



# Making the Most of International Meetings

## A Playbook for IFLA Representatives

International meetings, such as those organised by the United Nations, offer a great opportunity to speak up for libraries, and make contacts in a way that isn't possible at other times

To make the most of these chances, it is vital to plan ahead, use the time well, and follow up

This briefing offers tips on what to do before, during and after meetings, on talking to other delegates, and on how to convince (almost) any delegate that libraries matter to their work!

Attending an international meeting, especially on behalf of IFLA, is an opportunity both to promote the relevance and importance of libraries, and to build up contacts for yourself and colleagues in the library community. Here are a set of ideas for how you can best use these opportunities! While there is a strong focus on meetings related to the Sustainable Development Goals, you can also use this on other occasions.

There are also two annexes, with suggestions on how to make best use of any time you get with useful contacts, and then on arguments to use with different people on the importance of libraries.

### Before You Go

1. Look at the list of participants, if this is available. Do any look interesting (i.e. because they are from your country, speak your language, or are working on library-related subjects?)
2. If you find any, see if you can work out their e-mail addresses from Google, or call up the ministry and ask for contact details. Say that you are looking forward to seeing them at the meeting.
3. Check if they appear on Google Images – this will make it possible to identify them at the meeting. Are they on social media – can you follow them?
4. Look carefully at the programme. Which sessions could offer an opportunity to talk about libraries? Are any of the participants you have identified speaking? If you are there with a colleague, coordinate who goes to what!
5. Is there civil society coordination? Who is leading it? Can you ask for a chat about their expectations? Can you register for any pre-meetings?

### Why Attend International Meetings?

International meetings can seem long, slow and formal, and mean time out of your agenda.

However, they can also be an important part of an advocacy strategy. For example, they allow you to:

- Meet senior contacts who are difficult to approach at home – for example a director or ministerial advisor – either for yourself or for colleagues in another country
- Find information about national policies and processes – for example how the SDGs are being implemented or coordinated.
- Meet like-minded NGOs working on similar issues to you, and share ideas – for example on who to talk to, or successful strategies
- Speak at a session and raise awareness of libraries to a large number of people.

6. Prepare your arguments – what is the library ‘angle’ on all of the subjects covered in the meeting? Use ‘[Access and Opportunity for All](#)’ to get ideas, as well as the [Development and Access to information Report](#), the [SDG Stories](#) on Library Map of the World, and the examples collected on our [start.me page](#). While these focus on the SDGs, the arguments are useful elsewhere.
7. Refresh your knowledge – can you say how many libraries there are in your country, how many people they serve etc? Ask colleagues for examples of how libraries in your country matter on all the themes covered in the meeting.
8. Make sure you have enough business cards, and relevant materials to share.

## When You’re There

9. Take part in any civil society pre-briefings (before the meeting as a whole, or in the mornings). This will help you understand how the meeting will work (especially speaking slots), and potentially find allies in arguing for the importance of access to information.
10. If only one statement from civil society is allowed, get involved in drafting this. Be aware that there are many different interests and stakeholders, so be clever about ensuring key library messages are included.
11. Get to the room early. Walk around to see if you can find out where the people you want to talk to are sitting – there may be country name-plates. If you can, make sure you then sit in a place where you can see them.
12. Aim for one person at a time – you don’t know how long the first person you find will want to talk, and it looks bad to leave in a hurry. If there is more than one of you, you can divide responsibilities.
13. Be quick and clear when you make your case – they need to understand rapidly why you are interesting to talk to. If you feel comfortable, take a photo. See the annex for more.
14. If you are talking to someone from another country, ask them if it is OK to put them in touch with librarians locally, and get their contact details.
15. Take notes straight after each meeting so you don’t forget!

## Once the Meeting is Over

16. Follow-up! Send an e-mail to people you met, as well as relevant extra information. When you do this, don’t just send a one-line message with lots of attachments – take the time to explain these and why they are relevant. Share your photo with them if you have one.
17. If you didn’t manage to meet your targets, send them an e-mail proposing a phone call or meeting subsequently. At least you will have your experience of the meeting in common.
18. If the meeting went well and there is scope for cooperation, invite the contacts to events, or perhaps offer them the opportunity to feature them in your local library journal.
19. If your contacts said that they would be happy to be in touch with librarians from their country, share relevant details with your colleagues (including via IFLA HQ).
20. Let IFLA know! We’re always interested in who you met, and the messages you heard.

