

Public Comment of Youth4IG on

[Enhancing the Effectiveness of ICANN's Multistakeholder Model – Next Steps](#)

Introduction

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 100 members belonging to over 20 countries who are academics, internet end-users, tech workers, and civil society actors. More information about the community can be found at youth4ig.asia.

Youth4IG welcomes the opportunity to make public comment on this important effort to improve ICANN's Multistakeholder Model. The Multistakeholder Model is something which ICANN should be proud of, and only exists through the efforts and commitments of the community and ICANN Org working together. As youth and young people in the Internet Governance community, it is incumbent on us to take part in the important process of improving the Multistakeholder Model; and it is on that basis that this public comment is made.

Work Plan

Are the identified work processes or mechanisms and actions, found in the table(s) for each work area of Section II, sufficient to address the gaps that may not be addressed by the work already underway?

Gap in Community-Developed Processes for Prioritization and Retiring Work

Community Inclusion

Broadly, Youth4IG supports the identified work processes, mechanisms, and actions under this table. The increased focus on communication between ICANN Org and community groups is something to be commended, and we would also highlight the importance of community groups

outside of the usual ICANN ecosystem. Youth4IG, for example, doesn't fall directly within any of the [identified groups in ICANN](#), but could still be leveraged within the multistakeholder model.

This isn't to say ICANN's direct model of ACs/SOs/Constituencies needs to be altered, or even expanded. Rather, we would advocate for greater awareness of community groups outside of the identified groups - and encourage communication with them as well.

COVID-19

Additionally, we would suggest further consideration of the work listed in this table in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Broadly, much of the engagement-focused work centres on face-to-face (**F2F**) meetings which are recognisably unfeasible in the current environment. How would such work take place in the future? Presumably via video-conference, but this is not confirmed.

Public Meetings - Regional Inclusion

Further, in respect of "Improving ICANN Public Meeting Planning", we would highlight the regional disparity in Prep Week activities. In the case of ICANN 68, a meeting which itself was held in an APAC friendly time-zone, less than four of the Prep Week activities were held during normal hours for APAC time zones. ICANN meetings should be planned in a manner which is inclusive of the **entire** ICANN community - not just those located in the most active regions. The APAC region is already underrepresented at ICANN, and it does the region a disservice to be overlooked during Prep Week sessions for a meeting which is ostensibly hosted in that region.

This isn't a problem isolated to ICANN Public Meetings and extends to similar problems when contributing to Policy Development Processes (**PDP**). The work process listed under this section, that each community structure creates a yearly priority list and work plan, should also include consideration of this time-zone issue. We suggest there is increased communication and use of rotational meeting times amongst all SO/AC and Prep meetings to make it more inclusive for all regions to be able to participate.

Gap in Community Alignment on Cost Management and Budget Allocations

Importance of Community Consultation

The work listed here is wholeheartedly supported. Annual planning and budget review aren't everyone's cup of tea, but it is an important part of ICANN's governance, and deserves to have more people not only making public comments but being actively engaged in how the budgets

are executed. In this manner, the proposed 'cadence of discussions' about ICANN's annual planning and budget process is welcomed and encouraged.

We would echo the point made above in respect of engaging groups outside of the defined SO/AC/SG/Constituency leaders, but recognise that in respect of direct ICANN spending, those groups are likely to be the ones most involved.

Budget - Public Comment

Additionally, we would encourage ICANN Org to undertake greater outreach to ensure a proper number of public comments are made on ICANN's budget. This links into references elsewhere in the paper to improving the public comment system, and we would encourage ICANN Org to tap into groups such as the ALS network of each RALO to garner public comments. Additionally, ICANN Org should consider direct outreach to organisations such as Youth4IG, other NGOs, and other organisations who should be leveraged to collect public comment.

Gap in Maintaining Appropriate Scope of Work

We don't have many members who have been directly engaged in working groups, or at least have experience in directing a scope of work. Broadly, we look forward to discussions on this topic being channelled to the comments of ATRT3 Final Report. That report deals with this issue thoroughly and provides recommendations, which should be considered.

Gap in Resolving Areas of Impasse

Youth4IG supports the work listed here, particularly in respect of inclusion, diversity, and representation. We would also make the following comments regarding work already mentioned in this section, as well as work not mentioned.

Fellowship

Particularly in reference to the Fellowship program, and as a follow up to the recent review of that program, we would encourage further work by ICANN Org and community groups to create a 'bridge' for fellows after the Fellowship program into the wider ICANN community. The Fellowship and NextGen programs are good introductions to the ICANN ecosystem and should encourage individuals to get involved long-term in the ICANN ecosystem. But to achieve that goal, the community needs to ensure fellows are not just 'dropped off' at the conclusion of the program - meaning a stronger continuing strategy is required.

