IFLA Strategy 2024-2029: Change Pathways Survey

This report presents a summary of the survey run by IFLA into the proposed changed pathways for the development of our next Strategy (2024-2029). It offers useful pointers on where we should focus most of our efforts, as well as lots of rich material for subsequent planning of actions. Crucially, it also gives us a benchmark that we can use when trying to evaluate whether future drafts of the Strategy are doing what the field wants and needs.

0. Introduction

In its December meeting, the Governing Board held a workshop in order to discuss the results of the four pulse surveys held between October and December 2023. On the basis of this, a collection of 10 potential ‘change pathways’ were identified. Each of these represented one way in which the current IFLA strategy could be improved in order to make it more likely to maximise its effectiveness for the field.

These change pathways were as below, as also set out in the news story on our website. These are presented alongside the short-hand that is used subsequently in graphs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Pathway</th>
<th>Shorthand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Make a stronger connection between Vision and Actions</td>
<td>Vision-Actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Be adaptable and adoptable by members, volunteers and librarians everywhere</td>
<td>Adaptable, Adoptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Be fit for and responsive in an uncertain world</td>
<td>Responsive to Uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Bring out libraries’ contribution to human development and resilience</td>
<td>Development Contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Provide a basis for meaningful synergies with partners</td>
<td>Meaningful Synergies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Reflect the public interest goal of our Federation</td>
<td>Public Interest Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) Be relevant for all people and regions</td>
<td>Relevant for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Focus more strongly on the wider world (not just on ourselves)</td>
<td>External Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Be more easily communicable, and use attractive and resonant language</td>
<td>Easily Communicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Include Key Performance Indicators and other means of measuring progress</td>
<td>KPIs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The goal of the survey was both to test the substance of the change pathways set out, and to seek input on where we should focus most effort going ahead.
We received 335 full responses. These were fully anonymised, and so we only have global results.

1. Overall Results

The first question we asked was: **To what extent do you agree that the 10 change pathways proposed here together represent a good basis for preparing a first draft of the IFLA Strategy 2024-2029?** Respondents could give answers ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’.

The results are given in Graph 1 (right), and show that an overwhelming majority (around 88%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, numbers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing stood at less than 1.7% of the total.

Assigning values to each result (from 5 for ‘strongly agree’ to 1 for ‘strongly disagree’, the average score was 4.25 overall, between ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’. In short, it looks like the collection as a whole represents a good starting point, even if a higher score would have been possible.

Secondly, we asked participants the following: **Which of the proposed change pathways do you think are more important for the success of the 2024-2029 Strategy? You can choose 1-3 options.**

The overall results for this are provided in Graph 2 (below). These show that the first pathway – that there should be a clearer link between vision and actions – was the most likely to be included by participants, with almost 50% doing so. No other pathway scored more than 40%, but being adaptable and adoptable by members and volunteers everywhere, highlighting the development contributions of libraries, and being relevant for all each had support from more than a third of respondents.

Meanwhile, the pathways which were least often voted for were around using the Strategy as a basis for building meaningful synergies with partners, setting out the public interest goal of our Federation, and being easily communicable, all of which were selected by fewer than 20% of respondents.
A point made by some respondents is that sometimes the distinction between different pathways was not entirely clear, and that they could perhaps have been organised into groups.

It is interesting to look at how far the probability of voting for one pathway was linked to that of voting for another one, as we do in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Probabilities of respondents voting for two pathways in combination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision-Actions</th>
<th>Adaptable, Adaptable</th>
<th>Responsive to Uncertainty</th>
<th>Development Contributions</th>
<th>Meaningful Synergies</th>
<th>Public Interest Goal</th>
<th>Relevant for All</th>
<th>External Focus</th>
<th>Easily Communicable</th>
<th>KPIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision-Actions</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptable, Adaptable</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to Uncertainty</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Contributions</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Synergies</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Interest Goal</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant for All</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Focus</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily Communicable</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPIs</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To read this table, each cell represents the share of people who voted for the pathway on the left who also voted for the pathway mentioned on the top. Therefore, we can see that 33% of people who felt that connecting vision with actions also wanted the new strategy to be adaptable and adaptable. At the other end, only 8% of people who felt that our new strategy should have a stronger focus on the world around us also felt that it should be easily communicable. Separately, we also compared these figures with the overall shares voting for each pathway.
From this work, we can see particularly strong connections, for example, between those wanting to see a stronger connection between vision and actions, and those wanting the new strategy to include key performance indicators. Similarly, there was quite a lot of overlap between those wanting a strategy that is adoptable and adaptable, and those who wanted it to be relevant for all, as well as easily communicable.

Other links which can be identified by comparing these figures with the overall shares voting for each pathway include that those wanting a stronger focus on wider contributions to development also are more likely to want a strategy that is responsive to an uncertain world, sets out the public interest goal of libraries, and has an external focus. Finally, those keen that the strategy helps build synergies with partners are also more likely to want it to be easily communicated and have key performance indicators.

