

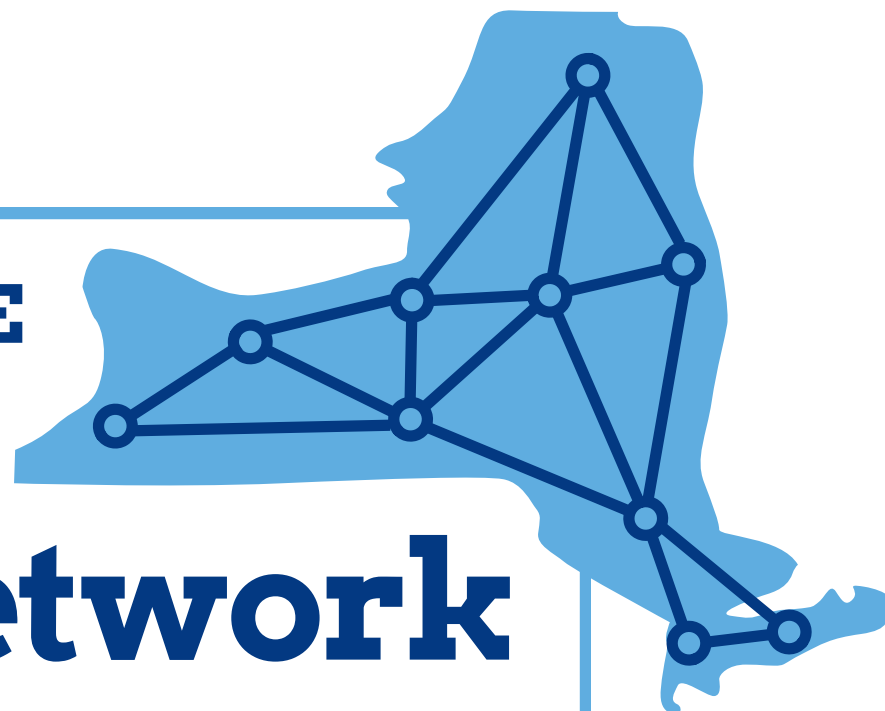
2025 NYS DEN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Advancing Access through Collective Advocacy

IN PARTNERSHIP BY:

NEW YORK STATE

**Digital
EquityNetwork**



Center of Excellence

WIRELESS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY™

ConnectALL

A Division of Empire State Development

Stronger Together: Strategic Case Making to Power NYSDEN's Collective Impact



WORKSHOP



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Building Public Will for Digital Equity

Technical solutions alone won't address digital equity.

Digital equity is an **adaptive challenge**. It demands strategic advocacy that builds public and political will.



The Three Advocacy Traps

1

Backfires

When problem-focused data triggers defensiveness rather than action. Statistics about digital divides can inadvertently reinforce resistance when presented without solutions.

2

Backpacks

The tendency to favor small-scale fixes over systemic change. Individual device donations feel good but don't address the underlying infrastructure and affordability issues.

3

Bedtime Stories

Outdated beliefs that stall meaningful action. The persistent myth that "everyone has internet access now" prevents urgency around addressing real gaps.

