



The benefits of attending IFLA conferences

Executive Summary

The IFLA Section for Libraries and Research Services for Parliaments wanted to understand more about the benefits that participants got from attending the annual preconference and/or the main IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) conference. A survey was developed which 65 respondents completed from 44 countries from all the regions of the world. All the respondents work in parliaments, most as employees and a few as parliamentary development consultants.

Employers paid for 70% of participants to attend the conference, with relatively small numbers who paid for themselves, or were paid for by either a donor organisation or Library Association. Nearly 90% of participants rated the preconference which is focused upon the work of Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services as more useful than the more general IFLA conference focused on the work of libraries generally.

Benefits of attendance

The key benefits of attending the conference for their organisations were described by respondents as:

- Learn from other parliamentary libraries/research services
- Gather new ideas to develop your service
- Identify future trends that will affect your service
- Assess your service against international best practice for parliamentary libraries/research services

Respondents also mentioned the benefits of identifying which other parliamentary libraries/research services to work with, or promoting your service. Some respondents mentioned having a broader context, or building a network to call upon for specific benchmarking requests and exchanging information about best practice.

¹ Participants at the 29th IFLA pre-conference, Singapore 2013. Photocredit: BeckerFraserPhotos

There was even greater congruence from survey participants when it came to identifying what the personal benefits were from attending the IFLA conference and just under 90% identified three features:

- Networking with the international community
- Professional development
- Identify new ideas

Focus group members said it was hard to differentiate between individual and organisational benefits of networking, as networks are maintained by individuals and used for business benefit. They spoke of the inspiration they received from attending a global conference and meeting people all around the world working in similar environments and facing similar challenges. This results in deep knowledge sharing and increased motivation for the work of parliamentary libraries and research services upon their return home.

“It is more like education than training – your thinking develops, you get insights, arguments, evidence, bad examples as well as good. It isn’t so much that you get products to slavishly reproduce as your practice is better informed, stimulated – not necessarily in a direct way. And the network has been very useful in informing/supporting initiatives between the conferences.”

What would make it easier to attend

There were several important threads in the answers which all tended towards reducing the cost of attendance. The ideas included having the conference venue in your own region, or making the conference shorter or providing more opportunities for funding. More relevant programming was important to some, as was a support letter from the Section Chair. Language assistance was mentioned by about 11%.

Recommendations for IFLA Section leadership

- Advocate with the Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments (ASGP) by sending a report to ASGP, writing an article about the IFLA Section’s work for the ASGP Newsletter, and a general invitation via ASGP, so that our profile is raised with Secretaries-General
- Engage with other parliamentary forums (e.g. World e-Parliament, IPU Assemblies etc.) to raise the profile of the IFLA Section’s work
- Post an Invitation letter from Chair on website for downloading that outlines the benefits of attending the conference
- Make it easier to understand how the pre-conference, the training day and main conference work together for first timers considering attending
- Post a Communique/one page report on website for delegates to present to their own parliamentary leadership shortly after conference
- Ensure relevance of theme to parliamentary work
- Consider Webinars and other ways of attending remotely
- Arrange for Podcasting presentations where possible

Ideas to advocate for change with IFLA leadership

- How to shorten the length of the conference for participants attending both the preconference and the main conference
- Hold business meetings simultaneously with the conference sessions (as the second Standing Committee meetings are held) to reduce the impact of the two slow days between the pre-conferences and the main IFLA conference getting under way.
- Reduce the registration fee, especially for developing countries