Key Findings of the WLIC 2021 surveys

In October 2020, IFLA surveyed different groups regarding their expectations for the upcoming virtual World Library and Information Congress. The goal of the surveys was to gain insights from the different groups to better understand the intentions of a virtual WLIC and assist in the design of the conference.

1146 past attendees/IFLA members and 354 officers from IFLA professional units completed the survey. 69% of the respondents had attended a virtual conference in 2020 which resulted in informed feedback on best practices. Find out what respondents had to say about the virtual WLIC.

An opportunity to be more inclusive

Many respondents consider the virtual WLIC a great opportunity to reach out to more librarians, including groups such as students and new professionals who may normally not be able to travel. A virtual conference also enables increased participation from all the regions.

> "This is a historical opportunity for IFLA to reach the entire world."

> "The virtual conference has the ability to draw audiences from these countries who would otherwise not be able to travel and attend WLIC, it's important to have the programme represent their needs."

> "I am sure that IFLA will organize a very good virtual conference that will give a chance to more people to attend."

> "Meet other people from all over the world."

> "It is always great opportunity to meet with other library professionals from around the globe to share and learn new ideas. But this is an even greater opportunity."

And to be different: not a replication of the physical conference

The surveys insisted that the virtual WLIC should not be a replication of the past format for WLIC. Respondents expect participants to be able to engage which is key in a virtual environment. Shorter sessions, a variety of formats, interactivity through World Cafe style sessions, Q&A's or workshops were highly recommended.

Staying away from the traditional presentation of papers was often mentioned.

> "Don't make the mistake of attempting to duplicate the in-person experience online. Zoom fatigue is real."

> "Keep it as informal as possible."

> "There's no need to force that amount of content/info overload/zoomnosis over a week when you don't have to logistically. "

> "Have a mix of formats; Don't try to replicate a physical meeting too much."

> "And make sure to shorten the sessions in comparison to offline events."

> "Don't overload it, select the subjects." "Plan for good contents. Every presentation might not be necessary."

> "Short sessions, lots of interactivity and breaks."

> "Provision of relevant content, efficient planning, engaging activities and chance to have fun."

Participation

Over 80% of respondents indicated that it was likely or very likely that they would participate in the virtual WLIC. Overall, there seemed to be a lot of interest in attending a virtual WLIC and engaging with IFLA in this way.

Intention of respondents to participate in the conference
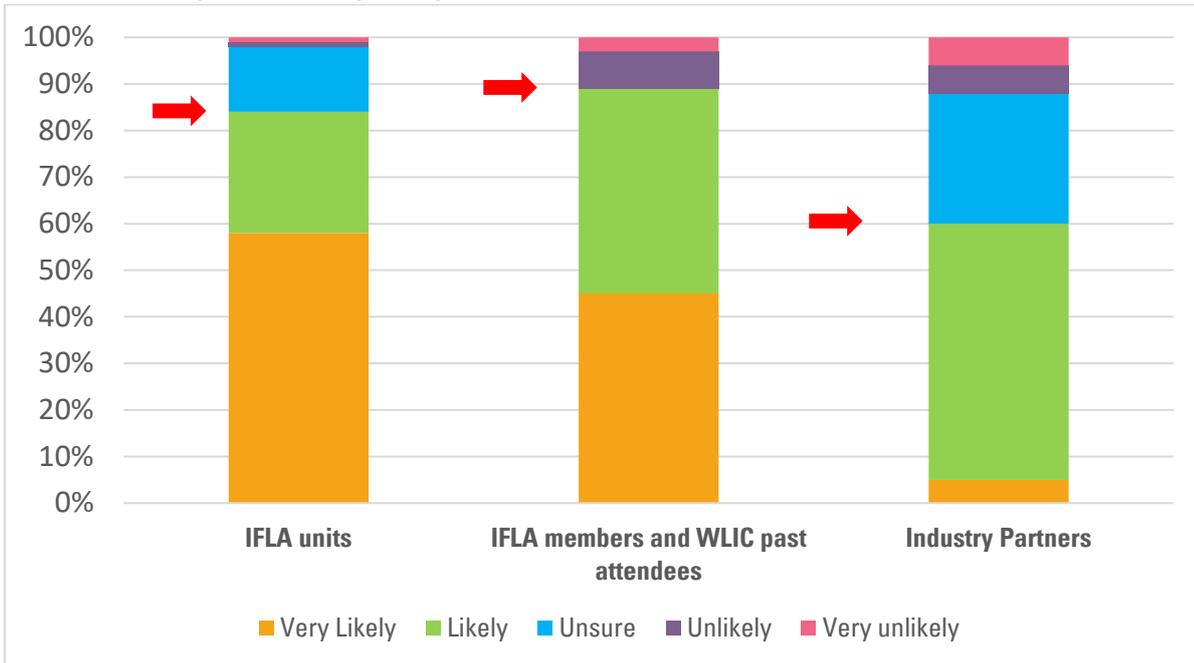
Participation from Industry partners

The survey completed with industry partners showed that they were still feeling their way in the world of virtual conferences. They were also looking for greater engagement and time with attendees. They felt that this was not always scheduled into conference models thus far.

