Net Neutrality Toolkit

Libraries and librarians, as facilitators of learning, make an important contribution to the dissemination of knowledge. The central mission of IFLA, and a universal principle set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is "the right to seek, impart and receive information and ideas, and obtain equitable access to all content". The IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers[1], states that libraries have a mission to use the most effective ways to make material accessible, and to ensure that this access is not subject to barriers of any kind.

But what if the material available in a digital format through the Internet is somehow externally controlled? What if librarians and their patrons can only access and upload content at somebody else's discretion? How can this be favourable for the exercise of freedom of information online? This freedom is threatened when the principle of net neutrality is not respected.

There are many reported concerns about the way in which Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have used their power. In 2007, Verizon blocked NARAL's Pro-Choice texts by rejecting a request for a short code messaging system. Comcast blocked users with file sharing protocols.

More recently, Level 3, a communications company that helps connect large-scale ISPs to the rest of the internet accused six ISPs of deliberately degrading the quality of internet services using the Level 3 network, to get Level 3 to pay them a fee for additional traffic, a process known as paid peering. These all have a negative impact on the ability of individuals and others to access information and express themselves.

The purpose of this toolkit is to support library advocacy on net neutrality and zero rating, in defence of free access to information and free expression. We want to provide a practical guide to empower librarians with the knowledge necessary to be active on this topic, to be able to share their knowledge with patrons and stakeholders, and to advocate through their professional associations for the rights of libraries.

Purpose of this toolkit

This toolkit is for all librarians and aims to increase awareness about net neutrality, and so help you play an active role in advocacy on the topic. This toolkit will help you to:

1. **Understand** what net neutrality is and why it is important. 2. **Learn** how your ISPs may be meddling with your connection and, 3. **Read** about other organizations that are closely monitoring events and making a case for net neutrality, and 4. **Take action**

1. Understand what net neutrality is and why it is important

Net neutrality is a basic principle behind free speech on the Internet. It defines the relationship between subscribers and ISPs. By 'subscribers' we mean the people who

have entered into an agreement with an ISP to receive internet access service. By "Internet Service Providers", we refer to the entity that offers internet access service to the public, or Internet transit services of different types.

Net neutrality requires ISPs to give users equal access to all content on the internet without arbitrary restrictions, paid prioritization, slowing or blocking of content[1]. The key premise of net neutrality is that the internet must remain an open platform accessible to all. Appropriate national legislation should prevent ISPs from unfairly meddling with connections and discriminating in any way the content that reaches an audience.

The internet is a place for creativity, free expression, and exchange of ideas and it has thrived because of net neutrality. Not applying, or repealing, net neutrality rules would give already powerful corporations more power. They could dictate and determine people's choices online. Without net neutrality, the internet will become more like satellite TV, where the content you see is what your provider decides to make available to you.

Corporations, through signing deals with ISPs, would have the ability to offer the highest speeds to the highest bidders, leaving smaller content producers in the slow-lane. The outcome is that the information that subscribers receive is being manipulated. Libraries in particular, which are unlikely to be able to pay for prioritisation, may see their own sites load slowly for users.

Connected to the net neutrality debate is another important issue known as zero-rating. Zero rating exempts certain activities from counting towards a user's data cap. The ISP decides which data is not counted (or 'zero rated'). By doing so, the ISP creates a range of problems. It distorts consumption of content because it gives an unfair advantage to the provider of the content that is zero-rated, de facto excluding other competitors. It provides a narrow experience of the internet, where users are possibly influenced to use services because they are zero-rated. Finally, it increases risks for online user privacy since zero rating services imply internet gatekeepers that inspect traffic and its content.

2. Learn how your ISPs are meddling with your connection, and how do can do something about it

It is possible to assess whether an ISP is throttling or slowing your connection. There are currently a number tools online to test your connection. Each requires a different level of expertise and knowledge. Below are some examples of easy to use online tools to test the quality of your connection:

https://www.howtogeek.com/165481/how-to-test-if-your-isp-is-throttling-your-internet-connection/
https://qz.com/688033/netflix-launched-this-handy-speed-test-so-you-can-go-shame-your-internet-provider/
http://www.pcworld.com/article/158951/internet_throttling.html
https://www.battleforthenet.com/internethealthtest/
http://testmy.net/results

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[1] This is a particularly important issue for services which are sensitive to the speed of a connection, such as WhatsApp or Skype, or for video services. Infringements of net neutrality can also include efforts to block Virtual Private Networks, which can help defend privacy, especially in countries subject to censorship.

