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INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM USA 2021
100% Online: How to close the Internet access gap once and for
all
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>> DUSTIN LOUP: All right, everyone. Welcome back from the
break. I hope you enjoyed the brief time off from the discussion,
but we're ready to jump back in and get talking about how we bring
100% people online, and so I'm going to hand it over to Jane Coffin
to moderate this panel. I'm looking forward to the discussion.

>> JANE COFFIN: Thank you very much, Dustin. I wanted to
make sure that we called you out specifically for all the great work

that you're doing, and to thank Ann Hagens from our team who helped
organize this panel, to the captioner who is about to help capture
the captioning because this is so important for the accessibility
and for the live stream, and a quick thank you in advance. We have
an amazing group of humans today to speak to you about making sure
we're all online, and as we know during the pandemic, the Internet
has been our life line, so how do we get 100% of the humans around
the planet and in the United States online and close the Internet
access gap once and for all? For those of you that don't know me,
I've been working in 9 access and connectivity space from the
private sector side, government side, nonprofit side for over 20
years and it has been a preoccupation of mine to see people get
connected, and part what have we do at the Internet Society. What
we have before you today is a fabulous group of panelists. We've
got Michelle Connolly, Professor at Duke University, and can you see
the full bio on Internet Governance Forum USA landing page. Alonso
Melendez, the inclusion coordinator. Alonso, help me later. Sonia
Jorge from Alliance for Affordable Internet, the Executive Director,
and Donald Cravins Executive Vice President and Chief Operating
Officer for the National Urban League.

     The way the panel will work is that I'm going to ask some intro
questions to our panelists, and I'm going to start with Alonso and
move to Michelle and Sonia and Donald. And so for those of you
that are just joining us, get ready for a great interaction with
some super people spending their lives working on connectivity
issues.

     Alonso, you are working at the local level, and we're trying to
frame this conversation for the people watching here at IGF USA
about the local, regional, the global perspectives on connectivity,
the issues related to affordability and to digital equity and
inclusion, the economics, the financing. All of you are involved
in that, and Alonso, you're really involved at that local level.
Libraries around the world have been an anchor institution for
connectivity, not only in the United States but globally, and many
of us work with those institutions. Help us understand from your

perspective what happened during the pandemic from the library side and what you do generally to help with digital equity inclusion and connectivity from that very local and important execution style and practical perspective to connect people.

>> ALONSO MELENDEZ: Yeah. Hello, everyone. Hopefully you can all hear me okay. So, yeah, the library -- so pre-pandemic, I'm going to start with pre-pandemic, we host about 2 million Internet sessions a year, so that's a lot of people coming to the library to use the Internet. And, you know, I think that the library has always been a place for access. All right. We moved to really -- well, and I can really speak -- so it's Multnomah County Library and we really try to be equitable with the services and making sure folks are aware of the services and resources that we have and doing our best to make everyone feel welcome and invited to the library to access those resources. And even within those efforts, we still find that there are communities of color that don't see the library as a place for them. So, you know, we're still working on that. We're definitely making some movement, but it's -- there is still a stigma associated with libraries and who libraries are for.

So, during the pandemic what we've done, and so again I'm going to speak mostly from our Multnomah County Library, and I did some research on what other libraries were doing. I can say that there were libraries that stayed open in some capacity during the pandemic, and they had limited capacity for people to come in to use computers to get online and they had very limited capacity to provide one-on-one support for people that needed that tech support, folks didn't know how to use technology or computers or navigate a website. That was greatly reduced due to the pandemic, and really the pandemic really just kind of highlighted the need for access to Internet, computers, and training.

When it comes to training, there are different things that need to be considered for that training to be successful, for it to be beneficial and effective for people, and really thinking about adult learners, English language learners, and just different levels of education or literacy that we need to consider when we

try to develop training. Then, of course, there is also accessibility issues, mobility issues, what kind of limitations do people have physically to be able to access and be successful with training.

So, there are a lot of things that kind of go into what we're trying to do, what our county library has done is we kind of started late in the game in terms of trying to provide services to people and access to Internet and computers during the pandemic. There was a lot of concern, you know, there was a lot of unknowns, and so we wanted to be strategic and safe, as safe as possible, to bring people into libraries or to access our services.

So, about well let me see. When was it? Back in October we developed a program to do a tech lending program to provide computers and hotspot for people to use at their home. That went pretty well. We got some finding through the CARES act and we had some funding already through the library foundation, and we used that money to buy 500 hotspots, 500 Chrome books and lended them out to community organizations. We wanted to be strategic these got into the hands of people with little to no access, so thinking about people low income, people disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, thinking of those already marginalized communities. It started with a small group of people doing the work and kind of grew a little bit in, let's see, in March of this year I took that program and started actually going out to the community and doing outreach events to provide mobile computer labs, and so really kind of giving people access in the community to be able to get online to use a computer and to have that one-on-one tech support. So that's something more recent that we've been doing.

Yeah. Did I answer the question?

>> JANE COFFIN: You, absolutely answered the question. And it's amazing to see during a pandemic, you've created a tech-lending program, which I think is probably something that's going to last passed the pandemic, I bet and there's probably demand in the community for inclusion, to feel like there is a group there looking at them at that local level to help them get online and to access

connectivity.

>> ALONSO MELENDEZ: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it started as a pilot program, and it's now a permanent program and we're going to get some more Chrome books and hot decision spots to expand this program. There are groups that don't have Internet, can't afford it, and we've been hearing about this all throughout today's discussions and panels, and so it's really something that we can't say, okay, the pandemic is over or almost over and we don't have to continue this. No, we do have to continue this. Another direction we're moving in is trying to make these programs accessible to people, again, in the community but also during times that they're available and not when we're available to provide it, but when they're available to access it. So really thinking of working families, thinking of multiple children, and trying to provide these mobile computer labs in places and areas for people that -- and during times that people can actually access them, so also actually late in the evenings.

