



2020 IFLA General Assembly Address by the President



Dear colleagues, dear friends,

This part of the General Assembly is to provide you with an overview of the Governance Review that has been undertaken over the past year.

At its heart, IFLA is led by its people – you, our members and volunteers.

You elect us, the Governing Board, to oversee the work of our federation.

And you don't just elect us. Your ongoing contributions and input continually guide us in what we do.

It is your voice that comes through in the Global Vision.

It is your priorities that underpin our Strategic Plan.

And it is your needs and concerns that are at the centre of the Governance Review we have been undertaking since August last year.

Periodic reviews of our governance ensure our federation has the best possible structures to achieve our mission.

And as the world and our professional field continue to change, we must evolve to meet new demands and opportunities.

Of course, structure alone cannot guarantee the success of our mission and strategy.

We know that it is your continued energy and engagement that is the key factor in that.

But a fit for purpose structure can enable success and make it more likely.

So, I want to start by saying thank you for the time and energy you contribute to making IFLA the vibrant community of library professionals and leaders that it is.

And thank you for your many contributions to this Governance Review. You are the architects of this new structure.

Before outlining the key features of the proposal, I will briefly tell you how we arrived here.

You will remember that at last year's General Assembly, the IFLA strategy 2019-2024 was launched.

Immediately following this, and in line with the development roadmap, the new Governing Board started its work on reviewing IFLA's governance.

We defined the scope of the review which was to cover the structure and operations of the Governing Board, the Professional committee and units, and the Strategic Committees.

These are the bodies that steer and carry out the work of our Federation.

We then formed 3 workgroups for each of these areas and all Governing Board members participated in one of the groups.

I chaired the Governing Board workgroup; PC Chair Vicki McDonald, the Professional structures group, and President elect Barbara Lison the Strategic Committees work group.

The Governing board agreed on 6 key principles to guide our work.

The first question each working group addressed was - Do our current structures best enable us to achieve the actions of the strategic plan?

And if not, what are the problems that need to be addressed?

To establish our goals, we surveyed you - our members and volunteers - to learn what was most important to you in this governance review.

In response, you said you wanted to see:

More transparency, efficiency and collaboration

Stronger regional representation

Greater financial and organisational sustainability

More varied opportunities for participation, especially for new leaders, and

Better support for volunteers

We also looked at comparable organisations, we talked with stakeholders, and we reviewed key pieces of work including the Global Vision, the membership survey, and input received during the creation of our Strategy.

This input helped us to come up with possible solutions to the key problems identified and develop different options to consider.

And it was at this point it became clear that we need a new regional structure to raise the profile of regions, and better respond to regional priorities.

Each work group brought their options to a workshop at our Governing Board meeting in December – the last time we met together physically!

Following these discussions, the work groups started to refine their proposals.

This was done in close consultation with the steering committee which comprised the chairs of each of the workgroups and the Secretary General and Parliamentarian.

This resulted in the first draft of a Governance Proposal, which was published in June for consultation.

We then conducted a second survey to get your feedback on the key concepts of this proposal and to seek input on a number of open questions.

There was a great response – in the number of you who replied and also in the detail and fullness of your answers.

You showed strong support for the general concepts put forward.

And you helped us to develop our ideas further by sharing more detailed views and concerns, through the survey and also through letters and emails.

We took all of these into consideration in revising the proposal.

Because of your input:

- We removed the Governing Board's power to co-opt members to the board, putting that power back into members' hands through direct election
- We agreed that the Committee on Standards and the Cultural Heritage Programme Advisory Committee should continue to report directly to the Governing Board
- And we committed to working more closely with members to understand better the opportunities and challenges involved in creating new regional divisions.

We also published answers to the most common questions, and gave further explanation of concepts that weren't as clear as they could be.

We then engaged with you in a deeper discussion of governance through 11 virtual round tables. Thank you to the hundreds of you who made time to join us for these discussions, to ask questions and share your views.

So now let's take a look at the proposed governance structure, beginning with the Governing Board.

The Governing Board will have 11 members – a size that will allow for more participatory discussion and debate, and effective strategic leadership for our Federation.

The majority of the Governing Board will be directly elected by members. In addition to the President and President-elect, the Treasurer will now also be directly elected. There will also be 5 elected members at-large.

And there will be 3 members who serve because of their positions - the Chairs of the Professional Council, the new Regional Council, and the Management of Library Associations Section.