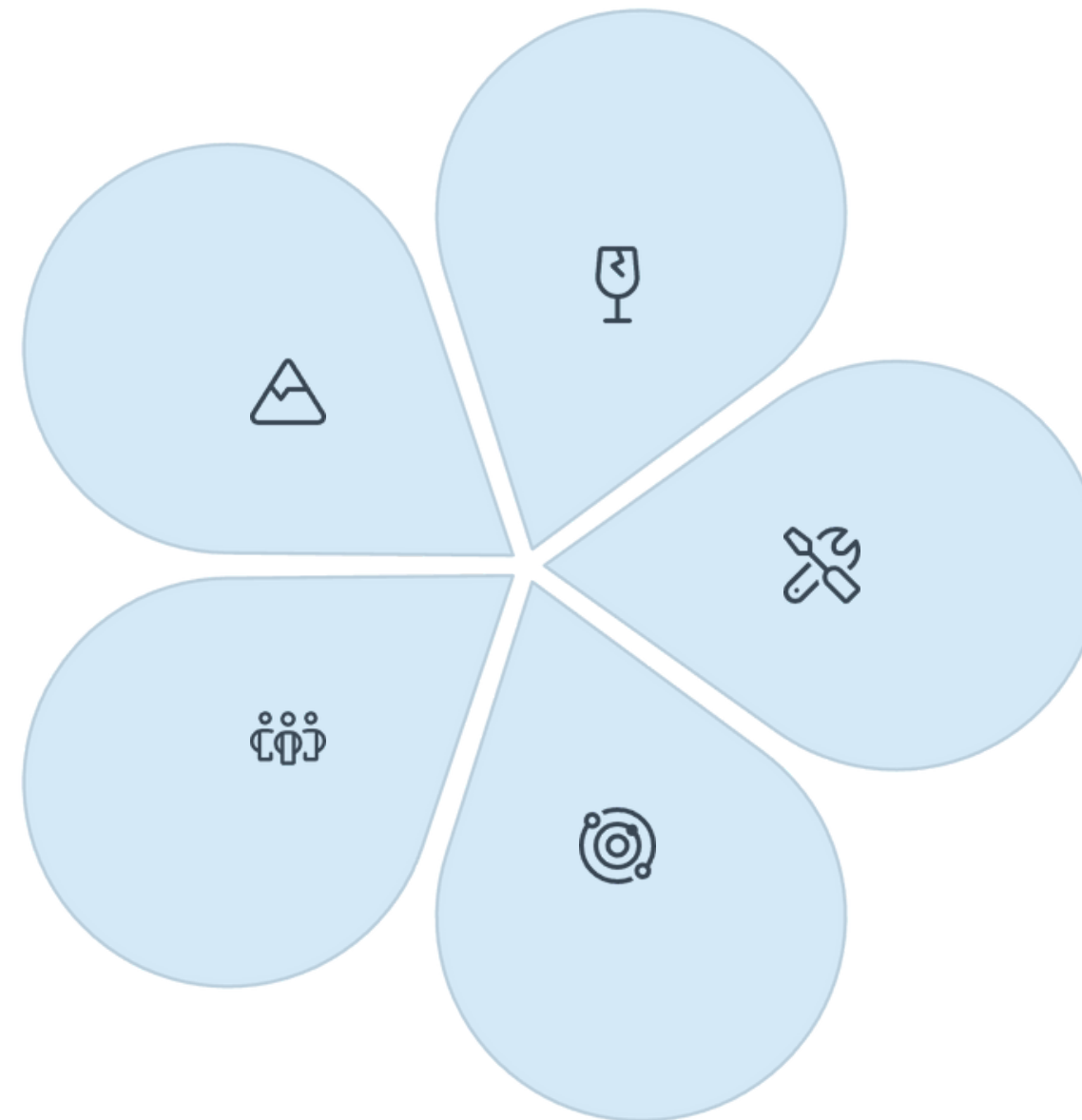
Five Strategic Casemaking Principles

Connect to Aspirations

Frame digital equity as enabling shared community goals rather than as a standalone issue.

Foster Collective Ownership

Create shared responsibility for implementing solutions.



Trigger Loss Aversion

Highlight what stakeholders stand to lose without action on digital equity.

Anchor Solutions

Lead with proven solutions rather than dwelling on problems.

Make Systems the Villain

Target broken systems rather than blaming individuals or organizations.

Case Study: Syracuse Surge Link

-  Families want their children to thrive in school and future careers
-  1 in 5 households lacked internet access due to affordability barriers
-  Existing systems left affordability gaps while ISPs focused on profitable markets.
-  \$10/month high-speed internet for qualifying households
-  City, residents, and partners co-created the solution
-  Thousands connected, boosting student success and job readiness

The logo for Surge Link is displayed on a dark blue background. The word "Surge" is in a light blue, sans-serif font, and the word "Link" is in a white, sans-serif font. A blue Wi-Fi signal icon is positioned above the "i" in "Link".

Bridge of Understanding

Aspirations

What goals does your stakeholder already care deeply about that digital equity enables?

Impediments

What systemic barriers prevent these aspirations from being realized?

Connections

How does digital equity specifically advance their priority goals?

Loss

What do stakeholders stand to lose if they don't act on digital equity now?



Try It Out!

Step 1: Bridge of Understanding (8 minutes)

Working with your group, map your stakeholder's:

- Key aspirations and priorities
- Current impediments they face
- How digital equity connects to their goals
- What they stand to lose without action

Step 2: Draft a 90-second pitch (7 minutes)

Create a compelling case that:

- Focuses on your 1–2 strongest principles
- Leads with solutions, not problems
- Makes systems (not people) the villain
- Connects to stakeholder aspirations



Share-Out & Peer Feedback



Quick Case Presentations

2-3 volunteer groups will present their 90-second digital equity cases to our full workshop.