In short, it is possible to see clusters of answers around the overall structure of the strategy, a more outward-looking focus, and greater relevance and adaptability for members. One respondent did offer their own breakdown, which is helpful: clarity, agility, advocacy and value.

Respondents were given the option to provide comments on their answers – these are summarised in the next section.

The next main question was: *Are there any change pathways that you think need to be amended? You can choose 1-3 options here and provide feedback.* The shares choosing to comment on each are given in Graph 3

![Graph 3: Shares suggesting that pathways needed amendment](image)

Interestingly, once again, the first pathway around making a stronger connection between vision and actions came first, with 14% feeling that it needed amendment, followed by wanting amendments to the pathway on being relevant for all. The pathway which received the least suggested amendments was that on being easily communicable.
It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the comments made go in different directions, from opposition in some cases to efforts to strengthen or sharpen them in others. These comments are the focus of the next section.

2. Summarising comments

Respondents were given two opportunities to provide additional comments, firstly when suggesting which pathways were priorities, and then to propose amendments. In this section, we go through each pathway in order to highlight common points.

It is worth noting from the start that many comments focused on the specifics of what could be included in the next strategy, effectively going into more detail on pathways rather than seeking to amend them. This information is nonetheless very helpful for the next stage in the development of the Strategy.

2.1 Make a stronger connection between Vision and Actions

Many comments here focused on affirming the relevance of this as a pathway, and welcomed the idea that the new Strategy should do this. As one respondent noted,

> At the moment the [strategy] often feels more like homework than a strategic perspective for the section and IFLA as a whole

There were also many that emphasised the link with having key performance indicators, as well as structures for ensuring accountability – i.e. verifying whether the actions we are taking really are leading to the change we want to see. Some suggested that independent evaluation would be helpful here, as well as asking about accountability of, and to, different groups.

While this relates to other pathways also, the role of the vision as a tool for shaping expectations and helping people to relate their own work and experiences to the global field was also highlighted. To do this, it would be important to be clear and simple, and carry out work to explain the vision, while also being realistic. Other comments asked about the link to the Global Vision

Suggestions for changes included questioning use of the word ‘stronger’, ensuring flexibility in the vision, and ensuring that actions then looked concrete enough to be grasped.

2.2 Be adaptable and adoptable by members, volunteers and librarians everywhere

Once again, there were a number of comments that simply welcomed the pathway. Others make the connection with how the Strategy is communicated (including through different channels and proactive outreach/surveying), ensuring that it is practical, and that it is flexible. One respondent in particular highlighted that it was important to accept that not everything would be relevant for everyone. There was a sense that past strategies have given undue attention to the needs of some over others, while another suggested that a goal would be for everyone to be able to see their place in the final document.
Further comments focused on practical aspects of IFLA’s work in general, for example the accessibility of the conference, demand for training (a very popular issue), the role of IFLA in providing a space for inclusive discussion.

In terms of changes, ideas included being realistic about what we can and cannot do, to avoid being directive and rather be enabling, to ensure that we accommodate different societal structures, and to be more future focused.

2.3 Be fit for and responsive in an uncertain world
On this pathway, in addition to comments that offered support, comments included the value of ensuring that we plan not only for sudden disasters but also change over time, as well as questioning whether a 5-year strategy has relevance in a fast-changing world. Others suggested that in looking at uncertainty, we should think both about our own readiness, and how to support the readiness and resilience of our communities. The fact that different regions face different risks was also raised.

 Plenty of comments looked more at specific ways in which a greater focus in this area could be operationalised, for example providing practical tools to help respond to disasters, supporting continuous learning, holding more regular events looking at current issues, and facilitating information sharing.

 Suggested changes included a call to be specific about particular risks (such as climate change), upholding values in an uncertain (or fast-changing world), and to put a greater emphasis on being proactive and innovative.

2.4 Bring out libraries’ contribution to human development and resilience
Beyond affirmations of the pathway as a whole, comments highlighted in particular the potential through the strategy to underline that contributing to development represents a responsibility and skill at all levels of the profession, as well as how work here related to IFLA’s overall mission to advocate for the field, as well as to build partnerships.

 More detailed suggestions focused on different aspects of development that should be highlighted (open access, heritage, disinformation, the Sustainable Development Goals, climate action, sustainable regional and urban development, and digital inclusion), as well as actions such as better demonstrating libraries’ impacts, carrying out more research, and building skills for development impact.

 Suggested changes included more focus on how to underline the uniquely trustworthy nature of libraries, more about communication and clearly siting libraries within communities and societies.

2.5 Provide a basis for meaningful synergies with partners
Comments here highlighted different aspects of partnerships, including how these could be formed and supported at all levels, and in particular the potential for knowledge partnerships. Some talked about specific partnerships, such as with UNESCO, publishers and vendors, as well as greater readiness to be flexible in how we partner.
In terms of practical suggestions, suggestions focused on providing practical tools to support partnership building, while others highlighted areas for partnerships, such as heritage, entrepreneurship and skills building.

