

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2017

*Internet governance from the edges:  
National and regional IGFs in their own words*



GISWatch 2017  
SPECIAL EDITION

# **Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words**

Global Information Society Watch 2017 Special edition  
Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

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Global Information Society Watch 2017 special edition:  
Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words

Disclaimer: The views expressed in survey responses are not necessarily the views of APC or of its members.

This report is a special companion edition to Global Information Society Watch 2017: National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs), which can be downloaded from <https://www.giswatch.org/2017-local-and-regional-internet-governance-forums-igfs>



## NRI founding stories and development

*What is the story of the founding of your NRI?  
What were its inspiration, its objectives?*

The first IGF-USA took place in 2009. It came together after years of informal briefings and “informational sessions” held across different stakeholder groups in preparation for the Tunis World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and subsequently to support participation in the Open Consultations for the IGF MAG. In the time leading up to this, other countries began hosting 1-2 day events that developed into what are now known as the National and Regional IGF Initiatives, or NRIs. The group that founded the IGF-USA was motivated by having learned about other countries holding such initiatives from briefings brought back from the IGF open consultations by several persons participating in those events. Much discussion took place about what to focus on – national policies or global policy. Eventually, it was agreed within the Organizing Group that as there are so many think tanks, academics, regulatory agencies, law firms, business professionals, and groups that are international in their focus in the United States, that focus on national internet issues, that the IGF-USA should contribute into the global fora. The IGF-USA community has recently revisited the question of a mission statement, and so the conversation on its objectives continues to unfold. In 2009, with approximately 75 participants on the IGF-USA mailing list and sufficient interest, this community began planning the first one-day conference event of the IGF-USA.

There were several challenges, including funding and debates over the location of the event. Through an open process, an organising group ultimately decided to hold the event in Washington, DC. Additionally, despite the funding challenges, the event was able to come together. Several entities offered financial and in-kind support, and in addition, thanks to the support of AT&T and Verizon, an in-kind space for the event was obtained. Additionally, various organising group members contributed their time and resources to coordinating the logistics and

providing the materials necessary to hold the event. Several companies, NGOs and individuals, including the “Chief Catalyst”, donated interns to support the planning and staffing of the event. While several financial sponsorships were received, the initial IGF-USA would not have been possible without the in-kind and *pro bono* support provided. Partnerships with universities were particularly instrumental in the first few years. These partnerships include the ongoing relationship with Elon University, Syracuse University, Cornell, Georgetown Law Center, George Washington University, and American University.

*How did it develop and what difficulties did you experience along the way?*

In the earlier years, the organising group was unable to agree on a formalised structure for the IGF-USA, which led to the appointment of a “Chief Catalyst” to moderate the event. The Chief Catalyst title was proposed by an organising group member, who noted that debates over the structure and titles were endangering the actual event. He proposed that as IGF-USA had been “catalysed”, and that the title be used. As explained further below, that position remained in place until 2014, when the IGF-USA appointed co-chairs. The position of co-chairs was later formalised in an open process to develop a set of principles and a formal structure. There was also uncertainty around funding procedures, for example if and when sponsors would pay their pledges. This was eventually resolved by creating the relationship with the Washington DC chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC-DC) as the independent secretariat/treasurer, resulting in a very efficient and stable approach to managing funding.

Sustaining engagement from all stakeholder groups has also been an ongoing challenge. However, by increasing the number of sessions per event to seven or eight, we have been able to bring in more diverse and balanced participation and voices. This was initially due to challenges with limited room availability, but was addressed when we moved to Georgetown Law Center which gave us the ability to host up to four simultaneous workshops. Other challenges that have been encountered include

maintaining direct engagement and outreach to different groups, and enhancing awareness and outreach about implications of internet governance to such a diverse set of stakeholders as we have within the US, as there are so many other competing activities addressing public policy for the internet. From 2009 to 2013, the IGF-USA used a Ning website. Much of the content has been archived on the IGF-USA website.<sup>25</sup> As the IGF-USA relied on email lists prior to 2014, many of those exchanges are of limited availability. However, the Elon University reporting and detailed event reports are available for years 2009-2012. The IGF-USA did not conduct a formal event in 2013. In 2013, the planning began as usual, but there were disruptions to the fundraising cycle and difficulty making key decisions. The planning cycle also overlapped with the shutdown of the US government, limiting the involvement of government officials. Thus, a “re-launch” was undertaken in 2014, drawing strongly on the commitment of members of the IGF-USA community.