>> JANE COFFIN: This is really interesting in the demand side. I'm going to shift to Michelle, who knows more about demand-side issues than I do. But Michelle, and then we'll turn to Don after Michelle. Michelle with the work that you're doing and the money we're seeing out there in the community. Alonso is giving us a head's up of the CARES act money and millions and billions going into infrastructure in Washington DC where I am, and the Senate and House are talking about what to do with the money on infrastructure on that side. Alonso's shown us that there is demand in local communities, probably latent demand that we're just seeing and it's not just there and probably around the world. Talk about what you're seeing in the money side, on the financing and the economics from your perspective with respect to how do we get more people online, how do we make this more affordable, how do we make this sustainable, because sustainability is so critical. We can't just be looking at money going somewhere and not having accountability, so let us know what you're thinking and seeing, this would be really helpful to this conversation.

>> MICHELLE CONNOLLY: Okay. So, I think there are kind of two dimensions when we talk about -- or when you ask about money. One is there was a discussion of where there is investment in broadband and how that impacts access, and so that's one discussion. Another discussion is then how do prices affect demand or affect affordability and things like that. And those are in some ways two different discussions.

On how money affects -- I shouldn't say accessibility, but the provision of broadband, I mean we've really greatly increased the provision of broadband throughout the United States, so literal access is less of an issue -- much less of an issue than it was five years ago even.

And I think so now a lot of the discussion is more about the digital divide in a sense of even if there is access, why are we still seeing a digital divide and why is this not -- you know, why are things not improving on that side.

And what I have seen from other people's research and from what I've looked at in some of the census data on this is what's surprising is there clearly -- traditional factors that one expects such as income levels or education, do play a role but things like age or presence of children, these things dwarf the impacts of other factors that we're talking more about. And listening to what was just presented, I've been thinking there have been some programs where like in Connecticut, they were offering free computers, free Internet service, and yet they're still not getting full takeup. And so, I think there are a lot of issues within communities that can be digital literacy, and even computers were being offered as well, and like everything was potentially being offered and households were still not necessarily doing this. And there can be an issue that if households are moving frequently, then it's difficult to set up each time, or households might be afraid to give out their information even if something is free or potentially free if they're worried that something will happen later on or they might be on the hook for costs later or they're just afraid of giving their information out. So, I think there are

a lot of issues that we need to think about that are very important, and I think when they're talking about the libraries and teaching is so important because it does seem like knowing how to access is very important, and that's also, so in terms of the digital divide, I see it, in my own research, I see it as two things. One is, do you find the Internet relevant? If you're 90 years old and you've never used it before, then you don't care if it's free even if someone paid each month, you might still not want to deal with it. And so for those households, we're not going to really shift things much.

But there are other households that do find the Internet relevant, and historically have relied on smartphone-only access, which until COVID, was pretty good and that, you know, but then COVID changed things dramatically in a sense that you might have been happy with smartphone access at home because then you could go to work and access it there or to a library and access it there, you know, you had access outside of the home. But with COVID, you lost the outside access, and the need for, you know, high speed and high quality really increased at home because you might be working from home. If you had children, they were going to school at home, and so I think there was a big shift in relevance of Internet to the home, of high-speed Internet to the home for a large percent of our population who previously had been happy or reasonably happy with a smartphone.

And, in fact, the key research kind of shows this, that the percentage of people that used to say smartphone access only was sufficient, it went down -- I wrote this somewhere. It used to be 80% in 2019, and then in 2021, in early 2021, they were saying only 71% of those who currently did not have Internet or broadband service to the home were now saying that -- I'm sorry. This said they were not interested in the Internet at all, but what I was saying before is still true in terms of the smartphones.

So, I think COVID has really shifted relevant, not of the Internet, not relevance of broadband but relevance of broadband to the home, so that's -- you know, if someone doesn't care for

service, then I don't care if they don't have it. I don't think we have to force things upon people. But the issue is really if people have a need for it, have a desire for it and they're still not getting it, why is that?

But like in the case I'm talking about in Connecticut with the schooling program, it wasn't cost, in a sense that they were able to have everything for free and yet you still had a large, a very large percent who weren't signing up. That's a big problem and a big question to solve. I think even at the end of that report, they were talking about we feel that we need more people who can actually go to the home and help them set this up. I mean if the parents are not educated, if they don't speak English or they're just not educated and they've never used a computer before or don't use it frequently, it can be -- that can be a hurdle to figure out how to do this. I mean I spent all day today trying to get Internet service, and I know a fair amount about this, and I really had trouble today to do that. So, I can imagine that if someone isn't in a profession that's regularly doing this, it's very difficult and how do they do that if they're trying to set it up just for their children to go to school for the first time. So, I think a lot of this one-on-one interaction and helping is very important.

>> JANE COFFIN: Yeah, and I think we've heard from Alonso and what we're seeing also from some of the community-led networks that we work with around the word, particularly in New York City, for example, there were a lot of parents who did not have connectivity at home because they couldn't afford it, or they -- the kids were learning at school and the affordability and availability was there and I think what we're seeing from you on that demand side or potential for demand and supply is that there are people that may not know enough about where to get that connectivity, and they may not be able to afford it right now. I'm from Maine and there were actually several families in the area where I'm from who couldn't afford to have connectivity at home and they had to rejigger their finances to figure out what to do. With the schools closed, it

showed us that there is this role that local urban municipalities can play, cities, towns, states and really looking at what's the game changer of public and private access, and I think Don knows a lot about this from the Urban League. So, I'm going to turn to Don right now and we'll come back to you, Michelle, on this one. But Don, you've got a new report out from the Urban League side and I want to make sure I get this right, because you saw during the pandemic there were millions of Americans affected who lost access because of the schools, their place of work, libraries, coffee shops closed, and access to broadband was limited and/not there. This disproportionate availability of access also impacted certain groups, African Americans, people of color, those in rural America and low-income families. This is not new. We've seen from Larry Irving that I used to work with at NTIA back in 1997 the falling through the network reports, and Don you're smiling so I have a feeling you know Larry, and to address the digital divide that we see in this country and Sonia and I see, the plan for digital equity and inclusion, can you give us more information about that, share some details and recommendations to address the digital equity divide that you're seeing?

