FAQ: INFITT - Objectives and Achievements

1. What is the mandate of INFITT?

The International Forum for Information Technology in Tamil (INFITT) is founded for the purpose of coordinating Tamil Information Technology efforts worldwide, furthering the growth of on-line Tamil content globally, and facilitating the development of new Information Technologies for the advancement of Tamil culture, language, education and skill development, especially through global information infrastructure. INFITT will provide a forum and a mechanism for coordinating such activities through conferences, workshops, symposia, meetings, working groups, commissioned research and studies and other means, legal and appropriate.

2. What efforts INFITT has taken to meet its mandate/objectives?

INFITT attempts to meet its mission objectives through three key initiatives:

i) promote dialogue by facilitating networking of key players with different background/expertise e/needs;

ii) provide technical forums (in the form of Working groups and Discussion lists) in key areas of Tamil computing technology development and

iii) Organize international conferences in the area of Tamil computing in different parts of the world where there is a substantial Tamil Diaspora.

3. Has there really been any interaction and support of regional governments for INFITT efforts?

Yes, we can cite several specific examples:

i) When INFITT was initially launched in 2000, govt. representatives of all leading countries and states (Tamilnadu, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka) participated at the ministerial level and committed their support

ii) Govt of Singapore provided financial support for the Secretariat initially for 3 years;

iii) Tamil Virtual University is the IT Task Force focal point for Tamilnadu Govt and INFITT has been given exofficio

representation in the Tamilnadu IT Task Force committees; IT Secretary of Tamilnadu has participated in several of the INFITT-run Tamil internet conferences.

iv) Govt. of Tamilnadu has twice provided full financial support to organize Tamil Internet Conferences of INFITT in Chennai.

4. Are there specific examples where online technical forums produced concrete results?

At least four of the eight specialist working groups launched have produced clear results:

i) WG1 has compiled a glossary of technical terms in Tamil for use by leading MNCs (Microsoft, Apple, Oracle, Sun, ...) and Open Source Software in their products (OS to applications) .

ii) WG2 worked closely with Unicode Technical Committee in the review of current Tamil Unicode block; helped UTC rewrite block description and add new characters such as symbols to the Tamil block.

iii)WG3 worked closely with Multilingual Domain Name Consortium. For Tamil Domain names, WG3 helped to define equivalents in Tamil for extensions like .org, .net, .gov. etc.

iv) WG5 examined various transliteration schemes for Tamil and has produced a technical note on usage of some, as recommended standards.

International MNCs like Microsoft, Yahoo and Unicode all have appreciated the key contributions of the WGs. Even United Nations agencies have cited INFITT as a typical example where community user groups can play a positive role in standards development.

5. Font Encoding is very basic to language computing. What role did INFITT play in working out standards for font encoding?

First, it must be pointed out that INFITT is NOT a standard-setting authority for Tamil. There are regional Govt. agencies (like Bureau of Standards of Govt. of India) and International Organizations (such as IETF and IANA). INFITT role consists mainly in bringing together all key players of different regions of the world and assist these groups work out mutually acceptable standards. INFITT organised several specific working groups (WG2 on existing Tamil Unicode block) WG4 on 8-bit encoding and WG8 on 16-bit encoding).It is up to Tamilnadu Government to make best use of these international forums to work out consensus-based standards acceptable to everyone globally. Wherever possible, INFITT has provided technical input and

evaluation and in the case of 8-bit encoding even tried hard (sadly in vain) to work out a unified standard fusing TAB and TSCII.

6. What are the benefits of the annual Tamil Internet Conferences (TIC)?
First, TICs are the only occasion for Tamil software developers from leading MNCs and independents to meet, discuss key issues and to learn about developments in all key areas of Tamil computing. Regular participation from leading MNCs (Microsoft, Apple, Oracle, Sun, IBM, Adobe, ...), Professors and Students of leading academic institutions (from Tamilnadu, Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka) has shown clearly the need for such conferences. Co-sponsoring with sharing of financial costs by leading Institutions such as Univ. of California at Berkeley also confirms the utility of these annual meets.
Community Hub of the Conference (where Tamil software is demonstrated) is a popular component in TICs held in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Chennai. Several thousand visitors (school children accompanied by their teachers in particular) passed through the stalls.

7. Tamilnadu is where majority of Tamils live. Hence Tamilnadu Govt. has every reason to have a major say in all issues related to Tamil. How does INFITT ensure equitable representation of Tamils residents in other parts of the world?
Operationally INFITT has adopted a three level democratic structure: GB, General Body, composed of grass roots membership elects 51-member General Council (like a state assembly). GC in turn elects a 12-member Executive Committee (like the government composed of ministers). INFITT Constitution has put in proportional representation in both GC and EC, so that no single region can dominate the proceedings or decisions of INFITT. Tamilnadu has one-third representation in both bodies.

8. Who financially supports INFITT?
Since its launch in 2000, Singapore Govt. supported the costs of running a Secretariat in Singapore for 3 years. Since then INFITT runs on its own. For its routine operational costs, INFITT depends on annual dues from its members. For major events such as Tamil Internet Conferences, INFITT depends on support of regional governments and local businesses and sponsorship of major MNCs with interests in Tamil computing/IT.

9. In what way would I becoming a member help advance the mission of INFITT?
INFITT has already built up (continue to build) strong working relationships with leading MNCs (Microsoft, Apple, Unicode, Yahoo, Oracle, Sun,...). In several cases we have established formal liaison relationship. For any global organization such as INFITT, its credibility is seen largely by the extent of its grass roots membership and regional bodies support. So we need to have a large grass roots membership, with members coming from all over the world. Also if you have specific ideas on Tamil IT, here is your chance to influence how Tamil IT evolves. Get involved. Be counted.

10. How do I become a member of INFITT? Any current promotional efforts?
It has been 3 years since INFITT held election for its 51-member General Council and Executive Committee. INFITT is anxious to conduct election as soon as possible, preferably before end of 2007. With this in mind, currently there is a promotional drive for people to join INFITT. Anyone interested in INFITT and subscribe its Constitution, can become a member by registering via online gateway:
http://www.infitt.org/

11. Are there any special forums, assistance for young students?
INFITT wants to encourage young students of schools and colleges to take active interests in Tamil computing, Tamil IT. For this, we have created a new "associate membership" category for registered students of academic institutions, with NO annual dues to pay. We have set up special forums to
provide online help on Tamil software and to take projects in Tamil IT areas.