



Making the most of international meetings

A playbook for IFLA representatives

International meetings, such as those organised by the United Nations, offer a great opportunity to speak up for libraries, and make contacts in a way that isn't possible at other times. To make the most of these chances, it is vital to plan ahead, use the time well, and follow up. This briefing offers tips on what to do before, during and after meetings, on talking to other delegates, and on how to convince (almost) any delegate that libraries matter to their work!

Attending an international meeting, especially on behalf of IFLA, can be a unique chance both to promote the relevance and importance of libraries, and to build up contacts for yourself and colleagues in the library community. Here are a set of ideas for how you can best use these opportunities!

While there is a strong focus on meetings related to the Sustainable Development Goals, you can also use this on other occasions. Many of the lessons may also be helpful in national settings of course as well.

There are also two annexes, with suggestions on how to make best use of any time you get with useful contacts, and then on arguments to use with different people on the importance of libraries in connection with different SDGs.

Why Attend International Meetings?

International meetings can seem long, slow and formal, and mean time out of your agenda. However, they can also be an important part of an advocacy strategy. For example, they allow you to:

- Meet senior contacts who are difficult to approach or get in contact with at home – for example a minister, advisor or senior official – either for yourself or for colleagues in another country
- Find out key information about what is going on nationally – for example how the SDGs are being implemented or coordinated.
- Meet like-minded NGOs working on similar issues to you, and share ideas – for example on who to talk to, or successful strategies
- Raise awareness of libraries to a large number of people, as well as look to build support for your messaging and goals

Before you go

Goals and messaging

- Do you know someone who has attended a similar event before? Get in touch with them to find out about what to expect.
- Think about what you can achieve at the event and define strong but realistic objectives accordingly.
- Look at the theme of the event. Reflect, potentially with colleagues, on the subjects that provide the best opportunities for library advocacy. Prepare your arguments – make sure to keep them simple and easy to remember.

Making contact in advance

- Look at the list of sessions planned and their organisers. Are there any which look particularly relevant? If you can identify the organisers and find e-mail addresses for them, get in touch and let them know that you're looking forward to their session or sessions. They may even be looking for additional speakers!
- Look at the list of participants, if this is available. Do any look interesting (i.e. because they are from your country, speak your language, or are working on library- related subjects?) If you find any, see if you can find their e-mail addresses, or call up the organization they work for and ask for contact details. Say that you are looking forward to seeing them at the meeting.

- Find out if there is any civil society coordination? Who is leading it – if you can find out, you can ask for a chat about their expectations? Can you register for any pre-meetings?
- Find out if there is any sort of briefing organized by the hosts or anyone else? Go along!

Just before the event

- Look at your list of people you want to talk to, under points 3 and 4. If you don't know what they look like, check if they appear on Google Images – this will make it possible to identify them easily at the meeting. Are they on social media – can you follow them?
- Plan your own programme at the event. Which sessions could offer an opportunity to talk about libraries or make useful contacts? If you are going with a colleague, coordinate who goes to what, to make sure you don't miss anything!
- Refresh your knowledge – can you say how many libraries there are in your country, how many people they serve etc? Do you have stories or examples of how libraries are contributing on issues close to the theme of the meeting, or do you need to ask others for briefing?
- Think about bringing something as a conversation starter, such as a badge or even a library t-shirt – that way you will find it easier to talk with people who already are pro-library, but also challenge others who are less so.
- Make sure you have business cards or something else you can hand out!

While you're there

- If there is a civil society process, take part in any pre-meetings (either those taking place before the meeting as a whole, or during the event). This will help you understand how the meeting will work (especially speaking slots), and potentially find allies in arguing for the importance of access to information. Be aware that other civil society organisations have their own goals and agendas, so look for synergies.
- If only one statement from civil society is allowed, get involved in drafting this. Be aware that there are many different interests and stakeholders, so be clever about ensuring key library messages are included.

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- Get to the meeting room early. Walk around to see if you can find out where the people you want to talk to are sitting – there may be country name-plates. If you can, make sure you then sit in a place where you can see them.
 - Ideally, say hello to any speakers you want to engage with (if relevant) before the session. Keep it brief, but make sure they know you are from libraries, and that you're looking forward to speaking later. This increases the chances that they will talk about libraries in their intervention.
 - Note carefully what the people you want to talk with say in any speech they make – look for points you can raise with them.
 - If you have found the people you want to talk to on social media, make sure to tag them in posts you make about their interventions.
 - Aim for one person at a time to approach at any given opportunity. If there is more than one of you, you can divide responsibilities and so talk with more people.
 - Be quick and clear when you make your case – they need to understand rapidly why you are interesting to talk to. Have something to leave with them.
 - If you feel comfortable, take a photo. See the annex for more.
 - If you are talking to someone from another country, ask them if it is OK to put them in touch with librarians locally, and get their contact details.
 - Take notes straight after each meeting so you don't forget!

After the meeting

- Follow-up! Send an e-mail to people you met, as well as relevant extra information. When you do this, don't just send a one-line message with lots of attachments – take the time to explain these and why they are relevant. Share the photo you took with them if you have one.
- If you didn't manage to meet your targets, send them an e-mail proposing a phone call or meeting subsequently. At least you will have your experience of the meeting in common.
- If the meeting went well and there is scope for cooperation, invite the contacts to events such as your library conference, offer them the opportunity to feature them in your local library journal, or even simply invite them for a tour of your library.
- If your contacts said that they would be happy to be in touch with librarians from their country, share relevant details with your colleagues (including via IFLA HQ).
- Keep us informed at IFLA know! We're always interested in who you met, and the messages you heard.