>> DONALD CRAVINS: Thank you so much, Jane. Good afternoon to all of the panelists and everyone joining today. I apologize for being a little late but it seems like I came in at the right time. Because Michelle could have written the Lewis Latimer program or project because many of the things she talked about are the issues that we addressed, and you know the National Urban League is around since 1910 and we serve 91 communities with our local affiliates and we're a civil rights organization that was developed when African Americans were leaving the deep south and trying to escape Jim Crow right after reconstruction ended and they moved up north thinking we need to get a job, we need a school to send our kids to, hospitals that we can get health care, and a home. And that was the divide then.

The Urban League has been working on the divides of this country, the racial-wealth gap and those divides for 111 years.

The most recent one that we've been able to put attention on, all of us, is on this digital divide and that's exactly what the Lewis Latimer Project and Plan was about. It's named after an African American investor and it was how do we address these issues, and Michelle hit them literally on the point. The first one, obviously, is the availability gap, the ability to just have available broadband that brings us into the 21st Century and as we know in rural America especially, I work for the National Urban League but I grew up as a Black boy from southwest Louisiana in the country, and I know my parents struggled with availability and access and many of our Latino communities in the rural parts of this country and African American community struggle with that and that's why we're a big support of the infrastructure which is what brought Michelle to the topic. We believe infrastructure is not just roads and bridges but also access to the 21st Century. The gap that I want to talk about the most though is the adoption gap, which is what Michelle talked about as well, which is just really looking at that in two ways, one is affordability which I'll come to, and then this digital readiness.

We believe organizations like the National Urban League and others, the library, Michelle you said something, it's about trust. You brought up that we can offer things for free. We have low-cost programs. Why is it that some people are still not getting -- and they get it, but why is it they're not buying it? Why are they not truly investing in it? And some of it is trust. It's having the right person, Alonso communicate to the people in the community why this is important for your health, job, future, education, checking and paying bills, and that's why it's so important and why we stand for programs, grants, opportunities and that people that know their communities should be the people that are saying these things to these people, and it's going to take time and be surgical because we're really trying to get to the last millions of Americans to say hey, this is good for you and we want to make it good for you. We believe that there has to be a digital empowerment movement is what we call it at the National Urban League where we empower people by

teaching digital literacy and readiness.

Affordability, we have low-cost broadband plans now, many companies offer it and people still aren't able to afford it. It's hard for those of us with means to even think that if your broadband is $14, can't you get it and some people cannot. And so that's why the Urban League and the Latimer Project, we're big supporters of creating a permanent broadband benefit that we're asking Congress to appropriate money to the FCC to help people, to subsidize people's ability to get online. We believe that is a -- that is the way we can really -- it may not solve everything but it's definitely a solution that needs to be considered, so we've used this Latimer Program, Project, Jane, to not just put out a great report, and you have the link to it in the chat, but we used it to advocate. So, we're on the Hill, we're meeting with the White House, we're got our 91 affiliates, we've got all of the people that lived this over the last year that are advocating and letting people know that this is a big issue.

And I'll say this, it's not -- minorities in our country, sometimes we have people that advocate for us and we are shut out of the advocacy. And this is an issue that we have been very clear to all communities, and our White Allies and Allies from all other groups, we have to -- we have an opportunity right now to make this better, and if we don't and we get stuck again in the other pandemic or another crisis, some of us may not make it out of that. So, we need to make sure that we get this right and we get it right now, and so we are at an inflection point in the country in so many ways, but even in this digital divide, and so I want to just say and then I'll stop, I want to just thank IGF for even hosting this forum. This is what we need to be talking about and we need diverse voices talking about it. I don't mean just racially diverse, but diverse backgrounds, libraries and experts and civil rights organizations, so I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate.

>> JANE COFFIN: Thank you, Don. There is a saying that we have at the Internet Society when we're working with local

communities wherever they are, which is we the community, for the
community, by the community. Doesn't matter what kind of community
it is, urban, rural, remote, unserved, underserved and picking up on
the point of minorities left out on the advocacy side, we often go
in not trying to speak for communities but with them, at their pace
and as they like, and I'm thinking of tribal communities in the
United States as well, the tribal window that the FCC opened up to
provide some more connectivity, and there are a lot of great
programs going right now based on tribal needs, at their pace, as
they themselves want to advocate with support from behind. So,
thank you for highlighting through the Latimer Report and the work
that you're doing, the importance of making sure that you're not
trying to speak for others when you're going out there to provide
that connectivity.

    You highlighted affordability, picking up on the adoption gap
that Michelle mentioned and the importance of working with local
people to get that advocacy out there. Advocacy is critical.
We've got to raise the issues up around the planet, and there is a
person here on the panel, that would be Sonia Jorge who is doing
just that through the great reports that they have focused on
universal service and I want to throw out we see a need for hybrid
finance, hybrid regulation, and hybrid everything because some of
the old system is broken. This may not necessarily be in this
country but around the planet the old universal service funds
didn't do the job, we're seeing a need for different creative types
of financing and for organizations like AFRAI the library league,
the work Michelle is doing at the University at Duke to highlight
how we can do research to address that affordability gap, highlight
what needs to be done and advocate and work with others. So,
Sonia, over to you to give us a perspective on what you're doing
related to bringing people online and how you're addressing it with
your partners.

    >> SONIA JORGE: It's really highlighting to hear everyone
speak about the reality in the U.S. and the different states. As
you all know, probably, we focus most of our work in developing

countries, in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South and as you can imagine the situation is much more dire than it is for those of us here in the U.S. There are some similarities, and I think what is interesting is actually understanding what are the similarities, what are the challenges, and how in different countries we're able to and trying to address some of these challenges in a way that not only can we learn about them here in the U.S., but also make sense of them, especially around the discrepancies and inequalities that exist in different communities.

