



GET INTO... IGF

Internet Governance Forum

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.

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. As such 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 would work to inform and facilitate a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges. The work of IGF can also 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 including 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 annual 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) and France (2018). IFLA has been attending the annual meetings since 2008, looking to organise and join sessions, as well as speaking up for libraries.



There is also a number of [regional](#) Internet Governance Fora (Europe, Africa, including standalone events for Central Africa, East Africa and West Africa; the Arab region, South-East Europe, Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean among others), and many [national](#) events, as well as local and regional youth fora.

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 on issues like cybersecurity or local content, or the Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion process, which brings together evidence (also from libraries) on successful projects aimed at increasing Internet access.

How Does Engaging in IGF Help Libraries?

For IFLA, the IGF represents a unique opportunity for library engagement in questions around the way the Internet works. Given how central the Web is to creation, sharing and access to information, libraries have a strong interest in ensuring that it benefits all.

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.

Why Should You Get Involved?



As the importance of the Internet grows, so too will debates about how it should work. To ensure all voices are heard, the 'multi-stakeholder' format of the IGF is highly valuable. Moreover, as highlighted, IGF meetings at all levels offer libraries an opportunity to find partners, support and inspiration.

What Can You Do?

Depending on your capacity, you could do one of the following:

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 another [Dynamic Coalition](#) in an area of interest to you.
3. Hold a discussion at your annual conference on the impact of the Internet on libraries, and how libraries can build a better Internet. You can find ideas on the [IFLA website](#).



4. Check the [IGF calendar](#) to find a meeting in your area, or get in contact with the organisers of a [regional](#) or [national IGF](#).
5. Get in contact with the local chapters of other organisations working on Internet governance issues, such as the [Internet Society](#), or [Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers](#).
6. Join the global IGF if it takes place near you! The 2019 IGF will be held in Berlin from 25 to 29 November.
7. [Let us know](#) what you're doing!