

At-Large – The ALS-RALO-ALAC Structure

Analysis: Does it work? Can it work?

The concept was that the large number of At-Large Structure (ALS) members would contribute to the policy advice provided by ALAC to the Board and to other parts of ICANN.

This has never happened for a number of reasons:

- What we do in ICANN is complex, arcane, and probably impossible to understand without a lot of direct support. The ICANN Fellowship process has been very successful, but the investment per person is large.
- Aside from the technical jargon, English, the language of most of our documents is a barrier for many.
- Although we say we interact with ALSes, in fact in most cases, we interact with one or two ALS representatives.
- We have never put in place a program to reach the wider membership of an ALS, nor have we tried to measure how well we reach past the lead ALS representative.
- Where we have focused on or attempted to measure involvement, it is the involvement of the formal representative that we concentrated on. On the one occasion where we attempted to understand ALS skills, we only asked about the skills of the formal ALS representative, not what's available within his/her organization.

If want to achieve the objective of substantial ALS input into our processes, we need to increase awareness among ALS members of key ICANN issues. If we could do that on a widespread basis, we should be able to generate an increasing number of people who really get caught up in our world and start productively contributing in the desired bottom up way.

Looking at this from another perspective, there is great awareness in ICANN of our responsibility to address the Public Interest and our Public Responsibility. The latter was the focus of the Strategy Panel on the Public Responsibility led by Nii Quaynor in 2013-14 (Report in all ICANN languages at <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/public-responsibility-2013-10-11-en>). The conclusion of that panel was that a significant part of our Public Responsibility rests on communications, raising awareness, engagement and education/capacity building.

I believe that our objective of using ALSes to feed into our policy processes has caused us to miss the critical first steps of communicating just what those issues are – as dictated by our Public Responsibility.

Proposal

I believe we need to set new objectives that:

- Are credible and realistic
- Focus upon the membership of each ALS rather than just it's formal representative(s).

- Aim to disseminate appropriate base information on ICANN and key ICANN issues designed both increase awareness of and knowledge about ICANN, and designed to allow informed input into the bottom-up policy processes.

This approach should lead to an increasing number of individual ALS members who are knowledgeable and can start to fulfill the original target. It will also go a long way to meeting the Public Responsibility aspects outlined in the Quaynor report.

Steps

1. Produce palatable, comprehensible synopsis of ICANN issues. These documents also describe At-Large activities and invitations to participate. This can be supplemented by Region-specific information provided by the RALOs.
2. Distribute to ALSes with a requirement to disseminate to their membership.
3. Have ALSes regularly (perhaps annually) confirm that they are doing this and provide a measure of how many of their members are receiving the information.
4. Put in place mechanisms so that we can recognize when ALS members other than the formal representatives participate in At-Large activities.

There may be special cases where an ALS is focused on a niche area where it is clear they do not have an interest in most of what we do, but can be a valuable resource when we do (perhaps occasionally) focus on that area. And they commit to contributing at that time.

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