So just to put a little bit of perspective, and some of you may know these data well. Let me just share a little bit. In regions we focus most of our work, Africa, Latin America and Asia-Pacific. In Africa about 29% of the population is online, in the Americas you have about 77% of the population online, and in the Pacific, Asia and Pacific, about 45% of the population online. Now, this is very different of a situation than you have in the U.S. The other thing that is really important, and in the U.S. it's about 80%, depending on which data point you're looking at and maybe you can all correct me on that.

The other thing that is important is understanding the different gaps that exist in access. You may say 29% of the population online in Africa, but in fact 85% -- there is an 85% gender gap meaning that there are some people online, but most that are online, women are not online, and then as you break down into different groups and communities, poor populations are not online and other kinds of marginalized groups. This is true across the board in different regions.

Now, why is that important here to compare with the U.S.? What we've learned, and again to some of the points that Don was mentioning, is that there are many alternative ways in which not only we make sure that people have access, but make sure that once they have access, they can actually benefit from the opportunity that that access provides to them. Right.

So, I apologize. So, affordability is the key concern and that's why we are The Alliance for Affordable Internet, very

concerned about affordability in many respects and focus primarily and work with government, private sectors and society organizations to develop policy and regulatory solutions that tackle affordability issues in different ways. One is by overall reducing the cost structure in the industry, which is really important and it's a really big challenge. But also, we look at how even when there is infrastructure, how can we then have the kinds of programs that compensate either through subsidies or otherwise the kind of traditional cost, right, that the industry insists that it has to provide connectivity. And this is why the U.S., for example, we have the high-cost fund and other kinds of universal access programs, and similarly in other countries we have those. The thing is the magnitude of the problem is much bigger and so even when you have, say for example, in some regions of the world, coverage of say as the industry likes to say about 80% or 90% coverage of 3G and 4G broadband, in reality it's that a sliver of the population actually has access to that. Right. Cost is a main issue. And frankly, this is actually just to try to kind of keep the comparison alive here, and that is also a problem in the U.S. There are some areas in the U.S. that are supposedly covered by broadband networks. We like to look at broadband as kind of 4G and above, 3G is kind of what the pandemic has shown is not enough for the kind of activities that people need to connect online, right, including schooling, health care, and business, et cetera.

But the truth is that there isn't, you know, while there is infrastructure, it's not affordable for people who come online. Even when it is affordable, there are those issues that many of you already highlighted, the skills, content, language, content in the right language, information that is relevant for the different communities. If say the information in a particular community, and again this is true in other countries as it is in the U.S., if the majority of the information online is information that is not relevant to people's lives, either not relevant for them to support their family or their kids' education or for them to have education to health information, for them to help civically in their

communities, it's not going to be relevant, and so access to the
Internet has to be relevant, different languages, different content
and content that is relevant for everyone and not just through a
few elite or a few that may seem to be a majority but are not all.
And so all of these pieces of the puzzle need to come together, and
one of the things that needs a few things that I wanted to share
with you, and I know we'll have more discussions, Jane.

One is that when we think about infrastructure investments, and
this is an area where we have spent a lot of time thinking about,
not only calculating what the investments needed are, but when you
think about investments, we cannot neglect the investment that is
needed, and we need investment in communities, skills, skill
building, programs for communities, as well as the policy and
regulatory kind of investments needed to facilitate the kind of
access that is required for those communities that tend to be left
outside of the equation. So say, for example, in many countries
that we are working in Southern Africa, Asia, Latin America, we've
been focusing a lot on making sure that spectrum policies, such
that offers spectrum and license spectrum and spectrum in kind of
the white spaces that rural operators, smaller operators, community
networks as Jane mentioned earlier, are able to provide access, not
only in a much more affordable price, but what we discover is that
those kind of alternative providers are more likely to develop
community programs that will come with programs to help with
skills, programs and content that is relevant to the communities.
Generally, larger MNOs, mobile network providers are not so
interested in the communities at that point, at that level, so it's
not just about making sure that there is investment but that the
investment is one that is very specific to meeting the needs of the
populations that are being left behind or outside of the
opportunity, and then also making sure that the content is
relevant. Right. Policy is really important to support the mesh
network example in New York is a good example, and Jane, I don't
know to what extent that particular community of network also
provides skills but I imagine they probably do and probably are

connected with the library, schools, et cetera, and so it's looking
at that whole picture holistically that really makes a difference.

     And just to close on this point. What we insist and really
advocate for at the Alliance is that we don't just look at
affordability but we look at affordable and meaningful connections,
affordable and meaningful connectivity, and the reason that is the
case is because we cannot accept the situation where you have cub
connectivity or poor Internet access as there is in many
communities and many parts of the world, and what we mean by
meaningful connectivity, we mean access to this daily, regular,
whatever people need. We need connectivity that is to the right
data, to the right speed, the right data alliance, and also with
the right device. What that says is because we're considering also
devices and affordable devices, that devices also have to be part
of the equation and that goes to the reason why libraries are so
critical, right, Alonso here we've also written an interesting
piece, my colleague wrote an interesting piece about the role of
libraries in ensuring meaningful connectivity to different
communities and not just in other parts of the world, but I would
say also here in the U.S. and there has been some interesting work
in that area.

     So, I'll stop there and we'll come back to these again, but
hopefully this gives you a bit of a broader picture of how we look
at the question.

       >> JANE COFFIN: Thank you, Sonia. You've given us that great
global perspective, which is back to also our local level.
Michelle, we've seen the fact that, yes, things may not be
affordable in certain places and they may need more skills, and you
wanted to come back to this so I'm going to start with you,
Michelle. But I want to sort of pivot the conversation a little bit
and ask this question about the importance of affordability and
startup financing or subsidies, because let's be frank that some
projects can't get off the ground without a little bit of help. For
example, the CARES act of putting money in libraries to start them
up. Some stay no funding, no startup, but let's be frank,

everywhere around the world there are subsidies for infrastructure or networks and community grants to get started because they may not have the liquidity in their own market. Here is the question. What do you think about more public spending for startup for equity and inclusion training and for, say, libraries to go out to the communities? So, help us there from the economic, and I'm going to start with Michelle, go over to Don, hop over to Alonso and back to Sonia because sometimes we see a need for startup, companies have startup funding so why not nonprofits and libraries and others, so what's your perspective on this, Michelle?

