Past I2I Scholarship Awardees Reflections

2022 TechEX I2I Scholarship Awardees

Emily Chahar, IT Project Manager at the University of Delaware

Attending the Internet2 Tech Exchange this year in Denver through the I2I program was a wonderful experience! Being able to bond with my fellow scholarship awardees, as well as engage in conversation with the assigned mentors every day at breakfast and lunch, was personally gratifying. (It also made my first IT conference much less intimidating!) The mentors thoughtfully answered our questions about changes in the industry, how to make more opportunities for women in IT, and how they navigated their own career paths.

I was able to attend a variety of conference sessions on cloud technology, research engagement, cybersecurity, and IAM. The panelists and speakers at the sessions spoke candidly about best practices, lessons learned and future goals at their institutions. I especially appreciated the sessions on CMMC Compliance, the death of unlimited storage, and the changes to the HECVAT, as those are all part of ongoing conversations at my university.

As part of the cross-topic session on I2I and mentorship, I learned more about how Internet2 is dedicated to building diversity and inclusion among IT professionals. I think the I2I initiative, designed specifically for women in the IT profession attending their first I2 conference, is a great idea. It goes a long way to help women build their personal networks with mentors and other higher ed professionals with varied expertise; feel validated in sharing their personal experiences with others; and also have a meaningful first professional development opportunity within the Internet2 community. Thank you to I2 for their commitment to uplifting emerging women professionals like me!

Allison (Ally) Hepp, Systems Engineer at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County

As I was sitting on the 16th street bus in downtown Denver headed to the hotel, I noticed the gentleman sitting across from me had an Internet2 jacket; I introduced myself and we chatted the rest of the (short) bus ride to the hotel. He introduced himself as Nick, a member of the Internet2 network team. The next day, Nick made a point of finding me and saying hello at the conference and checking in throughout the week to see how my conference experience was going. He was not part of the I2I program group, nor part of the conference planning group, but made a point to be welcoming to a first- time attendee. This was just one of many positive interactions I had with many Internet2 staff and the TechEx22 attendees – they were welcoming, encouraging, and went out of their way to be kind.

TechEx22 was a fantastic experience and a great introduction to the Internet2 community established in higher education IT. The breakfast and lunch mentoring sessions became a great opportunity to discuss a large range of topics with those in various roles and career stages – everything from career goals, life experiences, raising women to excel in STEM fields, and how we create change in our organizations. The I2I scholarship cohort was a dynamic group of women, both on a professional and personal level. Having the opportunity to meet and network with the NSRC fellows and WINS-Internet2 sponsored WINS recipients was a great opportunity. The WINS representation at Internet2 was welcoming and encouraging about their programs. It was a good opportunity to see like-minded women in roles similar to my own. I particularly enjoyed the ability to attend sessions in different tracks, as I was able to learn more about other areas of IT that I don't often get exposure to in my role.

Steffanie Johnson, IT Security Risk Analyst and Team Lead with the Office of Cybersecurity at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

I am very thankful I was able to be a recipient of the Internet2 Inclusivity initiative. From the very first engagements, the Internet2 community made me feel extremely welcomed and connected. Over the course of the week, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet so many technology experts that were eager to share their knowledge and expertise. With many of us coming together for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, you could tell people were excited to be together to engage and share experiences.

I really appreciated the mix of sessions where some talks remained high level and then other tracks did more of a deep technical dive to discuss challenges and solutions. A lot of the sessions were small enough where I felt comfortable to ask questions during or after the presentations. Efforts to bring the I2I awardees together often during the conference was one of the major positive impacts for me personally. I instantly felt a bond with the other awardees, and it was refreshing to hear their stories and to share our experiences as women working in tech. I was happy to learn the conference had the highest percentage of female attendees this year but there is still more work to be done to increase attendance and participation.

Thank you to the Internet2 staff and community for welcoming me with open arms. The event was a success and I hope to connect again soon!

Nicole Klueber, Systems Integration Engineer for the Institute for Computational and Data Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University

It was truly an honor to be an Inclusivity Initiative Scholarship recipient and to have the opportunity to attend the Internet2 Technology Exchange in Denver, Colorado. It was exciting to see research professionals come together and share their experiences in many different facets. The sessions were invigorating and allowed for participants to have conversations with the speakers in a personal and informal manner, which was unique to this event. I was able to meet my fellow scholarship recipients and build relationships with them as we participated in various events together at the conference. It was wonderful to have breakfast and lunch sessions with mentors who shared personal experiences and provided advice to the scholarship recipients. It was also beneficial to have mentors at the conference to answer questions and assist with networking.

As a result of this scholarship, I was able to connect with others who have similar passions to mine. Attending the conference sessions provided me the information necessary to join working groups that continue to advance research in higher education. I was also able to create connections with individuals at different research institutions to establish partnerships and learning opportunities. I am grateful to be an Inclusivity Initiative Scholarship recipient and participate in a conference that positively impacted my career and empowered my vision to expand diversity in the technology field.

