

# Internet Governance and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)



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## What Is Internet Governance?

Internet governance refers to how the Internet is coordinated, managed, and used. The Internet is a collection of over 70,000 networks that interconnect following shared rules, principles, norms, and decision-making processes, allowing them to act as one distributed, global, borderless system. Its governance is a shared global responsibility that involves multiple stakeholders, such as governments, technical communities, civil society, and businesses. How the Internet is governed impacts how we use it and how it evolves.

A common question in [Internet governance](#) discussions is, "Who runs the Internet?" People naturally want to know who is in charge, especially when discussing how the Internet can and should evolve or address emerging challenges. The answer isn't simple; depending on the context, "nobody" and "everybody" could sound correct, but the actual answer would be "no one by themselves, no one single party". This complexity becomes apparent when discussions arise about guiding the Internet's evolution to meet new needs or address emerging challenges. People naturally want to know who is "in charge" of directing these changes.

The Internet fundamentally relies on collaborative, bottom-up processes. This is guided by the [multistakeholder approach](#), which is deeply embedded in the Internet's design. This open, collaborative foundation is key to the Internet's success, allowing it to grow as a platform for innovation and sharing ideas. How the Internet is managed—its governance—directly impacts its use, evolution, and our daily lives.

This collaborative perspective has shaped major initiatives like the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#), a United Nations (UN) process (2003-2005) aimed at building a "people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society." However, proposed policies and regulations can sometimes threaten the Internet's open nature, potentially risking the aspects we value most.

The [Internet Engineering Task Force \(IETF\)](#) and [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers \(ICANN\)](#) exemplify a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance by bringing together diverse participants from various stakeholder groups to collaboratively develop and manage the Internet's core



functions. The IETF offers open processes where anyone can contribute to technical standards, while ICANN fosters inclusive policy development around domain names and IP addresses.

## What Is the Multistakeholder Approach?

Think of the multistakeholder governance model as organizing a concert. No single group—the organizers, technicians, stage managers, or performers—has control over everything. Different parties handle various aspects, such as the venue, stage design, lighting, sound, setup, instrument tuning, ticketing, and performance. When all parts work together effectively, the result is a harmonious event. However, in such a complex and interdependent system, if something goes wrong, it can lead to significant problems that affect everyone's experience.

Advocating for a multistakeholder approach does not exclude any group; it emphasizes collaboration among all stakeholders. While governments play a crucial role in UN-led processes, effective and lasting Internet governance and digital development decisions come from inclusive stakeholder discussions. In these discussions, the technical community, private sector, civil society, and academia should all have strong voices and be able to make meaningful contributions, as outlined in the [Netmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement](#).

## How Is Internet Governance Practiced? The Case of IGF

Internet governance occurs in various forums: events, consultations, and processes run by different institutions. A very important one—and a key outcome of WSIS—is [the Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#). Convened by the United Nations (UN), the IGF is a global multistakeholder platform for discussing public policy issues related to the Internet. It provides a space for open dialogue among governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, the technical community, and international organizations. The IGF ecosystem also includes regional and national forums where local issues are discussed, informing global positions. Furthermore, the IGF helps track digital policy trends and informs other UN processes.

The IGF has served as a vital multistakeholder platform for inclusive dialogue on major global Internet governance processes, including the IANA transition, the Global Digital Compact (GDC), and the WSIS+20 review. During the 2014 and 2015 IGF meetings in Istanbul and João Pessoa, the IGF held key discussions on the IANA stewardship transition, helping raise global awareness, encourage participation, and build trust in the multistakeholder model that ultimately guided the transition in 2016. More recently, the IGF provided a space to engage stakeholders around the GDC preparations. Looking ahead to the WSIS+20 review, the IGF continues to serve as the primary multistakeholder platform where stakeholders can shape the future of digital cooperation and reaffirm commitments to an open, inclusive, and people-centered information society.

## How Does the Internet Society Contribute?

The Internet Society actively supports and helps fund the IGF. Alongside our community and partners, we advocate for strengthening the IGF as a vital UN multistakeholder platform, pushing for a permanent mandate and sustainable funding. We participate by:

- Financially supporting global, regional, and national IGFs.
- Attending meetings and contributing to preparations, consultations, and working groups.
- Mobilizing our community and partners to defend the multistakeholder approach.
- Sharing evidence-based stories, data (e.g., from [Internet Society's Pulse platform](#)), and policy analyses to demonstrate the benefits of multistakeholder collaboration and inform public debate.

Through these efforts, we aim to bring the voice of the global Internet community to these crucial deliberations.