We understand that Fellows' continuous involvement in ICANN should be an effort made by both parties. Much of Youth4IG's work, for example, helps to build the bridge to greater community involvement that we deem necessary but lacking. However, community initiatives to fill in the gap often stop short without the luxury of having abundant resources as ICANN does. Therefore, we encourage ICANN to identify similar community initiatives and provide support as needed.

One way this could be improved is through cultivating a stronger community of past fellows. For example, we would suggest the ICANN Fellowship team could organise alumni meetups (virtually) at least once or twice a year to stimulate the community and enable engagement even years after someone has completed the programme.

At Youth4IG, we're working towards this further connection by acting as a community which connects those who have participated in fellowships and similar programs. For example, we hosted an [ICANN68 prep session and readout](#) - both as a way to reach out to newcomers, but also to provide a place for people who attended the meeting to share their thoughts about how it went. It is efforts like this which ICANN should encourage and try to integrate into their own programs.

This is particularly important when considering diversity and inclusion within the ICANN model - because surely one of the best ways to improve diversity in ICANN is to keep newcomers engaged!

NextGen@ICANN

Additionally, Youth4IG would also like to highlight the importance of the NextGen@ICANN program in introducing young people to the ICANN ecosystem; and as an element of work not otherwise mentioned in this section. There is a keen distinction between the NextGen program and the Fellowship program, as the NextGen program specifically caters to those students enrolled in tertiary education - representing a particular focus on youth and young people. The NextGen program should be recognised, particularly in respect of diversity and inclusion of young people in the ICANN ecosystem.

Virtual Meetings

Further, we would again encourage additional consideration of these processes in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly in respect of programs that thrive on physical

participation and networking (Fellowships, and NextGen), more work needs to be done to ensure those programs remain effective in a virtual environment.

In this vein, the Fellowship and NextGen programs are essential not only because they provide newcomers an easy channel to connect with peers. More importantly, they grant Fellows and NextGenners the precious opportunity to meet senior and high-level ICANN members in person. However, the privilege of talking to ICANN Org executives and SO/AC Leadership in F2F meetings is lost to Fellows and NextGenners during virtual meetings.

Indeed, while the virtual format opens new doors and provides easier access to newcomers, obstacles remain for newcomers to engage in ICANN meetings. For example, the webinar format in ICANN68 was not the most newcomer-friendly as participants could not initiate private chats or check the other participants in the webinar were. The virtual format was rather easier for the people who had networks and past experience in ICANN meetings to continue keeping the networks and involving with the sessions.

Fellows and NextGenners in ICANN67 and ICANN68 were pretty much left on their own to navigate the meetings without the usual guidance from mentors or Nextgen Ambassadors in physical meetings. We would encourage ICANN Org and the community to consider new ways of encouraging and including newcomers in ICANN meetings in a virtual setting when F2F meetings are still far-fetched in the near future, including those who are not Fellows or NextGenners.

Are there gaps and related actions that may address those gaps that should be included in the Work Plan?

Generally, we would refer to our comments above in respect of recognising the work done by community groups outside of the identified SO/AC/SG/Constituency groups. Otherwise, we are not aware of any gaps or actions which should be included in the Work Plan.

Remaining Work Areas

Are there any actions that your community group would like to initiate or coordinate?

On our part, there are not any actions listed which we would specifically be best placed to initiate or coordinate. However, to the extent that anyone who is initiating or coordinating these actions would think our assistance would be helpful, we would be willing to assist.

For example, we would be willing to share our learnings through running webinars and mentorships for newcomers in ICANN.

Are there any community efforts missing from the list?

NextGen Program

In respect of the remaining work areas, we believe this program should fall under 'Complexity of Content' and/or 'Culture, Trust, and Silos'.

While not directly a community program as it is funded and organised by ICANN Org, the NextGen program should be mentioned in the same vein as the Fellowship program when it comes to enhancing ICANN's Multistakeholder Model. The NextGen program is currently evolving, and it was heartening to see earlier in the year that ICANN seeks public comment on how that program could be improved.

But where does that program fit into the evolution of ICANN's multistakeholder model - no matter how the program is run going forward? The answer is quite simple and is similar to that of the Fellowship program. The more youth and young people we can engage in ICANN's ecosystem, and who we can keep engaged in the ecosystem, the richer we all are for it. ICANN needs more engaged people, and youth, who have a desire to make a difference and learn about what ICANN does, are prime candidates to be engaged. This is where the NextGen program truly pays dividends.

The recent changes to the NextGen program go a good way towards the program being a representation of work to reduce the complexity of content within ICANN, with the addition of a mentor program to ease the NextGenners into the ICANN ecosystem. Such programs (as will be

shortly discussed) should be encouraged, and it is in the vein that the NextGen program should be included under the 'Remaining Work Areas'.

