

Nomination Form for 2026 Digital Equity Champion Awards

Named for Charles Benton, the founder of Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, NDIA created the awards to recognize leadership and dedication in advancing digital equity: from promoting the ideal of accessible and affordable communications technology for all Americans to crafting programs and policies that make it a reality.

NDIA will present two awards: the Digital Equity Champion Award will recognize an outstanding individual who has made a difference in the field of digital equity, while the Emerging Leader Champion Award will acknowledge an up-and-coming digital inclusion practitioner.

Awards will be presented during NDIA's Net Inclusion conference on February 3-5, 2026 in Chicago, Illinois.

For more information about the Digital Equity Champion Awards, including scoring, evaluation, and sample nominations, please visit: digitalinclusion.org/champions/

To be successful, nominees should demonstrate or exhibit the following qualities:

- Sustained commitment to digital inclusion programs and an expertise in [digital equity](#)
- Innovation in addressing and solving digital inequities
- Dedication to serving community(ies) and targeted populations who are most in need of digital inclusion services
- Demonstrated leadership and collaborative spirit
- Prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their work
- Use of data and evaluation to shape digital inclusion programs and share best practices
- Engagement in sustainable work that can be scaled and replicated

Digital Equity Champion Award Proposal Timeline:

- Submission Deadline: November 21, 2025
 - Notification of Award: December 19, 2025
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- Award Ceremony: During Net Inclusion conference on February 3-5, 2026

PDF of the nomination form

Word Doc of the nomination form

If you prefer to use the PDF or Word Doc version, please email your completed nomination to pamela@digitalinclusion.org with the subject line "Digital Equity Champion Award Nomination".

For any questions, please contact Pamela Rosales at pamela@digitalinclusion.org

Section One: Contact Information

If you are nominating someone else, please submit your name, affiliated organization, and relationship to the nominee here. If you are nominating yourself, please leave this part of the section blank.

Your First Name:	Joseph

Your Last Name:	Raimondi
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Your Organization/Affiliation:	Freelance
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Your Job Title:	Freelance
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Your Email:	joeraimondi6@gmail.com
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Nominee's First Name:	Whitney
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Nominee's Last Name:	O'Brien
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Nominee's Pronouns:	she/her
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Nominee's Organization:	Crimecon, partnered with Fox Nation
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Nominee's Job Title:	Accessibility Consultant
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Nominee's Email:	wobrien@nativemsg.com
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Section Two: Nominee's Impact

What award are you nominating this person for?

The Digital Equity Champion Award will recognize an outstanding individual who has made a difference in the field of digital equity. The Emerging Leader Award will acknowledge an up-and-coming digital inclusion practitioner.

- Digital Equity Champion Award (Generally, 3+ years of service)
 - Nominee has demonstrated leadership and a breadth of experience, and they have made a deep impact in the field of digital equity
- Digital Equity Champion Emerging Leader Award (Generally, 3 years or less in the field)
 - Nominee has engaged in outstanding digital inclusion work and brought an innovative approach to the field
- Digital Equity Champion Award
- Digital Equity Emerging Leader Champion Award

Describe why this person should win a Digital Equity Champion Award. Include a brief description of the focus and impact of their work as related to NDIA community definitions of "digital inclusion" and "digital equity." Maximum of 1500 characters.

Whitney O'Brien opened my eyes to what digital equity truly means. Before meeting her, I viewed accessibility as a technical requirement. Whitney helped me understand that it's about people—about creating spaces where everyone, regardless of ability, can participate fully.

She lives that belief every day. Growing up alongside a cousin with total hearing loss and living with an invisible disability herself, Whitney brings deep empathy and authenticity to her work. Professionally, she's built a career advancing accessibility at every level—from her years at Level Access, where she was recognized as an "accessibility champion," to her current consulting work with Red Seat Ventures,

where she improves both digital and in-person experiences.

