

Best Bits 2013 interim steering committee report

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1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by the interim steering committee of Best Bits to record the work undertaken during 2013, and to provide an overview of the main joint activities of participants in the Best Bits network that continue into 2014. We are sharing this report in line with the proposal from Anriette Esterhuysen in November 2013, which enjoyed support from other participants, namely that the current interim steering committee:

- would continue in place until it had served a full year's term;
- should issue this report at the end of 2013; and
- should propose a procedure to replace itself by the end of the first quarter of 2014

We have adopted that suggestion accordingly and will work to propose a generally acceptable procedure for refreshing the steering committee over the coming months. In the meantime, we offer this report for consideration.

2. About Best Bits

Best Bits is a civil society network on Internet governance and Internet rights. It offers an open space where each group can present and advocate for the initiatives that they believe offer the best positive agenda for advancing broadly shared civil society interests in Internet governance. Through knowledge sharing, it provides the opportunity for broader engagement in and better coordination of these initiatives. This will lead to more informed, effective, inclusive and complementary advocacy outcomes.

There are currently 282 subscribers to the main Best Bits mailing list. In partnership with academic researchers we aim to produce more information about the breakdown of participants by region, affiliation, gender, etc for a future report, but that analysis is yet to be done.

Subscribers to the list are not considered members of Best Bits, because it is not a membership

organisation. However those who join discussions, meetings and common initiatives can be described as Best Bits participants. By the same token, different groups of participants may join different joint initiatives. Though we do hope to develop consensus on issues of shared concern, this takes place organically through deepened understanding, and does not involve participants being required to agree to a single “Best Bits” position.

Facilitating the activities of the network is its steering committee. When Best Bits began, organisational decisions were essentially made by a self-appointed committee of two (Jeremy Malcolm and Andrew Puddephatt), whom participants trusted to guide the network's early growth. In June 2013 the interim steering committee grew out of this, to ensure that the network's leadership was both more regionally balanced, and also more inclusive of diverse perspectives from some of the major participating groups who were active at that time.

The interim steering group comprises Andrew Puddephatt (Global Partners Digital, Europe region), Anja Kovacs (Internet Democracy Project, Asia-Pacific region), Deborah Brown (Access, US region), Jeremy Malcolm (Consumers International, Asia-Pacific region), Joana Varon Ferraz (CTS/FGV, Latin America region), Marianne Franklin (individual/IRP coalition, Europe region), Nnenna Nwakanma (Web We Want, Africa region) and Valeria Betancourt (APC, Latin America region). There is no chair or other hierarchy of roles.

These appointments (save for those of Valeria and Marianne who had not been confirmed by then) were announced on the main Best Bits mailing list on 8 July 2013 in the following terms, which produced no dissent at that time:

a few volunteers have come (or been prodded!) forward to serve as an initial steering group. Since we don't already have a democratic procedure for selecting such a steering group, we haven't tried to invent one. Rather, it will be the steering group itself that is responsible for recommending such a procedure for the rest of us to adopt. ... The initial steering group will be responsible for recommending a process for making future such appointments, will distribute the few organisational tasks between themselves, may come up with some ideas on strategy and fundraising for the rest of us to consider, and can help mediate disputes if there are any.

Thus the main role that the steering committee has assumed is in supporting/organizing the activities of the network, and when appropriate taking leadership on some of the workstreams in order to drive the work forward, as well as administrative support such as maintaining the website/calendar (though that is done by volunteers too); planning Best Bits meetings; and reaching out to external organisations, networks and prospective participants.

3. Outputs

The outputs of Best Bits are the joint interventions that participants have made on Internet policy issues, as well as the infrastructure of the network itself that supports the participants' engagement, information sharing and collaboration. These will be further detailed below.