Peer Feedback

After each presentation, peers will offer structured feedback:

- One specific strength of the case
- One concrete suggestion for improvement

Five More Principles (For Another Time...)

- **Navigating Dominant Narratives**

Strategies to reframe limiting stories about technology access and who "deserves" connectivity.

- **Future Pacing**

Painting a vivid picture of what success looks like after digital equity is achieved.

- **Storytelling (Story of Us)**

Crafting narratives that build collective identity and shared purpose around digital inclusion.

- **Reimagining Your Value Proposition**

Positioning your organization's digital equity work to maximize impact and support.

- **Sharing Roadmap & Metrics**

Creating clear pathways with measurable milestones that demonstrate progress.

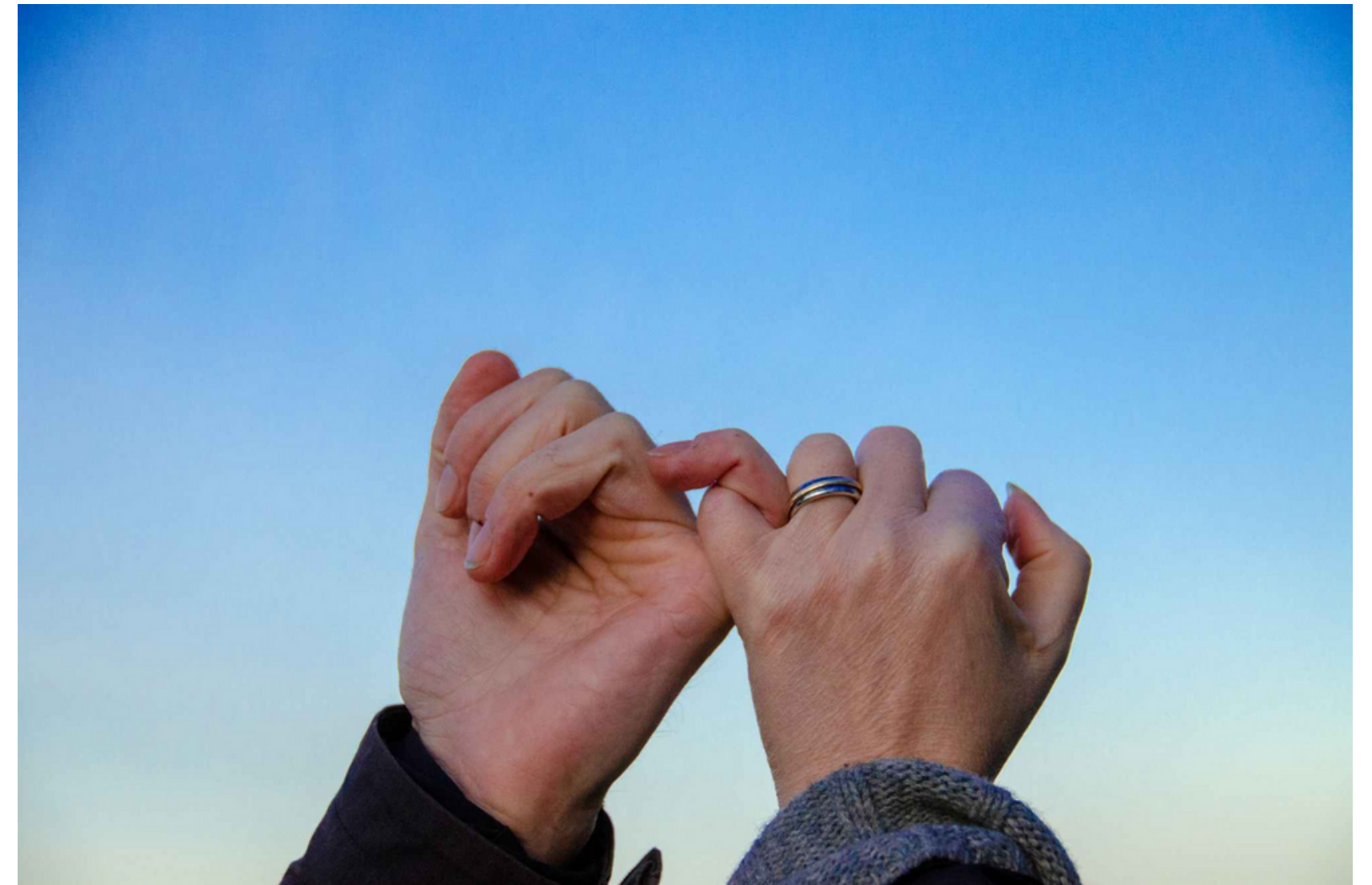
Action Steps

Individual Commitment

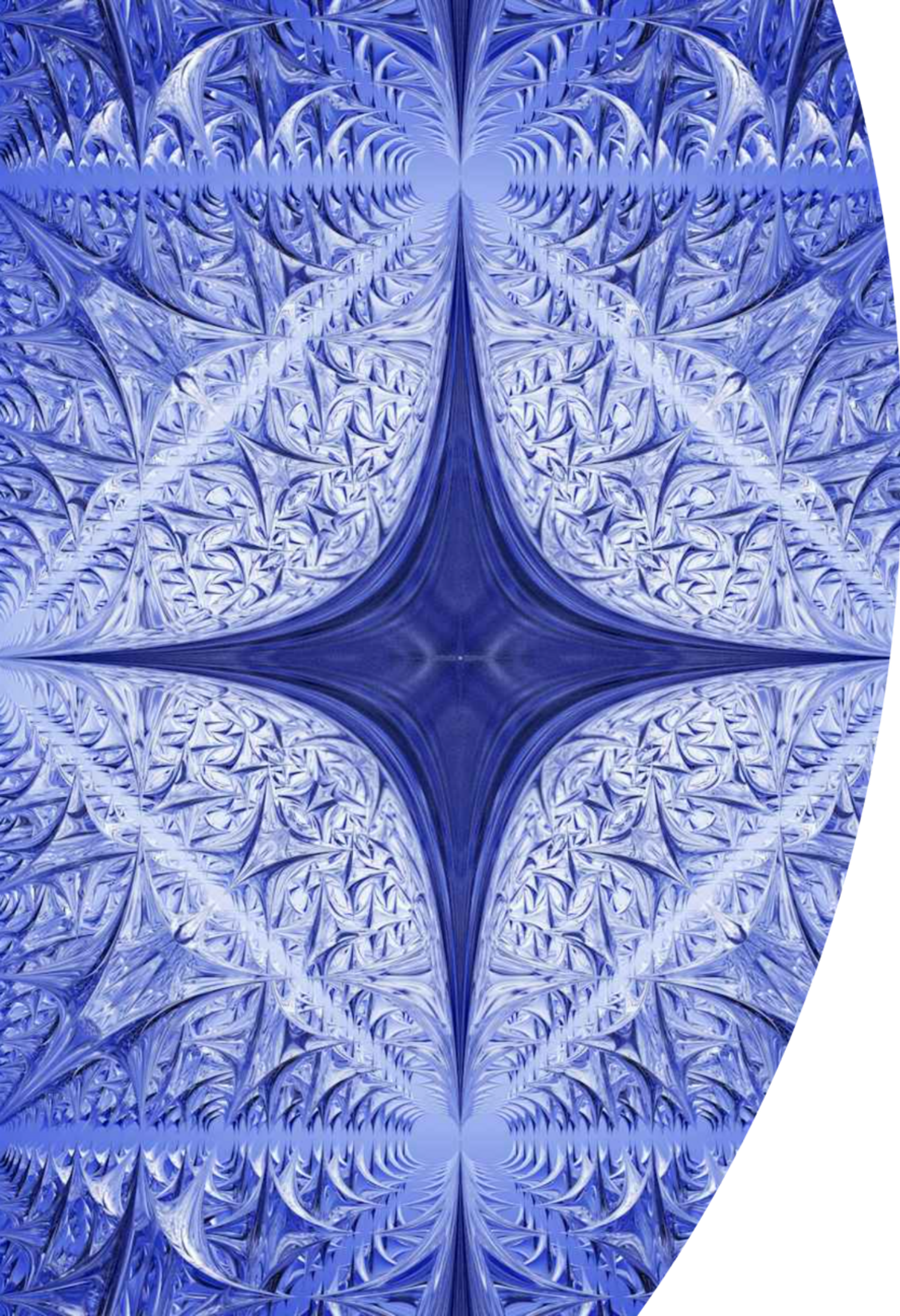
Take a moment to write down one concrete, specific next step you'll take to apply these tools in your advocacy work.

Example: "Next Tuesday, I'll use the Bridge of Understanding framework to prepare for my meeting with Councilmember Johnson about our municipal broadband proposal."

