

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Australian librarian and ALIA Fellow, Christine MacKenzie, will become the President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) at the World Library and Information Congress in Athens later this year for the 2019–2021 term. Before she commences her presidency, ALIA grabbed a moment of her time to have a chat about her presidential theme, the challenges on the horizon, and what she's most looking forward to in her time in office.

What excites you most about becoming IFLA President?

The big picture answer is that I want to continue to promote the role that libraries have in achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda. There is a new sense of urgency entering the discourse and the future of the world depends on sustainable development. We all know the power that libraries have in providing access to information, fostering literacy and preserving our cultural and intellectual heritage. Librarians can be powerful advocates for change. I want to build on the great work that is already being done, and ALIA is an excellent example of how national associations can move this agenda on.

For IFLA the organisation, it is a very exciting time. Having developed our global vision for libraries in the most inclusive and consultative way, we are now ready to launch our new Strategic Framework 2019–2024. We have identified four strategic directions and I am looking forward to working with the new Governing Board and professional units to achieve our plan. I am very pleased that Vicki McDonald, ALIA President 2017–2018, is Chair of the Professional Committee for the term of this Governing Board. This is a vital role on the Board and I am so happy to be working with Vicki to ensure we maximise what IFLA Secretary General Gerald Leitner calls 'the greatest brains trust for libraries in the world'.

On a personal level, I have already experienced the great joy of meeting many librarians from all over the world. It is a privilege to visit so many different countries and libraries, to attend conferences, better understand cultures and meet passionate and committed colleagues in their own environment.

What do you think are the greatest challenges you will face?

Globally, I think it is advocating that access to information and universal literacy can save the world and that libraries have an important role to play. This can be a bit overwhelming but if we break it down to achievable bits, we can progress this agenda.

For IFLA, I think that the planned governance review, which is the next stage in the development of IFLA as a more inclusive and global organisation, may challenge some members. Change is not always easy, or readily embraced, but I believe that the excellent consultative process that has been used to engage people in the global vision project will reassure members that we will be doing this in an inclusive and participative manner. Structure follows strategy, and with our robust, ambitious and achievable strategic framework we now need to ensure that the structure we have supports it.

Personally, I would say the challenge for the next two years is staying healthy and strong. I have found since I retired from full time work it is much easier to have a regular exercise regime. But travelling frequently and being in different time zones challenges my body. Jet lag is a bummer. I travel with my own hot water jug, teabags and Australian long-life milk. I've just added a travelling iron to my kit too. So, I'm as prepared as I can be! Luckily, I seem to have a strong immune system, touch wood.

How far do you think you will be able to lead IFLA down the road of the Global Vision?

We have worked hard to develop the IFLA Strategic Framework 2019–2024 which will guide IFLA in achieving the outcomes highlighted in the Global Vision. We now have a clear road map to follow and we will break it down into shorter-term plans.

When we achieve the actions set out in the Framework we will have united and strengthened the library field and IFLA will be able to more powerfully represent libraries globally. I don't think we (IFLA and libraries) will ever get to the end of the road – all of what we do is a journey. We are on a path of continuous improvement and we are learning along the way.

FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Your IFLA presidential theme is 'Let's work together' and collaboration is a feature of library life – what are you hoping to achieve by the end of your term?

I am particularly looking to improve and grow our partnerships with like-minded organisations. We have already started this with a two-day workshop held in The Hague in January where we met with a number of international organisations including the International Council of Archives (ICA), the International Publishers Association (IPA), and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO.) I also want to encourage libraries to work better together. While competition can be a positive thing, I think that there can be more collaboration amongst ourselves. I recently heard about 197 public libraries in St Petersburg who now share a single library card and a very spiffy website. I get concerned when sectors here in Australia seem to exist in silos and I think that more cross sectoral initiatives can only help in strengthening the library field. As ALIA says, together we are stronger!

The IFLA President clocks up a lot of air miles – which cities are already on your schedule and where are you most looking forward to visiting?


I have already visited wonderful places, some of my favourites have been Tunis, Moscow and Hanoi. In the pipeline are Buenos Aires, Changsha in China, Nouméa and Beijing. Everywhere I go I am so impressed and grateful for the hospitality shown by our hosts and the warmth of their welcome. It is a privilege to be able to learn about other cultures and experience many different things – from boating down the river at night in Surabaya where the lights strung across the water make the city look so beautiful, to being enthralled by the opera at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, to being escorted through the souks of Tunis at night by an elderly gentleman with an oil lamp. I have to pinch myself, often.

Can you give us a few lines preview of your speech as incoming President in Athens?

Well, I'm still working on that! But I will be talking a bit about my own story and how a girl from Maffra in country Victoria became President of IFLA. I will also outline our agenda for the next two years and how I see my theme of working

together as an essential part of achieving that agenda. It is a great thing to assume the presidency in Athens, this beautiful city that is the birthplace of democracy.

What would you like to say to Australian library and information professionals who haven't had much engagement with IFLA?

Being involved with any professional association is so rewarding. There are many learning opportunities and it is a great way to grow your network. From attending the World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) where up to 4,000 librarians from all over the world gather to learn, exchange ideas and have fun, to being involved with one of the many professional units, there is something for everyone in IFLA. Many have discovered a special niche where they have found their own people. IFLA provides so many opportunities to engage with colleagues from around the world and this is such an enriching experience. Please consider joining us – it could change your life! 



Incoming IFLA President Christine MacKenzie with current IFLA President Glòria Pérez-Salmerón at ALIA Information Online 2019.