3.1. Joint statements

In the first category, the most tangible outputs from the Best Bits network for 2013 are the following twelve joint letters or statements that were issued in that year:

- [Civil Society Statement to the ITU Secretary General in preparation for the WTPF - May 2013](#)
- [Proposal for a multi-stakeholder opinion on operationalizing the role of Government in the multi-stakeholder framework for Internet Governance](#)
- [Civil Society proposal to open participation in the Council Working Group on International](#)

Internet-Related Public Policy Issues

- [Civil Society Statement to the Human Rights Council on the impact of State Surveillance on Human Rights addressing the PRISM/NSA case](#)
- [Civil society letter to United States Congress on Internet and telecommunications surveillance](#)
- [Contribution from members of international civil society to the U.S. Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board](#)
- [Statement from members of Civil Society on the ITU Council's Rejection of the Proposal to Open CWG-Internet](#)
- [Questionnaire response to CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation](#)
- [Letter from International Civil Society Organizations to President Dilma Rousseff in support of her statement at the 68th Session of the UNGA](#)
- [Civil society statement regarding the 2014 Internet Governance Summit in Brazil](#)
- [Joint civil society letter on appointment of representatives to Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance](#)
- [Nominations for the 2014 Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group of the Internet Governance Forum](#)

These gathered an average of 98 endorsements, ranging from a low of 10 up to 372, during the height of interest in the Snowden/NSA revelations.

3.2. Reports and background papers

We intend the Best Bits website to provide a hub for information of interest to those working in the Internet governance space, containing rich resources in many cases generated by the community, for the community. The steering committee can play a role in curating this, but contribution of content is open. Due to resource limitations, the website and the materials offered there are currently still at an early stage of development, which provides much room for future improvement.

For the Best Bits 2013 meeting in Bali, Indonesia a number of background papers were contributed, which are collected on the website at <http://bestbits.net/events/best-bits-2013/>, and some of which are not available elsewhere. Amongst the background papers contributed for the Bali meeting are:

- [*Internet governance processes: Visualising the playing field*](#), by Deborah Brown, Lea Kaspar and Joana Varon
- [*Issue Comparison of Major Declarations on Internet Freedom*](#), by Jeonghyun Baak and Carolina Rossini
- [*Notes on an "IGF plus"*](#), by Andrew Puddephatt and Matthew Shears

In addition, reports of the major gatherings of Best Bits participants during the year are uploaded to the associated event pages on our website (currently collected in a pull-down menu on the right hand side). In future we aim that such reports will be uploaded for all other meetings attended by Best Bits participants.

Similarly, background information (based on the "Visualising the playing field" document above) has been contributed for a number of key Internet governance institutions, that will be linked with every mention of those institutions in the Best Bits event calendar (see below). So far such information is available for IETF, ICANN, IGF, ITU, WSIS, UN General Assembly, ECOSOC and CSTD.

The distinction between reports of individual meetings, and background information about

institutions is that the latter are intended to be less time-bound, as the same information will be relevant to a number of different meetings.

3.3. Website development

During the year, progress was made towards realisation of the plans laid down by for development of new functionality for the Best Bits website to better support the information sharing objectives of the network. However, progress has been slow due to lack of any funding to support this development.

The main new functionality unveiled in 2013 is a shared event calendar. Events for the calendar are contributed by volunteers (from the steering committee, though this need not be the case), and also by drawing in events from ten external calendars maintained by a number of other organisations such as Access, Consumers International and Diplo Foundation (though these events are hidden by default, pending moderation).

Amongst the feature of the calendar are:

- **RSVPs:** This shows who is attending each upcoming meeting, thereby allowing participants to discover each other and to collaborate. If you RSVP for any meeting, you will also receive information about travel support opportunities.
- **Institutions:** As noted above, the hosting institutions for meeting each have a wiki-style page of information about them that carries across all the meetings that they host. The page also links to all of the past and present meetings for that institution.
- **Metadata:** Each event is assigned to a broad category, and can also have issues associated with it. Issues are more fine-grained than categories, and are designed to capture the particular topics that a meeting will discuss.
- **Reports, Background Papers & Links:** Any event can also have briefing papers (ahead of the event) and reports (after the event) uploaded that will be associated with them, by any registered user. Links to external information can also be uploaded.