## ANNEX 1: Two Minutes to Impress

When talking about libraries at an international meeting – or indeed any meeting with decision-makers or influencers – it is important to prepare yourself to make the most of the opportunity. The first 20 seconds can be crucial, as they will shape the judgement of your interlocutor. You then need to keep them interested, and keen to hear more. This is often described as an 'elevator pitch'.

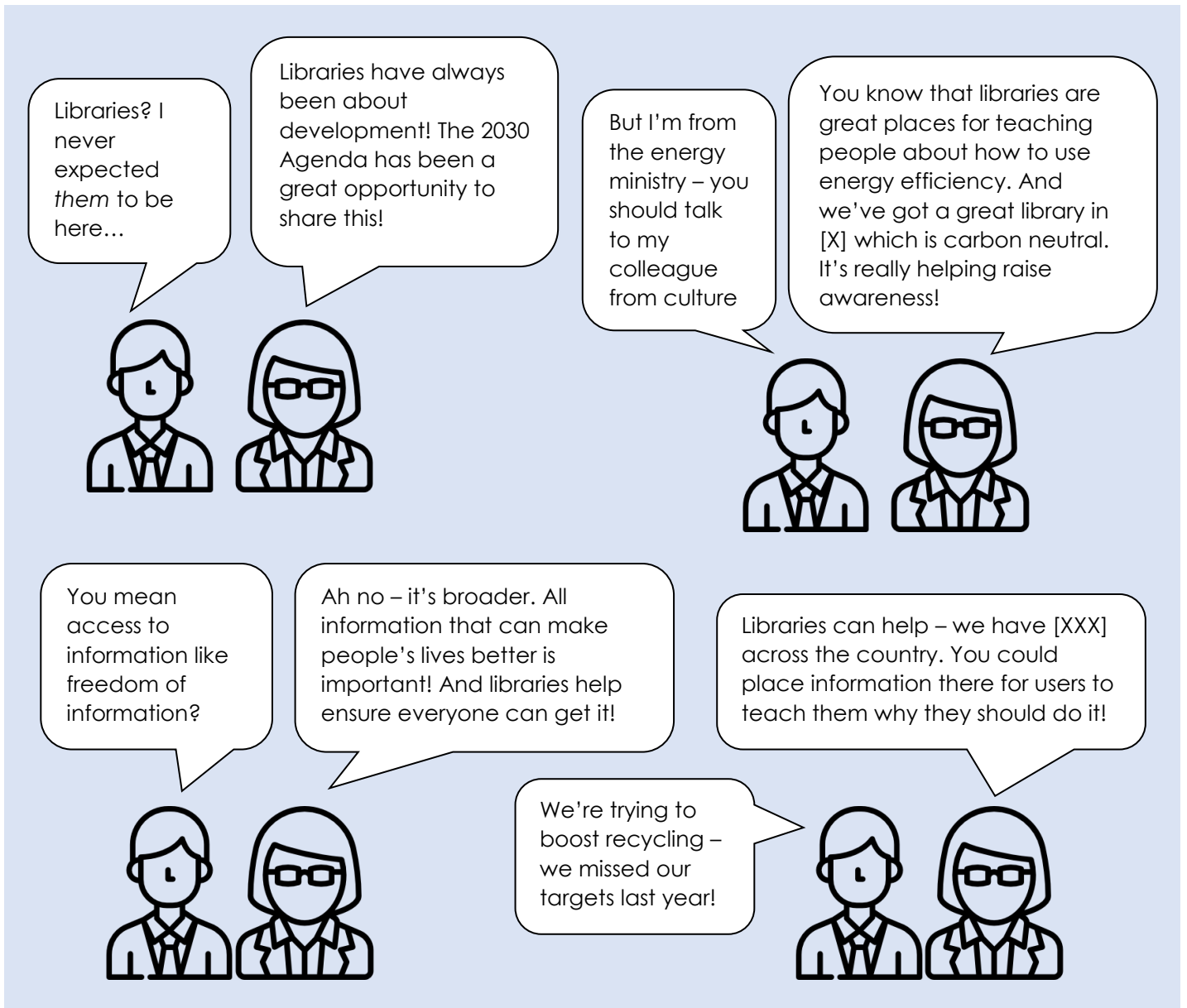
This does not need to be hard, but does need to be prepared. You need to ensure that you are clear and concise in what you say, and pick arguments and references that will catch the attention of the other person.

