

Stichting IFLA Global Libraries Report on Activities 2020

Background

Stichting IFLA Global Libraries (SIGL), an independent public benefit foundation, was established in 2016 to support the work of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as a legacy partner of Global Libraries.

The object of the foundation, which is exclusively charitable and educational, is to strengthen the library field and to empower public libraries to improve people's lives and support growth of sustainable societies.

This report will focus on the activities undertaken by IFLA in support on the legacy initiatives throughout 2020. The actual activities over 2020 were lower than planned, due to delay and severe disruptions because of COVID-19. Many planned activities involve bringing people together for face-to-face meetings, workshops and training. The restrictions on travel around the world meant that many projects were not possible in 2020.

Overview of phases and implementation

IFLA's Legacy grant is shaped in three phases:

1. Discover and Launch (2017-2018)

As initially planned, this phase established a collective Global Vision (GV) among IFLA members and the library field and engaged IFLA's Professional Units and members in synchronized planning to achieve the vision that will catalyse and promote change. It built a strong foundation for subsequent phases and prepared grounds for developing strong library metrics for better advocacy by launching the first Library Map of the World (LMW) and Development and Access to Information (DA2I) report.

2. Implement and Amplify (2018-2022)

This phase aims at implementing strategic and operational plans developed in phase one and aligns IFLA's work to implement the Vision around an ongoing consultative cycle. It uses capacity building and knowledge sharing to build, connect and mobilize efforts of leaders at the national level, and begins the shift to strong regional leadership that will facilitate regional cooperation and progress on common challenges.

3. Grow and Thrive (2023-2026)

This phase will see IFLA and the library field reaching full capacity and operating with increased effectiveness and impact. All the work to build capacity and expertise will be in place and results will begin to be fully realized. Library leaders will be able to assess and communicate impact on local communities and at the national level to advocate for funding, resources and enabling policy environments. A cycle of strategic renewal and progression will be well-established that will ensure sustainability and lay the foundation for action beyond legacy.

The main activities to deliver started in the year 2017 and have continued over subsequent years, including in 2020:

1. Convene the library field to develop a global vision for the future of libraries that only a strong and connected library field can achieve. With the result of the Global Vision discussion (2017 and 2018), the IFLA Strategy was developed in an inclusive way with all members (2018-2019) and launched in August 2019. Since then, we have both focused on the implementation of the Strategy, working with Members and sections alike, and reformed IFLA's governance to match the ambition of the Strategy.
2. Conduct a membership survey to understand what members value in IFLA and what they hope for the future of IFLA (completed in 2018)
3. Create a plan to develop capacity to support regional operations and national development and learning (ongoing, linked to point 1)
4. Library Map of the World/Development and Access to Information (DA2I) Report (ongoing)
5. Planning for Leader Mobilization (ongoing)
6. Launch campaigns to support the library field to adopt community engagement and outcome measurement (ongoing)

Following the results of the IFLA Global Vision and the development of the Strategy – the second phase in the development roadmap agreed by the SIGL Board in order to deliver on the SIGL grant agreement – our attention has now turned to implementation.

The Governance Review has been a crucial part of this, looking not only to give IFLA the inclusive, effective and transparent structures it needs to achieve the roadmap, but also to set a standard of being open for all.

Starting already in 2019, this process has emphasised the importance of involving the whole field, both at the stage of identifying priorities (in 2019), and then of defining how these will be acted on (in 2020). Through multiple surveys of members and volunteers, as well as sets of round table discussions with IFLA regions and professional units, we provided unprecedented opportunities to build understanding and receive feedback.

By being ready to listen and learn, it has been possible both to make the document stronger, and to strengthen further the sense of belonging to IFLA among members. Key highlights have included a much stronger focus on diversity across IFLA's structures, new regional structures (more below), and new possibilities to form more agile groups to address emerging issues.