Suggested changes included making clearer the role of working with library associations, being clearer about who partners are, being better at explaining who we are to partners, and to underline that partnerships should be mutually beneficial.

2.6 Reflect the public interest goal of our Federation
Responses here underlined connections between highlighting the public interest function of the Federation and our advocacy work, and how this can be a basis for partnerships. One comment suggested that a public interest goal could help bring people together.

Suggestions for change here related to being clearer about the underlying values of libraries, as well as their social justice function, but at the same time to be careful not to exclude anyone. Respondents also underlined that we should avoid too much of a focus on the current situation, and rather keep looking to the longer term.

2.7 Be relevant for all people and regions
This pathway received many comments, highlighting different aspects of what relevance might mean, as well as changes. Respondents highlighted IFLA’s unique potential reach, both geographically and in terms of library types, but also suggested that as part of this, we needed to address questions around financial accessibility, physical presence in more parts of the world, linguistic diversity, and diversity in representation, and support for mobility. The relevance of the conference for all members was brought up also, as was investing more in thinking about how we deal with cultural differences within the field (but also one suggesting that we should be firmer about upholding certain values, regardless of who that might exclude.

In terms of actions to support relevance, comments highlighted the value of supporting IFLA’s regional structures and library associations as key interlocutors, and/or identifying focal points in each country. The responsibility of members to communicate IFLA further was mentioned, alongside of course better adapted communication from different parts of IFLA, as well inclusive tools for knowledge sharing. One respondent suggested specific actions, such as producing a series of books on health.

As for suggestions for changes, ideas included making sure that we choose goals that leave room for everyone to be involved, ensure a strong focus on members and volunteer work, to make relevance more explicit, and

2.8 Focus more strongly on the wider world (not just on ourselves)
Among responses here, and in addition to those comments that simply underlined the value of this as a pathway, people noted how work here could link with how we build a sense of agency among libraries, as well as a stronger focus on advocacy and defending libraries from attack. Others highlighted the role of partnerships (including in specific areas such as education and advocacy), and the potential of working at regional level to achieve goals here. Nonetheless, one respondent suggested that IFLA may not yet be ready to open up to others.
Concerning practical changes, proposals included avoiding hyperbole and being realistic in how we talk about our place in the wider world, making clear that we are not giving up on working on ourselves (and in particular supporting library associations), highlighting how we are trying to connect what we do with wider trends, and making the connection with the partnerships we form with UN agencies and others.

2.9 Be more easily communicable, and use attractive and resonant language
There were fewer comments on this pathway, but comments here highlighted the importance of using clear language and summaries (as well as translations), providing materials which can be adapted by all. The importance of using communication to show impact appeared a number of times, and one respondent mentioned that in communicating, we should be sure to speak the language of the people we need to convince. Some also noted that we should think beyond social media, and look at more meaningful ways to reach out.

Suggestions mentioned included being more consistent in the way we talk about things, diverse and engaging communication, and making sure that the Strategy is understandable by everyone, in all parts of the world.

2.10 Include Key Performance Indicators and other means of measuring progress
There were lots of comments simply supporting a move to include KPIs, although a couple also cautioned against using these against strategic goals, rather than concrete actions. They were seen as helping to deliver transparency and accountability.

Many highlighted the need to design these carefully in order to make them meaningful, and one called or them to be developed collaboratively. Respondents also connected the preparation of KPIs at the global level with wider efforts to improve evaluation practice in the field, with some hoping to see a means for everyone to report back regularly on progress.

As for changes, as highlighted, there was some concern about where KPIs should focus, and how we can build a culture of evaluation more broadly.

2.11 Other comments
Finally, we did offer the opportunity to make broader comments. In terms of those which are not already covered above in some way, key ones included the desire that the Strategy should help to build the impact of the work of IFLA’s units, and provide a structure for mobilising energy, talent and resources. It should refer to emerging leaders, and allow for space to reflect the needs of under-represented groups, and build trust. Lastly, there calls for a more staggered approach, highlighting that planning should be over the shorter term, but visioning over the longer.

A quote from one respondent is also welcome:

“This is hard work. I understand that you will have much feedback that is in conflict and is quite varied. It’s more important than ever that our associations understand what they can uniquely contribute and then go all in on that. That
may mean some members will feel a sense of loss and shift of power and it may mean the loss of some members. That is necessary. This is important work. Thank you for taking it on. Thank you for the labor and the frustration and the work you will do together. As members, we value your effort.”

3. Conclusions
This report includes a lot of information, both about how IFLA should design its next strategy, and about how it should implement it. It highlights also a number of beliefs (positive and negative) about what IFLA is and should be, which are relevant for the organisation.

Its main value will now be in providing an important benchmark for the next Strategy. Practically, as the new text emerges, we will then need to measure it against the views and comments expressed here, in order to confirm that we have acted on them or, where this is not the case, that we can explain clearly why this is not the case.