



ASU Library, Arizona State University
P.O. Box 871006
Tempe, Arizona 85287

PROFILE

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CONTACT: Elle Augier, PR Intern

ANN OKERSON AND HER JOURNEY TO BEING CO-FOUNDER OF OFFLINE INTERNET CONSORTIUM

TEMPE, Ariz.- Ann Okerson, Director of the Offline Internet Consortium (OLI), brings a deep passion for learning, connection, and informational accessibility to everything she does. With a multicultural upbringing, and deep interest in international cultures, Okerson has dedicated herself to connecting people with knowledge.

Okerson attended University of California at Berkeley, and from there developed an impressive career working in the world of libraries, research, and worldwide networks. She held positions as associate director at Yale University Library, senior advisor at the Center for Research Libraries, and currently works with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. In 2018, she co-founded the Offline Internet Consortium, an organization driven by the belief that access to information should not be limited by internet connectivity.

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The daughter of immigrants, Okerson grew up navigating the complexities of cultural identity, “trying to keep a culture alive at home that was not the culture outside.” This dual perspective shaped her deep appreciation for international culture and led to her work with international collections at Yale.

“It was there,” she recalls, “that I got very much involved with international programs of other kinds,” including her long-time commitment with IFLA, where she currently serves as one of the 8 members of the IFLA professional committee.

Through her global work with IFLA, Okerson has taken inspiration from the culturally diverse experiences that come with international collaboration.

“One of the things about being in an organization that’s globally committed is that you have all these kinds of new experiences,” she said. One such experience sparked the idea for OLI. At the 2017 IFLA conference in Poland, Okerson and long-time friend and co-founder of OLI, James O’Donnell, met a colleague from Malaysia working on offline internet solutions in remote parts of Borneo.

“I knew of another program that was similar,” Okerson said, “and that was the point where we said, well, let’s bring people together and see if there’s a set of common interests we can build on.”

From that conversation, the Offline Internet Consortium was born. Founded in 2018, OLI began as a passion project that Okerson and O’Donnell pursued alongside their full-time professional commitments.

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“It’s something we do as much as we can,” she said, “but our other jobs, which are central to our professions, take up the bulk of our 50- to 60-hour work weeks.”

The first OLI meeting took place in Tempe, Arizona, in 2018.

“People got together and were genuinely interested. Some of them knew about each other, most of them, I think, didn’t,” Okerson said. That initial meeting laid the foundation for what would become a growing network of 20 partners and counting, all dedicated to closing the digital divide.

“We just brought strangers together into a space and said, ‘Hey, everybody, tell us about each other, and what are you doing?’” The spirit of collaboration and shared purpose has guided OLI ever since.

Today, Okerson continues to blend her global perspective, love of learning, and commitment to shaping a more connected and inclusive world, online and offline.

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