

Governance of the Internet, by the people, for the people: A Call for Civil Society Participation and Engagement

The Internet has become a crucial tool for Civil Society today. NGOs are Civil Society's executive motors for development, justice and sustainability, and are becoming increasingly depending on the Internet to pursue their mission and sustainability.

Internet Governance is where crucial decisions are made and policy is set. Civil Society's role in Internet governance is unique. Civil Society's first key contribution to Internet Governance is its role as the main advocate and defender of the Internet's core values such as freedom, stability, security, accessibility, and affordability. Civil Society's second key contribution to Internet Governance is representation. Internet governance today resembles a country where 1% of the population governs 99% of the population, and most don't even know that the 1% exists! Legitimate Internet governance depends on awareness and participation by all its stakeholders. Civil society's strength is its people, with community groups and NGOs as their organized voice. NGOs should be the educators, mobilizers, opinion builders and organizers of multi stakeholder based Internet governance. Civil Society and NGOs are the sleeping giant of Internet stakeholders.

Civil Society and the Internet have become interdependent. The Internet and its governance need Civil Society as a guardian of its own key values and it is Civil Society involvement and engagement that gives Internet Governance legitimacy. In turn, Civil Society depends on the same values and representation in order to fulfill its visions and Mission.

Civil Societies future is at stake in Internet governance today. The Internet is changing in ways that will have a major impact on Civil Society and its NGOs. The immediate change will come from the decision of the US Government to hand over the oversight and accountability over the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS), the IANA Functions, to a yet unformed multi stakeholder process. The future of the Internet will depend on this new structure. NPOC, (the Not-For-Profit Operational Concerns Constituency), was established to give voice to NGOs and Civil Society in ICANN's multi stakeholder Internet governance processes. Civil Society's influence and role determining this future depend on how effective it engages with ongoing Internet Governance processes. Civil Society is the Internet's largest stakeholder group, it has the most to lose, and the most to contribute. The weaker NGO participation in Internet governance, the harder it is prevent Internet policy from being captured by interests opposed to the free and open goals of Civil Society. A weak policy role also weakens NGO sustainability, blunts NGO activities, and, in developing and emerging economies, weakens overall socio-economic development.

How can Civil Society and NGO's engage to show that they care about the future of the Internet?

1. Let us know what you think!

In order to strengthen Civil Society engagement in Internet governance, NPOC is planning set of regional surveys designed to understand the Internet needs of Civil Society and NGOs, and the Internet realities they face. This is a critical initial step in designing activities, accountable to stakeholders, that both give voice to those concerns in Internet governance, and begin to address specific needs within civil society and its NGOs.

2. Engage and make your voice heard!

Become a member of NPOC. NPOC is working to dramatically increase the scale and scope of Civil Society and its NGOs in Internet governance policy setting and implementation, within and beyond ICANN. NPOC's role and mission are to promote Civil Society stakeholder engagement in Internet Governance, to make its voice heard and its opinions count.

3. Help spread the word! Increase awareness, create capacities build engagement: Become a regional implementation partner!

Working with NPOC, regional partners will implement outreach, awareness and capacity building programs using knowledge exchanges, regional train-the-trainers outreach and capacity building events. Regional outreach and capacity building events, supported by NPOC, are to be held by regional partner organizations, with NPOC support for engagement and capacity building materials.