2019 TechEX I2I Scholarship Awardees

Bridget Bartell, Cybersecurity Analyst at University of Wisconsin-Madison

I greatly appreciated the opportunity to attend the Internet2 Technology Exchange conference in New Orleans. The Internet2 team clearly put a lot of work and care into designing and organizing the event. As an Inclusivity Initiative scholarship awardee, I was grateful for the ability to meet with community leaders during the breakfast and lunch hours. The event clearly draws accomplished people from all over the world, it was helpful to have someone help connect you to some of these incredible individuals.

As far as sessions go, I appreciated Internet2's staff member Adair's session regarding diversity. The lack of women in IT is obvious, but I thought it was great to help call out some of the lessor considered aspects of diversity such as neurodiversity, mental health, education, and sexuality, and how that affects team dynamics as well. I also feel those areas can be judged more harshly and so people can be embarrassed instead of embracing the differences that make for a balanced and productive team. I overall enjoyed the information security track and was pleased by the number of incident response options. It's great to hear how others are handling situations we handle on a daily basis and know that we are all in this together.

Once again, I want to deeply thank the Internet2 community, and Taleitha, for the time and effort put into organizing the event.

Jacqueline Knight-Barber, Support Engineer at OSHEAN

I really enjoyed this event. I met a lot of great people and made connections that will help further my future. One thing I loved most about this experience was being able to meet mentors every day so that I had "go-to" people when needed. Everyone I met was so kind and extraordinary in their own way. While I was there, I was on a mission to learn a few specifics that I could take back to my coworkers and use towards our new Layer 2 implementation. These included EVPN, NSO and anything that involved implementing a new network. I gained a lot of valuable knowledge. I was very thankful Mike Kowal from Cisco took time to sit with me to teach me NSO because it gave me some good key pointers to bring back to my company. Aside from what my main goals were while there, I found it very easy to migrate from session to session. I especially enjoyed the social because it gets you to step out of your comfort zone a bit.

Overall, I would definitely go to this event again. I am very thankful for the experience to go this year. There are not many places that you can meet such a diverse group of people and connect with such a strong community.

Shashwitha Puttaswamy, Research Scientist, Cyberinfrastructure at George Washington University

I am very grateful the Internet2 Inclusivity Initiative Committee selected me, and The George Washington University nominated me from our IT Department and supporting me in my travel and accommodation as part of the Scholarship program. The Internet2 Technology Exchange was well organized from start to finish. I was also able to get in contact with my former colleague and project partners.

It helped me to build professional connections within the field and learn new tools and developments, which I can implement in my work. It made me much more confident in understanding the concepts and implementing the software. There were many interesting talks which were overlapped, but Internet2 community members were very supportive to put me in touch with the speaker and learn more about the projects and give a recap of the presentations. In the award program there were many women who shared their personal experiences in the field of IT which was a remarkable journey and a very inspirational talk.

Overall it was a wonderful and memorable experience. I will always look forward to being part of the Internet2 community.

2019 Global Summit I2I Scholarship Awardees

Rachael Collard, Marketing & Publicity Coordinator at CEN

I would like to thank Internet2 and its members for the incredible amount of knowledge and support that was extended to the Inclusivity Scholarship recipients during the 2019 Global Summit. The program was well planned and executed from start to finish. From the second we arrived, until we departed, we were welcomed, guided, mentored and encouraged by everyone we encountered. Our mentors were genuinely interested in learning more about us individually, and they offered advice and guidance in our professional development both educationally and in the workplace.

Personally, I was able to meet professionals with a wide range of experience levels from similar Research and Education Networks, share common issues, learn from their best practices, and gain insights to share with my organization. I loved hearing from K-12 teachers directly on how they are using Advanced Computer Networking in the classroom and how exited their students are when they interact with other students around the world during the Community Anchor Program session. I am looking forward to sharing that knowledge with CEN's K-12 members. The Keynote speakers were inspirational and entertaining. As organizer of the CEN member conference, I found much value in seeing how the Internet2 Global Summit was executed. I came away with new and exciting ideas for our conference that will enhance the experience for our members. I arrived at the summit a little nervous and overwhelmed, and I left feeling nurtured, confident, and eager to learn more. It truly was a wonderful experience and I look forward to the possibility of returning as a mentor for next year's inclusivity scholar recipients.

Kaitlin Helfter, Emerging IT Professional in ITaP Research Computing at Purdue University

The Global Summit Conference was a great experience and an amazing opportunity to connect with the other scholarship winners and others in the tech industry. Between all the recommended sessions to go to, there was enough time to attend several sessions I was interested in, including topics in cyber security and networking which will help me later in my career. The two keynote presenters had amazing presentations and I am glad I was able to attend.

Erin Plese, Information Security Analyst at Int Northern Arizona University

Although I am new to the IT field, I gained so much knowledge from speaking with so many individuals whether they were from the vendor booths, out in the industry, or from my fellow Higher Education colleagues. I was a bit nervous when I first arrived because I was afraid that everything would have been too technical, and I would have been lost. Although there were some highly technical sessions, of the sessions that I did attend, I was able to keep up and understand the content in which it focused. Additionally, there were several sessions that I attended and was able to further develop my understanding of the content, therefore, allotting me the ability to follow along and grow in my own expertise.

