Statement of the Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group on

Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements

The Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group (NCSG) highly appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements published on 11 February 2020 and based on the feedback received during the first phase of the community consultations.

About Us

The NCSG represents the interests of non-commercial domain name registrants and end-users in the formulation of Domain Name System policy within the Generic Names Supporting Organisation. We are proud to have individual and organizational members in over 160 countries, and as a network of academics, Internet end-users, and civil society actors, we represent a broad cross-section of the global Internet community. Since our predecessor - the Non-Commercial Domain Name Holders Constituency (NCDNHC) - inception in 1999, we have facilitated global academic and civil society engagement in support of ICANN's mission, stimulating an informed citizenry and building their understanding of relevant DNS policy issues.

NCSG will structure its comment around thematic blocks as they are separated in the Draft Proposal.

Purpose and Goal of the NextGen@ICANN Program

NCSG commends an attempt to provide a clearer definition of the NextGen@ICANN Program's purpose and goals. At the same time, we believe that the purpose by its nature should be broader and deeper than the enlisted goals, and give an overall sense of value – why this specific program is important. In its current wording the purpose is too narrowly defined: it neither encompasses the proclaimed goals, nor indicates any desirability for NextGenners to become further engaged in the ICANN activities. Moreover, it is terminologically wrong to limit the purpose to university students only as the Program is equally aimed at PhD candidates, who otherwise become formally excluded. Given that, the NCSG would recommend to define the purpose by adjusting its current wording: "*the purpose of the NextGen@ICANN Program is to enlarge the ICANN community and promote the involvement in ICANN activities of the next generation of scholars (undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students/candidates) who are interested in Internet governance and shaping the future of global Internet policy*".

In this case, the suggested goals would fit more organically under the overall Program's framework set by a purpose. At the same time, the NCSG would like to point special attention to the importance of policy development processes (PDPs) at ICANN, and, thus, recommends to complement the first short-term goal and put it as follows: "*Provide*

participants with an introduction to the ICANN ecosystem, working groups, and policy development processes (PDPs)."

We would also recommend to rephrase the second short-term goal due to repetition of words and lack of clarity, and to substitute current wording with the following text: "*Raise awareness and increase participation of NextGen@ICANN Program participants ("NextGenners") in ICANN and regional engagement activities.*"

Regarding the third short-term goal, we would not recommend limiting raising awareness to universities only but rather extend it to all types of higher education institutions that NextGenners might come from. Furthermore, many NextGenners are active not only at their universities but also at various community events with broader youth participation, which, in our opinion, should be reflected in this sub-goal as well. Therefore, the NCSG recommends the following wording: "*Raise awareness of ICANN at higher education institutions and among young people in NextGenners' home countries (e.g., NextGenners present learnings at their universities, facilitate visits of ICANN's regional engagement team, share their related research findings, etc.).*"

Additionally, the NCSG recommends to separate the mid- and long-term goals, and to target broader engagement of NextGenners in ICANN activities not only after completion of their studies but continuously. Therefore, we suggest using the following wording: "*The Program's mid-term goal is to increase the number of the next generation of scholars (undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students) interested in and willing to actively contribute to ICANN activities, Internet governance and Internet policy development processes.*" While, "*The Program's long-term goal is to qualitatively enlarge the ICANN community by facilitating an increased and long-standing engagement of NextGenners in ICANN structures and activities at global, regional, and national levels.*"

Outreach and Recruitment

Same as above, the NCSG recommends to focus equally on undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students/candidates. In any case, whatever groups of young people would be defined as eligible in the final Program description, the terminology should be used in a uniform manner, as opposed to the current draft where the Program's purpose refers to university students, while outreach activities are directed at post-graduate students.

While the NCSG agrees that a targeted outreach should include students in a broad range of relevant fields, it stresses that potential applicants should be able to showcase their interest in Internet governance and in shaping the future of global Internet policy. The experience of a few NCSG members who served on the Selection Committee for the NextGen@ICANN Program proves that a lot of applicants have very poor, or no understanding of ICANN and Internet governance in general. This can be a sign that outreach activities should either be more targeted and directed at the faculties that are more likely to get interested in ICANN and Internet policy development processes, or the presentations of engagement team should be simplified to give students a clear understanding of potential opportunities opening upon completion of the NextGen@ICANN Program. Applicants' inability to provide proper reasoning for their participation in the Program, especially if they mention that they have

been recommended to apply by an ICANN engagement team or community member, prove that there is an urgent need to improve communication and outreach efforts. Students might not know all the specifics of the ICANN, as it is a quite complicated structure, but if they are applying to this specific program, they should have a basic understanding of what the organization is doing. Given that, the NCSG supports the idea to focus outreach efforts on students studying technology, international business, law, and related fields.