The intent is that our calendar can be a resource for any other groups who can embed it on their own websites, and extract just the events that they want, based on categories or issues. It is straightforward to add the calendar to any website either by subscribing to an iCalendar feed, or by embedding the calendar as a pre-formatted page. For detailed instructions on doing this, see <http://bestbits.net/wiki/main/calendar-faq>.

More recently, a wiki section has also been added to the website – though this remains a work in progress. Currently any registered user can edit or add pages or information to the wiki. The intention is that ultimately this will become a resource for information about Internet governance issues, history, processes, institutions and even practical tools such as secure communication tools.

3.4. Draft procedures

As a loosely governed network, procedures for Best Bits are adopted by rough consensus rather than by voting. During 2013, a proposed set of procedures was put forward by the steering committee, to kick-start discussion and to be tested out in practice.

The first procedure is about the meta-question of how procedures are developed and agreed, and is based on a policy of the Wikimedia Foundation. It provides that proposed guidelines or procedures can be opened for discussion simply by editing the wiki itself, and raising any changes for discussion until they are either generally agreed or defeated.

Procedures currently exist on the following topics, all of which are available for comments and edits by members (though presently there is a website bug that makes this more difficult than it will eventually be):

- Editing these procedures
- Best Bits membership and guiding principles
- Producing Best Bits statements
- Selecting the steering committee (*this draft is particularly likely to undergo further change*)
- Best Bits meetings and workshops
- Creating a new mailing list on a specific topic
- Appointing nominees to other groups (*this draft needs updating to reflect the role of the new civil society IG coordinating group*)
- Editing the website, calendar, social media, etc
- Fundraising

Whoever contributes suggested text and knows or believes that it may be contentious and require further work, can mark it with italics to indicate this. In any case, all procedures are marked with [RFC] (for “Request for Comment”) unless or until agreed. If it is clear that a procedure does not have acceptance, the “RFC” should be changed to [Failed].

Although the procedure wiki has been promoted both on the main mailing list and at our last face to face meeting, as it appears that many participants still have not addressed their minds to the proposals, one of the action items for 2014 will be to set up a separate working group to go through, improve, and where possible finalise the procedures.

4. Workstreams

Best Bits is a network rather than an organisation with the capacity to take actions in its own right. As such, although the steering committee can facilitate the work of the network and make suggestions, it does not make decisions that bind other participants. But what Best Bits does do is provide a platform for cooperation on shared work streams, and both steering committee members and non-members alike can initiate these.

As described here, workstreams are informal activities that can take a number of forms, and produce a variety of outputs: for example, they may result in a joint statement, or in establishing a channel of liaison of Best Bits members with an external organisation, or in the development of a shared resource, or simply in the provision of a forum for discussion on a certain topic. A group of willing participants who contribute to a workstream can be called a “fluid working group”.

Workstreams are proposed through discussion on the main Best Bits list or at one of our annual meetings. The major workstreams listed here are divided into legacy groups begun before the 2013 Best Bits meeting, new work streams begun at the 2013 meeting, and those relating to the Brazil meeting.

Some of these work proposals are currently inactive due to lack of active leadership or facilitation. If this work is to progress, volunteers will be needed to shepherd these work streams or to lead fluid working groups that will take responsibility for them.

