



International Federation of  
Library Associations and Institutions



Manifesto endorsed  
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of UNESCO



## IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto for Digital Libraries

***Bridging the Digital Divide: making the world's cultural and scientific heritage accessible to all***

### **The digital divide is an information divide**

Bridging the digital divide is a key factor in achieving the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. Access to information resources and the means of communication supports health and education as much as cultural and economic development.

The dissemination of information enables citizens to participate in life-long learning and education. Information about the world's achievements allows everyone to participate constructively in the development of their own social environment.

Equal access to the cultural and scientific heritage of mankind is every person's right and helps promote learning and understanding of the richness and diversity of the world, not only for the present generation, but also for the generations to come.

Libraries have long been essential agents in fostering peace and human values. Libraries now operate digitally, and their digital services open up a new channel to the universe of knowledge and information, connecting cultures across geographical and social boundaries.

### **Digital libraries**

A digital library is an online collection of digital objects, of assured quality, that are created or collected and managed according to internationally accepted principles for collection development and made accessible in a coherent and sustainable manner, supported by *services* necessary to allow users to retrieve and exploit the resources.

A digital library forms an integral part of the services of a library, applying new technology to provide access to digital collections. Within a digital library collections are

created, managed and made accessible in such a way that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities.

A collaborative digital library allows public and research libraries to form a network of digital information in response to the needs of the Information Society. The systems of all partners in a collaborative digital library must be able to interoperate.

A digital library complements digital archives and initiatives for the preservation of information resources.

### **Mission and Goals**

The mission of the digital library is to give direct access to information resources, both digital and non-digital, in a structured and authoritative manner and thus to link information technology, education and culture in contemporary library service. To fulfil this mission the following goals are pursued:

- Supporting digitisation, access to and preservation of cultural and scientific heritage.
- Providing access for all users to the information resources collected by libraries , while respecting intellectual property rights.
- Creating interoperable digital library systems to promote open standards and access.
- Supporting the pivotal role of libraries and information services in the promotion of common standards and best practices.
- Creating awareness of the urgent need to ensure the permanent accessibility of digital material.
- Linking digital libraries to high-speed research and development networks.
- Taking advantage of the increasing convergence of communications media and institutional roles to create and disseminate digital content.

### **Content creation, access and preservation**

Building a digital library requires sources of content in digital form, whether digitised or born digital content.

Many countries have created national digitisation programmes, and more will do so, as agreed by the World Summit on the Information Society<sup>1</sup>. IFLA strongly supports and

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<sup>1</sup> World Summit on the Information Society, 2nd phase, Tunis 2005: 'Agenda for the Information Society', paragraph 93.

encourages both national and international digitisation strategies as well as single library and partnership initiatives. Digitisation allows the creation of virtual collections bringing together material across continents. Digitisation also has a preservation role in the case of deteriorating original documents and media.

The products of digitisation themselves must be preserved, just as born-digital material must be preserved. All digital library initiatives must include plans for digital preservation by an appropriate authority.

The digital library serves as an environment to bring together collections, services, and people in support of the full life cycle of creation, dissemination, use and preservation of data, information and knowledge.

*Interoperability* and *sustainability* are key to the vision of digital libraries able to communicate with each other.

Digital libraries that conform to commonly agreed open standards and protocols improve world-wide knowledge dissemination and access.

### **Implementing the Manifesto**

*IFLA encourages national governments, intergovernmental organisations and sponsors to recognise the strategic importance of digital libraries and to actively support their development. Contributions to large-scale digitisation programmes serve to make cultural and scientific information resources more widely available, and advance national and international digital library initiatives that will be sustainable over time.*

Specific legislation and financial support from national and local governments is required to bridge the digital divide and to ensure sustainable access. Any long-term strategy must aim to bridge the digital divide and to strengthen the development of education, literacy, culture – and most of all – to provide access to information.

Bridging the digital divide also implies the need for action by the appropriate authorities to incorporate information literacy into education curricula, and to raise awareness that much valuable information from the past is not in digital form.

*IFLA encourages libraries to collaborate with other cultural and scientific heritage institutions to provide rich and diverse digital resources that support education and research, tourism and the creative industries.*

Consultation with rights owners and other stakeholders is essential. Designers and implementers of digital libraries should consult fully with indigenous communities, whose tangible and intangible cultural heritage it is proposed to digitise, to ensure that

their rights and wishes are respected. The implementation of the digital library must also support equity of access to the content by meeting the special needs of people with disabilities.

Authorities should be aware that active planning for digital libraries at any level (national, regional and local) should cover the following issues:

- Trained personnel
- Adequate buildings and facilities
- Integrated planning for libraries and archives
- Funding
- Target setting

National e-strategies, as recommended by the World Summit on the Information Society<sup>2</sup>, could establish a firm basis for planning digital libraries.

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<sup>2</sup> See: World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva 2003: Plan of action, Action line C1, paragraph 8; Tunis 2005, 'Agenda for the Information Society', paragraph 90.