We would also suggest changing the title of this section from "Outreach and Recruitment" to "Outreach and Engagement", which will better reflect the nature of undertaken efforts.

Application

NCSG is not in favor of introducing an option for applicants to upload a letter of endorsement or recommendation of a community group. For a vast majority of applicants, the NextGen@ICANN Program is their very first acquaintance with ICANN and the Internet governance ecosystem in general. There is nothing for what they could have been praised in terms of contributions to ICANN activities. Moreover, since NextGen is a program for newcomers, it is unreasonable to expect from applicants a prior professional interaction with any of the ICANN community groups. Therefore, we believe that the introduction of such a requirement would give unjustifiable advantage to those students who appear to have some personal connections with ICANN community members, and would exclude from the application other potential candidates who might have much better knowledge and skills in the field than those endorsed by community members

Selection

The NCSG is not in favour of reviewing the selection criteria by the new Selection Committee only, but recommends inviting contributions from the whole community and especially from the former Selection Committee members. This would be of great practical value, as they have experience dealing with applications for the NextGen@ICANN Program, and can easily suggest what was missing and what could be improved. Once again, while supporting the idea that the applicants' potential engagement in ICANN should be considered as an important selection criterion, the NCSG points out that it is quite challenging to make such assessment given that vast majority of applicants have very little understanding of what ICANN is, not mentioning their potential engagement. Therefore, the selection criteria should be drafted in a way to make such assessment as easy as possible.

While acknowledging the region based selection of participants for the NextGen@ICANN Program, the NCSG would recommend leaving a small quota (2-3 places) for the students coming from the other regions than the one where an ICANN meeting is held. This would give students from all regions the opportunity to get involved at any time, and not wait until the meeting is held in their region. This approach would ensure that students do not miss the opportunity of being part of this program simply because of their geolocation. This suggestion is based also on the fact that there might be very good candidates from other regions that at the time of the next meeting might not have the student or PhD candidate status anymore, so they would miss the opportunity of getting into the program and into the ICANN ecosystem. This approach would be similar to the Fellowship program, but with a

more restricted quota due to the small number of places available. Moreover, in cases when the majority of applications from the region where the meeting will be held are very weak, we would suggest opening more quotas to applicants from other regions, rather than excluding them immediately simply because of their location. This would ensure quality of participants, which of course is to the benefit of the whole ICANN ecosystem and community.

The NCSG would also like to suggest modifications to the application forms for both NextGenners and Ambassadors. Current application questions for NextGenners are presuming quite significant knowledge of ICANN or interest in its activities. This is not the case with the majority of applications. Some applicants show quite good results in IG in general but not in ICANN. Given that, the Selection Committee is forced to put low grades, and identify best from generally low quality applications. It should also be noted that quality of applications differs a lot depending on the region, and this is why we deem it to be practically important to keep a quota for few students from other regions for each ICANN meeting, as suggested above.

Regarding the Ambassadors, the two questions included in the current application do not provide much information about the applicant making it difficult for the Selection Committee to identify the right candidates. There is no requirement for the Ambassadors to explain their level of involvement in the ICANN and other related IG communities and activities. Even though ambassadors are supposed to be already integrated in the ICANN community, this does not mean that all members of the Selection Committee have had the chance to get to know them personally. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate in the Ambassadors' application additional questions where applicants would explain their level of engagement with ICANN upon completion of the NextGen@ICANN Program, and not only their mentoring plan and NextGenner's experience. This would help to select already experienced members of the community to serve as Ambassadors, which would result in increased quality of guidance provided to NextGenners.

NCSG supports the appointment of the Selection Committee members by ICANN community Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs).

