

Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC PAL)

Principles on Public Access in Libraries

The DC-PAL hereby presents the Principles on Public Access in Libraries for review and feedback as part of the Dynamic Coalition Main Session scheduled for the 2015 IGF meeting in Brazil. The WSIS+10 review is underway and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been adopted, with national development plans to follow. Feedback on this statement from IGF participants in 2015 would underline the critical role of libraries in ensuring access to information through providing internet and supporting technology, and support libraries in their efforts to engage in the national development plans related to the sustainable development goals.

Introduction: The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 19, states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that access to information is crucial. Access to information empowers people to exercise their political and socio-economic rights, to be economically active, to learn new skills and to hold their governments to account. It enables informed decision-making, supports creativity and innovation, strengthens identity and provides transparency. While the number of Internet users worldwide exceeds three billion, a significant percentage do not have their own network connection. Hundreds of millions of people use the Internet through shared connections and through providers of public access such as libraries. Achieving access to information requires more than investment in technology infrastructure. It requires a policy environment that supports governments and other stakeholders in publishing information online and ensuring it is accessible, that ensures individuals have the ability to find and use information provided via the Internet, and that communities have the capacity and incentives to publish local content online. Public libraries are trusted, safe institutions that already exist in many developing countries. They are funded by the taxpayer and embedded in government infrastructure. They partner with civil society, with entrepreneurs and with the private sector. They include skilled and qualified library staff who offer the public support on technology and training on information and media literacy. Libraries provide an avenue to achieve ubiquitous public access to the Internet and to ensure that people have the skills they need to access information through technology.

Principles

Libraries have a role in national development through providing access to information. The members of the Internet Governance Forum agree with the following principles:

Infrastructure: Libraries should be recognized as a vehicle to ensure universal access to the Internet. Libraries should be used to initiate universal and affordable infrastructure in developing countries and under-served communities in developed countries. Where libraries do not exist, information and documentation centres should be recognized as a vehicle for ensuring universal access.

Policy: Policies and legislation should create an enabling environment for universal access to information by supporting the role of libraries in providing public access to ICTs, Internet connectivity and technology training.

Copyright: National and international copyright frameworks should balance the public interest in accessing information with the rights of authors, artists, and publishers by ensuring provisions for libraries and archives to provide public access to the world's knowledge in all formats.

Accessibility: All people, irrespective of gender, age, capacity, race or ethnicity, should have access to information through ICTs and the skills needed to participate fully in society.

Privacy: Individuals have the right to privacy when they seek information using the Internet. Internet users in public venues such as libraries must not be subject to surveillance of their activities.

Skills development: Libraries should be supported in their role of offering training and skills development in using technology, media and information literacy, so that people can access the information and services that they need.

Open access content: Through providing technology and Internet access, libraries offer and promote access to free online content that supports education and development, complementing access to commercial content through online subscription resources.

Local content: Through providing technology and offering support, libraries have the capacity to promote and enable the creation of local content and to ensure its preservation. Libraries should be supported in using and facilitating access to open data and open access solutions and libraries' role in providing access to government information and services should be recognized.