

The Top Eight Things to Know When Attending Your First IGF



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1: Know what to expect

The Internet Governance Forum is a neutral space where stakeholders concerned about the Internet and its future can share ideas about Internet policy and development issues on an equal footing. Walking down a hallway, you may encounter discussions between government policymakers working on legislation, engineers developing tomorrow's Internet standards, representatives from your favorite social network, or civil society activists who risk their lives at home for online freedoms. Everyone exchanges information and viewpoints, and builds (human) networks to help them address the issues that are important to them.

Knowing some IGF terminology may help keep you oriented. Dynamic Coalitions (DCs), for example, are informal groups with members from various stakeholder groups. There are about 15 active DCs, each focused on a specific issue. Most are open to anyone interested in contributing to their discussions; you can ask to join the email list of any that interest you.

Best Practices Forums (BPFs) are working groups created by the IGF; each produces best practice outcome documents in their assigned area.

Look for a pocket acronym guide at the booths run by different organizations.

2. Be selective

To get the most out of your first IGF experience, focus on one or two topics where you have expertise, or that concern your country or region. Focusing on a limited number of topics will prevent overload and help you organize your time.

3. Connect with your local Internet community

Your attendance at the global IGF brings most value when you are knowledgeable about national or regional Internet issues. Start by identifying relevant Internet governance initiatives on the IGF website. (See the URL

at the end of this video for a page of links to relevant resources).

Look for upcoming country or regional meetings and points of contact. If there is a meeting in your area before the global IGF, try to attend, whether in person or remotely. If neither is possible, read papers or documents from last year's national or regional meetings (on the IGF website), and see if you can connect with the people or organizations via email. This will familiarize you with the issues and give you a chance to meet some of the global IGF attendees in advance.

4. Plan your time—and leave breathing room

Putting in some advance effort will make it easier to understand the discussions at the IGF. Try to schedule your travel so you can attend the newcomer orientation on Day 0, the day before the IGF officially starts, as it is extremely helpful.

Look at the agenda as soon as it is posted --usually two to three months before the meeting. There are several types of sessions at the IGF. Main sessions may take up to three-and-a-half hours, while workshops take about an hour and a half. There are usually several sessions occurring simultaneously. If you want to attend two scheduled at the same time, it's best to make at least a tentative choice in advance. Consider broadening your exposure to new issues by adding one or two sessions outside your areas of interest.

When planning, decide where you can skip a session periodically, to catch your breath and interact with other participants. IGF attendees stress the importance of chatting at coffee tables or in the hallways. It's a great way to meet people who can help you, and whom you can help, as you move forward in achieving your goals after the meeting.

5. Do your homework

The more you know about the topics for sessions you want to attend, the better you will be able to take in the discussion and participate. Try to do some basic reading.

Look at the session webpages on the IGF website; the organizers may have posted documents to help you prepare. You may want to look at videos or transcripts from previous IGF meetings as well. The output of prior Dynamic Coalition or Best Practice Forum sessions is also available on the IGF website.

Consider preparing a short paper to share about your regional or national situation in a specific area. These are often highly appreciated, especially if they reflect some of the core themes of the annual IGF meeting, which you can find on the IGF website.

6. Meet new people

Bring your business cards, because the IGF is a great place to expand your network. You can discover and join new organizations, communities, and interest groups. Don't be shy—just introduce yourself and join or start a conversation. Ask to share notes from sessions you could not attend. The IGF has a very open, welcoming, and friendly atmosphere.

Several organizations hold side events such as dinners and receptions. Watch for invitations handed out or sent by email.

7. Listen, speak up, and help out

During some IGF sessions, people line up to ask questions and to comment. They represent many countries and different stakeholder groups. Listening carefully is respectful and better prepares you to make your own comments and send follow-up messages after the IGF.

While speaking offers the benefit of recognition, don't speak for its own sake. Try to offer a different perspective or a solution-oriented observation. Share a local experience, and speak with confidence.

You can also help out in sessions as a remote moderator. Most IGF sessions are live-streamed in the six UN languages. Moderators, who are trained by the IGF organizers, are needed to recognize and integrate remote participants in the Q&A and discussion. It's a perfect task to take on when you want to connect with session organizers and attendees with interests similar to yours.

Another way to get involved is to register as a resource person on the IGF website. Workshop organizers may call

on you for particular expertise or if your presence on a panel would improve regional or gender diversity.

Finally, a lot of the IGF's work now happens through intersessional work, between global IGF meetings.

See the link page to learn how to get involved as a remote moderator, resource person, or in intersessional work.

8. Stay engaged

Think of the IGF as a process rather than a single event. You keep the process going by following up with people you've met, and staying involved through national and regional Internet governance initiatives, as well as through other Internet-related organizations. Share your experience through social media, write blog posts or an article, or connect with local Internet organizations.

If you're ready for more, you can plan a workshop for a local or regional IGF, or propose a session at the next global IGF with some of your new colleagues. Or organize a remote participation hub in your city for a local or regional IGF, inviting people to join discussions through video / audio feed. Whatever you do, know that your work is helping to strengthen the openness and accessibility of the Internet.

Resource links

This URL provides links to the resources mentioned in this video: www.internetsociety.org/IGF/top8

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