Pre-Meeting Preparation & Support

The NCSG wants to point out that while mentoring is a good option for the Fellowship Program, it might not show equally good results for the NextGen@ICANN Program. First of all, mentors are usually well-recognized community members with pretty busy personal agendas during the ICANN meeting. It might not seriously disrupt their work to provide general guidance to fellows most of whom are well familiar with ICANN, have already attended its meetings, and require only sporadic support. The situation with NextGenners is quite the opposite, with the majority, if not all of them, attending an ICANN meeting for the first time. This would require a mentor to dedicate a lot of time to provide qualitative and meaningful support to a NextGenner. Such clash of agendas would either fully prevent a mentor from contributing to working groups, PDPs and attending sessions of interest or would deprive a NextGenner of much needed support and guidance. At the end, no one would benefit from such change of the Program's structure. Secondly, for some experienced community members it is complicated to explain ICANN in simple words as they have been

around for quite a while to comprehend its nuances, which at this point might seem nothing but ordinary.

The NCSG believes that keeping Ambassadors, as opposed to mentors, is more beneficial, as their memories of participation in the Program are still fresh and they know from their own experience what a NextGen participant needs, which allows them to provide proper guidance based on their recent experience. We also support the requirement to complete the upcoming course on Mentoring Best Practices. Regarding Statements of Interest (SOIs), NCSG would recommend requiring them for Ambassadors, rather than for NextGenners.

The NCSG finds the pre-meeting preparation to be equally important for a smooth and fully-fledged engagement of NextGenners into the ICANN community. Given that we would suggest to introduce a series of pre-meeting dynamic webinars conducted by ICANN staff and/or experienced community members and explaining to the NextGenners the ICANN structure (so that they can identify which working group matches their interests), the engagement opportunities within the organization (WGs, PDPs, etc.), short overview of the sessions that would be held during the meeting, as well as the current "hot topics". The NCSG believes that by completing a more in-depth pre-meeting preparation, NextGenners could take more advantage from the onsite participation in the meeting.

On-Site

The NCSG welcomes the suggestions for on-site activities specified in the Draft Proposal for NextGen@ICANN Program Improvements. The NCSG suggests that the NextGen@ICANN Program should focus less on the powerpoint presentations of participants and instead pay more attention to group work on some Internet policy issues, whenever possible relevant to ICANN PDPs, past and current discussions, in order to foster team building, teach consensus building to NextGenners and give them a sense of community work in a multistakeholder environment. This would also foster closer relationships between NextGenners and members of the community who are actively engaged in work in areas of interest to the young generation.

We also want to note that it is important for all ICANN community SOs and ACs to present their work and role to the NextGenners, as well as to delegate its representatives to attend presentations conducted by NextGenners. Such two-way communication will ensure better exposure of the Program to the ICANN community at-large, and will create a more welcoming atmosphere for NextGenners to join other groups and not only NCSG or ALAC, as it is usually claimed.

There is a need for more space to integrate the NextGenners into the ICANN community. Based on the experience of former NextGenners, the participants usually feel like being completely isolated from the rest of the ICANN community, because their tight schedule does not leave much time for networking or participating in some sessions of their interest. The NextGen@ICANN Program should enable a higher interaction of participants with the rest of the community.

Post-Meeting

The NCSG fully welcomes the suggestions for post-meeting reporting and publication of related research and publications. We find it to be a very good way to keep track of NextGenners' personal development within ICANN, and to expose results of their work to the broader community. Finally, the NextGenners should be encouraged to mention which constituencies they wish to join or already joined in their feedback report.

Metrics

The NCSG supports the collection of data specified in the Draft Proposal. Additionally, the Program staff might want to consider publishing success stories of NextGenners and their achievements within ICANN and the broader IG community. It could be done on an annual basis.

Responsibilities and Expectations: ICANN org, NextGenners and Mentors

Considering that this section provides a summary for all the points addressed above, we would not go into details but just briefly mark a few points that we consider to be important:

- It is quite a high expectation to believe that NextGenners will be able to identify SO/AC/SG of interest at the stage of application, as all of them are new to ICANN. And if the Program's goal is to introduce participants to ICANN, then it is too early to incorporate such a requirement into the application phase. Though, this would make sense to be included in the post-meeting report;

- A letter of recommendation should not be required (see detailed explanation above);

- Statements of Interest (SOI) to be submitted by Ambassadors, and not be required from NextGenners (see detailed explanation above);

- To keep Ambassadors as the Program's structural element, as opposed to mentors. Otherwise, the Program becomes the exact copy of the Fellowship, with the only difference in participants' age (see detailed explanation above).

Once again, we would like to thank you for inviting us to provide our input on the matter. The NCSG hopes that the collected contributions would help to make the NextGen@ICANN Program more efficient in serving the needs of the ICANN community and organisation.