

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/dignity-justice-and-the-webbys>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the 21st Annual Webby Awards because Vera's new online home won Best Website in the associations category. The Webbys are perhaps best described as the Oscars of the Internet, and it was an honor to be selected by the [International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences](#) out of 13,000 total entries from all 50 states and more than 70 countries.

As web engagement director, I was proud to represent the Vera Institute of Justice and my dedicated colleagues who work to make our justice system more equitable and more humane. Our online presence furthers that work. While the number of people incarcerated in our country has begun to fall, we still incarcerate more people at a higher rate than any nation on earth. The financial and social costs are disastrously high, and the disproportionate effect on people and communities of color is an affront to our bedrock belief in equal justice.

But what does injustice have to do with the Webbys? A lot, actually.

Throughout my initiation in the online world, I learned that the Webby is a serious award, despite the frivolous-sounding name. Don't let it fool ya. Many of the people and much of the work advances the culture in some way by making it more open and accessible, more diverse, and ultimately more democratic, free, and just. Special Achievements awarded at the Webbys offer some shining examples:

[The Womens March](#), whose overall mission defends human rights, dignity, and justice *for all*, was awarded the Social Movement of the Year award for using the power of the Internet to spur a global movement and catalyze the largest demonstration on a single day in U.S. history.

[Van Jones](#), whose work to end mass incarceration closely aligns with Vera's mission, received a special achievement award for his use of the Internet and social media during the 2016 election, as well as for The Messy Truth video series.

[Solange](#) was recognized as the web's Artist of the Year for leveraging the web to promote community and diversity through the Saint Heron website, her online collaborative platform and online store that seeks to foster racial and social justice.

It's clear that the web was a powerful force for social change in 2017. It could even be called a heroic year for the web because it made us more aware of what's at stake in some of the very things the web was meant to enshrine: inclusion, diversity, democracy, truth. **The Internet Archive**, founders of the Wayback Machine, have made a mission of preserving the truth and making it accessible to all. They accepted, in great style, a Lifetime Achievement award for their commitment to making the world's knowledge available online and providing universal access.

It's this combined spirit of social awareness and creative activism that is galvanized in the Webby. A spirit that Vera embodies. A spirit summed up in our requisite Webby 5-Word Speech: Dignity and Justice for All.

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