Next-Steps - Enhancing the Effectiveness of ICANN's Multistakeholder Model

Public Comment by the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group

The Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group (NCSG) highly appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Next Steps - Enhancing the Effectiveness of ICANN's Multistakeholder Model, published on 4 June 2020.

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.

Both in the document and in the accompanying webinar, ICANN Org and the Board asked us to specifically provide answers to the following questions:

- How to evaluate current works in progress regarding enhancements brought to the MSM.
- Whether there are gaps between current works in progress and overall objectives of the plan to enhance the MSM.
- Whether there are any other gaps that are not currently identified or properly addressed.
- What we intend to do, or are already doing, regarding the other three (non-priority) areas: the complexity of (A) tools to access information and data and (B) content; culture, trust and silos; and roles and responsibilities.

Evaluation

One key characteristic of the MSM is its recourse to consensus decision-making. In that sense, achieving consensus more quickly or more easily can be understood as one "enhancement" or "success." Given the variety of efforts undertaken (or to be undertaken) as part of the overall Work Plan, we believe that a substantive, results-oriented approach is the best way to measure success at a high level.

Such an approach, however, must be coupled with a more granular measure of success. In turn, such granular measures have to be adapted to what is being measured. Taking PDP

3.0 as an example, it would be important to measure WG participants' understanding of the contents of PDP 3.0, and whether it is *actually* used as it should be, besides a result-oriented measurement of whether better consensus is achieved. That way, we ensure that we understand the causes behind the success or failures when it comes to consensus improvements. It could be that PDP 3.0 is well understood and used properly, but that we do not see improvements in achieving consensus. On the other hand, it could be that PDP 3.0 is not well understood and/or not used properly, and yet we see improvements in consensus. Either situation (and any other scenario that might fall between these two extremes) raises very different questions.

Although respecting time frames and budgets is important, we do not see either of those as key measures of the overall success of the Work Plan. Overspending was not identified as an issue to start with, and so our attention should not be set on measuring such kinds of resource flows. As to time, it is true that the length of processes under the MSM is often put forward as an issue, but the current Work Plan shows that just "time" itself is most likely not the problem, but rather a symptom of other issues, which have rightly been identified. To put it another way, the MSM would not be "enhanced" simply by us delivering something (whatever it may be) on time, or under the specified budgetary allocation.

Finally, it is worth stressing that certain parts of the Work Plan will bear their fruits on the medium and long-term, and that must be kept in mind in the context of any evaluation. Improvements to ICANN Learn, for example, will be felt after a large-enough number of newcomers will have benefited from it and will have started getting involved in policy work. This is not something that can be achieved in a matter of weeks or months, but more likely years.

Gaps between general objectives and current works in progress

From our stakeholder group perspective, we have not identified any other gaps besides those already addressed in the Work Plan. We note that most of the items, either falling under works in progress or new works to be undertaken, are under the responsibility of ICANN Org and/or the Board. In that sense, we do not have the required perspective to give a truly meaningful answer to that question. Rather, we expect both Org and the Board to come forward with their own reasoned plan regarding gaps between either of the WIPs, general objectives, and works to be undertaken.

What we intend to do or are already doing, regarding the non priority areas

The NCSG and the NCUC both applied for and were granted Additional Budget Requests (ABRs) for FY 2021. Both of those relate to capacity-building for civil society (focusing on advocacy for NCUC and leadership for NCSG.) While both the stakeholder group and the constituency are still developing their implementation plans for these ABRs, we believe that they will contribute to all three of the secondary issues.

Capacity building is one element that contributes to the creation of a level playing field and meaningful diversity within the ICANN community, and more specifically within the part of the community more actively involved in policy-making. On the flipside, such courses, webinars or workshops also aim at remedying barriers to meaningful participation that may be under the control of our individual members, so that they can get involved more deeply in policy-making. We believe that in doing so, we contribute to reducing the silos and improving the general working culture at ICANN.

Such workshops also reduce the complexity of tools of access to information by providing small-group or personalized guidance on all kinds of matters pertaining to ICANN. While it does not constitute a formal mentorship system, our workshops aim at providing the opportunity to develop informal, mentor-like relationships between experienced members and newcomers (or generally less experienced members). They also contribute to creating a common understanding of the distribution of power and duties or roles within the whole of ICANN.

Additional comments

We noted that one element of the new work to be undertaken directly touches the NCSG, and that is the creation of a priority list and a regular touch point with Org and the Board regarding the list and its contents. We are in favor of more communications regarding priority between the different parts of the community and plan to contribute to this effort.