



# Comment on Draft Community Travel Support Guidelines

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**Business Constituency Submission**

**GNSO//CSG//BC**

## **Background**

This document is the response of the ICANN Business Constituency (BC), from the perspective of business users and registrants, as defined in our Charter:

The mission of the Business Constituency is to ensure that ICANN policy positions are consistent with the development of an Internet that:

1. promotes end-user confidence because it is a safe place to conduct business
2. is competitive in the supply of registry and registrar and related services
3. is technically stable, secure and reliable.

## **BC Comment on the Draft Community Travel Support Guidelines**

The Business Constituency is pleased to comment on the Draft Community Travel Support Guidelines for community members who are supported by the ICANN organization to attend ICANN Public Meetings or other approved ICANN events.

BC notes that the guidelines are by and large reflective of expectations of the community, however, there are a few areas that the BC wishes to solicit improvements. The BC would recommend improvements in the following areas:

1. Visa application process and alternate routing for supported travelers from countries where transit visas would present barriers to participation, e.g. routing through US or Europe.
2. Compensation
3. Hotel deposit advisory
4. Wire Transfer Costs
5. Substitution of traveler, when a cancellation for defined cause occurs<sup>1</sup>

## **Visa application process**

Over many past meetings, some BC travelers have been unable to secure host country visas to attend ICANN meetings in China, UAE, USA and recently Panama. While a consultant was engaged to help with this process, the BC notes that its effort has not been that effective. For example, in Panama, an approved BC traveler received his visa to Panama only a few days before expected travel, however, the Travel Support team routed this traveler through Europe, where for many travelers, transit visas are required, and appointments to receive such transit visas require 10-15 days to schedule an appointment and the primary visa to the destination country is a basic requirement. This is not an isolated example.

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<sup>1</sup> The Guidelines – page 11 – Cancellations and Substitutions allow for substitution up to 45 days before the start of an event, for two defined circumstances: failure of a supported traveler to respond to ICANN Travel Support after four attempts at communication and cancellation for any reason by the supported traveler.

Alternate routing, which may not be the least cost or most direct routing, in some cases, that does not require the transit visa should be an option, if the issue is identified at the time of the request for travel approval. The additional costs in airfare and a layover hotel, if justified due to the layover time, should not be a major impact on the overall travel budget and will strengthen the ability of ICANN Travel Support to ensure that travelers from affected countries/regions are able to participate in ICANN face to face meetings.

Instead, it is BC's recommendation that the following options be considered.

- I. Begin the meeting travel process six (6) months before a meeting. This would give enough time for the visa processing to accommodate the need in some cases to secure transit visas.
- II. Work to secure host nation agreement as done by the United Nations whenever it hosts an Internet Governance Forum (IGF) or any similar event with any country. The host nation agreement requires among other things that visa is provided for all approved travelers [who are also required to be registered participants in the IGF] and thus, names of such travelers are provided to the host nation who then sends such list to their relevant embassies around the world. Invitation letters are also provided to the approved traveler.
- III. Identify early if there are significant barriers to travel routing, which adds in transit visas, that can be challenging to obtain, due to delays in the approval of the primary visa [see example above], and provide reasonable routing that may avoid transit visa requirements, when possible.

### **Compensation for Costs incurred**

As an international organization, the BC recommends that ICANN examines how UN organisations compensate travelers for expenses incurred. Travelers' local costs for transportation, food, etc. should be covered and if possible improved upon. In most cases, the per diem that ICANN provides does not cover basic travel costs incurred by travelers. For example, in some cases, local transport from domicile to airport can be a significant additional cost that is not factored into the compensation.

### **Hotel deposit advisory**

Some travelers report that they tendered their debit cards at hotel reception on arrival for ICANN meeting and were not refunded afterwards when no consumption occurred. So we recommend that the word "debit" be removed from the advisory below:

"Lodging In most hotels, a deposit or **debit**/credit card is required at the time of check-in to cover incidental expenses. ICANN will not provide any guarantee or supplement the inability of a supported traveler to provide a deposit or **debit**/credit card."

In some instances, hotel staff advised that refunds were only possible with credit cards. This would result in ICANN approved travelers, who in good faith, used a debit card, would suffer a serious financial challenge if the deposit funds were not returned, or were excessively delayed in refund from the hotel. We recommend that “debit” be removed from the statement.

### **Wire Transfer and Foreign Exchange Fees/Losses**

The draft Community Travel Support Guidelines states that "foreign exchange fees/losses" are acceptable, and ICANN is willing to reimburse the traveler if a wire transfer fee exceeds USD 50, as long as a justification is sent to ICANN Travel Support.

Some BC participants have experienced challenges in the charges for wire transfer/foreign exchange fees/losses. First, losses as high as 120 dollars due to foreign exchange fees are regularly reported in the Latin American region, and second, no offer of reimbursement of that value is ever provided. While on-site disbursement may be a feasible approach, some have encountered challenges as ICANN Travel (IC) wishes to keep on-site reimbursement at a minimum.

This generates unnecessary losses both to ICANN and to travelers. A different approach should be considered for dealing with Global South countries that are known to have difficult and uncooperative banking systems. ICANN should look into alternatives, including working with intermediaries that expedite transfers and almost eliminate taxes – for example, TransferWise, which is used by ISOC.

### **Cancellations and Substitutions**

Substitutions are allowed up to 45 days before the start of an event, yet in many cases, the community group or program would not know that a traveler has encountered significant visa issues that may prevent their travel. Upon rare occasion, illness or other family or business circumstance may change plans of an approved traveler only days before a meeting that were not previously visible. We propose that a “exception” process be created, where a substitution can occur up to when nonrefundable costs are incurred, but only when the community group or program has developed an “alternate” for said traveler, identified and qualified said alternate, and where the exception would not result in significant additional costs; e.g. alternate traveler does not require visa, or can obtain visa within one to two weeks. This may result in alternates coming from different countries/regions than the originally designated traveler but will avoid the loss of a funded traveler for a community group or program.

We thank the ICANN Travel team for their dedication and commitment to serving the community.

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This comment was drafted by Jimson Olufuye, with edits by Marilyn Cade and Mark Datysgeld.

It was approved in accord with the BC charter.