The Governing Board will have three committees.

These are the Professional Council, the new Regional Council – about which I will say more later – and the new Finance and Risk Committee, which will be chaired by the Treasurer. The Finance and Risk committee will be strengthened by the addition of an external member with expertise in auditing and relevant Dutch law.

Governing Board members will be funded for travel and accommodation to attend two physical GB meetings outside WLIC. This is to ensure that no-one is prevented from serving on the Board for financial reasons.

And we will continue to work on improved communication and transparency, and to introduce new practices for stronger accountability, such as regular board self-evaluation and training.

The Professional Committee will be renamed the Professional Council and be organisationally aligned with the new Regional Council.

The basis of the professional structure remains Professional Divisions comprised of Professional Units.

The composition of Professional Divisions will be flexible, and the structure can respond to the changing library environment.

All Professional Divisions will have a similar number of Professional Units to ensure that Division Chairs can support and work closely with all of their Units, and to enhance communication and collaboration.

To increase the opportunities for librarians to engage with IFLA, there will now be three mechanisms for progressing professional work beyond Sections: Special Interest Groups, Working Groups, and Networks.

These will provide different levels of flexibility in addressing emerging issues for the profession.

Procedures will be strengthened for transparent and regular review of committees and other structures.

One of the most profound changes to come out of the Governance review is the new Regional Council.

As the global voice for the library and information field, you told us loudly and clearly that stronger regional representation must be a priority.

And so IFLA is introducing a regional council, that will mirror the professional council. It will be made up of the chairs of Regional Divisions.

The purpose of our Regional Council and Divisions is to ensure that regional priorities and concerns are heard and listened to within IFLA.

It will coordinate work at a regional level to strengthen advocacy – in particular with regional efforts for the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. And it will support the visibility, coherence and effectiveness of IFLA's wider work.

To form this new council, the current Professional Division V (Regions) will be upgraded in size and responsibilities. The 3 Professional Sections representing the regions of Africa, Asia Oceania, and Latin America and the Caribbean will be elevated to Regional Divisions.

So that all global regions are represented on the Council, there will be new divisions for Europe and North America, and for the Middle East and North Africa region.

This new MENA region brings together a group of countries which form a single United Nations political region and share a language. IFLA has recently treated MENA as a separate region, including with the Global Vision initiative and the International Advocacy Program.

IFLA's global work is currently supported by 4 committees referred to as strategic committees.

They focus on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression, Copyright and other legal matters, Standards, and Cultural Heritage.

For clarity and simplification, they will now be known as Advisory Committees and their composition – that is, the number of core members and the way they are appointed - will be standardised.

All 4 committees will report to the Governing Board.

I am excited by these new ideas and look forward to IFLA's future.

Of course, we have procedural steps ahead of us before we can see these changes occur.

First, we must amend our statutes by vote of the General Assembly.

Second, we must update our rules of procedure by vote of the Governing Board. The rules provide further detail on processes, building on the Statutes.

And third, the Governing Board will produce a handbook to guide all our IFLA volunteers in understanding and implementing the statutes and rules.

IFLA has consulted a Dutch legal expert to assist in this process. She has advised that our current statutes are overly complex and can be modernised and simplified. We want these statutes to stand for 10 – 15 years. They must guide the work of IFLA, and provide clarity, flexibility and the ability to adapt to whatever circumstances may arise.

In mid-February next year, there will be another General Assembly called to approve these new statutes.

Following the result of this vote, nominations will be then called for the federation's governing bodies 2021 – 2023.

I want to thank you all for your interest and enthusiasm. Despite the constraints imposed by this unprecedented pandemic, IFLA's board, staff, volunteers, and members have continued the important work of the Governance Review.

I would like to especially acknowledge my colleagues on the Governing board who have spent great deal of time on zoom - often late at night or early in the morning - to ensure robust debate and thorough consideration of the important questions before us.

I would also like to thank the members of the steering committee, Barbara Lison and Vicki McDonald, Secretary General Gerald Leitner, and IFLA Parliamentarian Martyn Wade; and the IFLA staff. We have been ably assisted in the project by Megan McNally from Luma Consulting.

And most of all I would like to thank everyone who contributed their ideas, comments and critiques to ensure that we have arrived at the best outcome we could – this new proposed Governance Structure for IFLA.

We have indeed worked together for IFLA and for the global library field.

Christine Mackenzie

IFLA President 2019-2021