Best time of the year

The month of August is considered by both groups as the best time of the year to attend a virtual WLIC. Holding the conference in a normal working week between Monday to Friday is the preferred option for both groups.
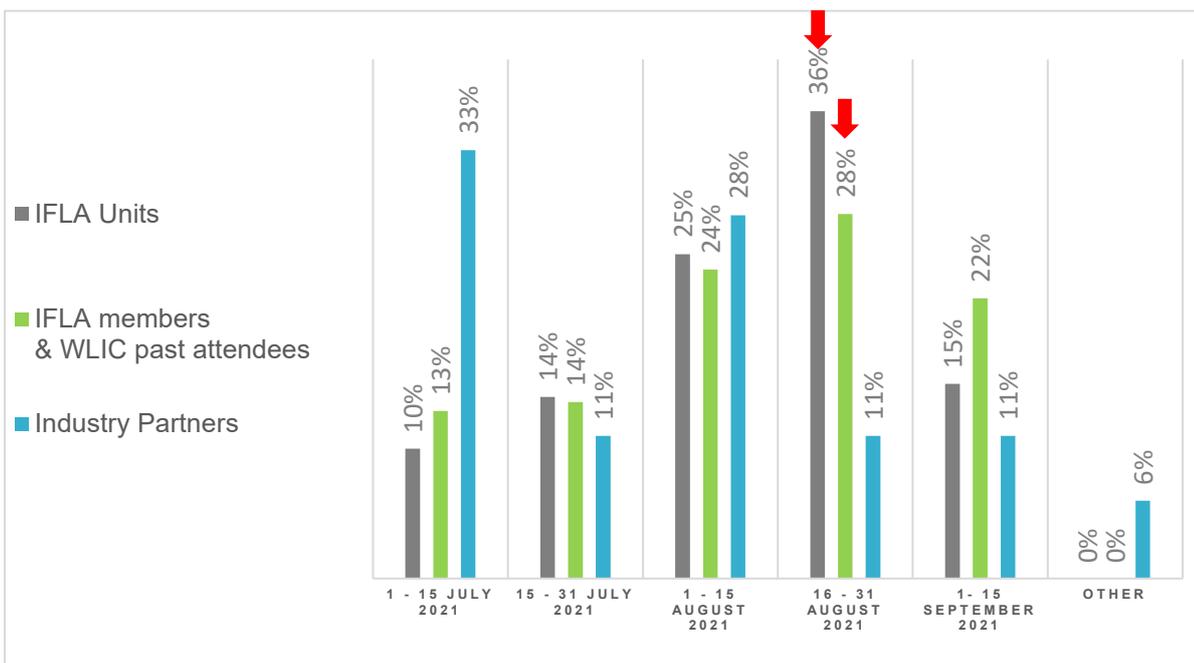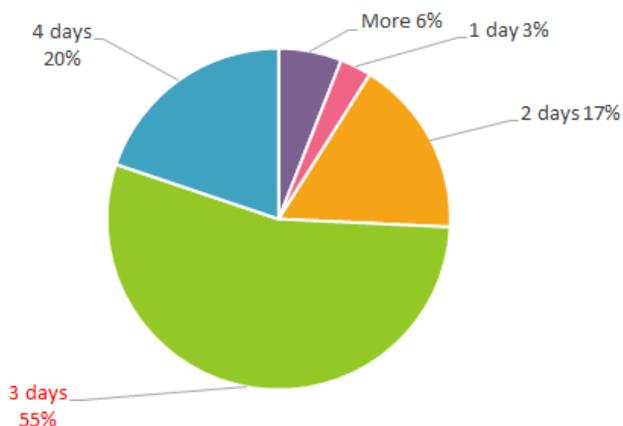
Length of the Core programme