Cross-Community Inclusion

Particularly when discussing 'Culture, Trust, and Silos' alongside efforts to reduce the complexity of ICANN content and internal work environment, we would suggest that ICANN also look to efforts outside the recognised community which also assist in resolving these issues.

Leadership training

In addition to the ICANN Learn course on "Conflict Resolution", other such consensus building exercises or training should be added to help volunteers adapt to the PDP and the ICANN Community.

This leadership training shouldn't just be offered to volunteers, but virtual training sessions for youth and newcomers would also assist in educating individuals as to ICANN's culture and important work. We would suggest such training could include:

- Knowledge of ICANN groups and work tracks.
- Cross-cultural communication.
- How to work virtually (recognising that even outside of COVID-19, intersessional PDP work is frequently done virtually).

Youth4IG programs

For example, at Youth4IG we run a mentorship program, currently in its pilot stage, which supports young people who have 1 or 2 fellowship experiences but want to learn more after their program ends. By connecting these young people with experts in Internet Governance, we aim to pave the way for them to gain the knowledge and courage to become a 'substantial participant' in Internet Governance.

We are honoured to have Samiran Gupta and Donna Austin as our mentors for the pilot program. Samiran is the Head of India at ICANN and Donna, with her expertise in the domain industry, is also an active ICANN veteran. Through the 1-on-1 sessions and bi-weekly meetups, the participants are able to take a deeper dive into their interest area with the professional and personalized help from the mentors.

What can ICANN take from this program? Certainly, it demonstrates that there is a subset of the community who wish to be more involved but have difficulties in finding their way in. It also demonstrates the merits of getting the community directly involved in education and communication efforts.

This can be contrasted to ICANN's current mentorship system as integrated into the Fellowship, which fails to constructively engage Fellows in ICANN after the end of the program. Our mentorship program differs by offering the opportunity to continue the learning experience while nurturing valuable connections between the youth and the experienced. We assist in transferring interest from one-off meetings into a long-term and in-depth learning experience that substantially strengthens youth's ability of continuous involvement.

This is not an ICANN specific program, and we would not insist on it being included in this list - but improving ICANN's existing fellowship programs should be included in respect of improving the accessibility of ICANN's ecosystem, and improving the diversity of the ICANN community.

APIGA

Another quasi-ICANN program, the Asia-Pacific School of Internet Governance (**APIGA**), again represents an effort to deconstruct ICANN's complexity for newcomers and introduce new individuals to the ecosystem. This is particularly important when trying to resolve the issue of ICANN's complexity of content, and teaching people how to effectively work within ICANN's culture.

At a very core level, APIGA guides youth and young people into the multistakeholder model - something which should be understood even before getting into ICANN's ecosystem.

In this manner, APIGA should be considered in the list, particularly in respect of 'Complexity of Content'.

Evaluation

Do you support the idea of using existing mechanisms to evaluate progress on the three work areas, including the actions already underway and those proposed to address the identified gaps?

We support the ongoing use of existing mechanisms, such as the strategic plan, to evaluate progress on the relevant work areas. While new mechanisms are important, what is more important is the immediate work; that being the improvements to the multistakeholder model detailed in the paper.

Speaking more specifically, we would suggest a reliance on more objective methods of evaluation such as budgetary or time-based measures as opposed to subjective metrics.

Yes, there is a need to review the broader mechanisms, but a time will come for that; and to create entirely new mechanisms to review the ongoing work may result in needless complexity. Additionally, the existing mechanisms come with existing expectations and baselines as to the performance of work - and to abandon those and create new mechanisms would reduce the ability for the work areas to remain accountable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our comments revolve around the following core issues:

1. ICANN's multistakeholder model needs to evolve in an inclusive manner, which focuses on the entire ICANN community - not just those very directly involved in official ICANN processes.
2. The work listed in the paper must be continually reviewed, with a focus on adaptation to the relevant issues of the time. Now, the relevant issue is COVID-19, but going forward ICANN must be flexible and adaptable to the issues of the day and be prepared to communicate and involve the wider community in its wider decision-making process.

These are not new issues in ICANN, nor are they easy to solve. But they are important, especially as ICANN seeks to evolve its multistakeholder model in a more inclusive manner.

The role of youth in this evolution cannot be understated. One frequent issue raised throughout the paper is the difficulty in achieving consensus, and the tiredness of long-working community members. New voices are needed; and community groups should embrace those young people who are willing to step up.

To do so will lead to a more inclusive ICANN, one which is more efficient and effective, and one which leverages the very best of the multistakeholder model.

Youth4IG

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