

Making Investments in Digital Infrastructure toward More Equitable Outcomes

Speaker Biographies

Opening remarks

Kimberlyn Leary is a senior vice president, managing research and program development across the Urban Institute. She comes to Urban from Harvard University, where she is an associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, an associate professor in the department of health policy and management at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and a lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. For four years, she directed the Enabling Change program for the Doctor of Public Health program at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Leary also served as executive director of policy outreach and of the Center of Excellence in Women's Mental Health at McLean Hospital. Before that, she was chief psychologist at the Cambridge Health Alliance for nearly 12 years. Leary served as an advisor to the White House during the Obama administration. As a Robert Wood Johnson health policy fellow, she helped launch the Advancing Equity initiative for the Obama White House Council on Women and Girls. She was also an advisor to the health division at White House Office of Management and Budget and senior policy advisor to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Leary served on the Biden-Harris transition as a volunteer part-time member of the Agency Review Team for the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the Executive Office of the President. Leary writes, consults, and teaches on adaptive leadership, leading teams, cross-boundary collaboration, negotiation, and conflict transformation. She holds an MPA from the Harvard Kennedy School and a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan, and she completed advanced training as a clinical psychoanalyst at the Michigan Psychoanalytic Association. Leary serves on the board of trustees at Amherst College, the Austen Riggs Center, and the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute and serves as an advisor to Pivotal Ventures and the Upswing Fund. Additionally, she serves as a judge for the McArthur Foundation's 100&Change competition and for Lever for Change's Lone Star Competition.

Ines Hernandez is driven by her passion and commitment to building inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities. She has over 20 years of experience building cross-sector consensus that led to community and economic development policies and solutions with demonstrable results. The U.S. Department of Commerce appointed Ines as its first-ever Counselor for Equity. In this newly created role, Ines works across the Department's 13 bureaus to institutionalize equity across all workstreams and advise senior leadership on policy design and implementation strategies that help advance the equity agenda within the Department's programs and strategic initiatives. Most recently, Ines served as the inaugural Senior Economic Development Fellow for StartUP FIU, where she connected the university to opportunities that foster entrepreneurship and build inclusive prosperity by leveraging its role as an anchor institution and innovation hub. In her prior role as SVP in Community Investment and Development at Citi, Ines was responsible for leading the bank's regional commitment to economic inclusion and leveraged philanthropy, business solutions and relationship expertise to launch and scale transformative programs with high social impact.

Keynote

Alan Davidson leads NTIA, the President's principal advisor on telecommunications and information policy. As NTIA Administrator, Alan oversees a federal agency with more than 500 employees working to close the

digital divide, manage federal spectrum resources, and build a better Internet. Alan has spent the last 25 years working at the intersection of Internet technology, public policy, and the law. In his roles in government, public interest groups, and companies, Alan has focused on how society makes choices about the technologies we build. Before joining NTIA, Alan worked at Mozilla Foundation, a global nonprofit that promotes openness, innovation and participation on the Internet. As Mozilla's Vice President of Global Policy, Trust and Security, he led public policy and privacy teams promoting an open Internet and a healthy web. Alan served in the Obama-Biden Administration as the first Director of Digital Economy at the U.S. Department of Commerce. He started Google's public policy office in Washington, D.C., and as Director of Public Policy, led government relations and policy in North and South America for seven years until 2012. Alan has been a long-time leader in the Internet nonprofit community, serving as Director of New America's Open Technology Institute where he worked to promote equitable broadband access and adoption. As Associate Director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, Alan was an advocate for civil liberties and human rights online in some of the earliest Internet policy debates. He is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Yale Law School, and is a member of the District of Columbia Bar.

Laying the Foundation: Distribution of Funds Towards Digital Equity

Angela Thi Bennett is the inaugural Digital Equity Director at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) within the U.S. Department of Commerce. In this groundbreaking role, Angela administers the \$2.75 billion Digital Equity Act program, a cornerstone initiative of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. Her work is focused on ensuring that all people and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to fully participate in society and the digital economy. Angela's approach to digital equity is rooted in her belief that people must be at the center of efforts to bridge the digital divide. She advocates for a collaborative, "whole of nation" strategy that engages federal, state, and local partners, as well as philanthropic organizations and the private sector. Throughout her career, Angela has focused on community work and improving the quality of life in her Cleveland and greater Ohio communities. Before joining NTIA, Angela led advocacy efforts to expand internet access and digital literacy for marginalized communities at a nonprofit in Cleveland, Ohio. Angela is steadfastly committed to amplifying marginalized voices, empowering local communities to drive solutions, and using her network and voice to elicit social change. Angela holds both a JD and an MBA from Case Western Reserve University. Born in Saigon, Vietnam, to a Vietnamese mother and a Black American father, Angela's diverse heritage fuels her commitment to equity and inclusion in technology. She believes that access to the digital world is a basic necessity, essential for every individual to pursue their version of the American dream, and that everyone should feel seen, valued, and worthy of the opportunities this access provides.