As an additional resource on net neutrality, this compendium addresses neutrality at the intersection of human rights, economic competition and the future of the internet. For a **legislative angle**, read the summary of Open Internet and Net neutrality in Europe. If interested, the full text of the law is available here.

In the USA, there are ongoing discussions at federal and state level about Net neutrality regulation, following efforts by the government to repeal net neutrality in December 2017. In the rest of the world more than 40 countries have adopted net neutrality legislation to protect users, and guarantee free speech and online freedom. Documentation on Zero Rating can also be found here, and a summary of that issue is available on the Electronic Frontier Foundation website.

3. Read about other organizations closely monitoring events and making a case for Net Neutrality

Many advocacy groups and NGOs are fighting back. In the USA, the Battle for the Internet site offers a search tool that shows the names of the state politicians supporting anti net neutrality legislation to raise awareness and share information.

Since 2008, Access Now advocates for Net neutrality at a global level to protect an open Internet. The group has authored several policy papers on net neutrality and it provides timely alerts on the issue. The Global Neutrality Coalition, a project of Access Now, continues monitoring the world's net neutrality status and on its website provides information in sixteen different languages. The Internet Society supports key issues related to the internet including Net Neutrality. Article 19 underlines that our rights online should be comparable to the rights we should enjoy offline and makes a case for net neutrality.
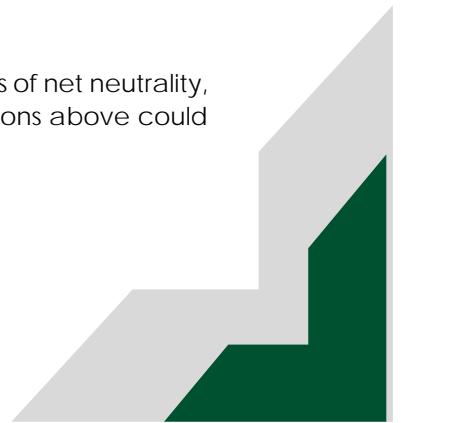
The Centre for Internet and Society in India addresses many topics that affect our society and the role the internet plays in it. Their Net Neutrality definition is very clear and thorough and certainly it is worth a visit. The Global Network Initiative offers important insights in protecting and advancing freedom of expression and privacy online and it is an important outlet for net neutrality as well.
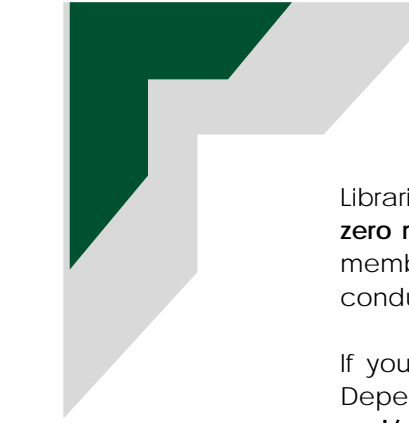
Advocacy work has yielded important results over the years. The Telecom regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has just released its recommendations from a previous consultation on net neutrality launched in 2016. TRAI has recommended a strong regulatory approach to licences of all ISPs with the intent to uphold the principle of non-discriminatory treatment of content.

The first recent attempt to curb net neutrality legislation in the USA was met with a massive protest that crashed the FCC's site and sent 10 million emails to the US Congress. Much of Europe, North America and South America have passed legislation to protect the neutrality of the net. However, there are still many countries considering protection or without any legislation altogether. The battle for the open Internet is still ongoing.

4. Take Action

A first, step, in addition to checking if your library is subject to violations of net neutrality, is to see who else is active in your country. The list of other organisations above could help you in this!

Libraries can then play an important role in raising awareness about **net neutrality and zero rating**. You could share your knowledge with patrons, users, colleagues, family members, and local government officials. Information literacy classes could be conducted in libraries regarding these important topics that affect us all.

If you want to go further, **online mobilization campaigns** can be highly effective. Depending on the region of the world you live in, you could **contact your legislators and/or regulatory agencies** – directly or through your library association – to sign petitions, write letters or leave voice messages. Media Democracy Fund shares their advocacy model to create a coalition of interested parties and launch the campaign that successfully challenged the FCC and net neutrality rules in the USA.

And of course, if you're interested in getting involved, contact us!

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