



GET INTO... IGF

Internet Governance Forum

September 2021

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.

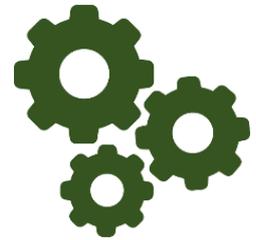
The IGF sees many discussions relevant for the library field: on public internet access, digital inclusion initiatives focusing on marginalised populations, creative solutions to help bring more people online (e.g. community networks), ICT skills training, access to digital content in local languages, online privacy, accessibility of digital content, and more.

IFLA therefore continues to actively engage and encourage libraries to take part in the IGF. In particular, it is a founding member of the [Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries \(DC-PAL\)](#), established in 2011. DC-PAL 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 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 welcomes everyone with a stake in internet governance to discuss, share ideas and exchange information, in order to 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 that bring together 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 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). Similarly, [national](#) events are organised in many countries, as well as local and regional youth processes.



These offer many 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 other 'inter-sessional' activities, such as Best Practice Forums (BPFs) and Policy Networks, which focus on issues like cybersecurity or the environmental dimensions of internet governance. 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 continues to grow, so do the 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.

The multi-stakeholder format of the IGF represents a unique opportunity for library engagement in questions around the way the internet works – as well as finding 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. Explore the work of the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) – and consider getting involved! You can follow the Coalition's work by joining the [DC-PAL mailing list](#), and read more on the "[internet governance](#)" tag on the IFLA website.
2. Take a look at other [Dynamic Coalitions](#) and [Best Practice Forums](#) that work on questions which are interesting to you. Many activities they organise take place online – such as surveys, calls for inputs, and consultations you can contribute to and learn from.
3. [Register](#) and attend the global IGF if one is due to take place near you – or take part remotely! The 2021 IGF will be held in a hybrid format, with events taking place both online and in Katowice, Poland. Registration is free and open to all.
4. Check the [IGF calendar](#) to see if a [regional](#) or [national IGF](#) will take place near you. You can attend, take part in discussions and activities, or even submit proposals to organise your own session(s).
5. 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](#).
6. [Message us directly](#) to find out more about the ways you can get involved, or to let us know what you're doing!