She also volunteers with Code Your Dreams, mentoring youth during a Google Hackathon for accessibility. Whitney doesn't just talk about inclusion—she builds it, teaches it, and inspires it. Her influence has fundamentally changed how I and many others see the digital world.

Describe how the nominee's approach to digital inclusion is influential or innovative. For example: novel policy approaches, new technological solutions, creative community programming, etc. Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney redefines accessibility as an act of creativity, not compliance. She helped me and others understand that accessibility isn't a box to check—it's an opportunity to innovate. Through her mentorship, I learned to see inclusive design as essential to great user experience.

Her approach combines data-driven strategy with human connection. Whitney uses empathy-based storytelling and inclusive design reviews to inspire teams and individuals to build technology for everyone. Her influence ripples outward—those she mentors go on to mentor others, creating a culture of awareness and accountability that lasts.

What communities/populations have been helped by the work of the nominee, and how has the nominee created solutions to serve populations who are most in need of digital inclusion services? Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney's work directly impacts people with disabilities—especially those with hearing, visual, and cognitive differences—by making digital spaces more accessible and equitable. Her consulting with Red Seat Ventures has led to lasting changes in how digital media and events include users of all abilities.

Through her volunteer work with Code Your Dreams, she's introduced underrepresented youth to accessibility principles early, shaping the next generation of inclusive technologists. I've seen firsthand how she translates her personal experience into practical solutions that make technology fairer and more human-centered.

Describe how the nominee shows leadership and a commitment to engaging others in collaboration. Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney leads by example. She never demands attention but earns respect through her consistency, kindness, and knowledge. In every setting—corporate, nonprofit, or volunteer—she creates a culture of openness and shared purpose.

When I first began learning about accessibility, Whitney invited me into discussions, shared resources, and encouraged me to ask questions. Her collaborative approach made complex topics approachable. She empowers everyone around her to take ownership of inclusion, showing that leadership isn't about authority—it's about influence and care.

How has the nominee shown a commitment to equity and diversity in their digital inclusion work and served as a leader in building an inclusive culture in addressing digital inequities? Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney's entire approach to technology is rooted in equity. She understands, from personal experience, what it means to navigate the world with invisible barriers. That empathy fuels her dedication to dismantling systemic inequities in digital access.

She consistently advocates for marginalized groups—people with disabilities, low-income communities, and underrepresented individuals in tech—to have a voice and a platform. Whitney doesn't just promote diversity; she builds environments where diverse perspectives are welcomed, valued, and reflected in every design choice.

How has the nominee used data to evaluate and share the impact of their digital inclusion work? Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney blends compassion with precision. She teaches that accessibility success must be measurable. I've watched her use data to evaluate accessibility compliance, analyze user feedback, and celebrate milestones of progress.

Her guidance helped me understand how data can tell the story of equity—tracking not just numbers, but human impact. Whitney's method ensures that inclusion efforts are sustainable, accountable, and continuously improving.



Describe how the nominee has helped to develop and share best practices and how their work is sustainable and replicable. Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney's mentorship doesn't end when a project does—it becomes part of how people work. She provides frameworks, checklists, and templates that make accessibility actionable and repeatable.

The practices she teaches are now embedded in my own workflows and those of many others she's mentored. She has a rare gift for turning personal conviction into scalable systems. Whitney's influence ensures that accessibility is not a one-time initiative, but an enduring standard of excellence.

Describe any additional personal or professional characteristics or accomplishments the judges should consider. Maximum of 1000 characters.

Whitney is one of the most empathetic and inspiring leaders I've ever met. Her lived experience gives her authenticity, her expertise gives her credibility, and her mentorship gives others the confidence to act.

She has spoken on accessibility in marketing, guided countless peers and students, and helped organizations transform how they think about inclusion. Whitney's legacy is already evident in the many people she's inspired—including me—to advocate for digital equity in every project and every community we serve.

Optional: Please add links to further our understanding of the nominee's work and impact. For example: blogs, news articles, speaking engagements, video showing their work, interviews, etc. (Maximum of 3)

