Observations from participating to an ICANN meeting as a new member of the community – an end user view

# Executive Summary

A non-scientific experiment was conducted to participate to an ICANN meeting as part of the end user community. Two women living in Finland participated in the ICANN#56 meeting in Helsinki and wrote this report of their observations on how difficult it is to start participating in the ICANN community.

The learning was that it is difficult to find the needed background information of ICANN and its structure including the meeting itself to meaningfully participate in the meeting. Perhaps, the most telling observation was the question that remained after the meeting: “Where does the actual work get done?”

The participants to this experiment provided the following suggestions:

* Provide a short, well-structured presentation of the ICANN community prior to the meeting.
* List the relevant groups for the end users.
* Schedule the groups into open sessions, which the end users can attend.
* Provide meaningful descriptions for the different sessions. In ICANN#56, some meetings did provide understandable descriptions, but many descriptions were only comprised of acronym soup. In addition, sometimes the coloring of the sessions in the agenda were misleading
* Continue to provide the morning summary letter. It provided good, concentrated information about the important meeting.

# Background

The ICANN#56 meeting was held in Helsinki June 27-30, 2016. As this meeting was in my home town, I decided to do a small experiment. We have been discussing about engaging local communities and attracting more people and diversity to the ICANN community, especially from the end user community. Therefore, I asked my wife and my mother to participate in the ICANN meeting and try to engage in the ICANN work.

Neither my wife nor my mother have prior engagement into the Internet Policy are or ICANN. Obviously, the interest to ICANN came by me pushing them to participate and not out of their own interest. This experiment cannot be considered by no means to be scientifically accurate or accurate on any other level. It was a very artificial setup. However, it hopefully can be used as a data point when considering the engagement to local communities and the outreach to new participants to ICANN.

I have edited the report that was written for readability and organized it a bit. However, I have not changed the main message of the report. Of course, I’m willing to provide the original text if requested. The authors of the report are willing to engage in dialog about these findings if somebody is interested.

# The provided task

ICANN board had a session about outreach and attracting new people to the ICANN process during the ICANN board workshop preceding the ICANN#56 meeting. This triggered a thought of doing an experiment with my wife and mother during the meeting. I defined the task as follows:

“Hi,

I would like to ask you for a favor. I know that both of you have registered for the ICANN meeting this week. Let's try to make use of it and perhaps make it even fun.

The exercise is the following:

You have heard (as you have) that ICANN is in town and you care about the Internet and you want to contribute. You want to do something useful for the Internet and you want to know if ICANN is the place and how you could help.

Please, try to learn from [www.icann.org](http://www.icann.org/)

1) What ICANN does?

2) How does ICANN do it?

3) What is the right place for you to get active?

If possible, I would like to get some of the key people from that community and really see if you could help.

In the end of the week, I would like to have a very short report (in your choice of language) on how well was information available, how understandable it was, how easy/difficult it was for you engage the community, and how difficult it was to get engaged (impossible is as a good as any). In addition, I would like to hear how relevant ICANN was for you.

Would you be willing to try?

Cheers,

Jonne.”

# Report of the ICANN#56 meeting

## Before the start of the meeting

The task was received a day before the meeting. We found nothing in the local media mentioning this event in Helsinki, though to our understanding, having a big event with some two thousand participants during Midsummer would have been news. There was a radio program about ICANN on Wednesday during the ICANN meeting. Most probably it would have been more "effective" if it would have come out before the meeting.

Generally knowing nothing about ICANN, the planning of the participation in the meeting at such short notice was difficult. Having more time to plan for the meeting would have most probably changed the observations somewhat.

The main ICANN website, and after registration to the meeting the Public Meeting pages, were the sources to obtain information about ICANN and the meeting. Lacking knowledge of ICANN’s organization beforehand would have made the looking for relevant information clearly easier. It was relatively easy to find what ICANN does in general: Providing addresses to the Internet world. Though, even getting that information needed to understand some acronyms.

## Participating in the meeting

The number of acronyms made it very difficult to plan, which meetings to attend and actually follow the meetings. It was relatively difficult to understand how ICANN administrates or manages the Internet addresses and it did not become fully clear. As an analogy, it was like looking at a Christmas tree and only seeing the decorations but not seeing the actual tree behind those decorations.

As such, the four days was very interesting. After becoming more familiar with topics and using Google for the acronyms, following the meeting became relatively easy. By the end of the week, most of the acronyms were already understandable. We also tried to attend different types of meetings. We found it quite difficult to understand the connection between the different meetings and groups.

In addition, most of the groups meeting during the week seemed to focus on internal issues and processes rather than the content. This raised the question where the actual work gets done.

# Suggestions for including end users into the ICANN community

We would like to offer some suggestions if ICANN wishes to include end users into its meetings and community:

* Provide a short, well-structured presentation of the ICANN community prior to the meeting.
* List the relevant groups for the end users.
* Schedule the groups into open sessions, which the end users can attend.
* Provide meaningful descriptions for the different sessions. In ICANN#56, some meetings did provide understandable descriptions, but many descriptions were only comprised of acronym soup. In addition, sometimes the coloring of the sessions in the agenda were misleading
* Continue to provide the morning summary letter. It provided good, concentrated information about the important meeting.

# Outcome

It was very interesting to follow the ICANN#56 meeting. However, the structure and the working processes of ICANN and its community remained unknown for us. The only visible part was the communication between different groups and within the groups themselves. This raised the question: “Where does the actual work get done?”