

**Concept note:
e-Participation
Geneva, March 2011**

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5. About the concept note

Introduction

The growing awareness about the importance of creating channels for online interaction has increased, both on the national and on the international level. Governments make use of online platforms to provide information and services, as well as seeking to remain in close contact with citizens. Commercial enterprises and civil society take advantage of the potential offered by online tools to improve their communication and organizational skills.

In the political sphere, online channels create new possibilities for constant participation in debates and in decision-making processes. While the traditional mechanisms for participation, such as councils, were limited, both in terms of space and time, the Internet offers an opportunity for real-time interaction of people who are geographically dispersed.

The possibility for broader participation, regardless of frontiers, is particularly important to processes of a broad scope, such as global meetings. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF)¹ and regional Internet Governance meetings, such as EuroDIG² have taken advantage of e-participation channels, particularly of the concept of participation from hubs, as explained below.

Statistics made public by the IGF Secretariat³ show that the participation from developing countries in the IGF meeting that took place in Vilnius, in 2010, has greatly increased thanks to e-participation. For instance, only 5% of the total number of on-site participants were from Latin America and 7% were from Africa. But if e-participation is taken into account, 25% of the total number of participants were from South America and 30% were from African countries. This shows that e-participation has a considerable potential to enhance levels of inclusion.

¹ www.intgovforum.org

² www.eurodig.org

³ <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/2010/Stats.2010.pdf>

1. Aims of e-Participation

- ***Broadening the range of participants.*** Allowing additional stakeholders who would otherwise be excluded to actively participate in the ongoing meetings
- ***Allowing synchronous and asynchronous discussions.*** Online participation may take place in parallel with the larger meeting or be extended throughout a longer period of time, in the phases of agenda-setting and programme shapping, for example.
- ***Capacity-building.*** Increasing e-participants' awareness of the topics under discussion during the larger meeting
- ***Community-building.*** Facilitating an exchange of views among e-participants and also with the participants physically present in the event. The goal is to make these online exchanges as close as possible to *in situ* exchanges among attendees

2. How to Join the Online e-Participation Platform

- a) **Individually**, from home/office/mobile
- b) **Collectively**, attending a hub meeting⁴. This option gives the opportunity to meet people with similar interests in the local community and to foster networking and capacity building efforts. Hubs should be motivated:
 - To introduce local policy concerns into the larger meeting
 - To discuss the challenges raised at the larger meeting from a local perspective



Image 1. IGF hub in Belgrade, Serbia



Image 2. IGF hub in ISOC – Chennai, India

⁴ The **hubs** are defined as local meetings that take place in parallel with the larger meeting, as an online extension of the meeting premises. They exhibit a webcast of the event wherein people can be informed about what is being debated. By using an interactive platform, e-participants can send questions that can be answered by the meeting panelists. Hubs can also hold their own panels and roundtable discussions.

3. Aspects Encompassed by e-Participation

3. ASPECTS ENCOMPASSED BY E-PARTICIPATION

3.1. Options for enabling e-participants to follow the larger meeting:

- By watching videocast or listening to audiocast from the meeting rooms
- By viewing the PPT presentations from the speakers, exhibited online in real time
- By reading real-time text transcripts of what is being said at the larger meeting. This is especially important for e-participants with low-bandwidth or accessing from their mobiles and for people with disabilities

3.2. Fostering e-participants' interaction with the meeting:

- By sending text comments in real-time, visible to other e-participants. They can be visible as well to the participants physically present in the meeting room if the image of the e-platform is projected.
- By sending text questions that will be forwarded to the panel moderator when he/she opens the floor for questions from the participants and e-participants
- By sending short pre-recorded video questions or statements that can be projected during the larger meeting
- By live audio/video inputs if agreed and pre-arranged. This is optional, but especially valuable for larger hubs or remote panelists

