



U.N. High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation

**Implementation of Recommendations 5 A/B**

Proposal of the U.S. Council for International Business

February 2020

The U.S. Council for International Business (USCIB) commends the UN Secretary General for initiating this multistakeholder consultation as a means of raising awareness about the extraordinary potential of digital technologies and the online environment enabled by them to generate economic growth, foster inclusiveness, and enhance social prosperity and well-being. We are a U.S. business association composed of U.S. multinational companies from every sector of the U.S. economy, which includes a cross-section of global companies in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector as well as a diverse array of leading users of ICT technologies.

USCIB has welcomed this opportunity to offer a cross-sectoral perspective on the work of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC) and has actively provided comments since the group was launched in the summer of 2018. This initiative comes at a critical time of challenges to the safety, security, stability and seamless functioning of a global Internet. We concur that the time is ripe to develop an architecture to strengthen cooperation in the digital space.

IGF-Plus Model: Moving to Implementation

Now is the moment to move from high-level statements to concrete action on HLPDC Report Recommendations 5 A/B. In previous submissions, USCIB endorsed the “Internet Governance Forum Plus” (IGF-Plus) as a digital architecture model that would enhance global digital cooperation. USCIB has participated in the IGF since its inception in 2005 and greatly values it as an international venue that enables all stakeholders to come together on an equal footing to have open and inclusive discussions on a range of important policy issues. These qualities can and should be enhanced.

In the next 9-12 months, USCIB would like to see a foundation laid for the IGF-Plus model. As business stakeholders, we bring a practical perspective about how the model should be implemented that has been informed by multiple sectors. This provides a broader viewpoint about what is commercially and technically feasible to enable more of global society to realize economic and welfare benefits from the digital transformation.

The following identifies areas that require action for the IGF-Plus model to be implemented and prove effective as a new architecture for digital cooperation.

Envisaged New Functions and How they Would Work

We set out below suggestions for how the new functions envisaged in the HLPDC recommendations could be realized, and questions that should be taken into account. In doing so, there are two general points to bear in mind.

Firstly, we want to emphasize the importance of avoiding duplication – we would not want to see the IGF Plus taking on new functions in a way that duplicates valuable work already underway in some organizations. In some cases, a coordination/liaison function might be appropriate as is common with technical standards work.

Secondly, to successfully implement the new functions, it will be necessary for the Secretariat to assign resources, including staff members, to manage these functions as dedicated workstreams of the IGF Plus. That already may be obvious with regard to the Help Desk function, but it is worth clarifying that it also will be important for the Cooperation Accelerator and Policy Incubator functions, even if much of the resulting work will fall to the members of the stakeholder community that contribute. These envisaged new functions, and the required support of the Secretariat to oversee and support them, clearly have significant budgetary implications that must be considered in the operationalization of the IGF Plus.

- *Cooperation Accelerator* -- As pointed out in an October 2019 submission<sup>1</sup> to the IGF consultation on Recommendations 5A/B, there are similarities between the envisaged Cooperation Accelerator function and the existing IGF Best Practice Forums (BPF). The BPFs are designed to “inform internet governance policy debates by drawing on the immense and diverse range of experience and expertise found in the global IGF community to create a resource of best practices and policy recommendations.” To some extent, we could see this Cooperation Accelerator function as a formalization of the current volunteer-led BPFs. In one way, though, for the Cooperation Accelerator function to be successful, it needs to go further than the BPFs have generally managed by bringing in experts from a variety of disciplines who have not previously engaged with the IGF. This would help to avoid the risks of working in silos and duplicating work that is done elsewhere.

The Cooperation Accelerator coalitions should of course continue to draw on the expertise and input of the stakeholder community, and indeed we believe they should be open to all interested stakeholders. We disagree with the implication from the HLPDC recommendation - “members should be selected” - that membership would be limited and closed.