4.1. Legacy groups

- **Topic:** General Best Bits discussion and coordination
Workspace: “bestbits” mailing list (open membership, public archives), etherpad (for transient documents, no authentication), main website (for permanent documents, authentication required)
Outputs: Various, as set out in detail elsewhere in this report
Status: Active

- **Topic:** Enhanced cooperation
Workspace: “ec” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, public archives)
Outputs: Developed a statement on enhanced cooperation for the CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation, ongoing liaison between Best Bits participants and members of the CSTD Working Group
Status: Has recently been active, though no current discussion
- **Topic:** Miscellaneous private discussion
Workspace: “private” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, private archives)
Outputs: None
Status: Has subscribers, but never used to date
- **Topic:** Steering committee
Workspace: “steering” mailing list (membership restricted to steering committee volunteers, private archives), and private etherpad
Outputs: Various, as set out in detail elsewhere in this report
Status: Active

4.2. Proposed workstreams from the 2013 Best Bits meeting

These are workstreams that were proposed at the 2013 Best Bits meeting in Bali. Some of these have progressed, whereas others have not. We particularly welcome participants who are interested in helping to take these workstreams forward to make themselves known on the main list or to the steering committee.

- **Topic:** Defining multi-stakeholderism and towards an IGF+
Workspace: Etherpad at <http://igcaucus.org:9001/p/bb-ms>, draft report linked from there, “bestbits” mailing list, contact person Joy Liddicoat
Outputs: (Proposed) statement on multi-stakeholderism, and possible future Best Bits “quality seal”-style endorsement of multi-stakeholder processes (to be further discussed).
Status: Not closed, but no current discussion
- **Topic:** ITU WTDC/Plenipot
Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/itu-work-sheet/>, “bestbits” mailing list
Outputs: (Planned) an engagement model or road-map that BB can use going forward
Status: Not closed, but leadership required
- **Topic:** UN/WSIS+10/post 2015 agenda
Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/wsis-work-sheet-2/>, “bestbits” mailing list
Outputs: So far no joint action has emerged but individual Best Bits participants are sharing information through the platform and engaging separately
Status: Not closed, but if joint action would be beneficial, leadership required
- **Topic:** Cybersecurity/Seoul Principles/African Union Convention
Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/cybersecurityseoul-principlesafrican-union-conventionother-work-sheet/>, “best bits” mailing list
Outputs: (Planned) an engagement model or road-map that BB can use going forward
Status: Not closed, but leadership required
- **Topic:** Surveillance and human rights – track 1, engagement with private sector
Workspace: Private cc list (*more information needed*), contact point Ian Peter, see also notes at <http://igcaucus.org:9001/p/bestbits2013>
Outputs: Fluid working group formed, at least one meeting held (*more information needed*)
Status: Presumed active (*more information needed*)
- **Topic:** Surveillance and human rights – track 2, engagement with technical community
Workspace: Private cc list, contact point Pranesh Prakash (*more information needed*), see

also notes at <http://igcaucus.org:9001/p/bestbits2013>

Outputs: (Proposed) statement from human rights and policy community about our aspirations for engineers

Status: Unclear (*more information needed*)

- **Topic:** Surveillance and human rights – track 3, principles on privacy and surveillance for global IG processes
Workspace: “bestbits” mailing list, see also notes at <http://igcaucus.org:9001/p/bestbits2013>
Outputs: (Proposed) global principles on privacy and surveillance that could be addressed to multilateral bodies
Status: Insufficient interest, presumed inactive/closed

4.3. Brazil meeting groups

An extended and heated discussion on the main Best Bits list took place ahead of the formation of fluid working groups to deal with the Brazil meeting, on the topic of whether these groups should work in private or in public. It soon became apparent that there are those who believe very passionately in one position or the other, which made it difficult to reach an acceptable compromise.

In the end, the compromise that was suggested on 2 November 2013 was that a new mailing list summit@lists.bestbits.net would be formed that would be for the use of civil society only, so that we could carry on our discussions in a safe space of our own. However in the interests of transparency, public access to the mailing list archive would be available. Additionally, there would be no limitation on individuals carrying on discussions on private cc lists.

In practice, less use has been made of the new list than the previous discussion might have suggested, with most people preferring either to use the main list (and often cross-posting to other lists), or else discussing in private cc groups. Below we attempt to map where most of the discussions in these fluid working groups are going on.