Here are a few things to think about:

- 1) Be friendly, while recognising what may be acceptable for the culture. Say who you are – your name, where you come from, and that you are representing libraries.
- 2) Be engaging – ask a question or find a way to get them to speak. People are usually flattered to be asked their opinion. What did they think of a speaker or session? If they spoke in a session, ask how it went from their perspective. Don't jump in – sometimes silence can encourage them to say more.
- 3) Be interesting – offer key facts or relevant information. Take a look also at IFLA's upcoming SDG Storytelling Manual for further tips on how to tell an engaging story
  - a. If they are a **national representative**, tell them how many libraries there are in their country (use the [Library Map of the World](#) and/or your own data). Offer examples
    - i. For example: you meet a member of the Embassy of France. Tell them that there are [XXX] libraries, with [XXX] users.
    - ii. Tell them about your work to promote the SDGs in France. Have you held an event, written articles, or met someone from the government? Use examples submitted to [IAP Updates](#).
  - b. If they are a representative of a **particular ministry or agency**, make your examples and facts relevant to the interests of your interlocutor
    - i. For example, if they are from the ministry for energy, talk about a library which has been built in an environmentally friendly way. Are libraries sharing information about how to be more energy efficient? In some countries, libraries are the only place where people can access electricity to charge their phones. See annex 2 and point 6 above for more ideas.
  - c. If they are a **civil society representative**, think about the cross-over between their interests and those of libraries. For example:
    - i. If it is an organisation representing women's rights, you could talk about the important role of libraries as a safe and welcoming place for women, who may not have access to technology at home, or not feel comfortable using a shared computer for very personal reasons.
    - ii. If it is an environmental NGO, you could highlight efforts to provide information about sustainability. You may have an example of a library which has been built – or renovated – to be more environmentally friendly.
    - iii. If it is a trade union, you could give examples of libraries that help people understand and so use their rights. You could also underline the role of libraries in ensuring that everyone has access to information, regardless of their income.
  - d. If they are from the **UN** (or a UN agency), talk about how libraries are promoting the SDGs, or are active in their areas of work. For example:
    - i. You could talk about an event/publication you have done

ii. Talk about what IFLA is doing to promote the SDGs – [get the latest here](#).

- 4) Be a success: once you have got their attention, you can achieve your objective. This could be any of the following:
- a. Get contact details so that you can meet them in future, invite them to an event, or potentially cooperate with them. Be careful – don't say anything that would make them think immediately that you want money from them – focus on how you can promote their work
  - b. Get contact details so that you can share them with a colleague from another country.
  - c. Get information – for example about how they are coordinating SDG implementation, or who the coordinator is?
- 5) Be ready for questions or challenges, for example:



## ANNEX 2: How do Libraries Support the SDGs?

The people attending international meetings are likely to come from a wide variety of ministries and areas of expertise. For some – such as education or research, the role of libraries may be obvious. But for others, the link is less clear. You can use the examples below for arguments for how libraries help almost anyone in government achieve their goals. The best is to find similar examples from your own country.

In addition, there are the cases given in "[Access and Opportunity for All: How Libraries contribute to the United Nations 2030 Agenda](#)" and in the "[Development and Access to Information \(DA2I\)](#)"<sup>1</sup>. In effect, almost all of what libraries do can be related to one or more of the SDGs.

[SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere](#): Libraries provide opportunities for people to improve their own lives and support informed decision-making. Mobile libraries in the form of buses and other vehicles, reach out to rural and remote communities, offering books, services, and internet access, providing opportunity to people that would otherwise be isolated.

[SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture](#): Agricultural libraries provide access to research and data on crops, market information and farming methods that support resilient, productive agriculture. They also provide literacy skills, training in the use of ICTs, access to information in local languages, and a gateway to government services and funding, as well as fostering partnerships to support local development.

[SDG 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages](#): Medical and hospital libraries provide access to research that supports improved public health outcomes. Public access to reliable health information in all libraries helps people to be better informed about their own health and to stay fit. This is particularly important for vulnerable groups such as new immigrants and people experiencing homelessness. Additional services include: developing health literacy skills, receiving help to acquire appropriate health insurance, and participating in first aid training.