        >> MICHELLE CONNOLLY: Okay. So I will address that but before -- I kind of -- an attendee made a good point that I was being not careful with some of my language, but I feel like right now your question is a little not careful in its language because we've been talking about many, many issues and you keep referring and keep saying that this is all having to do with the affordability gap, and I think a lot of what we're talking about is affordability is really a very, very small component of what's driving the gap, at least in the United States.

        Now, I would totally agree in developing nations that's a completely different story, but there is work by Rostin that have shown even when you're -- so I have an issue -- I take issue with the term of affordability gap. The other thing I wanted to take issue with is, then you said well then we need to -- you know, the community needs to do things, and I agree that the community needs to do things in terms of helping with digital literacy, helping to show relevance and things like that; however, recent work that I'm currently doing right now with a co-author, we've been looking at municipal Internet service provision and cooperative Internet service provision, and we're looking at the State of Illinois, at the census block level, and we're limited in a sense that we're using FCC data which is not very granular, kind of an all-or-nothing for census block, but still pretty good. And one thing that we found, we're looking from June of 2016 to June of 2018, and we're looking at the probability of entry of an Internet

service provider during that time period.

What we discovered is that while incumbents generally lead to more entry in the future, you know, probably because these are good markets, and were controlling for marketed factors, the demographic, all of those things, the income, geography, all of those things. So, while incumbents generally lead to higher probabilities of further entry by Internet service providers, if an incumbent happens to be a municipality, it lowers the likelihood of a new entrant by 72% relative to if the incumbent were not. And if the incumbent is a cooperative Internet service provider, it lowers it by 87%. And there are some real reasons to understand that, and a lot of those are regulatory, because municipal utilities and cooperative utilities have differential treatments and have differential abilities to impact competition.

So we had been looking at that to see how the presence of these organizations impacted continued investment, continued entry and continued investment, and the fact that we see such a huge decrease in the likelihood of any other provider wanting to go into that area, is a really strong indicator that those are not the providers that we want to be with our new regulations or with our new subsidies, we should not be prioritizing groups that seem to have a negative effect on investment locally. I'm not saying to harm, but there is a problem with me saying these are the ways that we're going to help because municipal ISPs are not in the areas that we're worried about the digital divide, and so municipal ISPs were actually in higher-income areas and more urban areas, not rural on average, at least in Illinois when we looked at this. They were in average in areas with higher income levels than a regular Internet service provider, so the idea of looking to municipalities and giving money to try to solve the digital divide is kind of a non-starter because they're not even in the big areas where that's really the big issue and most of the time they're not the first entrant.

>> JANE COFFIN: Thank you. Perhaps I mistake. It's not just affordable but access. There is a reason there are the words

unserved and underserved and universal service language and the ones we're all using, we're working around the world, and you've brought up some really interesting points and we've seen a differential in some of them, if you're talking about tribal communities where there are community-led networks because of the tribal sovereignty issues, but also in certain urban, rural, remote areas there is this access gap, right. So, with respect to the infrastructure itself and the affordability of that infrastructure, we also know that there are certain companies that don't get a return on investment for serving certain populations under say 5,000 and we've learned that from GSMA, MNOs, but that also means that there is a way for the public space to work with the private space, whether it's PPP or whether it's investment in public backbones. I'm going to turn to Don, and then Alonso, I'm sorry, Sonia. Don, what are you saying with respect to both the affordability and access gap? If we're trying to get 100% of the population online, and we also know from the World Bank and other financial institutions that more connectivity equals stronger socioeconomic development, so talk to us about that from the Urban League perspective.

     >> DONALD CRAVINS: The Urban League perspective is we need to focus on areas where there are no dollars today and that's a very complicated issue and we get caught up in the technicalities of it and I get it but that's where we are. Let us find the best ways to deploy in places that don't have it, and as you said, Jane, a lot of those places right now are real rural areas. I mean a lot of the folks who we serve in the national urban league in the cities of America, the argument would be made that they absolutely have access, absolutely have access to high-speed broadband and then we go to the next issue, which is again, how do we pay for it? How do you afford it? So again, we believe the solution is a permanent broadband benefit like SNAP where we subsidize and we give people a benefit who cannot afford even the low-cost programs that are out there, we give them an opportunity to participate in the new economy, and I look forward to the day, ladies and gentlemen, where we're not just talking about access. We're talking about

empowerment by the broadband, by connectivity. We're talking about businesses and being able to bring opportunities to people who never would have been able to dream of these opportunities. Like I feel like we have a tone here today, and I get it, we're still in a pandemic. Our country, especially, an inflection of a lot of things, trust me as a civil rights worker, I wake up every day, but we should also be talking about the power of it, of connectivity, and the positive of it once we get it to everyone. I don't want us to go down a rabbit hole of, we have done some good things too, and there are a lot of people connected and we know we're going to do better and let's do it make sure get people the access they need. Then the third thing is then once we do bring organizations in that people trust and I do believe in government being able to grant organizations, library, schools, helping people of all ages feel comfortable, giving people incentives with equipment to make sure they can learn how to do it, and again this may be the time, and this is the one revolution that all Americans get to participate in. Most of us couldn't participate in the agricultural revolution, we were enslaved, the Industrial Revolution missed many of us, immigrants who were not here and African Americans and Jim Crow stopped us from doing that. This is a revolution if we do it right for the entire country, the entire world that everybody can participate in. So, I just hope that we will, yes, as we work through the nuances and God knows there are a lot of them, we'll see the benefit or the bright side of it. I will say this, I left the Urban League two years ago and I went to a telecommunications company, and I'm back at the Urban League. I want to say this because this never gets said. I do see a sense, because I've been on both sides of the issue in some ways, and I absolutely do see some communication, no pun intended, between industry and civil rights that did not exist years ago. It's not that they weren't talking, but there were certain issues they were not going to be on the same side of it. I am happy to see that we're working through some tough issues that I never in a million years thought we would be able to work through, so there is some good news in this space,

and I hope that we can continue to work together, and again I said this, that's why these panels are important and I'm watching the chat. So, I love the chats, and there are a lot of experts in the chat and I can see that too. There are a lot of people that know this issue a lot better than me. I will say every day, the people on this panel, we wake up to make people's lives better but let's not have a negative tone on this panel. I don't want us to leave here that this is the worst, this is terrible, no. We have work to do, we've made a lot of progress, and we can get there if we work together and come up with some good common-sense, trustworthy programs that bring this to the last group of millions of people that need this in America.