Yonah Freemark is a principal research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. He is the research director of the Land Use Lab at Urban. His research focuses on the intersection of land use, affordable housing, transportation, and governance. He has published peer-reviewed scholarship in numerous journals, including *Urban Affairs Review*, *Politics & Society*, *Housing Policy Debate*, and the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Previously, Freemark worked for Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council and has written for the *New York Times*, *Next City*, and *CityLab*, among other publications. He holds master's degrees in city planning and in transportation, as well as a PhD in urban studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He lives along the U Street Corridor in Washington, DC, and is an appointed member of the ANC 2B Land Use Committee.

Chris Proctor serves as the Technical Assistance Branch Chief within the USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Telecommunications (Telecom) Program. He has held various roles since joining the USDA Rural Development mission area in 2014. Chris has expertise in broadband policy, partnership development, regional planning, community capacity building, and implementing place-based approaches. In his current role, Chris leads the implementation of the RUS Telecom Program's technical assistance strategy. This includes administering the Broadband Technical Assistance Program and playing a critical role in policy development and outreach efforts. Chris holds a Bachelor's Degree in political science from Salisbury University.

Rekha Balu is the director of federal equity initiatives and co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she leads research and policy programs that deploy analytics and evidence to inform federal agencies on how to advance equity. Balu joins Urban from MDRC, where she was a senior fellow and director of the Center for Applied Behavioral Science. She launched a portfolio of studies and designed interventions tackling challenges in human services, K-12 education, and the transition to postsecondary education. She has partnered with federal agencies and grantees around the country to help them base their decisions on data and evidence. In 2019, as a fellow with the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the US General Services Administration, she developed trainings, intervention designs, and field trials for federal agencies. She has an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, a master of education degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a master's degree in economics from Stanford University. She earned her doctorate in the economics of education from Stanford University.

Digital Equity as a Pathway to Outcomes in Health and Education

Fredric Blavin is a principal research associate in the Health Policy Center at the Urban Institute with expertise on a wide range of topics, including private health insurance markets, health care reform, health information technology, provider supply, health care spending, child and maternity health, Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) policy, and the Health Insurance Policy Simulation model. In addition, Blavin has extensive survey development experience, including Urban's Health Reform Monitoring Survey and the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey Physician Workflow Supplements. Before joining Urban, Blavin worked as an economist at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology within the US Department of Health and Human Services. Blavin has published widely in peer-reviewed journals on various topics, including the impact of express lane eligibility programs on Medicaid/CHIP enrollment, trends in health care financial burdens and prescription drug spending, measuring and forecasting electronic health record adoption, value-based insurance design, the role of private health insurance in developing countries, and the cost and coverage implications of various state and national health reform policies. Blavin received his PhD in managerial science and applied economics from the University of Pennsylvania in 2011.

JaWanna Henry, MPH, MCHES serves as the Interoperability Systems Branch Chief in the Office of Policy at the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy/National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ASTP). Her branch is responsible for advancing ASTP's policy goals through targeted implementation activities, specifically the Trusted Exchange Framework and Common Agreement (TEFCA), social determinants of health (SDOH) and Health Equity. Prior to this role, JaWanna served as the lead for the SDOH, prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMP), and women's health IT data integration and implementation activities while at ASTP. Before joining ASTP, JaWanna supported research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health that focused on environmental and multi-level systems effects,

respectively, for population and community health. She received her MPH in population and community health from the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Priyanka Sharma is the Vice President of World Education and oversees part of the organization's education portfolio and co-leads Digital US, a national collective cross-sector impact initiative designing and implementing a learn-and-work ecosystem that fosters digital resilience for all. With her leadership at World Education, a Division of JSI, she supports the global organization's dedication to enriching people's lives worldwide through education, public health, and social and economic development programming. An expert in innovative project design, Priyanka continues to provide leadership to multiple national initiatives on college and career readiness, financial literacy, technology integration, and digital literacy. Priyanka remains at the forefront of innovation, continually developing and spearheading projects that prioritize digital equity and harness the power of new technologies like AI to amplify the reach and effectiveness of education and workforce initiatives. Through her leadership, Priyanka exemplifies how technology can be leveraged as a tool for inclusion and empowerment, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to thrive in the digital age.