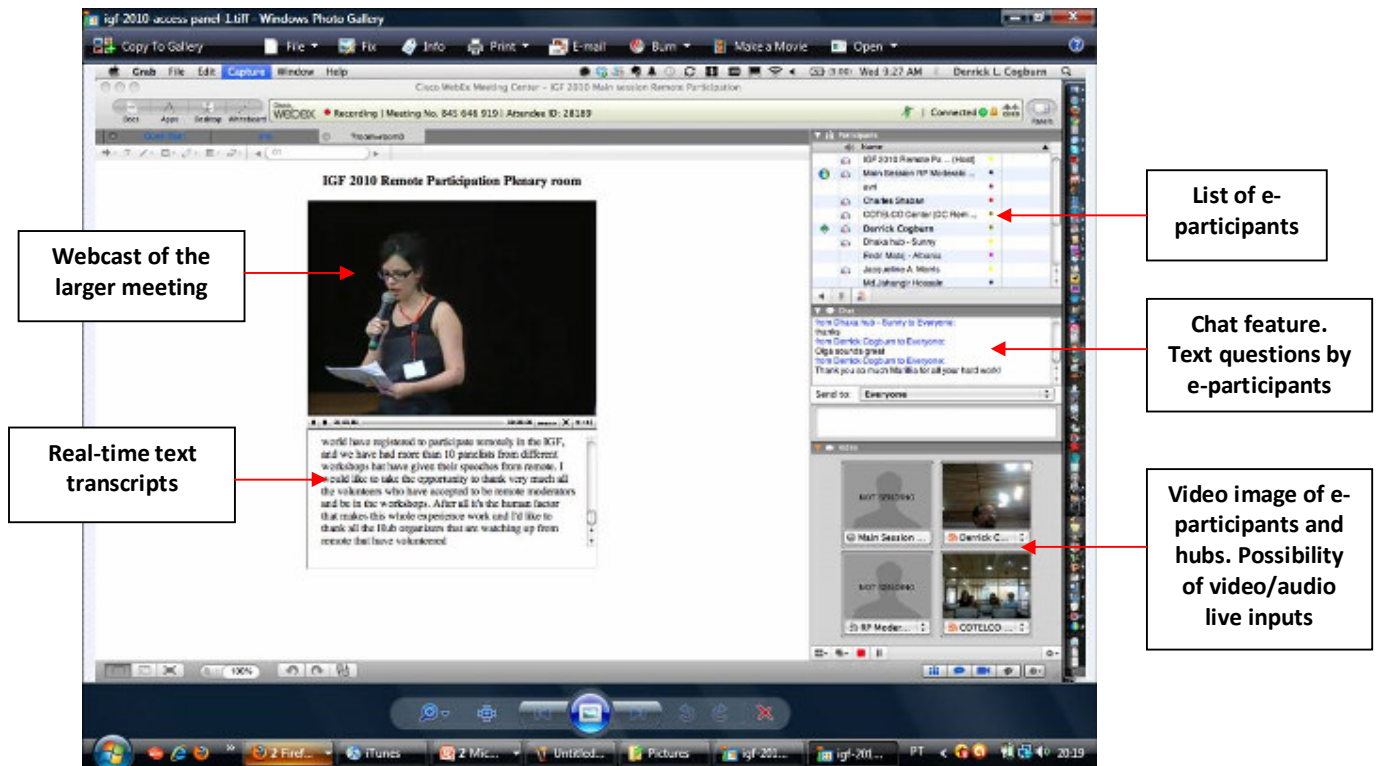


Image 3. An e-participant using Cisco's Webex platform during the IGF

3.3. Enabling speakers' interaction with e-participants:

- By receiving questions from e-participants, which will be collected by moderators and forwarded to the panel
- By following the e-participants' discussion thread, which can be made visible on the meeting room screen as well as in the online e-participation platform
- By logging in the e-participation platform and sending short messages in the real-time chat window

3.4. Enabling interaction between the participants who are physically present⁵ and the e-participants

- By following the discussion thread, that will be visible on the meeting room screen as well as in the online e-participation platform
- By sending short messages in real-time, visible to e-participants on the e-participation platform

⁵ Participants who are physically present at the larger meeting and meeting speakers may also use their computers to join the platform for e-participation, in order to interact with e-participants or to follow sessions that are taking place in parallel

- By combining and making available on the e-participation platform the comments made by physical attendees about the meeting on other platforms, (ex: in Twitter). This enhances the “social reporting” of the meeting.

Image 4. Workshop room in IGF 2010

Screen showing the e-participation platform. On site participants could follow e-participants' discussions. The screen was larger in main sessions

e-participation moderator, responsible to follow the discussions in the e-participation platform and voice the questions from e-participants



Screen showing the text transcripts of the discussions.

4. How to Put in Place e-Participation: Summary of Instructions

4.1. To e-Participants

e-participants only need to use their web browser in order to access the platform for e-participation, where all video feeds, presentations and captioning will be exhibited in real time. They can test their browser and operational system in advance, to make sure they meet the requirements needed.

4.2. To larger meeting organizers

4.2.1. Registration and publicization of hubs

A registration form can be made available in the website of the larger meeting and a call for hub registration can be publicized through all relevant channels. As an example, the following information was requested in the IGF hub registration form:

City:

Location:

Programme of your local event: (starting time, ending time, sessions you intend to follow; see the draft program here):

Number of expected participants:

Organizing institutions (and individuals):

Hub coordinator:

e-mail /tel/Skype:

local web page of the event (if available):

Please also provide us with short bios and photos of persons involved with organization of the hub.

Some of the information above was made available in the website of the IGF, in order to give hubs publicity among local people interested to join.

4.2.2. Communication with hub organizers

It is important to keep close contact with hub organizers, in order to assist them with any doubts they may have, especially regarding technical assistance. They should send the

contact of an IT-responsible person able to discuss technical set-up details and schedule the test of the connection in advance

4.2.3. Reporting from hubs

Hub organizers may be asked to send reports of the local meetings, especially if there was a local agenda and discussions with panelists, to be published in the website of the larger meeting, if convenient.

4.2.4. Technical aspects

a. Webcast

Webcast is the major way of communication for e-participation. It can take one or many of the following forms:

- Videostreaming
- Audiostreaming
- Live Captioning (transcription)

The most important aspect of webcast is the quality of sound; a video can be distorted but without proper audio, e-participants won't be able to know what is happening at the event.

