

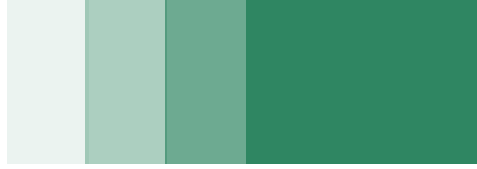


# IFLA Internet Manifesto

**Building better digital access with libraries**

2024





Libraries believe in a people-centred Internet, as both a guarantee of rights and an enabler of development. Upholding the fundamental rights of access to information and knowledge is a starting point. To guarantee these rights and realise this vision of the Internet, we must get governance right. This will require action by decision-makers and stakeholders at all levels, inside and outside of governments, including libraries.

This Manifesto – the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, although entirely updated – sets out the key principles that the library sector believes should underpin decisions taken about the Internet, as well as setting out libraries’ own contribution.

## 1. *Our vision for the world*

Meaningful and universal connectivity is connectivity that protects rights and realises potential. The Internet must connect societies and advance the rights and autonomy of individuals so that they can participate fully and freely in society.

## *Our vision for libraries* 2.

Libraries are an essential part of the infrastructure for digital inclusion, from policy development to service delivery. Libraries are inherently democratic spaces that can enhance access to information for all, including the digitally disadvantaged. Libraries must continue to be enabling partners in building connected societies that are sustainable, accountable and people-centred.

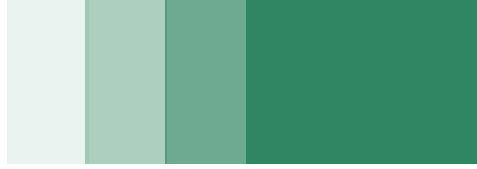

## 3. **Building a People-Centred Internet Together**

### 3a. **We can only achieve a truly people-centred Internet when people are:**

**Meaningfully connected:** Internet access is not merely a convenience, it is an enabler of freedom, empowerment and development in the digital age. Everyone must have the possibility to enjoy Internet access that goes beyond connectivity; both individually and collectively, with adequate speeds, devices, affordability and reliability. This is necessary to enjoy the diversity of the digital experience and the opportunities it offers for learning and empowerment. Multiple routes to connectivity – including through public access – build resilience and can help ensure full use of the potential of the Internet.

**Skilled:** Effective use of the Internet requires skills, ranging from basic literacy to more advanced technical and critical skills. Everyone, at all stages of life, needs to have the possibility to acquire and update such skills in order to realise the potential of the Internet.

**Informed:** The Internet can only ever be as useful as the information and services found there. Everyone must be able to find, access, engage with and apply the information they need online on reasonable terms. Access to relevant content must be considered a cultural rights issue; a key success of the Internet has been its enabling of the spread of open access as a key pillar of the Knowledge Commons.



**Safe:** Everyone has a right to safety and security, online and offline. People must be provided with options to safeguard their personal data and protected from cyber threats and misleading content. They deserve to have their privacy protected, preventing unauthorised collection and misuse of their personal data.

**Included and respected:** All individuals must be able to participate in the digital environment regardless of their location, beliefs or socio-economic status. There must be particular care for vulnerable groups, as well as high levels of respect and recognition for complex and varied indigenous knowledge systems, as well as decolonisation principles. Young people must be protected in terms of their rights around access and intellectual freedom.

**Engaged:** The Internet is fundamentally a tool for communication and exchange, and should enable this. It should bring people together, overcoming distance and barriers, and allow them to do more than would be possible alone. Included in this, we believe that people need to be engaged in the way the Internet is governed, with the agency to shape it.

### **3b. Crucially, the Internet cannot fulfil its potential when it is:**

**Fragmented:** A key potential benefit of the Internet is the possibility to access data, information, knowledge and ideas from around the world. This helps accelerate innovation, build understanding, and overcome geographical barriers. We cannot let uncoordinated and conflicting national laws and policies lead to a splintering of the internet.

**Inequitable:** The Internet and digital technologies can be a major driver of progress, but when they are only enjoyed by some, they risk exacerbating divides. Following the logic of ‘leave no-one behind’, we need to combat policies, business models and trends that drive digital exclusion.

**Harmful to human rights and development:** The Internet must be a force for the protection and enjoyment of human rights. Where it, as well as the policies, business models and practices that shape it, is undermining rights to privacy, intellectual freedom and more without good reason, action is required.

**Purely commercial:** While the importance of commercial players in the online world cannot be denied, an Internet where only financial motives matter will be likely to fail to deliver for all. The search for market dominance at the expense of alternatives, as well as the promotion of mis- and disinformation as a consequence of business models focused on maximising attention without regard to consequences, are particular concerns.