In recent years, the introduction of an independent Secretariat provided by ISOC-DC provided administrative improvements, including moving to a formal website, and using various other tools to advance coordination. The IGF-USA has also benefited from carving out other official roles as well, including co-chairs, which have been very effective in coordinating the planning, and treasurer to oversee the financial reporting. Additionally, the support from members of the IGF-USA community in providing professional level remote participation has successfully brought the IGF-USA to a wider audience. The sustainability of the IGF-USA has been a product of effective engagement with sponsors to ensure stable and predictable funding to support planning and conducting the event annually.

2014-2017: In relaunching the IGF-USA in 2014, and through 2017, a core challenge we continually face is the challenge of obtaining and incorporating inputs from stakeholders across our community while managing the multitude of tasks necessary to produce a full day, quality IGF national conference. To this end, we have a Steering Committee that is open to the public and has regular meetings – both face to face and always with remote participation during the planning cycle. At the beginning of each cycle, a survey is sent out to our entire community to assess the importance of the of the many key issues facing the internet. The survey results form the basis of the workshops and main sessions

presented at the IGF-USA conference. Throughout 2016 and 2017, the IGF-USA community worked via a consensus process to adopt a set of guiding principles, based upon the Core IGF Principles, and recognised a lightweight and flexible organisational structure. The principles and organisational structure are available online.<sup>26</sup> Over the last several years the leadership of the IGF-USA has worked on further developing a broader and stable base of donors who not only have given generous funding sponsorship, but also have devoted time and energy to the multistakeholder planning process. The IGF-USA has devoted significant resources for the past several years developing its website and media presence, including the streaming and archiving of all sessions. Two of those who support the IGF-USA are unique experts in such support, and that, coupled with the Elon University reporting of the IGF-USA sessions, has built a strong library of archived information.

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*How do you imagine your NRI and its activities in the future?*

The IGF-USA is encouraging sister events to take place in other cities in the U.S. and longer-term is looking to hold the annual event outside of Washington DC. The IGF-USA is investigating the possibility of organising ongoing activities between annual events. Finally, the IGF-USA will seek to involve youth and students from a number of universities, while maintaining the highly positive involvement of Elon University journalism students and youth volunteers at IGF-USA 2017 and prior years. It is possible that Day Zero or “lead up” events could extend the ability to bring in experts in different subjects of particular interests in how technology is impacting internet governance. All such decisions will be based on input from the community of the IGF-USA.

## NRI internal governance and initiatives

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*Who are the people involved in your NRI and how do they contribute to it?*

The IGF-USA Secretariat is provided by the Washington DC chapter of the Internet Society. The organisational process is led by two co-chairs, who chair the Steering Committee, which is open to all for participation. Engagement in the IGF-USA

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.igf-usa.org>

<sup>26</sup> [https://wiki.igf-usa.org/images/5/5f/IGF-USA\\_2017\\_Organization\\_Structure\\_final.pdf](https://wiki.igf-usa.org/images/5/5f/IGF-USA_2017_Organization_Structure_final.pdf)

organising processes has always been open to all interested in advancing multistakeholder engagement and adhering to the core principles of bottom up, consensus based decision making. Diversity of participants has been varying, but for several years, several different US agencies sent representatives to the IGF-USA planning process and also attended and spoke in workshops. The organising process has sometimes included Congressional staff, representatives from the White House, government officials, numerous parties from businesses, civil society organisations, law firms, NGOs, technical community, academics, and individuals. The number of active contributors has varied, year over year, with some very helpful stability provided by a core group that has ensured the stability of IGF-USA and its continuity, and that it fulfils the requirements from the IGF. During the event, Elon University, as one of the major partners, both attends and provides thorough and unique documentation of the sessions.<sup>27</sup> Over the past few years, the IGF-USA Secretariat has employed the services of a professional meeting manager, who takes care of many of the logistics for the actual event, which provides key support to what is essentially a volunteer organised event. For the last two years, IGF-USA has developed a very positive relationship with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in the use of their conference center.