For the webcast, at least two solutions can be envisioned:

- A team of 2-3 people dedicated for setting up and maintaining webcast through several online platforms such as ustream.tv, justin.tv or adobe.com. In this case webcast will be delivered in the browser (and can be integrated in the e-participation platform along with chat and transcription).
- Usage of Web cameras and microphone: A simplistic way to deal with webcasting the event. In this case webcast will be delivered in the e-participation platform along with chat and transcription; however the quality of audio and video will be very minimalistic. This might be convenient for smaller meetings.

b. Bandwidth (upload/download)

In order to insure a smooth e-participation experience a minimum of Internet bandwidth is to be provided from all involved entities; however, an optimum bandwidth is needed (Upload/Download) from the organizers of the larger meeting:

- e-participation computer: 2/5MBps dedicated wired connections for each (2-3 computers per room);
- Captioning computer: 5/5MBps dedicated wired connection for each (in case we have captioning 1 computer per room);

- Wireless in the rooms for the participants: Bandwidth depends on the number of expected attendees
- Webcasting platform: Bandwidth depends on whether one will host the stream delivery server locally or outsource it and it also depends on the equipment used. This can also be simplified if using webcams on the e-participation computers; however the quality of video and audio will differ.

It is strongly advised that the organizers make use of a bandwidth management software/hardware in order to avoid any Internet connectivity problems at the venue of the event especially not to intervene with the quality of e-participation.

c. Platform

Several platforms can be used for e-participation, such as Webex⁶. Webex has been the platform used for e-participation in IGF, but several customized chat solutions can be used to integrate webcast and could show good results. These platforms allow chat and video interaction, the sharing of presentations, documents or whiteboard annotations.

4.3. To Hub organizers

4.3.1. Layout and features of the room

In terms of **equipment**, it should be arranged:

- a) A computer with a broadband Internet connection;
- b) A video conference (or projector) equipment, to exhibit the webcast
- c) A microphone;
- d) If possible, wireless connection for people to use their laptops, as they might like to also individually e-participate in the meeting

Room layout can be flexible. The best scenario would be to have chairs that can be moved around, so they can quickly be arranged at the front of the room, if the organizer wants to hold a local panel with speakers, or in circles, if he wants to break-out participants in discussion groups.

⁶ www.webex.com

4.3.2. Bandwidth

- Individual e-participant: 512/2048 Kbps internet connection needed for video-cast; less needed for following transcripts and sending text contributions only
- Hub:
 - Main e-participation computer: 2/5Mbps dedicated wired connection
 - Wireless in the rooms for the participants: Bandwidth depends on the number of expected attendees (this is of course optional, and it is strongly advised that hub participants view the event through the main computer and projector)

4.3.3. Personnel

Among the team organizing the local hub, we suggest that you assign two people with the following tasks:

- a) An e-participation moderator (see image 4), the person responsible for forwarding the questions of the hub participants to the main meeting, through the e-participation platform;
- b) A moderator for the local debates (in the hub), responsible for making them dynamic and productive (see section 4.3.6 local discussions)

4.3.4. Interaction with the main meeting

E-participants in the hub will be able to **follow the meeting** by watching videocasts or listening to audiocasts from the meeting rooms, by viewing the PPT presentations from the speakers, and by reading real-time closed captioning.

E-participants in the hub will be able to **interact with the meeting** by sending text questions, using the e-participation platform. These questions will be forwarded to the panel moderator when he/she opens the floor for questions from the audience. Hubs are also encouraged to send short pre-recorded video questions or statement (2-3 min) outlining key issues on the local discussion agenda that will be projected on the larger meeting; if previously arranged, hubs can be allowed to join the larger meeting with live questions and comments

For example, videos that were recorded by IGF hubs, gave a better idea of the dynamics of the meetings:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2Ja_PfFptE&feature=player_embedded

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3SaPYzF8d8&feature=player_embedded

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cZwblQJrXQ&feature=player_embedded

4.3.5. Commenting/reporting the meeting

If there is wireless in the room where the hub is taking place, all people with laptops may act as individual e-participants as well: use Twitter or any other online channels to make comments about the meeting and to communicate with other hubs. To learn more about this possibility of “Social Reporting” and how can be used in the context of global meetings, please access: <http://www.diplointernetgovernance.org/group/socialreporting>

4.3.6. Local discussions

One of the most important advantages of creating hubs is the possibility that people present in the hubs engage in discussions about local issues. Hub organizers are free to plan the dynamics of these sessions at their convenience. We suggest that the discussions take place after the webcast of a particular session, so the sessions of the larger meeting can serve as a starting point for the local debate.

Short panels with local speakers can be arranged to complete the discussions in the larger meeting or to discuss the issues from a local standpoint. Hub organizers can carry out group discussions or they can break-out the participants into smaller groups that will discuss the topic from different perspectives. All are valuable dynamics and the moderator should only make sure that they are highly interactive.

5. About the Concept Note

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