- **Topic:** Overall Brazil meeting coordination
Workspace: “summit” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, public archives)
Outputs: Statement of principles agreed at Bali meeting, appointment of four interim liaisons with Brazil organisers, and will review outputs of subsidiary working groups
Status: Active
- **Topic:** Stream 1 – process issues for the Brazil meeting
Workspace: “summit” list, coordinated by Jeremy Malcolm
Outputs: Periodic summaries of informal discussions to Brazil executive committee
Status: Active
- **Topic:** Stream 2 – Substantive input on universal Internet governance principles
Workspace: cc list of interested volunteers, coordinated by Matthew Shears. See also notes of the session on “Global Internet governance principles, enhanced cooperation and the IGF” at the 2013 Best Bits meeting at <http://bestbits.net/report-from-session-on-global-internet-governance-principles-enhanced-cooperation-and-the-igf/>.
Outputs: Pending, a formal input to the Brazil meeting
Status: Active
- **Topic:** Stream 3 – Substantive input on an institutional framework for multi-stakeholder Internet governance
Workspace: cc list of interested volunteers, coordinated by Andrew Puddephatt. See also notes of the session on “Global Internet governance principles, enhanced cooperation and the IGF” at the 2013 Best Bits meeting at <http://bestbits.net/report-from-session-on-global-internet-governance-principles-enhanced-cooperation-and-the-igf/>.
Outputs: One face to face meeting between a subset of volunteers, and notes from that

meeting; later a formal input to the Brazil meeting

Status: Active

5. Financial report

Until now, the Best Bits network has been run without core funding to support its infrastructure or operations. A limited amount of funds to support our two face to face meetings have been contributed by Best Bits participants themselves, and by one external donor. Total contributions of money received during 2013 amounted to:

- \$3,200 from Google
- \$1,500 from World Wide Web Foundation
- \$1,000 from Global Partners
- \$152 from other participants through a crowdfunding campaign

Total expenditure amounted to:

- \$4,000 on venue hire and catering for the Bali meeting
- \$1,000 on travel and accommodation for the Bali meeting

Therefore \$852 remains unspent, which is being held for Best Bits with the kind help of Access.

Amongst participants who have already contributed in kind or in funds, and whether from core funds or from project funding, are Global Partners & Associates, Consumers International, Association for Progressive Communications, World Wide Web Foundation and Access. This does not include the time that many other participants have invested, whether on the interim steering committee or through fluid working groups.

6. Outlook

Major works in progress for the Best Bits network that are to be addressed over the coming year include the following.

6.1. Organisational structure and accountability

There has been some disagreement during the year over the organisational structure of Best Bits. At this point it remains that there is no membership of Best Bits. The draft principles presented in Bali (and, at least to this extent, met with generally agreement) allow for open participation in the Best Bits network, but state that participants should understand and agree with the objectives of the network (<http://bestbits.net/organizer/best-bits/>), and should be:

- action oriented
- willing to compromise
- realistic
- committed to a plurality of representative voices
- conservative in their contributions (so no one person should flood the platform)

Following the meeting in Bali, the following points of contention have arisen from a vocal minority of participants:

- Whether Best Bits should remain as a relatively loose network, or should transition to become a formal organisation, with membership, voting, etc. This is favoured by some, but seems to be opposed by most. Nevertheless the question can be re-opened and discussed.

- If Best Bits does not become an organisation, whether it is limited to only sign-on statements, or whether other actions can be taken on a broad consensus of the participants. (For example, during the year, it was proposed that Best Bits could reach consensus on a panel of candidates for the IGF MAG that the steering committee would recommend.) This question remains unresolved, as no other joint procedures have yet been successfully trialled.
- How the steering committee should be selected. As mentioned above, Anriette Esterhuysen suggested that the interim steering committee should propose a procedure to replace itself by the end of the first quarter of 2014. We have adopted that suggestion accordingly and will work to propose a generally acceptable procedure for refreshing the steering committee over the coming months.

