31 March 2020

Public Comment of Youth4IG on

Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements

Background

Youth4IG is a network of youth and young people from the Asia-Pacific region, with the objective of further engaging and involving this crucial demographic in internet issues and Internet Governance. We are proud to have over a hundred members belonging to over 20 countries who are academics, internet end-users, tech workers, and civil society actors. More information about the group can be found at youth4ig.asia.

We welcome the opportunity to make comments on this proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements. The NextGen@ICANN (NextGen) program has been one which many of our members have been involved in as NextGenners, Ambassadors, and applicants. As a result, it is important that our views on the future of the program are heard, and we welcome the opportunity to make this Public Comment.

In general, we encourage the continued mission of the NextGen@ICANN Program to involve and educate postsecondary/tertiary students about what ICANN specifically does, and Internet Governance more generally. The NextGen@ICANN program fits well alongside the fellowship program as it specifically caters to youth and young people who are currently studying at a tertiary level, and we welcome the continuing focus on growing ICANN's outreach in that key demographic.

This Public Comment is made on behalf of the group and reflects the diverse views of the group, not any one individual.

Purpose and Goal of the NextGen@ICANN Program

Broadly, Youth4IG is in support of the continued purpose and goal of the NextGen program as an introduction for young people to the ICANN ecosystem and associated work. However, we would seek some clarification over the term 'university students'. Within our group, we had much discussion over whether this pertains specifically to students studying an undergraduate program, or undergraduate **and** postgraduate students. Given the Outreach

and Recruitment section of the draft proposal refers to 'post-graduate' students, the meaning of 'university' students is still unclear. Even further, we would encourage consideration of students studying at vocational and trade institutions, which are not traditionally considered universities.

Ideally, we would propose amending 'university students' to 'tertiary students' - reflecting the inclusion of further education students not studying at a university but still within the demographic the NextGen program seeks to engage. Alternatively, we would encourage clarification of 'university students' to include both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

When considering the contribution of NextGen alumni to the ICANN ecosystem, we want to draw special attention to the policy development processes (PDPs), as a main function of the ICANN community. Many NextGenners do not have a clear understanding of this process as there is a perception that it happens 'behind closed doors'. This can be an opportunity for NextGenners to get further involved in the community.

Outreach and Recruitment

Youth4IG encourages the prospect of targeted outreach to further engage tertiary students in the ICANN ecosystem. Here, we would seek clarification that ICANN does not intend to focus on post-graduate students at the exclusion of other demographics. If the intent is to engage tertiary students no matter their level of study, then the targeted outreach should be across all levels, not directed at post-graduate students in particular.

Application

Youth4IG does not support this proposed improvement to the NextGen program. While recognizing that uploading a letter of endorsement or recommendation is optional, we fear that this may give an advantage in the application process to those who are already somewhat engaged in the ICANN process. It is important to keep the NextGen program as open as possible to those who are uninitiated to the ICANN ecosystem and do not have any prior connection to a community group.

Even where this option is removed, individuals who are connected to a community group can still include details of that connection throughout the rest of the application process. Allowing an individual to upload a letter of endorsement or recommendation does not improve the

equality of the application process, nor its openness - indeed, it only serves to give an advantage to those already known by a community group.

Consequently, we want to ask ICANN to reconsider this proposed improvement. We suggest either removing it entirely or making it clear that such a letter will not be considered in the application process as it would violate the proposed goal of introducing ICANN's activities to university students.

Selection

Youth4IG supports increased transparency in the selection process for NextGen applicants, in a similar manner to the Fellows program. We want to ask that special attention be taken to ensure a wide scope is still left in the selection criteria for individuals to be selected even in areas where they have no previous Internet Governance/ICANN experience.

We foresee a situation where SOs/ACs easily select people who have prior Internet Governance experience because they have high "potential for engagement in ICANN" - overlooking those with no experience in the field. Many NextGenners have had no prior IG knowledge or experience prior to attending an ICANN Meeting, and it is important that selection criteria for this program reflect this. This is a particularly important consideration when seeking to further broaden academic diversity in the NextGen program - as students in the humanities or soft sciences often have little knowledge of Internet Governance or ICANN.

Pre-Meeting Preparation & Support

Broadly, Youth4IG supports this proposed improvement to the NextGen@ICANN program. While recognizing the concerns made as part of the Community Input Status Report dated 11 February 2020, and particularly those by BC and IPC, our members do not draw issue with the NextGen Ambassador program as it currently stands. While we understand the concern that Ambassadors can often be somewhat removed from the overall ICANN ecosystem, we submit that the more important consideration is that Ambassadors are people who are knowledgeable about the ICANN ecosystem, that they have connections in the community which they can share with the NextGenners. This does not require any constant involvement in ICANN processes.

The above notwithstanding, we do support the move to Mentors identified by SOs and ACs as a way of ensuring continuing involvement by NextGenners in the ICANN ecosystem. However, we would stress the need for some oversight in the selection of mentors (particularly around safety) and we welcome the need for Mentors to complete prerequisite ICANN Learn courses. Again, there is also a need for Mentors to be available both prior to and during the meeting, but we would trust the SOs and ACs take this into consideration when selecting mentors.

On-Site

Overall, Youth4IG supports a renewed on-site focus on integrating NextGenners into the community and policy work ICANN does as opposed to an overwrought focus on their presentations. We would suggest a focus on introductions to community groups involved in the Policy Development Process, to educate NextGenners about where they can further assist in the ICANN ecosystem. We hope that such an emphasis would lead to better community engagement and consensus-building as opposed to a singular focus on the NextGen presentations. The inclusion of mentors from community groups would assist in this integration.

The above notwithstanding, Youth4IG would also maintain support for the NextGen presentations as a method through which NextGenners can be publicly seen during the ICANN meeting, and present their thoughts and ideas about the Internet. For many of our members who have attended ICANN meetings as NextGenners, these presentations can become a highlight of their time at the ICANN meetings - and a great opportunity to network with others who share the same research or professional interests.

We also encourage further development of on-site programmes (for example initiatives such as shadow days) to encourage participants to engage in the meeting. Often, NextGenners can feel lost and out of touch from the rest of the ICANN community and the meeting. Typically, this can be because the schedule does not leave much time for networking or participating in some sessions of the NextGenners' interest. The NextGen@ICANN Program should enable a higher interaction of participants with the rest of the community both before, during and after the meeting.

Post-Meeting

Youth4IG supports this proposed improvement as a method of keeping NextGenners accountable and allowing ICANN to garner detailed feedback from participants. We also

encourage the creation of the page on icann.org as a method of showcasing the alumni, and as a way for ICANN community members to get in touch with alumni.

Metrics

Youth4IG supports this proposed improvement to measure the success of the NextGen program over time. Naturally, and in line with good privacy practice, we expect all the relevant data to be anonymized.

Overview of Responsibilities and Expectations

Youth4IG broadly supports the Overview of Responsibilities and Expectations as set out in the table. We commend the role of ICANN in further developing outreach plans and creating frameworks for alumni to become more regionally integrated and form stronger links within the ICANN Community.

One area where improvement is needed is for further and more concrete feedback/instruction before the NextGen presentations. This could come from the newly created role of the mentors, but should also be considered by ICANN, as well as the identified community group which will assist the NextGenners. Increased communication on this point would improve the NextGenners understanding of ICANN's ecosystem, and help the presentations be further integrated into the ICANN ecosystem.

Implementation Timeline

Youth4IG supports the proposed implementation timeline. We would suggest that any changes, if agreed or approved, could take place when they are agreed or approved as opposed to after the two-month waiting period. However, we recognize that under current circumstances some caution is warranted.