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*Have you experienced difficulties in ensuring all stakeholder groups participate fully and more or less equally?*

The core members of the Steering Committee – those who attend the organisational meetings throughout the year – are from civil society and NGOs; business, government, and technical community representatives. There is no requirement for equal attendance of participation from the four stakeholder groups. The IGF-USA community is always working to broaden stakeholder diversity and welcomes new faces and thus, ensures that all planning sessions are open to all. Efforts continue to encourage engagement from different and new participants, across all of the stakeholder groups. We focus on ensuring that all voices are included, and when we can identify a gap, we try to address this through outreach and encouragement of engagement in the IGF-USA. As it is time consuming to participate year around, and typically more stakeholders increase involvement after the meeting date

is announced and the programme planning begins. Thus, the administrative work is always fully reported out to the larger group primarily interested in the policy topics, and the event. All planning meetings are made available via remote participation. Teams who volunteer to plan workshops or main sessions are required to ensure diversity of participation across stakeholder groups and to try to be inclusive of gender inclusion in the panel. A key concern is ensuring inclusion of all views.

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*Do you measure gender balance in your NRI? Did you undertake measures to encourage gender balance?*

All organisers of panel sessions are encouraged to follow the IGF-USA principles, one of which relates to “Diversity and Inclusion” and reads “The IGF-USA strives for diverse and inclusive participation, including people regardless of their gender, color, age, sexual preference, gender expression, disability or specific needs, stakeholder perspective, or location.” Additionally, the 2017 IGF-USA panel guidelines stated that the panels should, to the greatest extent possible, reflect gender balance. This was successfully achieved in the programme, with 24 male and 24 female speakers. This balance is a reflection of the open search for panellists from all sectors and the significant involvement of women in the leadership and planning processes.

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*How was your last forum organised, what were the topics chosen and the outcomes of discussion? How was it financed?*

The 2017 IGF-USA took place on 24 July at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. It was organised over a series of 11 in-person steering committee meetings from February to July, which supported remote participation. The topics were chosen from a bottom up consensus process, which includes using survey tools, and further discussions in face to face and conference calls included: Nationalism, Disinformation, and Free Expression in the Age of the Internet; Smarter Networks; Healing Internet Fragmentation; Promoting a More Inclusive Internet; Taking a Holistic Approach to the Internet of Things; National Network Regulation vs. the Global Cloud; Privacy Regulation in the U.S.: Bottom-up vs. Top-down Approaches; and Where are all those Digital Dividends We Thought the Internet Would Deliver? The IGF-USA is financed by contributions from various private sector and technical community organisations and significant

<sup>27</sup> [www.elon.edu/e-web/imagining/event-coverage/igf-usa/default.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/imagining/event-coverage/igf-usa/default.xhtml)

in-kind contributions. The sponsors are always acknowledged in materials at the IGF-USA, thanked during the IGF-USA, and the sponsor list is posted on the website and reported in the required IGF Meeting Report from the NRIs.

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*Are there controversial topics that have been difficult in your NRI and if so, why?*

The IGF-USA encourages all internet policy issues, whether controversial or not, to be discussed in an open, multistakeholder environment. Some topics might not be addressed year over year, depending on the bottom up consultation. For instance, in past years, cyber security was always a topic. In 2017, that topic did not make it into the top ten, but not because it was controversial. The survey just didn't bring it forward.

