AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC Statement on Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements

Introduction

On 11 February 2020, Public Comment opened for Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements. On the same day, an At-Large workspace was created for the statement. The At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG), decided it would be in the interest of end users to develop an ALAC statement on the Public Comment.

A drafting team was formed, including Joanna Kulesza, ALAC Vice Chair for Outreach and ALAC Member of the European At-Large Regional Organization (EURALO), Laurin Weissinger, member of the EURALO and Glenn McKnight, member of the North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO).

On 24 February 2020, a Google Doc was created by ICANN Policy staff in support of the At-Large community for coordination of the draft ALAC statement.

On 25 March 2020, after several CPWG meetings discussing the Public Comment, Laurin Weissinger presented the outline of the draft ALAC statement to the At-Large community. The same day, staff issued a call for comments to the CPWG mailing list on the ALAC statement via the Google Doc.

On 31 March 2020, the drafting team finalized the ALAC statement.

On 31 March 2020, the ALAC Chair, Maureen Hilyard, requested that the statement be transmitted to the ICANN Public Comment process, copying the ICANN staff member responsible for this topic, with a note that the statement is pending ALAC ratification.

ALAC Statement on Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements

Observations

The NextGen has been operating as a parallel activity during the ICANN meetings and dedicated to young students in post secondary education. Due to their obligations to produce presentations, they tend to be a cloistered group at the ICANN meetings with significantly limited interaction with the wider ICANN communities. The At-Large believes this could be altered to the benefit of the community by opening the programme and ensuring a welcoming environment to all NextGenners, including first time participants.

1. At-Large would welcome a more active participation of NextGenners in its community.

Being broad and diverse, it offers unique opportunities for young academics from around the globe, giving them a unique chance to test their research against real life policy making. Yet despite the reporting in the NexGen survey that participants have joined with the At-Large community, the community has thus far noted limited participation of this specific group in its work. The ALAC would welcome a structured, direct interaction with this high impact group and recommend the programme to be amended so that it accommodates such an interaction. We anticipate that other communities, thus far not having enjoyed active NextGen input would also welcome this change.

A solution to this is to:

- Ensure that NextGen are not cloistered away from the community. At-Large members willing and able to attend the NextGen presentations, can provide advice and guidance on specific student topics while offering a way of direct involvement into the policy work being done across the ICANN community. Currently the Nextgen presentations are sparsely attended by the other constituencies and many of the presentations do not take into account the ICANN policy process. This is unsurprising considering that NextGen are first timers at ICANN. Reconsidering this part of the program appears appropriate.
- Have the program highlight the academic work by At-Large members in educational efforts, e.g. Schools of Internet Governance, as well as academic research as conducted by its numerous members around the globe. At-Large could then serve as a natural platform for including young academics into policy work in their respective region or country.
- Provide an opportunity for an At-Large Mentor to individual attendees and invite them to present to the broader At-Large audience during face-to-face meetings as well as during our regular webinars, enjoying quite some popularity across the regions.
- Provide an opportunity for At-Large to take a more proactive approach to the NextGen group. This could be done by engaging directly with the group as per its schedule, speaking to the participants about the relevant activities that the students are genuinely interested in, including but not limited to e.g. DNS Abuse, privacy or cybersecurity, narrated in clear, comprehensive language. To meet this aim, we are looking to have a simple flyer indicating academic outreach efforts of At-Large.

At-Large, spanning across stakeholder groups and geographic regions, is the natural environment to welcome academic expertise on all IG related areas and process it into relevant policy advice. We believe the At-Large offers a unique opportunity to introduce young academics to their local communities allowing them to become a more active community members on both the local and global level.

We would welcome engaging NextGen participants into the At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG), transposing their academic research into the ICANN policy advice development dialogue.

- Current plans for enhancing ICANN's Academic Engagement as per the strategy currently in development, directly reflect the interests of the At-Large community, which aims to serve as a pool for informed end-user opinions and a pathway to fuel these into the policy development process within ICANN.

2. Mentorship

All the NextGen participants who attend the ICANN meetings present on specific topics. Within At-Large, we have subject matter experts that may be helpful to provide critical feedback to enhance the academic rigour of the papers. At the same time, this would offer NextGen participants to get a "real-feel" experience of ICANN policy development processes by encouraging them to ensure a pragmatic approach to their research topic and allow for a direct confrontation with the diverse views as represented by the community.

3. Analysis of NextGen

Stakeholder tool (268 NextGen entries)

Currently, there are eight NextGen participants active in ICANN or have had a longer tenure of post-NextGen participation at ICANN.