It also will be important to have Cooperation Accelerator coalitions staffed by someone who is responsible for driving the process, potentially also as lead drafter of outputs. This could be someone who is a member of, or is employed by, the Secretariat and would have a greater role than the consultants which currently support the work of the Best Practice Forums. That way, the exercise still would be open to all interested stakeholders but would not rely on volunteers to drive the process forward.

- *Policy Incubator* -- The Policy Incubator could play a valuable role in seeking and curating information on policy developments around the world. It also could make appropriate connections with relevant agencies and organizations, the goal being to support as much as possible a bottom-up multistakeholder process for study, discussion, and potential policy implementation. Such a function could enable broader, more full-featured discussions within a “safe zone” about the practical effects and implementation possibilities. This approach could foster greater collaboration and information-sharing about policy objectives and effective policy tools.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot\\_download/8763/1768](https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/8763/1768)

A Policy Incubator function also should explore innovative approaches to policy development, such as policy hackathons. There are different ways to do policy hackathons. This example<sup>2</sup> shows facilitated workshops where the participants are asked to adopt a policymaker's perspective to create and propose policy solutions. The IGF Plus would provide a perfect platform for convening activities that enable multistakeholder participation in innovative policy development.

As with other elements discussed in this response, great care should be taken to ensure that the Policy Incubator is additive, and not duplicative of other policy efforts. Crucially, the policy Incubator must not, itself, become a policy-making body.

- *Observatory and Help Desk* -- As a starting point, it should be recognized that the IGF already has a wealth of valuable information that, with suitable resources, could be organized into a wide-ranging repository of knowledge. This, of course, includes the written outputs and recommendations from the various intersessional workstreams, such as the 2015-18 project on Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion(s), and the annual reports from the Best Practice Forums (on issues such as cybersecurity, local content, and gender and access) and the many Dynamic Coalitions. It also includes the many summary reports and individual session reports from the annual IGF meetings held since 2006. In addition, we have outputs from National and Regional IGFs. Such information, if well-organized and easily browsable, could, in and of itself, provide a substantial knowledge bank.

The HLPDC report also envisages that the Help Desk function, in part, could facilitate coordination of capacity development done by other organizations. We agree that this could be valuable, given that the issues covered by the IGF relate to work done by many different agencies. We have two reservations, however.

The first concerns ensuring that interested policymakers and lawmakers who would benefit from accessing the Help Desk know where to go. They might not think to consider what is offered by the UN or other international bodies. Alternatively, policymakers might be more accustomed to approaching a specific agency, e.g. the ITU's Development Bureau. It therefore would be important to find ways to direct people to the Help Desk through traditional public affairs/communications outreach and other awareness-raising initiatives, both within the UN ecosystem so that all agencies are aware, as well as with national governments.

The second concerns active consultation with the OECD, whose [Going Digital Toolkit](#) is designed to help policy-makers assess their country's state of digital development and formulate policy strategies and approaches. As such, the Toolkit can provide valuable inspiration in developing the Help Desk concept.

### How to Address the Call for Actionable Outcomes

The envisaged Cooperation Accelerator and Policy Incubator functions, combined with the evolution over the last three IGF meetings of concise summaries of viewpoints and areas of consensus (e.g. Berlin Messages, Chair's Summary, session reporting templates), already lay the groundwork for a more outcome-oriented IGF.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.worldbank.org/psd/policy-hackathon-explained-how-all-society-approach-can-engage-entrepreneurs-and-governments-develop>