>> JANE COFFIN: Thank you for that word of trust and empowerment. Absolutely. This is something that we all do wake up every day and we want to connect people, we want to make sure that businesses thrive, we want to make sure that communities have what they have. From the library side, Alonso, Don and Michelle and Sonia have been talking about different ways we can look at bridging accessibility, affordability gaps, empowering communities, trust, business, connectivity, you're at local level and a trusted person in the community, so what did you do during COVID that was different, perhaps, to build more trust because people were in a different situation? It was a complicated time, and what have you seen from that trust side with the library, as the library is seen as a trusted entity, and was that transferred to you as a person going out into the community? Give us a little bit more on that.

>> ALONSO MELENDEZ: Yeah. So and I really appreciate that, you know, this kind of theme is showing up about trust and accessibility and affordability and about relevance, right.

You know, I think that Michelle made a comment about affordability, and you know that -- maybe that's not the biggest or the bigger issue, but you know I think it depends. There are communities that I work in and gone out and done outreach in that, you literally cross the street and you're in a very different world. You know, so we have these really rich and really affluent

neighborhoods with affluent families with people who had money for
generations, and literally crossing the street is a complete
different situation and scenario. Those folks have accessibility
because the infrastructure is there, but again we go back to
affordability. You know, and there are those real studies, those
situations where like even with our tech-lending program where we
have it and it's free, and libraries, toot the horn a little, it's
not only free but there are no fees if devices are damaged or not
returned or just broken. And whereas other library, there is like
a contract you have to sign and it's returned broken and not in
working order then you have to pay for the device. We don't have
that, so I'm kind of really proud of MCL for that. But even so,
you know there are areas that can have connectivity, but again
can't afford it. And if they go for that low-income program, that
subsidized program like Comcast Internet essentials program which
is like $10 a month, it's not sufficient, and if you got three kids
in school trying to use that connection, it's not going to work for
them. And so the affordability is still real. It's still an issue
for many families, for many individuals.

     But the other piece of trust and accessibility, it's like a
challenge. We have -- I mentioned 500 hotspots, 500 Chromebooks
and we're down to about 140 and lent out the majority of them, and
we're trying to get the others lend out. Some of the conversations
I have is about trust. You're a government agency, you're part of
the county, I don't know if I can trust the county. What are you
going to do with my information? Are you going to give my
information to the immigration? You know, is immigration going to
find out I'm accessing resources and if they do what does it mean
for my citizenship application and there are real fears and
concerns and questions. A lot of it is just the reassurance,
patience, being able to connect with people in a culturally
responsive way and linguistically responsible way, so having people
represent the communities, live in the communities, reflect the
communities, provide the resources, to answer the questions, to be
the representative that's connecting with them. That consistency,

to have that same person to be able to show up multiple times in a month and say, oh, you know what, there goes Alonso again, I know him, we can trust him, he's a trustworthy person.

So, you know, all of those things kind of come into play when we're trying to connect people to these resources that are free, you know, because it is true that you can have free resources but are people going to take them on. And sometimes, no. But again, it depends on the work being put into -- what kind of investment are you making into relationships, are you building community, are you establishing those connections and making people feel that like, yes, this is a trustworthy program, this is a trustworthy person, and you know so what work is being done there?

And part of it is I think the effort we're making to be out in the community, and so taking our services and moving them away from the building itself. You know, we're not just a building. We're a real resource. We are here to serve you, so trying to make that connection and build that trust.

And in terms of, you know, startups and financing, yeah, I think there needs to be that. We definitely have bailout for banks, so we should have bailout for community member, debt financial support for community members. I feel like that with municipal -- so in the county we did a municipal broadband feasibility survey, and there is some good information that came out of that. I could maybe drop the link in the chat, but basically, there is a place where, you know, if we have a municipal broadband, we can make the market a little bit more competitive and even though there is like as Michelle was commenting, there is like these rich neighborhoods that get these resources, services, infrastructure, but again crossing the street, there is that community that is not rich, that they're not wealthy, they don't have -- they're not making over $100,000 a year, they're making $20,000 a year and so then that infrastructure, that municipal broadband could be very beneficial for those families and individuals.

Another thing we've been doing at the library is connecting

with the house's population. There are encampments that people
created recreation areas and they're at camp sites and people
living in tents, we've been going to those communities and
providing mobile WiFi and computer access, and again you know how
would mobile broadband benefit those communities? Well greatly.
Right. And it's a challenge, it's not easy, there is a lot of work
ahead of us, but as Donald was saying and I really appreciate the
energy there, you know this is empowering and a moment where like,
you know, we could change the narrative. We could completely shift
and make this a whole different world for many people, and that's
the excitement that I have, that's the excitement I come to work
with every day to try to do more, to try to be better, you know,
look at what we have, look at it with an equity lens and say, okay,
how do we improve, how do we grow, what needs to change, and being
very honest and critical about what we're doing and how we're doing
it and who we're serving.

>> JANE COFFIN: Thank you for that, Alonso. Shifting the
narrative is very critical. We have Sonia in the queue and welcome
along Michelle, Don, and Alonso, and but it is really important
to -- we kind of need that empowering narrative which will help the
broadband be accessible to all. Right. And so the accessibility,
the affordability, the local drivers are different for each
community. You've got to know what those drivers are, and Don
you've seen this from the Urban League side and Alonso in the field
and Michelle with the research you're doing and work you've done.
Sonia, talk to us about that trust factor, the empowerment, and how
you shift change and how you create a different narrative because
you've been doing that with it to bring the policymakers and
regulators that you're working with and people in the field.