### Perspectives on the role of NRIs in internet governance

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*What is your take about the role of your NRI in internet governance processes, at the level of your country, region and globally?*

Many active members of the IGF-USA Steering Committee are speakers often in related events within the US, but also more broadly in regional or global fora, where internet governance issues are discussed. Several of the IGF-USA Steering Committee members are active at the IGF, ICANN, the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development; OECD; APEC; WSIS Forum, and other global fora. Some are also very engaged in national level events addressing internet policy. The synergy between understanding the national landscape and the global awareness of challenges and risks to internet governance supports and undoubtedly influences who engages in the IGF-USA.

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*How do you perceive your role and position towards other NRIs, the IGF and the IGF Secretariat?*

Many active members of the IGF-USA Steering Committee are or have been members of the IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group or attend the open consultations of the MAG on a regular basis; thus the IGF-USA itself is very well advised about the work of the IGF and information about the IGF planning process is often posted to the igf-usa discussion list, or briefed during working calls. Overall,

participants from the IGF-USA have a strong presence in the IGF, which is a reflection of the depth of interest and the diversity of stakeholders located in the United States. The IGF-USA also supports the development of IGF initiatives around the world and several IGF-USA members attend, speak at, or otherwise contribute to other NRIs. Several of the founders of the IGF-USA contributed to the dialogue around and the development of the core principles and criteria for the NRIs. The IGF-USA was instrumental in endorsing the creation of a singular and dedicated Focal Point at the IGF for the NRIs. During the IGF2015, the MAG chair strongly endorsed enhancing the role of the NRIs and appointed one of the founders of the IGF-USA as the Substantive Coordinator to enhance the role of the NRIs. This contributed to the IGF-USA's close awareness of the NRIs. Several of the IGF-USA Steering Committee, including the Secretariat and the co-chairs have been actively engaged with the NRI activities. This involvement included joining their working conference calls and participating in the 90 minute session that led to concrete recommendations to enhance the visibility of the NRIs and created the IGF Focal Point for the NRI. As a result, during IGF2016, major shifts in visibility for the NRIs occurred, and IGF-USA was one of the contributors to these activities. In support of the NRIs increased engagement at the IGF, multiple members of the IGF-USA community's leadership spent time in a shared NRI booth. The IGF-USA co-chairs had speaking roles, with one presenting at the NRI Main Session and the other at the 90 minute NRI coordinating session. Both sessions were also attended by other members of the IGF-USA. The Main Session was coordinated by one of the then MAG members who serves as the Chief Catalyst of the IGF, appointed by fellow NRI members, and the 90 minute session was also similarly co-chaired with the IGF Focal Point. The IGF-USA considers all NRIs to be on an equal footing, and does not recognise hierarchical reporting. We also recognise that NRIs are autonomous entities, without a formal role to the United Nations, but we adhere to and contribute actively through participation in the NRI network. Participants from the IGF-USA often speak at other NRIs, upon their invitation, but in their individual capacity as an expert or invited participant or speaker. This is a voluntary and not coordinated initiative, but is reflective of the commitment of the various participants in contributing, when invited, to sister NRIs. In a phrase: The IGF-USA is strongly supportive of sister NRIs, the IGF, and the IGF Secretariat team.

## Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) emerged in response to the success of the first two global Internet Governance Forums (IGFs). The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, the outcome document of the final phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), alongside the call for the creation of the IGF, served as the foundations for the model of bottom-up, multistakeholder internet governance. The first NRIs were set up in 2007 and 2008, and there are now close to a hundred initiatives, comprising national, sub-national, regional and youth initiatives, which organise autonomously and cooperate with the global IGF Secretariat. The importance of NRIs has increased throughout the years, as they have grown in number and their work has expanded in scope. They have acquired such relevance within the IGF that an NRI session was included in the IGF 2016 and 2017 main sessions agendas.

This year, APC has taken the initiative to compile two editions of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focused on the work of NRIs. While the main 2017 GISWatch annual report provides independent and analytical perspectives on the role of NRIs in internet governance broadly, the present companion edition, *Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words*, aims to give voice and visibility to the stories of each NRI, share their experiences and achievements, and highlight their perspectives on internet governance.

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