Thanks to the inclusiveness of the process, it proved possible to bring IFLA's membership along with the proposals, leading to an overwhelmingly positive response to the resulting Statutes in an advisory referendum towards the end of the year, and subsequently at IFLA's extraordinary General Assembly held in February 2021.

Looking into 2021, ongoing priorities included the finalisation of a new set of Rules of Procedure to add further detail to the Statutes, as well as the preparation of a Handbook in order to support volunteers better in their engagement with IFLA, as well as to promote good practices across the organisation.

We had planned, in 2020, to continue with the series of **regional workshops** already started with sessions in Buenos Aires (for Latin America and the Caribbean) and Alexandria (for the Middle East and North Africa), with a session for Asia-Oceania planned to take place back-to-back with the intended President's Meeting in Brisbane in June, as well as sessions for Europe and Africa later in the year.

However, the global pandemic required a change in approach. We therefore continued to work with those countries which had been represented in regional workshops in 2019, helping them to deliver on their commitments to take the Strategy back to their national library fields and define activities, and working to celebrate examples of good practice through the ‘Units + Strategy’ initiative (see below)

In parallel, we launched work to identify Professional Units which offered powerful examples of engaging with the Strategy. A first cohort of fifteen was selected, and worked with Headquarters staff to develop stories describing their work. The goal here was not to pick ‘winners’, but rather to provide helpful models that others could follow, in order to show what could be done to align with wider priorities, in line with the goals of the SIGL grant to find new alignments in the work of the library field.

As a result, soon after the pandemic forced the closure of IFLA’s offices, alongside libraries in many countries, we placed examples of these efforts by Members (Associations + Strategy) and Professional Units (Units + Strategy) at the heart of the regular ‘**IFLA From Home**’ newsletters sent to the IFLA-L mailing list. This has helped maintain a focus on the Strategy, even in the absence of the World Library and Information Congress, as well as celebrating examples of engagement, with much positive feedback. In parallel, a new 10-Minute International Librarian series of posts has offered ideas for quick activities which can help people feel attached to the global field.

In addition to the IFLA From Home series, we have also invested significant time in collecting news and examples of the library response to the COVID pandemic. Our **COVID-19 and Libraries page** brought together information and inspiration for the field, including sharing plans for re-opening from different countries which in turn have helped others develop their own documents. Through this, we have seen a further strengthening of the field.

Another change forced by the pandemic was the cancellation of the President’s Meeting, which was to have taken place in Brisbane in June 2020. This would have focused strongly on the update of the **Trend Report**, the first since it originally appeared in 2013.

Further issues came from the need to cancel the expert discussions planned for March as a first step in the preparation of the Trend Report, and from the cancellation of the Library and Information Congress 2020, which would have been the optimal opportunity to launch. Furthermore, our capacity – both within Headquarters, and among the volunteers who would have supported the work – was also stretched.

Preparing the report at a time of uncertainty, without the possibility to take account of the full implications of the Pandemic, and on reduced capacity, would have risked providing limited value, with the insights provided likely rapidly overtaken by events. As such, it represents an important project for the future, and could represent an important early contribution to the development of future Strategies.

2020 also saw important progress in strengthening our ability to reach and support the entire global library field, building capacity at the national and regional levels to seize opportunities and face the future with confidence. As part of the Governance Review (see above), the concept of Regional Division Committees and a Regional Council was developed, providing effective and upgraded spaces for discussing and launching initiatives to respond to needs and build capacity at the regional and national levels.

As these take shape in 2021, there will be new opportunities to launch a learning process bringing together members at the regional level. There will be a particular focus on developing the capabilities for advocacy, in order to ensure a more sustainable future for libraries.

2020 was also the year that the decision was taken to organise the first ever virtual World Library and Information Congress, in 2021. To ensure that this draws on the strongest examples and best responds to the needs of the library field, an extensive survey of past WLIC participants took place in 2020, providing invaluable insights for planning. The Congress promises to be the most inclusive in IFLA's history, giving more library and information professionals than ever before the opportunity to be inspired, learn, and contribute to the success of the field.