Rekha Balu is the director of federal equity initiatives and co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she leads research and policy programs that deploy analytics and evidence to inform federal agencies on how to advance equity. Balu joins Urban from MDRC, where she was a senior fellow and director of the Center for Applied Behavioral Science. She launched a portfolio of studies and designed interventions tackling challenges in human services, K-12 education, and the transition to postsecondary education. She has partnered with federal agencies and grantees around the country to help them base their decisions on data and evidence. In 2019, as a fellow with the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the US General Services Administration, she developed trainings, intervention designs, and field trials for federal agencies. She has an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, a master of education degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a master's degree in economics from Stanford University. She earned her doctorate in the economics of education from Stanford University.

Meeting Community Needs: Expanding Infrastructure and Connectivity in Rural Communities

Glen Howie is the director of the Arkansas State Broadband Office, where he serves as the chief broadband advisor to Governor Sanders. He is guiding the state's broadband infrastructure and digital opportunity planning and implementation, an effort expected to exceed \$1.8 billion by 2030. Starting in his role in August of 2022, Glen came to Arkansas from the nationally recognized Louisiana Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity. In his introductory remarks before the Arkansas Legislative Council, he noted his office would work every day to ensure Arkansas becomes a "leader in the South" and a "Top Ten state in the country" in all things broadband. In that time, from 2021-2024, Arkansas led the nation in increased broadband connectivity, with a number one ranking of 9%. Glen holds an undergraduate degree in finance and a master's degree in public administration from LSU. In June 2023, he was named as one of Arkansas Business' 40 under 40. In his spare time (of which, there is little), he enjoys going to the movies, news and politics, and Chipotle. Glen and his wife Julie are members of Christ Episcopal Church and reside in Little Rock.

Catherine Krantz is Area Director for Broadband at Communities Unlimited managing the implementation of CU's broadband strategy across their seven-state service area: AR, AL, LA, MS, OK, TN, TX, leading a team of broadband planners, broadband technical assistance providers, and digital equity coordinators. CU's broadband mission is to ensure equitable access to high-speed internet in rural communities throughout CU's footprint. Her team is offering broadband planning in some of the nation's least

connected, highest need communities by providing broadband education and technical assistance to community stakeholders, developing grant proposals, and facilitating partnerships to improve internet access, adoption and use. She brings over 20 years of experience in international business, non-profit management, community and economic development planning, with ten years of broadband planning expertise. She is a dedicated rural and community advocate, passionate about bringing high-speed internet to all.

Brian Vo is Connect Humanity's Chief Investment Officer, leading investment efforts to structure the right type of financing solution that meets the needs of organizations advancing digital equity. He collaborates with Connect Humanity's partners, communities and social enterprises alike, to understand connectivity barriers, local context and needs, and the implications on the appropriate blend of impact finance. Brian has +17 years of investment and strategy experience, with +\$7B of direct transactions, including private equity, and impact debt and equity. Previously, Brian was the Vice President of Social Investment and Innovative Finance at Pact, Inc., a global development NGO. He led the Pact Ventures team to deploy impact capital that accelerated Pact's theory of change through creative financing vehicles, like market-based incentive structures, early-stage investments, and structured project-based financing that enabled evidence-based interventions. Prior to Pact, Brian was a director at Quantified Ventures, where he designed outcomes-based transactions for nonprofit and for-profit social enterprises. With McKinsey & Company's Strategy/Corporate Finance and Public/Social Sector Practices, Brian advised clients on a range of topics including economic development, growth strategies, capital allocation, operational turnarounds, and transaction structuring. Previously, he was with Macquarie's Private Equity Group and Jefferies & Company Investment Bank. Brian also sits on the Board of Directors at Pacific Community Ventures, Public Knowledge and if, A Foundation for Radical Possibility. He holds an MBA and BS from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.

Corianne Payton Scally is a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute where she explores affordable housing and community development policy and practice from large cities to rural towns. From evaluating federal programs to assessing philanthropic investments, Scally's research focuses on multiple social determinants of health—from the affordable housing supply to quality drinking water to access to health and human services—and the policy environments and stakeholder capacities that affect community opportunity and well-being. Scally leads mixed method research projects, directing extensive primary data collection via site visits, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, and analysis of secondary and administrative data to evaluate program processes, performance, and outcomes. Recent studies have focused on how technical assistance is provided to housing organizations, how service coordination works for residents of public housing, how to preserve and increase affordable rental housing supply through innovative finance and collaboration, and how to improve rural data and support asset-based development via a national typology of rural census tracts. Her work has been published in books, research reports, policy briefs, and refereed journals and featured on NPR, Marketplace, the Washington Post, and USA Today. She started her career as a housing and community economic developer and earned tenure as an associate professor of urban planning. From 2015-2016, she led data and research initiatives at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service under contract with the Urban Institute. She received her PhD in urban planning and policy development from Rutgers University.