[SDG 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all](#): Libraries are at the heart of schools, universities and colleges in around the world. They support literacy programmes, provide a safe space for learning, and support researchers to reuse research and data to create new knowledge. Hands-on computer classes, after-school support, and programmes aimed at reducing failures and drop-outs, are just a few examples of how libraries are connected to local needs and take action to improve education worldwide.

[SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls](#): Libraries offer programmes for women and girls to access information about rights and health. They also provide ICTs and literacy programmes, as well as training to build their entrepreneurial skills and coding. Libraries are safe places where women feel comfortable going to read, pursue learning, access computers and the internet, undertake technology training, and talk with other women.

[SDG 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all](#): Libraries provide public access to information on water, energy usage and sanitation. They offer access to research and evidence for policy makers and development organisations, to ensure resources are dedicated to sustainable water infrastructure and sanitation projects.

[SDG 7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all](#): Many public and community libraries around the world are the only place where people can get reliable access to light and electricity to read, study and apply for a job. Libraries and library-like rural information

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<sup>1</sup> <https://da2i.ifla.org/sites/da2i.ifla.org/files/uploads/docs/da2i-2017-full-report.pdf>

centres can provide public-access computers, sometimes powered by solar panels or generators, allowing people to hold meetings, charge devices and access the Internet at night

[SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all](#): Public access to ICTs and training at libraries enables people to apply for jobs. People lacking access to a computer or the Internet at home come to the library to find these, as well as skilled library staff who can help them create their CVs, send online applications, scan certificates, and find the right job. Some libraries offer employment clubs to share tips and resources with other job-seekers in the same area.

[SDG 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation](#): Libraries are at the heart of research, technology innovation and academic life. They provide access to research infrastructure, data and quality information to foster innovation and competitiveness. Some libraries provide business centres that offer trainings to develop entrepreneurial skills, and offer legal and financial information to enable people to start their own businesses.

[SDG 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries](#): Equitable access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and privacy are essential to allow all individuals to live fulfilled and independent lives. Libraries help to reduce inequality by providing safe, civic spaces open to all located in urban and rural areas across the world. They foster community engagement and citizen participation through local programmes and partnerships with other civil society organisations and local governments.

[SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable](#): Libraries have an essential role in safeguarding and preserving invaluable documentary heritage, in all forms, for future generations<sup>2</sup>. Culture strengthens communities and supports inclusive and sustainable development of cities, and libraries are at the heart of local cultural initiatives. With targeted services to reach the most vulnerable groups and make them feel welcome, such as safe spaces for older people, or a welcoming place for immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, and refugees, who sometimes face many of the same challenges.<sup>3</sup>

[SDG 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns](#): Libraries are sustainable institutions; they share resources in the community and internationally and ensure everyone has access to information. Libraries are precursors of the new sharing economy, offering all kinds of materials for loan (not only books, music, movies, and all kinds of information resources, but also tools, musical instruments, appliances, and more), reducing the carbon footprint and the impact in the environment. Libraries offering access to 3D printers and skills in digital manufacturing technologies allow people to develop their creativity, and reuse and recycle materials.

[SDG 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts](#): Libraries play a key role in providing access to reliable data, research and knowledge that supports informed research and public access to information about climate change. They ensure future access by preserving environmental data and information for future generations. School and public libraries help raise awareness of younger generations about the critical and urgent need to protect our environment and to work together to reverse the effects of climate change.

[SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development](#): Libraries support decision-making by preserving and giving access to data and information related to the sustainable use of oceans, seas and other water bodies, appropriate fishing practices, and effective water management.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifla.org/node/11387>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/12642>

[SDG 15 - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss:](#) Libraries foster research and help protect the earth's ecosystems by offering open access to biodiversity data and literature. Botanical and forest libraries help raise awareness of younger generations about the need to respect and protect nature.

[SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels:](#) Libraries are the key source of public access to information for all, including the skills needed for enabling citizens to use it effectively, and to benefit from it. Libraries are a trusted information source, with skilled staff that helps individuals, institutions and governments to communicate, organise, structure and use meaningful information promoting development. They can contribute to open government initiatives, through preserving public legal information, and supporting citizens in engaging with eGovernment and holding their rulers to account.

[SDG 17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development:](#) Libraries partner at all levels with local, regional and national civil society institutions, governments and private sector, to offer community-based programmes and services to engage and empower citizens, strengthening societies.