>> SONIA JORGE: Thank you. Jane. Don, Nigeria, Mozambique,
Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, et cetera, that's exactly what we're
doing, the communities. In fact, the way that we work in all of
these countries is that we've found coalitions of all the different
stakeholders, public, private, Civil Society. And Civil Society
actors are not only super active, but they are fighters. They're

fighters for equality, fighters for equity, and you know really
trying to address a lot of the gaps that exist in all of the
different communities, and we work in both -- within a country at
the very local level and then national level, and sometimes large
like the U.S. and Nigeria and sometimes at the state level, and what
happens is that, yes, the communities are not only very active but
there and want to design policy and regulatory frameworks because
they see the importance to empowering the communities. It's all
about empowerment, and that's one of the reasons why, for example,
we do so much work also on the gender gaps and on the urban gaps and
different kinds of communities because the goal here is not just
access for the sake of access or investment for infrastructure but
to make sure it's useful and provides an opportunity to anyone so
that people can use it however they want, however they determine
that they have agency to determine their own news and put it into
practice. That's really important to us. I mean, this is why when
we talk about affordability, you cannot, we cannot diminish the
importance of affordability because if people cannot afford, that's
the first barrier, right. But even when they can however, afford,
if they cannot do other things that they need to do, then it's also
a barrier. We need to look at the whole package, and so some of you
already mentioned a couple of things here and I just want to
highlight from the numbers that I have, and I think we collected
them late last year. In the U.S., only about 70-73 percent of the
population, and Michelle correct me if I'm wrong, have enough data.
That means that many communities, many individuals, many
organizations, even if they can access or afford the kind of access
that they have is not good enough, it's not going to be enough for
productive activities, for civic activities, for civic
participation, and for the kinds of empowering opportunities that
good data, good speed will provide. So, all of these things come
together.

     Same with devices. You know, in the U.S. it's the country that
 has -- one of the countries in the world that by far has the
 highest usage of smartphones, and I think about 80% at the moment.

The but are smartphones in you have? As all of you pointed out, I mean what the pandemic has shown is that, well maybe in the pre-pandemic world where a lot of things were taking place elsewhere, you know libraries were actually a life line for many people and they may have smartphones but then go to the library when they need a computer or tablet or what have you. My kids here in Boston, half of the kids have their own devices, have subsidies to make sure that at home they also have connectivity. That's wrong, right. That's because the market and the policies that we have is not delivering on what we want universal access to look like. Universal access is not about creating those differences and benefiting from inequalities, but it's the opposite. It's actually taking away those inequalities and making sure that everybody is at the same level playing field, and that's why for us affordable and meaningful connectivity is so important.

So, you have to look at all of those things and in countries in the Global South primarily, there are different ways, again, that these things are being done. Libraries, sadly Alonso, are not as widespread in many countries as we wish, but in some countries they are. Most countries, community centers, you know, even schools and community centers, they're really kind of a magnet and for institutions where a lot happens, local governments as well, and in fact we're working with our colleagues at USAID in the Government of Kenya now to help them device a program to invest in public institutions in schools, three in the first counties in the country. Why? Because those counties in the country have been completely left out of everything due to conflict, due to poverty, and people will not be able to even consider the power of connection or the power of access to information as a basic tool for civic participation unless they have access to it. So, bringing all of these pieces together for us, it's really important, and yes, Jane, it may appear that sometimes you have to deal with the access piece, and you deal with that. Other times you have to look at the content piece, and the language piece. Other times you have to look at the skill's piece because the

access is there, but it's bringing all of this together in a way
that makes sense, and it's only when all of the pieces of the
puzzle that are addressed that people can fully benefit not just
from the digital opportunity as we like to say, but also very
importantly that empowerment opportunity that Don was talking
about. Otherwise, you know, people remain left out and they can't
participate, and that's exactly the kind of picture that we're
trying to change. Jane, if I'm allowed, just one second to answer
a couple of things around the chat. There are so many wonderful
questions.

>> JANE COFFIN: Yep, we've got 10 minutes left. We've got 10
minutes left so I want to make sure I wrap it up.

>> SONIA JORGE: Just mentioning about the connecting humanity
report, just to clarify what that was about. This was an attempt to
try to estimate if we were to bring the world to have basic access,
which we consider in this case equivalent to 4G connectivity,
everywhere in the world, with a caveat that universal access as I
put on the chat is 90% of the population of 10 years and older and
that was very specific, and I can tell you more about that issue if
you want, but that was a specific need to define that kind of target
population in that way.

But the 428 billion, as you pointed out also in the chat, is
not very much. In fact, I like to say to sound provocative that
428 billion from now until 2030 to bring the rest of the world to
that point of universal access is about as much as we spent on soda
every year in the world, and so the amount of money that we spend
on soda, it would be enough to bring the world to a 4G-type
connection by 2030. That's the magnitude of the problem, but it's
also how, you know, doable it is. Right. Imagine the
possibilities that that would do because that comes with skills and
content and all of that, and so I would want to promote you to
think a little bit out of the box when it comes to affordability
and access and think about, yes, the opportunity because that's
exactly what we want to get to. But I'll stop there.

>> JANE COFFIN: Okay. We have about 9 minutes left so I want

to give everybody an opportunity, each of you, 1 minute each. We're
going to go quickly on what you think the key drivers are for
getting people online. So, I'm going to start with Michelle and
going to move to Don, Alonso, Sonia. So, give me a minute,
Michelle, and I'm come back around to you. You'll each have 2
minutes but in 1-minute increments. Michelle one minute on where
you think some of the key things are to get 100% of the Americans
connected, or Sonia, globally people connected. Michelle, over to
you for a minute.

>> MICHELLE CONNOLLY: I'm sorry. I always want to answer a
slightly different question.