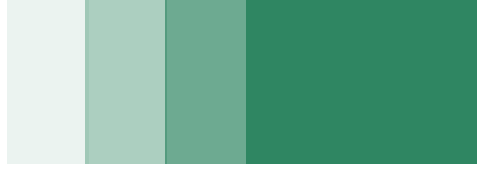

## **4. Governments can achieve this vision through:**

### **4a. Regulation that is:**

- **Coordinated:** Governments are more likely to be able to address the power of major platforms when they act together. Furthermore, coordinated action is the best way to avoid Internet fragmentation. This is preferable to a model where governments ‘race to regulate’, leaving some countries facing pressure to implement rules over which they have had no influence.
- **Comprehensive and outcomes focused:** We need a coherent, cross-cutting approach to Internet regulation. This can be assured by ensuring an outcomes-first, rather than a technology-first approach, focussing on how Internet regulation can support goals such as inclusion, education, innovation and more. For example, copyright laws must be updated to the digital age, in order to remove unnecessary barriers, uncertainties and risks faced by libraries in fulfilling their missions.
- **People-centred and rights-respecting:** Decisions taken about the Internet and how it works must take full account of impacts on rights. In addition to actively seeking to achieve rights through internet governance, there must also be efforts to address situations where rights are jeopardised, for example through violations of net neutrality.
- **Reasonable, proportionate and evidence-based:** To manage potential conflicts between rights, Internet regulation must follow principles of reasonableness and proportionality. To do this, it is crucial that decisions are based on evidence. This is particularly the case for new technologies such as artificial intelligence.
- **Democratic and participatory:** Given how essential the Internet is for so much of our lives, as well as for the achievement of sustainable development goals, regulation must be shaped by democratic principles. It must be designed transparently and with guarantees of accountability. In particular, libraries must be represented in all relevant decision-making processes, given their understanding of user needs and expertise in information ethics.
- **Supportive of community initiatives and digital public goods:** Laws and regulation should ensure adequate space and support for community-owned and led initiatives, such as community networks, platforms such as Wikipedia, and wider digital public goods.

#### 4b. Investment that is:

- **Equitable:** Government spending has a key role to play in overcoming barriers and launching and maintaining services and infrastructure that would not be



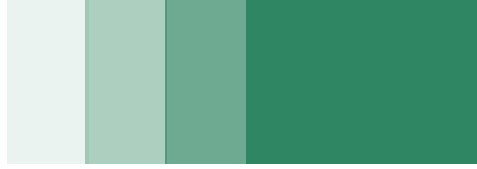

supported by the private sector. It can help address gaps in skills, confidence and access to content.

- **Locally relevant:** While the Internet is global, the interactions which determine its impact on people's lives take place at the local level. Therefore, investment must be made to ensure that each community can make the most of the internet, in line with their needs and priorities.
- **Comprehensive:** Spending on Internet related issues should align with the principles of a people-centred Internet set out above. Investment in connectivity should come alongside investment in skills, content, staffing and more. In particular, we support efforts to ensure that diverse content – including both digitised library collections and new ideas, research, and creativity – are made available and accessible.
- **Supportive of digital public infrastructures and digital public goods:** various networks, services and goods have a key public interest function, and we encourage efforts to support these. We affirm that libraries typically act as 'on ramps' to these infrastructures and services, and so must be part of any capacity building in this area.
- **Evaluated:** In order to support effective use of public funding, there must be measurement of the impacts of investments, and engagement with libraries and other community institutions to support data collection.

## 5. **An inclusive, rights-based, information society supported by libraries is characterised by**

- **Needs and context-based digital cooperation strategies:** Governments must collaborate with libraries on digital cooperation strategies. They must draw from libraries' expertise in information access and connection with civil society at a local level to create policies that are locally relevant and that ensure better access to information and civic participation in the information society.
- **Connecting the next billion:** Libraries act as an anchor connectivity point of access for the underserved. They provide free access to the Internet and devices, and act as a trusted gateway to information for millions of individuals around the world. When libraries are adequately funded, they act as connectivity points for communities while carrying out initiatives and programmes that support access to information and knowledge.
- **Advancing digital literacies:** The development of people's digital skills (including critical thinking for the digital environment) is essential, not only for access to information and Internet governance but also for the fulfilment of sustainable





development goals. The global library network, staff and infrastructure is vast and has a key role in mitigating the digital divide and building digital and cross-cutting skills in communities worldwide.

- **Better policies and guardrails in the face of AI:** While AI has the potential to increase access to knowledge, it can also lead to a degradation of information quality through inaccuracy, spread of misinformation and discriminatory bias. Governments and other actors should collaborate with libraries in advancing the understanding of emerging technologies among citizens and the workforce. This includes, but is not limited to, the promotion of awareness of the benefits of AI, but also acknowledgment of its risks, and societal and environmental impacts.
- **Improved access to e-government and advancement of the digital economy:** Libraries are key civic centres, offering a space for communities to access state resources. In a similar way, they offer content, training and services to entrepreneurs, micro and small businesses. These activities, amongst others, contribute to fast-tracking a digital economy future in developing countries.
- **Better digital integration of lower-income economies and vulnerable population groups:** Libraries are instrumental in advancing the rights of vulnerable individuals and people, in particular in the Global South. Their inclusive principles ensure that individuals with disabilities and varying skill-levels, from remote communities and with diverse cultural backgrounds can fully participate in the digital space. They also safeguard young people as a vulnerable population group in need of special protections in terms of their rights around access to information, intellectual freedom and privacy, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Library and information professionals also commit to a vision of the Internet that supports decolonisation principles and that recognises the complexity and sovereignty of indigenous, native and First Nations knowledge systems.
- **Multi-level partnership and impact:** The combination of staff, expertise, support and content that libraries offer can combine effectively with the work of other stakeholders to achieve more for a people-centred Internet than either could on their own.

*Endorsed by the IFLA Governing Board (August 2024)*

*This Manifesto will be reviewed within two years in order to evaluate its implementation and verify its relevance to developments in Internet governance discussions.*

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