- *Specifying Decision-Making Targets* -- One way to further develop IGF “outcomes” would be to ensure that future IGF Messages specify, where possible, decision-making bodies (e.g. intergovernmental bodies or national governments) that are urged to take account of the written outputs. This could help to solidify one of the valuable roles the IGF can play, of bringing ideas and potential solutions to the attention of the institutions that adopt relevant law, rules, and standards.
- *Retaining Consultative Nature* -- At the same time, it is critical to retain the open and consultative nature of the IGF that we have come to value. We worry that the focus on IGF “actionable outcomes” will undermine this quality as participants find they must spend the entire meeting in laborious negotiations on text. Indeed, there is great value in the function the IGF already plays in bringing people together from different stakeholder groups and different parts of the world to exchange views and learn from each other. Efforts to make the IGF more outcome-oriented should not be pursued in a way that diminishes this existing and original function as a forum that enables a rich exchange of perspectives and ideas.
- *Establishing Thematic/Topical Balance* -- We note proposals from some quarters to improve the coherence and “outcomes” of the IGF by reducing the scope of each meeting to a small number of well-defined issues. Simply put, there are too many workshops on too many divergent topics, resulting in “echo chamber” discussions and semi-empty rooms.

However, we also are aware that stakeholders have been drawn to the IGF because it has featured a broad variety of topical internet policy issues. Thus, we feel there is a risk in significantly narrowing the number of topics to be covered. Such streamlining might alienate parts of the IGF community energized by issues that would not be chosen, leading them not to attend the meeting, and possibly not to return in the future.

Conscious of this tension, we propose a middle ground, whereby a substantial portion of the program (e.g. 50 or 50 percent) be devoted to two or three “core tracks.” The rest of the program then might be allocated to supplementary/non-core topics that would retain the interest of IGF constituents not be not focused on the designated core topics in that particular year.

The core tracks would consist of narrower, more focused topics than the three broader thematic tracks of IGF 2019 and 2020 (Data, Inclusion, and Trust). These core tracks could be supported by preparatory work done in the six or more months leading up to the meeting by working groups of interested stakeholders, led by members of the IGF-Plus Advisory Group. This preliminary work could potentially include: (1) developing a structural approach to the core topics (which could ultimately facilitate clearer written conclusions from the annual meeting); (2) organizing some of the sessions at the annual meeting, and (3) developing written inputs to inform discussions at the annual meeting.

Furthermore, noting the call from the Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs that the IGF should “step up as a platform in responding to the Secretary-General’s call for a Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals,”<sup>3</sup> one of the core tracks for each IGF could be linked to a specific Sustainable Development Goal, with a different SDG chosen each year. The ideas and consensus views emerging from the discussions of that particular Core Track would thus provide annual outcomes, which would feed directly into efforts to fulfill the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/message-from-the-usg>

## Funding Needs

The U.S. business community remains concerned that there are not adequate funds to launch and sustain the IGF-Plus model into the future. To date, the IGF has operated on a shoe-string budget. In the spirit of stakeholder inclusiveness and fairness, we think all stakeholders should be encouraged to provide financial support to realize our shared aspirations for an expanded IGF.

As [documented on the IGF website](#), stakeholders from government, business, and the technical community have contributed to the IGF Trust Fund<sup>4</sup> since 2006, and some quite generously. We note that the Governments of Finland, the European Commission, the Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and the Internet Society (ISOC) each have cumulatively donated \$850,000-\$1,500,000 since 2006. We are grateful for the Government of Germany's recent pledge of \$1,000,000, to be disbursed during the 2020-2025 period, and hope that this pledge inspires other stakeholders to follow suit.

Nevertheless, these contributions have barely covered – and some years fell short of covering – costs of the IGF Secretariat's staffing and operations. We are not confident that simply calling upon stakeholders to provide financial support to launch and sustain an IGF-Plus will generate the needed resources. We propose the following ideas to provide a more stable and reliable approach to funding the IGF-Plus architecture. Some of these proposals initially were explored at the IGF Strategic Fundraising Planning Meeting hosted by UN-DESA on September 4, 2013, which included representatives from all stakeholder groups. We feel they remain relevant and should be considered as key elements of an IGF-Plus implementation plan.