One of my most favorite parts of attending this conference was having the ability to speak with so many unique individuals throughout breakfasts, lunches and receptions! I greatly appreciated having the opportunity to hear their story, learn from them, and garner strength to keep pushing in my own career path. Many of the women we met were able to describe their experience in the IT field and how they arrived at their current path. They are so inspiring! Also, I was so amazed to have the support of so many men within IT, which I've never experienced until I began my new career, it gives me hope that there is a better path for equality within this vast career field.

Overall, the best thing that I can take away from this conference was the knowledge that there are so many men who are also on board with making the workforce a place where women and other minorities can also be encouraged and celebrated. In many of the discussions that I had with my fellow scholarship winners, I have realized that I have a very unique team here at NAU. My team is more positive and invested in my growth and development than many of my peers' colleagues. Knowing that I don't have to constantly prove myself just to be in the same room with my peers is astonishing. I appreciate all the hardships that other women have had to go through to provide me with the opportunity to succeed today.

Katelyn Russell, Systems Administrator II at University of Texas at Austin

I had such a wonderful experience at the Internet2 Global Summit. The scholarship allowed me truly invaluable networking opportunities, during which I got to share in genuine connections with people I likely wouldn't have met otherwise. The Internet2 community is infectious with the passion for their work.

The lunches, breakfasts, and every opportunity in-between to interact with other professional and find out how their careers have progressed were enriching. Then, on top of meeting people within the community, it was such an honor to meet and participate in the conference with my fellow awardees.

The panels and discussions helped me build a broader context for project that are on-going within my own organization. I enjoyed learning how other teams have accomplished their own two-factor and other authentication projects. The panel discussion on diversity and inclusion was also very well conducted, which such a good diversity of experience and background and among one of my favorite moments of the conference.

As far as things that I would like to see improved, it would be helpful to see an improvement in standards of behavior for vendors. There were a few moments of inappropriate decorum on the part of vendors, that I feel were unprofessional. I would say that as a more morning person, I don't mind early breakfasts, however, I do think it would be helpful to have possibly shorter meals as the discussions did sometimes run down about 20 mins to sometimes a full half an hour before the end of the lunch.

The accommodations and features of the conference were wonderful. I did love the talks and had wonderful interactions with everyone within the internet2 community.

Nuyun Zhang, Research Scientist at Georgia Institute of Technology

I really appreciated the opportunity to come closer to all these women (and men) who are successful. I do not have this type of opportunity on a regular basis to talk to them without the event. I was able to ask about their experience and opinions on many specific questions I had regarding my situation. They provided details and very to the point answers. For example, I asked about child and work balance. Dee said she focused on her two boys until they finished high school and college. I realized it is not late for me in my 30s to do anything I want. I also asked about if being too curious and interested in many topics would be a distraction to success. I got the answer that was, "No worries! Keeping curiosity for many topics and working on them is important in IT and will lead to success."

I was also able to connect with my previous co-workers from Clemson during the executive event at night. I loved it! We talked until 10 PM and shared many personal updates, organizational updates, and experience in work. I felt extremely happy and encouraged.

I loved Howard Pfeffer's comments about people judging me being too quiet during interview lunch. He said the ability to do work cannot be judged by a person being quiet or talkative. That made me feel less self-criticized and confident. He also mentioned to me about the responsibility of leadership is to make sure things get done, not necessarily done by the leader themselves, which helped me a lot since I was just placed in a leadership role in the past year.

2018 TechEX I2I Scholarship Awardees

Tomomi Imamura, Cybersecurity Testing and Cyber Defense Team Lead at University of Wisconsin-Madison

Attending the Internet2 2018 Technology Exchange conference was a valuable experience. This conference provided me not just opportunities to learn about new technologies and best practices, it also provided me the opportunities to meet with the Internet2 community members. We discussed unique ideas and challenges around technologies and helped each other and collaborated with fellow institutions to come up with better IT solutions.

As a scholarship awardee, I had opportunities to meet with great IT professionals and leaders, and everyone I met welcomed me and discussed various topics with me. Listening to their leadership stories made me feel motivated and energized to continue my own journey. I was delighted to meet with my fellow scholarship awardees who have amazing accomplishments, skills and backgrounds. Getting to know such a great cohort encouraged me to do more in my life. Meeting with Carrie Regenstein, for whom my award is named, was an especially meaningful opportunity for me. Carrie emphasized that being female or underrepresented IT professionals doesn't undermine our abilities. I really appreciate her time and willingness to talk with me in person during the conference.

I also appreciate the opportunity to participate as a panel member for the Gender and Diversity in IT and Security session panel. It was a great speaking experience, and I enjoyed working with my panel members to prepare for the session. We had a good discussion with the audience, and I hope that the session attendees continue Gender, Diversity, and Inclusivity related conversation to educate more people in this topic moving forward.