Be specific about **when**, **where**, and **with whom** you'll use these strategies.



-  Consider enlisting another attendee as an accountability partner to check in on each other's progress one month from today.



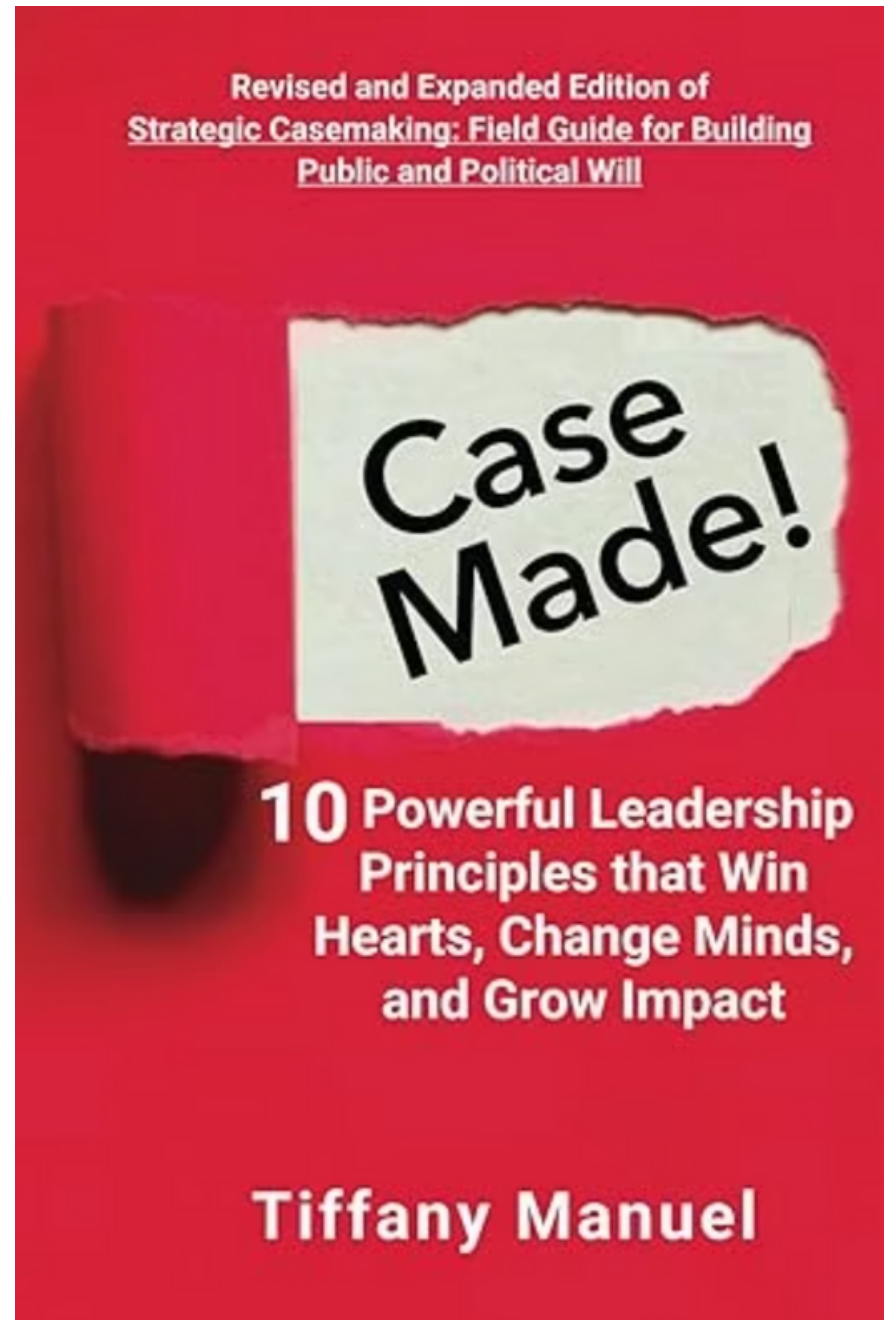
Digital equity is an adaptive challenge.

The technical solutions exist. What we need is the collective will to implement them at scale.

We already have everything we need to succeed.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.

Learn More about Strategic Casemaking



Dive deeper into Strategic Casemaking principles with Dr. Tiffany Manuel's **Case Made!** book, available on Amazon.com.

Visit The Case Made Online

Explore additional resources, case studies, and tools for effective advocacy at www.thecasemade.com.