Also relevant is to note the formation in 2013 of the Civil Society Internet Governance Coordination Group, which although hosted on Best Bits infrastructure is not a Best Bits committee but a joint committee of liaisons from major civil society networks active on Internet governance issues. These currently are including Best Bits, the Internet Governance Caucus, the Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group of ICANN, Diplo Foundation and the Association for Progressive Communications. The Coordination Group is currently consulting with the community about whether and how to expand its membership to include other groups.

The Coordination Group has taken responsibility for nominating civil society representatives to various committees, so far including the High Level Panel on Global Internet Cooperation and Governance Mechanisms (Ilves Commission), the 1net Dialogue, and two of the committees for the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance. To some extent this renders moot the second of the main points of contention mentioned above.

6.2. Procedures

Related to the last item, and further to point 3.4 above, an open working group of volunteers should be formed to finalise some of the draft working procedures that have been proposed on the wiki at <http://bestbits.net/wiki/main/procedures>.

6.3. Funding

Going forward, we believe that it would be beneficial for additional funding to be available to support joint endeavours of participants in the network, which may include:

- Travel funding either to Best Bits meetings or to other Internet governance events at which civil society would otherwise be unrepresented, under-represented, or where greater diversity of representation would be beneficial.
- Supporting advocacy-focussed research that members of the network can use in support of joint positions or statements.
- Further technical development of the Best Bits website, and contributing content for that website such as information on meetings, institutions, processes and resources.
- Funding that is more broadly based, and/or from outside the corporate sector and not from a politically sensitive government, to support our annual Best Bits meetings as well as any important side meetings during the year (eg. ahead of the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance).

While Best Bits remains a network rather than an organisation, the only way in which these funds can be raised are through our participants. Therefore we would like to suggest that all Best Bits participants feel free to raise funds that can be directed towards any or all of the above purposes. The draft criteria for accepting funding, that remain open for discussion on our procedure wiki, are

as follows:

- Does the funding place staff, partners, supported communities or mission at risk.
- Does the funding jeopardize relationships with partners or supported communities and networks.
- Does the funding compromise organizational independence
- Does the funding relationship influence priorities, policy positions, advocacy efforts, regions of focus or direct action work.

Consumers International has a pending proposal that would support its staff time to be devoted to Best Bits, and for some of the other purposes listed above (though not all – and notably not including travel or significant research).

6.4. Web site improvements

Amongst the needed improvements to the website that we hope to complete during the year are:

- Integrate social media links and feeds into event pages.
- A clearer and simpler way to navigate the website's content by campaign or issue, rather than just events.
- To fix a problem that prevents the wiki's visual editor from working correctly.
- To improve page layout, including development of a new theme and the removal of the sidebar on most pages.
- Perhaps to provide a secure chat server for regular group teleconferences.
- Better support for multilingual content.
- Full timezone support for events in the Best Bits event calendar.
- Participant profiles.
- Move the site to a separate server, from the currently shared Consumers International server where it now resides.
- A clear “how to” guide for users of the Website, especially including the process of making an RSVP for a meeting, linking up with other participants, and uploading a background document or a report.

Any other suggestions for improvements to the website will be very gratefully received. Please address these to the interim steering committee at steering@lists.bestbits.net.

7. Conclusion

Best Bits has accomplished a lot in short amount of time with limited resources, while relying heavily on the work of volunteers, including the interim steering committee. We hope that this report has assisted to allay some concerns and ask some questions about the role of the steering committee in shepherding the activities of the network during its first full year.

We look forward to your reflections on the next phase of life for Best Bits, including ways in which we can improve transparency and accountability, broaden our inclusivity, and add greater value. We thank all the participants for their trust and commitment, and reiterate our willingness to answer any questions and to receive any comments or feedback on this report.