



Cities for Digital Rights

Advocacy and engagement opportunities for libraries

- The *Cities Coalition for Digital Rights* facilitates good policies and practices around the use of ICT in city contexts - in ways that benefit communities and uphold their rights and freedoms.
- Several goals of the Coalition overlap with the work and key values of libraries. There are examples of libraries helping cities deliver on CC4DR commitments – from supporting digital inclusion and skills-building to raising awareness around data privacy – which show how libraries can get involved and contribute to this field of work.

The *Cities Coalition for Digital Rights* (CC4DR) was launched in 2018 as a joint initiative between [Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York City](#), supported by [UN-Habitat](#) and several other civil society organisations. Its goal is to bring together, support and mobilise cities to advance and defend people's rights in digital environments.

Today, more than 50 cities from around the world are part of the CC4DR network - committed to upholding key digital rights and to developing and implementing policies and solutions to champion these rights. CC4DR offers a space to discuss key questions and highlight good practices around cities' use of technology in ways which benefit communities, are trustworthy and secure, and protect people's freedoms and digital rights.

Why cities for digital rights?

Today, ICTs and accelerating digitisation enable many exciting opportunities for growth and development, but also give rise to acute rights challenges. These range from tech-enabled surveillance to algorithmic biases, inequalities in access to information, internet shutdowns, and many others. This highlights the urgent need to protect and guarantee people's fundamental rights to the same extent in the digital sphere as in the physical.

Cities are often grappling with the consequences of these challenges – and, as [CC4DR highlights](#), they can also be particularly well-positioned to respond and support communities facing these. This is in part due to cities' immediate proximity to communities, their agility in introducing new policies and legislative responses, their direct role in management of public spaces, and purchasing power.

Shared values and key priorities

At the heart of CC4DR's work is [the Declaration of Cities Coalition for Digital Rights](#). CC4DR's formal members are signatories to the principles the Declaration sets out, and the Coalition's activities are focused on the areas it outlines. The Coalition works to advance these principles by gathering evidence and good practice examples, preparing guidelines and other tools, supporting city-to-city learning, organising events and working groups to explore relevant issues in depth. These activities are described in more detail in the look-back reports for [2019](#) and [2020](#).

There are some key overlaps between the principles the Declaration sets out and libraries' work and values:

1. Universal and equal access to the internet, and digital literacy

This principle focuses on the need to ensure equitable, affordable and accessible connectivity, access to digital services, and ICT skills which enable digital inclusion for all. For libraries, this principle echoes their work to offer public access to the internet and ICT, and to provide support and digital literacy learning opportunities.

2. Privacy, data protection and security

At the heart of this principle is people's privacy, as well as their ability to know and control what happens to their personal data - particularly through data protection and security measures.

For libraries, these goals are reflected in their work to champion privacy literacy among their communities - and libraries' own procedures and measures to safeguard patron privacy, which could offer some good practice examples and insights to cross-sector discussions.

3. Transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination of data, content and algorithms

The Declaration emphasises the importance of "access to understandable and accurate information about the technological, algorithmic and artificial intelligence systems". This is key to realising people's rights when it comes to tech systems which impact their lives - and enables them to question or challenge these systems if they are harmful.

This aligns with libraries' overarching goal to ensure equitable access to relevant information, suggesting possible scope for collaboration in this area.

4. Participatory Democracy, diversity and inclusion

This principle focuses on everyone's ability to digitally engage with city-level policy-making processes, and take part in decisions regarding the local tech infrastructure. It also points out the importance of seeing everyone represented online.

Many libraries have experience supporting [open government initiatives](#), including facilitating engagement with digital public services and boosting civic participation. These library experiences can be useful in helping cities deliver on this Principle.

5. Open and ethical digital service standards

Open and ethical digital service standards and open data help ensure inclusion and interoperability, enabling people to use the ICTs of their choice and to benefit from the opportunities such services offer.

As libraries navigate digitisation of their own services, good practices and findings from this area of CC4DR's work can be of interest for them.

A [CC4DR checklist](#) highlights practical examples of how these principles can be implemented and supported. In its platform and publications, the Coalition also offers good practice examples showing how libraries are already helping member cities deliver on their goals and commitments:

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- In [Sao Paolo](#), rolling out WiFi in public places such as libraries has been one of the three main programmes to facilitate digital inclusion.
- In [Austin](#), public libraries are offering both WiFi hotspot and device lending programmes.

DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING AND SUPPORT

- In [Glasgow](#), the “Digi-Pals” programme by Glasgow Life offered users practical support for developing essential digital skills in the city’s libraries.

DIGITAL RIGHTS TRAINING AND AWARENESS

- In [New York](#), the Library Privacy Week offered more than 30 free open workshops to help residents learn important digital privacy and security skills and practices.

SUPPORTING ENGAGEMENT WITH DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES

- In [Grenoble](#), following the increasing digitisation of public services, one of the measures taken to make sure no-one is left behind was making computers and help from qualified staff available in libraries or city halls.

Drawing on experiences from outside of the current Coalition, there are other examples of how libraries can help cities champion digital rights. For instance, [libraires support Open Data movements, data and AI literacy, help build city-level open data portals](#), and facilitate civic engagement.

Why should libraries engage?

For libraries, working with CC4DR can be of interest for two reasons. First of all, many libraries already work locally to help deliver on people’s rights in the digital sphere – equitable access to information, privacy, addressing misinformation concerns through digital literacy initiatives, and other areas. As set out, there is much in the Coalition’s work which already aligns well with library values and activities.

Secondly, for many libraries, collaboration at a city level can be comparatively easy and accessible (in comparison, for example, with regional or international initiatives). Many (particularly public and community) libraries are supported through municipal or local funding, in part or in full, and so have strong links with local governments. In addition, libraries of different types have long experience working with local partners – from schools and colleges to city councils, local media and beyond.

As such, referring to CC4DR, and seeking to get involved in work associated with it can offer libraries useful engagement opportunities. It is also an opportunity to speak up for, and share library experiences with upholding longstanding library values (e.g. privacy, equity) in relevant city-level policy discussions.

What you can do

While cities are at the center of the Coalition, CC4DR is open to working with other stakeholders – e.g. civil society, communities of practice, knowledge experts, partners and collaborators. In addition, libraries can work directly with their cities to get involved and help champion communities’ digital rights. To get involved, you can:

- 1) **Identify how your library’s work already helps support digital rights and the CC4DR Declaration principles.** Digital literacy, digital rights awareness, citizen’s data sovereignty, AI and algorithmic literacy – there could be many examples of how your existing projects and initiatives already contribute to digital rights.
- 2) **Look at the good practice examples** in and outside of CC4DR to build a strong advocacy argument for involving libraries in broader digital rights work.
- 3) **Check if your city is already part of the CC4DR Coalition.** There are already many coalition members - from Amman and Amsterdam to Vienna and Zaragoza.
- 4) **Get in touch with your city representatives.** Whether your city may be interested in joining the coalition or is already working to implement and uphold the Declaration, you can discuss how the work of libraries helps the city achieve these goals – and discuss the possibilities for future collaboration.