

Registries Stakeholder Group Statement

Issue: **Draft ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025**

Date statement submitted: **11 February 2019**

Reference URL: <https://www.icann.org/public-comments/strategic-plan-2018-12-20-en>

Background¹

[Draft ICANN Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#) (.pdf)

Proposed New ICANN Vision Statement

To be a champion of the single, open, and globally interoperable Internet, by being the independent, trusted, multi-stakeholder steward of the Internet's unique identifiers, and by providing an open and collaborative environment where diverse stakeholders come together in the global public interest to:

- Secure operational excellence of the IANA functions;
- Continuously improve the unique identifier systems;
- Strengthen the security of the Domain Name System and the DNS Root Server System;
- Evolve ICANN's governance model to remain effective, transparent, and accountable;
- Improve the effectiveness of ICANN's policy development processes;
- Anticipate and manage the impact of legislation and regulation; and- Ensure ICANN is technically robust and financially sustainable.

Proposed ICANN Strategic Objectives for Fiscal Years 2021-2025

1. Strengthen the security of the Domain Name System and the DNS Root Server System.
2. Improve the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance.
3. Evolve the unique identifier systems to continue to serve the needs of the global Internet user base.
4. Address geopolitical issues impacting ICANN's mission to ensure a single and globally interoperable Internet.
5. Ensure ICANN's long-term financial sustainability.

Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) comment:

The Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025.

These comments submitted on behalf of the RySG were informed not only by reading through the relevant documents, but also from an exchange with Theresa Swinehart (ICANN MSSI) during a recent RySG conference call. The RySG appreciates the effort that has gone into the development of the draft Strategic Plan, and at a high level supports both the proposed Vision for ICANN and the five overarching Strategic Objectives. However, we believe that the plan requires more detail about how the objectives will be achieved, as well as how the plan will be costed and ultimately integrated with the financial planning cycle, before we can fully support the adoption of the Strategic Plan.

¹ *Background*: intended to give a brief context for the comment and to highlight what is most relevant for RO's in the subject document – it is not a summary of the subject document.

Metrics and deliverables

The relationship between the strategic goals, targeted outcomes, and strategic risks is currently unclear. While some of these relationships may have been identified through the trends identification process, they're not documented in the draft Strategic Plan. Furthermore, the draft Strategic Plan is missing the 'how' – specific information about how the targeted outcomes will be achieved and the risks mitigated. More detail in this regard is necessary to better understand both the rationale for the objectives and the process by which ICANN intends to deliver on the plan's objectives.

We therefore request that ICANN supplement the draft Strategic Plan with specific deliverables for each of the goals and concrete metrics by which success will be determined, along with assigned responsibilities, to allow for ICANN and the community to monitor progress and measure success throughout the five-year cycle.

Integration with the financial planning cycle

We welcome the announced new approach to complement the Strategic Plan with a fully-costed five-year operating plan with details of activities, dependencies, and phasing. However, more detail is required about how ICANN plans to work and integrate the strategic planning cycle and the organisation's financial planning process to make sure that it doesn't end up with an approved Strategic Plan that is not properly costed.

Related, and referring to ICANN's desire to move to a two-year budget, we wonder how this change, if and when implemented, may influence the planned integration of operating plan and budget cycles.

Due to the broad and sweeping nature of some of the strategic goals and objectives, the RySG is concerned that the cost of implementing the draft Strategic Plan could well exceed current budget allocations or at least place considerable pressure on ICANN's resources. The RySG believes that ICANN needs to balance the need to control costs – which the RySG believes should be an organisational priority – with the will to implement a Strategic Plan that could drive ICANN to operating beyond its means. With this in mind, it seems sensible to undertake an initial costing exercise prior to Board approval of the Strategic Plan, to ensure that the plan can be fully funded and provide some level of comfort to the community.

Future proof trends

We appreciate ICANN's effort to work with the community to identify the five primary trends expected to impact ICANN's future, mission and operations, and use these as framework for developing the Strategic Plan. Trends, however, are to a certain extent unpredictable and may change in unexpected ways. Moreover, we note that the 'trends identification phase' took place in 2017-2018, that the Board is expected to adopt the Strategic Plan in June 2019, and that the Strategic Plan starts in July 2020.

Trends may change between now and the start of the plan in 2020, or during the 2021-2025 cycle. It is important to have a clear and transparent process in place for adapting the Strategic Plan, if needed, as ICANN goes through the cycle. ICANN has a history of becoming caught up in the unpredictable: the IANA transition and GDPR being two recent examples of issues that were not foreseen and both resulted in considerable community and ICANN resources being devoted to these efforts.

The draft Strategic Plan does not appear to have the flexibility to deal with such future scenarios. We strongly believe that in the event that the 'unforeseen' happens in the future ICANN must revisit the Strategic Plan and the associated budget to recalibrate in order to account for the 'unforeseen'. We also believe that when ICANN decides to take on projects that go beyond those specified in the Strategic Plan that they be required to explain to the community why they believe the project is important and how funds have been reallocated to the new project.

Tracking the Strategic Plan over its lifetime

The RySG believes that the best way to achieve solid metrics, reliable financials, and future-proofed projects is to clearly link all work back to the Strategic Plan. When ICANN initiates new projects meant to achieve the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic Plan, it should make very clear to the ICANN community how those projects connect to the Plan and how they support ICANN's strategic objectives, why the particular objectives and projects were selected over others, and why ICANN is the proper owner² for the project. This added level of communication, coupled with regular and consistent report of the progress made against the Strategic Plan, will enhance the community's ability to assess the success of the Plan and make us more effective at helping to inform future Strategic Plans.

² ICANN should focus its resources on issues most narrowly within its remit and avoid duplicate efforts. Even if a project connects to the Strategic Plan and its objectives, other organisations, governments, or the private sector might already be working on it.