- *Professional Fundraising* –The IGF-Plus needs a formal, structured fundraising function. This is something that should be taken on by a dedicated part of the Secretariat, led by an experienced and reputable fundraiser. Fundraising should not fall to the Chair of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) or MAG members as is built into the current system. This Secretariat function would include fund-raising to pursue both substantive and, where possible, multi-year donations. It also would encompass financial planning, e.g., appropriate forecasting and input into the overall operational functions of the Secretariat. Following a common incentive-based model used in the U.S. non-profit community because it is generally understood to increase the overall amounts raised, the dedicated fundraiser would be paid from a determined portion of money he/she raises for the Trust Fund. The Secretariat would present annual fundraising plans to the Advisory Group for *expeditious* review and approval so that funds can be raised and deposited in the IGF Trust Fund in a timely manner.
- *Budget Transparency* – The budget process should be fully transparent and include review and inputs from an Advisory Group Budget Working Party. The approved budget should then be posted on the IGF-Plus website. It also is important to understand the amounts and purposes of any administrative fees charged by the UN, i.e., the proportions of any donations that are designated to the UN and not used for IGF operational expenses. The amounts and purposes of such administrative costs also should be reported transparently.
- *Forging Philanthropic Partnerships* – The dedicated fundraiser should be encouraged to pursue partnerships with philanthropic organizations, in general, and specifically philanthropic partnerships

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<sup>4</sup> While host countries bear the majority of the costs associated with holding the annual IGF meeting, the IGF Secretariat's activities are funded through extra-budgetary contributions paid into a multi-donor Trust Fund administered by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). All contributions are administered and accounted for in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations and other applicable directives, procedures and practices.

that would enable U.S. stakeholders to receive a tax deduction for charitable contributions. According to the UN Charter and related legal instruments and financial regulations, all non-governmental donor contributions to the UN and its organizations and entities may not be tax deductible. In 2013, the UN legal staff considered a proposal from the [Tides Foundation](#) that would enable U.S. stakeholders to contribute to the Tides Foundation. U.S. stakeholders therefore could take a tax deduction; the Tides Foundation, in turn, would channel all such contributions to the IGF Trust Fund.

Stakeholders who participated in the September 2013 meetings were not notified about whether the UN ultimately concluded an agreement with the Tides Foundation. [Information on IGF Trust Fund donor contributions](#) indicates that Tides indeed made contributions in 2014 and 2016 of \$97,000 and \$50,000, respectively. If these contributions were a result of the arrangement described above, the agreement with Tides should be renewed to help underwrite the IGF-Plus model. Importantly, the dedicated fundraiser should inform and educate the broader U.S. stakeholder community about the option provided by an UN-Tides Foundation agreement.

- *New Mechanisms for “small” contributions* – In addition, USCIB understands that soliciting contributions via the IGF website, using a service like PayPal, for example, is not workable under the UN’s legal instruments and financial regulations. The dedicated fundraiser therefore should work with stakeholders to develop and approach that would enable non-governmental contributions to the IGF Trust Fund of all sizes, from individuals and organizations. It should not be underestimated that even small contributions (e.g., \$50-\$100) received from the global Internet Community can add up to a significant amount.

## Conclusion

USCIB welcomes the opportunity to participate in this important exercise and appreciates the inclusiveness of the process. We have endeavored to provide concrete suggestions aimed at laying the foundation for the IGF-Plus model. There is great potential to operationalize the proposed Policy Incubator, Cooperation Accelerator, and Observatory/Help Desk elements in a manner that retains the valued voluntary, consultative features of the current IGF while also leveraging resources and expertise available in other global organizations. We further propose that the call for actionable outcomes can be addressed in a way that retains the consultative, bridge-building nature of the current IGF.

Securing adequate resources to support IGF-Plus improvements continues to be a challenge. USCIB has proposed a way forward that would enable more effective outreach and solicitation to the stakeholder community and not impose financial burdens on the United Nations. We sincerely hope you will regard these suggestions favorably and take them forward in order to operationalize the IGF-Plus model. We would be pleased to engage in further discussions with the HLPDC Secretariat in this regard.

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