GET INTO... **IGF**

Internet Governance Forum

October 2020

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), based in Geneva, is the United Nations forum for dialogue between governments, businesses, civil society and the technical community on public policy issues related to the way the internet works and is regulated: 'internet governance'.

Established in 2006, its official mission is to create a forum for an open and inclusive discussion and exchange of ideas. It is not a place to negotiate treaties, but a transparent and equal setting for all players – including libraries – to share priorities, highlight concerns, and build partnerships.
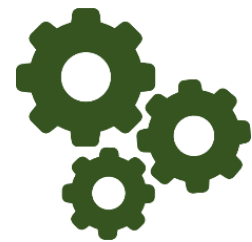
The IGF sees many discussions relevant for the library field: on public internet access, digital inclusion initiatives focusing on marginalised populations, creative solutions to help bring more people online (e.g. community networks), ICT skills training, access to digital content in local languages, online privacy, accessibility of digital content, and more.

IFLA therefore participates in the activities of IGF. In particular, it is a founding member of the [Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries,](#) established in 2011. This brings together civil society organisations, expert groups, governments and business with a shared interest in realising the potential of libraries to offer meaningful internet access to all.

How the IGF Works and Why It Matters

The IGF carries out the mandate set out in the 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society to convene a forum for multistakeholder policy dialogue. The forum is a neutral space where everyone with a stake in internet governance is welcomed to discuss, share ideas and exchange information. The IGF mandate was endorsed in 2006 and renewed in 2010 and 2015.

The creation of the IGF was the result of a desire to build a means of promoting cooperation and collaboration in the way the internet works. Rather than handing over control over regulations and standards to a United Nations agency (where some countries could use their veto), the idea was to develop a new process.

This would not involve developing regulations or signing treaties. Rather, it works to inform and facilitate a common understanding of how to maximise internet opportunities and address risks or challenges. This dialogue can in turn inform or offer ideas to policy-makers in the sphere of internet governance.

Main Bodies

The IGF has a small secretariat, based in Geneva, attached to the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs. Decision-making about the IGF takes place through the Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), which counts 56 members from governments, the private sector and civil society, including representatives from the academic and technical communities. The MAG meets three times a year and assists the UN Secretary General in convening the IGF.

The IGF has seen the emergence of a number of sub-groups, including Dynamic Coalitions (DCs). These are informal groups have members from various stakeholder communities dedicated to working on a particular internet governance

issue. Once formed they follow the principles of transparency: open membership, and inclusiveness. The Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries is one example.

Major Meetings

The annual global meeting of the Internet Governance Forum is the highest profile event in the calendar. The first meeting took place in 2006 in Greece, and the annual meetings in the last few years were hosted by Brazil (2015), Mexico (2016), Switzerland (2017), France (2018) and Germany (2019). IFLA has been attending the annual meetings since 2008 to organise and join sessions, take part in discussions and speak up for libraries.

During the annual global meetings, participants organise and join thematic sessions, presentations, panel discussions and other engagement opportunities and events.

There are also a number of regional IGF meetings (e.g. Africa; Central Africa, East Africa and West Africa, the Arab region, Europe, South-East Europe, Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, among others). There are also many national events, as well as local and regional youth processes.

These offer possibilities for libraries to raise awareness of their work and concerns, develop contacts, and learn more about key debates on the future of the internet at a more local level.

There are also 'inter-sessional' activities, such as Best Practice Forums (BPFs) on issues like cybersecurity or local content. BPFs work to create good practice compilations in a specific field to help inform global internet governance policies and practices.

How Does Engaging in IGF Help Libraries?

As the importance of the internet grows, so too will debates about how it should work. Given how central the Web is to creation, sharing and access to information, libraries have a strong interest in ensuring that it benefits all. This is especially relevant today, as we are seeing more and more regulatory and political activism around internet governance matters.

To ensure all voices and heard, the 'multi-stakeholder' format of the IGF is highly valuable. For IFLA and the global library field, the IGF represents a unique opportunity for library engagement in questions around the way the internet works.

Moreover, as highlighted, IGF meetings at all levels offer libraries an opportunity to find partners, support and inspiration.

IGF events allow libraries to educate stakeholders about the needs of our institutions. It is an opportunity to push for investment in libraries as places to access the internet and promote digital literacy, and a stronger role for libraries in decision-making and policy delivery.

For example, the IGF has seen civil society organisations come together to sign the Principles on Public Access in Libraries, held discussions on the right to be forgotten, privacy, local content, freedom of expression, copyright and the importance of media and information literacy.

But to guarantee our continuing impact, more library voices are needed in order to ensure maximum support for better policies for libraries.

What Can You Do?

Depending on your capacity, you could:

1. Join a mailing list! IFLA posts information on the IFLA-ICT list, or the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries list.

2. Join a Dynamic Coalition or a Best Practice Forum in an area of interest to you. Many activities organised by DCs and BPFs take place online – such as surveys, calls for inputs, and consultations you can contribute to and learn from.

3. Hold a discussion with colleagues from the library field in your country on the impact of the internet on libraries, and how libraries can help build a better internet. You can find ideas on the IFLA website.

4. Register and attend the global IGF if one is due to take place near you – or take part remotely! The 2020 IGF will be held fully online, and registration is free and open to all.

5. Check the IGF calendar or get in contact with the organisers of a reginal or national IGF near you. You can attend, take part in discussions and activities, or even submit proposals to organise your own session(s).

6. Get in contact with the local chapters of other organisations working on internet governance issues, such as the Internet Society, Alliance for Affordable Internet or Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers.

7. Let us know what you're doing!