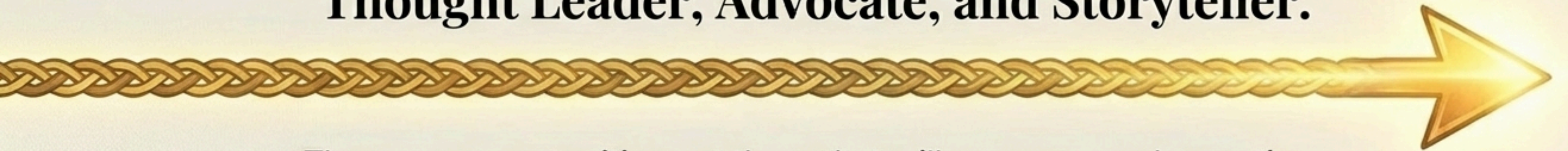
The Takeaway

Not all systems are designed for equitable participation, but there is always more to offer, build, and live.

**Claiming the work and
passing the torch.**

Kyla Williams Tate

**Policy Strategist in AI and Digital Equity,
Thought Leader, Advocate, and Storyteller.**



There are opportunities out there that will see you—and sometimes they help you see yourself more clearly, too. If the Rising Civic AI Leader Initiative is offered again and you see yourself in this story, apply.