Both groups considered 3 days to be the most suitable length for the virtual WLIC (55% of the attendees, 48% of IFLA Unit responses).
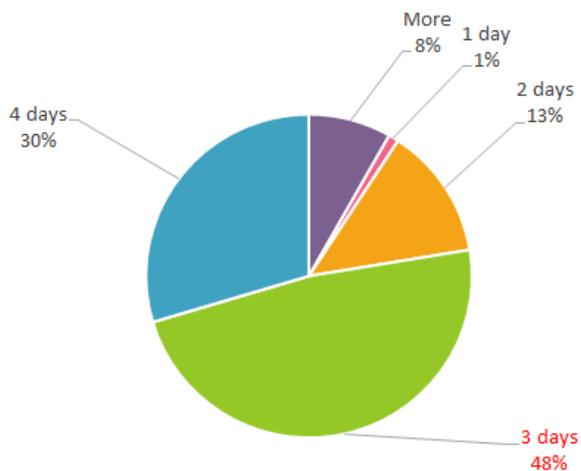
IFLA Members and WLIC past attendees

Professional units

Benefits

In terms of what each group wished to take away from the conference, both groups had similar interests: professional development, discussing topics of their field and networking. Networking is really considered an essential mechanism for interaction and is crucial to promote engagement.

It is one of the key benefits of attending IFLA WLIC and developing connections around the globe will be an attraction to those attending. The virtual WLIC is expected to fulfill this need as well.

	Units	*IFLA Members and WLIC past attendees*
1	Professional development	Opportunity to discuss interesting topics for their field
2	Opportunity to discuss interesting topics for their field	Professional development
3	Networking	Networking

Sessions of most interest during a virtual WLIC

	Units		IFLA Members and WLIC past attendees	
1	89.2%	Thematic sessions	85.3%	Session speakers
2	87.6%	Session speakers	82.4%	Thematic sessions
3	81.9%	Networking opportunities	79.6%	Keynote speakers
4	81.0%	Open session panels	78.4%	Expert interviews
5	80.0%	Experts interviews	75.0%	Panel discussions

Interest for networking in small groups and interactive workshops also rated highly for IFLA members and WLIC past attendees. Many of the comments spoke to a desire for engagement and connection.

Hours per day

When asked how many hours per day they would dedicate to attending the conference, the responses were quite similar for both groups: up to 4 hours per day. However, respondents mention that although they can attend the conference, they would most likely still be working at the same time. Therefore, the program should take this into consideration: this could either mean proposing the same session at different times or making available recorded sessions for on-demand viewing.

	Units	IFLA Members and WLIC past attendees
Up to 4 hours per day	46%	50%
Up to 2 hours per day	22%	22%
I can dedicate the same amount of time*	18%	10%
Up to 6 hours per day	7%	13%
Up to two full days of work	4%	-
Up to one full day of work	2%	5%

*I can dedicate the same amount of time as I used to for the physical conference for as many days

Preferred length of sessions

Research during the exploration phase indicated that a virtual environment is very different to a physical conference. The attention span of attendees sitting in front of a screen is much shorter and so presentations need to be shorter and more engaging. Breaks are important. This was reflected in the responses of IFLA members and WLIC past attendees.

Length of Sessions	Percent
45 minutes	40.6%
60 minutes	30.4%
30 minutes	18.6%
90 minutes	10.4%

Access to recordings

Respondents raised concerns around the programme over the different time zones. The spread of the sessions should take into consideration live sessions and/or recorded formats followed by live Q&As. Specific sessions could have Q&As addressed, for example, by a group who could be located in this time zone.

91.2% of respondents consider it very important to have access to recordings during and after the event.

Accessibility

Respondents raised a range of technological issues such as internet access, bandwidth, platform connection, security and more which will be addressed as we consider the development of the conference. The used of captions was felt to be very important.

Networking

A major outcome of the surveys is that networking is seen as a very important element of the conference. It is considered an essential mechanism for interaction and communication.

Breakout rooms tied to thematic sessions or random topics are reiterated as a good option for networking. "Speed dating sessions" for a duration of 5 minutes with maximum 4-6 participants are a variation.

Respondents also mentioned "Virtual Coffee Places" or networking lounges as well as the possibility to extend the time of the sessions for 15 minutes in order for participants to be able to discuss right away the topic of the session in the same environment.

Open live chats within the sessions and private live chats are also considered as crucial. Networking options range from connections in groups and/or one-on-one; "speed dating"; networking based on attendees' profile, video chats etc.

"Try some different takes on networking opportunities. Speed dating on specific topics, thematic breakout rooms and so on."

"Plenty of interactions possibilities are key to a successful online event! Not just chat rooms, meetup rooms, but a way for attendees to participate and navigate the flow of the sessions."

"Technical ability to connect with people who share the same interest. Would be great to easily see who else is interested in the topic."

"More interactive sessions with any kind of immediate feedback."

"There really needs to be an interactive element to make attendance worth the time and money!"

"Networking lounges (separate online meeting rooms) with set times for people with different interests to meet and also meet with the associations staff."

"I really hope to meet people online despite the pandemic."

IFLA Headquarters
16 December 2020