>> JANE COFFIN: Push out what you want to push out.

>> MICHELLE CONNOLLY: Sonia was exactly right. You want the
bang for the buck. You want to figure out where you're going to get
value. And so, this is where, it's you have to target what is --
this is why I keep saying what is the question. So, if the question
is affordability because of lack of income, then you want to target
the money helping low-income families. If the issue is
infrastructure, then you want to target infrastructure.

But that's exactly the reason why Alonso, I love what you're
 doing, but I disagree that if, you already have an Internet service
 provider, why spend billions of dollars to get a second one in
 where there is already availability, accessibility. You want to,
 you know, it the issued is if you already have a provider is, you
 know, is on the household side and not on the provision side. The
 point about my research is what is the additional competition from
 the municipality, actually it lowers competition because then we
 see less further entry and also saw less speed, lower speeds. So,
 the communities that had the stuff had less entry and less speed
 because the existing ISPs won't invest as much in quality when
 their competitor is the Muni, and so this idea that you want to
 everywhere bring in an extra competitor through Muni subsidies,
 it's counterproductive. If there is no service at all, but the
 universal service fund and all of these grants are for unserved and
 underserved and yes if someone wants to come in, and they want to

get these things, absolutely. But you want to spend your money
wisely.

        >> JANE COFFIN: Okay. Thank you. The minute is up. Don
over to you.

        >> DONALD CRAVINS: Three ways. A former politician, always
taught to go in three, so three ways is the fastest way to get
Americans online. Three, one, focus deployment on areas with no
access to broadband today. Two, establish a permanent broadband
benefit like I said, similar to SNAP. We have programs in place, we
don't have to recreate the wheel, we can do this. Closes the
affordability and allows low-income families to participate and to
decide what connectivity needs they have and allows them to meet
those needs. Lastly, we talked about this, and it's about digital
education, literacy, readiness, trust, getting people to feel safe
in a safe space and letting and helping them to understand the
benefits of being connected.

    I hope, and this is what I think real equity is. We talk about
 equity, and I know that's not what this panel is about, but real
 equity for me is that everybody is connected and then we're talking
 about people of color and women and others, small businesses,
 participating in the connectivity, in the broadband economy, and we
 never even talk about people of color owning networks and owning
 these economic engines that will come from this. So, I can't wait
 to get to that discussion and that will be another panel, but those
 are my three ways to get us connected and get us connected quickly.

        >> JANE COFFIN: Awesome. Alonso, over to you.

        >> ALONSO MELENDEZ: Thank you, Michelle, and thank you Jane
and thank you for the opportunity to be here. Michelle, I
appreciate what you're saying, and I'm sure that the research shows
that. But the research also shows like how the competitive markets
work. So, when there are more competitors, yes, the prices can go
down. But now what companies choose to do when another competitor
is introduced to the market, that's something that maybe policy
could help with, right, if they're going to like lower speeds and
pull some kind of sneaky trick like that, then yeah, we need to look

at what else we can do to support people and consumers so that that doesn't happen to them.

Even with the EVB that we currently have, you know, we've seen that some of the ISPs are like only applying that to like the most -- the very most economical plans and not to the high-tier plans, and also again, you know, how do we create policy to be able to support a very, I don't know, a better program, right, better programs, better Internet.

But in terms of the things that could bring 100% connectivity, I think Donald said it. Education, digital literacy, and also relevancy, how do we make this relevant to people in their lives for older folk, for a lot of like my family, they're like I don't need that. Like, no, but you do and let me show you how, let me show you the relevance of it. Providing that training, the accessibility and that education I think are some of the key points.

>> JANE COFFIN: Awesome. Thank you very much. Sonia, over to you and I'll wrap it up because I realize we have 3 minutes now so Sonia a minute for you.

>> SONIA JORGE: great. First and foremost for those countries that we focus on, it's all about partnerships and investments and it's more than clear to us that competition alone is never going to lead us there. Market forces alone are never going to get us there. We need a lot more and we need investments that are especially partnerships of public and private sector and much greater partnerships. And so, to give you an idea of development organizations and international financial institutions, invest only about 1% to 2% of their resources in digital infrastructure, and that's nothing, that's peanuts. If we live in a digital society and digital economy, we need a much greater amount of investments to make sure the masses of people unconnected, which is 50% of the world still unconnected, are connected. And then I think we need to change the paradigm and think about digital citizen, and digital citizens come with digital skills, have education, and also understand their rights as citizens not just to be disciplined in

civic life, but also to demand their rights of privacy, data protection, et cetera, that come with the usage of a digital opportunity. And so to me to change the course and to start thinking about the digital citizenship is absolutely critical. And last but not least, we need leaders that think about the public interest. We just don't have enough of them. You know, digital development and access to the Internet is a public good, it is a basic right. If we don't think about it that way, and if leaders don't have the nerve, the guts to do it in that way, I'm sorry for the language, we're not going to get there.

        >> JANE COFFIN: That's okay. 30 seconds.

        >> SONIA JORGE: Public interest, public interest.

        >> JANE COFFIN: Thank you, Sonia. We've gotten great information from Michelle, Sonia, Alonso, Don, thank you so much. We've talked about the importance of access, broadband benefits, education, training, partnership, investment, market forces, and the importance of some intervention in the market when we need it or don't Michelle is doing great organization and Michelle's organization and Dons and Alonso and Sonia and Don in the field, this is great panel and perspectives and we look forward to your work and stay in touch with Dustin so your reports get out there more and more into the public. Again, from the Internet Society's perspective, this was fabulous and thank you very much and thank you to IGF USA. We're on time. Excellent.

        >> DUSTIN LOUP: Thank you for a great discussion and ending on time. That means that all the attendees will get their full 15-minute break here, so reminder that there is networking breakouts. So, if you would like to do that, again, I'm dropping the link in the chat and otherwise we'll plan on seeing you back here in 15 minutes at 4:15 p.m. eastern time for a discussion on content moderation, the social platform dilemma. See you all soon.