ALAC: Three individuals have been active over time.

NARALO: One in nineteen NextGen from the United States joined NARALO.
                   None in six NextGen from Canada joined NARALO.
EURALO: Three NextGen participants are actively involved in EURALO.

IG: Three more are not as active at ICANN but in IG more generally.

It is reasonable to expect that some undergraduate and graduate students have other Internet Governance priorities that are not resolved by volunteering in ICANN, and are busy with other aspects of their education. Yet, it is likely that these numbers also speak to a lack of integration of NextGen and the community. Without doubt, the lack of participation in ICANN remotely or in person is a serious issue. Considering however that NextGen participants are usually "thrown into" a community and meetings that are difficult to navigate, it is not surprising that they struggle initially. It should be considered if the NextGen program can be redesigned to encourage longer-term involvement, potentially reducing the number of participants and increasing their contact with ICANN.

Vision

The NextGen program has a good objective and its aims are laudable, and we are clearly in favor of maintaining this program. It provides students an insight into ICANN's workings. However, given that NextGen participants attend only one single ICANN meeting, it is unrealistic to expect a wholesale integration of the NextGen attendees into At-Large and other groups within the ecosystem. On the Fellowship program, multiple individuals have been sponsored for multiple meetings, and many

individuals are now active within the ICANN community and IG more generally. Unlike the Fellowship, the NextGen does not seem to be as much of a stepping stone for interested individuals.

To enable those individuals who are motivated and interested, the community needs to permit them to attend more than one meeting and needs to establish programs that go beyond one meeting attendance for NextGen, as was the case with the NextGen ambassadors. For most people, one shot attendance will not be useful.

Furthermore, we believe that the program would benefit from becoming more long-term and "serious" per individual selected. This includes NextGen being accepted for two or three meetings, with the first one providing orientation and the latter being used for actual, more in-depth engagement with the DNS and ICANN processes. NextGen should, after the first meeting, select a policy issue and/or constituency and provide support and insight. Topics could include: Shadowing and reporting on a key process like the EPDP, or selecting a key issue like DNS Abuse.

For our vision to work, the selection of NextGen participants would likely have to be more involved, selecting fewer, but more invested and appropriately skilled, individuals. To achieve this, the process might involve interviews or reviews of CVs. On the other hand, it might be useful to remove regional limitations, particularly for more experienced individuals like PhD and Master's students.

Recommendations

1. Our key recommendation is to redesign the NextGen program: removing its "one-off" nature, and giving hand-picked, qualified participants more of a chance to engage the ICANN community and become involved.
2. Open more opportunities for participants of the NextGen Program to interact with the Fellowship Program, e.g. through more shared sessions. This will allow for excellent opportunities to get feedback from other individuals, probably with more experience in the ICANN environment and provide good tips on next steps to smoothly engage.
3. Embed questions in the application geared towards identifying:
    a. Undergraduate students, and graduate / doctoral students from ICANN meeting region, and
    b. Underserved, under-represented, and indigenous communities
    c. Individuals with identified subject interest / fit to ICANN discussions (independent of the region for highly specialized individuals like PhD students).
    The application should include more information for the selection committee, like a short CV and cover letters.
4. Restrict the program to only those over 18 years for NextGen and Fellowship Programs.
5. Mentors should be selected based on similar criteria used for the Fellowship Program, and those chosen must be representative of the different AC/SOs.
6. The idea of expecting NextGenners to immediately get involved in ICANN is not realistic, unless their studies are linked to ICANN's mission and/or prior involvement with ICANN exists. However, it is feasible to establish a relationship with the corresponding GSE and help coordinate local/regional events.
7. Expand the programme to include Multi-ICANN meetings for participation to help NextGen to truly understand and work with the ICANN community.

8. Before the first meeting, mandatory ICANN Learn courses and community introduction webinars should cover theoretical knowledge before experiencing the actual meeting. These sessions should also provide pointers to relevant communities and individuals.
9. Provide a series of criteria for what is expected from a NextGen participating in an ICANN meeting.
10. Provide a list of previous ICANN community involvement done by applicants prior to attending an ICANN meeting.

Conclusion

NextGen is a laudable program designed to "engage and educate" but it currently fails to provide most of its participants with concrete connectivity to the community but rather a cursory one-off experience. While the ALAC considers NextGen to be an important and useful program, we believe that the program has to be rethought, so that participants are selected with a stronger focus on their work and can then attend more than one meeting to engage with the community and find their "policy home".