

Participating in international librarianship

From living and working overseas to participating in online communities, there are many ways to be an international librarian, no matter your level of experience or ability to travel. What does it mean to be an international librarian? To me, an international librarian is someone who is interested in the world's libraries and the people who use them. They may or may not spend time working in a foreign country, but they will be interested in access, developments around the world, and networking with librarians globally. This probably sounds like you! The internet has made it much easier to be an international librarian, and means that you can participate globally without leaving home, unless you want to.

Participating internationally has many benefits. The opportunity to learn from other cultures and experiences and to gain a broader perspective is invaluable. For many, working overseas is not possible because of family or community commitments, but there are many other ways to get involved.

Attending conferences overseas can be a great way to share experiences and learn, just as at home but from a different perspective. Last year I spent eight months working for IFLA on secondment from the University of Technology, Sydney and attended the IFLA Congress in Quebec City. A walk through the poster session alone gives an indication of the breadth of issues and ideas librarians around the world are thinking about, from the Semantic Web to automating small, rural libraries in the developing world. IFLA, and other international conferences, are inspiring – many of us share the same problems, but we all have different ways of overcoming them. Being exposed to different cultures and ways of solving problems can expand your horizons and the possibilities for your library users.

Beyond conferences, there are many other ways to participate in international librarianship from study tours to short term volunteering. One way any librarian can be involved is social networking. You can develop a strong network of professionals around the world to share advice, ideas, ask questions, and to meet or work on projects together. Facebook and Twitter are two easy sites to start with. More associations are starting to facilitate the creation of virtual committees and others are moving more of their work online.

This opens up opportunities for working with committees in associations in Australia and overseas. I have been a member of ALIA and other associations both at home in Australia and while overseas, and it's a great way to keep learning and to maintain connections no matter where you live.

There are many ways to participate in international librarianship, whatever your level of interest, but most importantly you don't need to be long-established in your career or a senior manager to take part. Taking the first step can be as easy as adding a new friend.

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IFLA: the global voice of libraries and its members

Did you know the number of library professionals worldwide has recently been estimated to between 500 000 and 1 000 000? At the international level, this large and growing number of library and information professionals is represented by IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

IFLA was founded in 1927 and has its coordinating office (IFLA Headquarters) in The Hague, The Netherlands, in the building of the KB, the National Library of the Netherlands. To build up a strong international network, IFLA also has three regional offices. IFLA Africa in Pretoria, South Africa, IFLA Asia and Oceania in Singapore, and IFLA Latin America & Caribbean in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. To be able to provide information in all seven IFLA languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish) IFLA also has four active language centres, in Egypt, Senegal, Russian Federation, and Beijing.

IFLA has a Governing Board that is responsible for the managerial and professional direction of IFLA. One of the advisory bodies of the Governing Board is the Professional Committee. The Professional Committee takes care of IFLA's professional activities, policies, and programmes.

IFLA's aims, objectives, and professional programme can only be fulfilled with the cooperation and active involvement of its members. IFLA, as a membership organisation, welcomes as its members library associations, library institutions, individuals, and LIS students. Currently over 1600 IFLA members in almost 150 countries worldwide work together under the IFLA umbrella to help define the agenda of the international library and information community. Through their active participation in one or more of the over 50 IFLA working groups, they build a strong network for international librarianship. For almost every library topic you can think of, IFLA has a Section, Special Interest Group, or Core Activity. Within these working groups, conferences and meetings are organised. Often ground-breaking work emerges in the form of guidelines and other publications (both online and in paper form) to enhance international standards.

IFLA, the global voice of libraries, provides information specialists throughout the world with a forum for exchanging ideas and promoting international cooperation, research, and development in all fields. At the same time IFLA is one of the platforms on which libraries, information centres, and information professionals worldwide can formulate their goals, exert their influence as a group, protect their interests, and find solutions to global problems.

As an IFLA member you can participate in professional discussions, dialogues, information exchange, and other activities through our many professional groups, on a broad variety of topics. IFLA Members receive free section registrations, free subscription to the IFLA journal and the IFLA Directory, and substantial discounts on IFLA congresses registration and IFLA publications.

If you as a librarian or information specialist would like to establish international contacts to further or evaluate your every day practice, or if you just want to broaden your horizon by contributing to library work in your specific working area at an international level, a good way to get started is to get involved in IFLA and one of its many activities. For more information on IFLA and all its activities, visit the IFLA website: <http://www.ifla.org>

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