

Registries Stakeholder Group Statement

Issue: **First Consultation on a 2-Year Planning Process**

Date statement submitted: **4 March 2019**

Reference URL: <https://www.icann.org/public-comments/two-year-planning-2018-12-21-en>

Background¹

This is the first of two consultations on a 2-year planning process for ICANN:

1. “Problem Definition” (current consultation) to identify existing issues with ICANN’s planning process.
2. “Solution Definition” (to come): consultation on the proposed new approach for planning.

The consultation cycle is planned to be completed by June 2019.

Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) comment:

The Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on needs and improvements to the ICANN planning process and contribute to the consultation to evaluate the potential benefit of implementing a 2-year planning process.

While we understand that this discussion paper is focused on planning for the future, what we believe is missing from these discussions is an understanding of the many, many projects currently underway across the community - everything from their life expectancy to their budget and resource implications, including volunteer time and effort. None of these things are currently captured in these discussions.

You may be aware that in 2018 the GNSO developed a spreadsheet of all open GNSO projects: <https://gns0.icann.org/sites/default/files/file/field-file-attach/project-timing-planning-04oct18-en.pdf> .

At a glance, this suggests that there is a considerable amount of work being undertaken by the community on a number of issues. What it doesn’t capture is how long these work efforts have been underway, or that the majority of GNSO projects run over the expected timeframe - in many cases by more than 12 months - and the reasons for these delays, that there is no requirement for existing work to be completed before new projects start, or that as interest wanes in one topic community volunteers move on to the next shiny thing or because there is urgency, as we saw with the EPDP on gTLD Data Registration.

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.*

The community, ICANN org and the ICANN Board have been grappling with this issue for many years in the context of volunteer burnout, but in trying to understanding the planning process it seems timely for ICANN org to dedicate resources to capturing all the distinct projects currently underway or recently completed. On a sampling of the projects, it should carry out an analysis of the project lifecycle, resource implications including volunteer hours and ICANN org budget and resource implications, expected timeframe for completion and actual timeframe for completion and where there is a gap, understand the reasons for that.

It really doesn't matter if the planning cycle is one or two years: the planning will be flawed if the input is inaccurate.

Q1 - Does the community agree that the yearly planning cycle does not provide sufficient time for community extensive input and interaction on the operating plan and budget?

RySG comment:

The RySG does not necessarily agree that the yearly planning cycle is inadequate to gather sufficient community input and interaction. The issue here may be less of the total amount of time spent on the planning, and more a matter of how that time is utilized. One of the challenges with the planning cycle is that it competes with other efforts being undertaken within the community. The RySG supports ICANN's consideration of this question, and believes there may be value in exploring more efficient ways to present the information contained in the plan, solicit input and interact with the community that would create less pressure on the yearly cycle. While there may be value in extending the planning cycle, potential benefits should be balanced against the risk of further exacerbating volunteer burnout by demanding too much time from volunteers.

Q2 - Does the community believe that more time for planning provides more transparency?

RySG comment:

No. There is nothing to suggest that time correlates directly with transparency. More time may mean that the process will be less compressed or it may simply become more complicated. More transparency would come from better explanations about how ICANN org has managed the process for deciding budget allocations for different departments etc. and how community requests and comments were addressed.

Q3 - How and who should set ICANN's priorities?

- *The current ICANN strategic plan does not prioritize the 5 strategic objectives, they are equally important.*
- *Should parts of the strategic plan be prioritized of the 5 years it applies to?*

- *From the strategic trends exercises conducted with several community organizations during 2018:*
 - *“There is no prioritization, everything is #1 and nothing is #1”*
 - *“Are the community priorities aligned with ICANN mission/vision?”*
 - *“Focus on technical functions as a priority and avoid allowing budget constraints to negatively affect them”*

RySG comment:

The strategic plan is a list of goals against which projects should be measured. ICANN org should identify elements of the Strategic Plan that are currently being undertaken as part of ICANN’s core business and budget and resources are already allocated. Part of the community process for determining which projects ICANN should take on should include a consideration of priorities. Subsequently, when the Board approves projects and budgets funds for them, it can further prioritize based on budget and other resource limitations.

Where applicable, the Strategic Plan should note where certain parts correspond to specific years, and any prioritization should reflect that. Whether priorities are set by the community, ICANN org the ICANN Board, or a combination thereof, a detailed explanation of the prioritization should accompany the Strategic Plan.

Q4 - Should policy development and implementation activities be integral to the planning cycle?

For the purpose of better using the limited availability of the community stakeholders, already stretched, and to appropriately allocate ICANN’s support resources, policy development needs and activities could be considered during the planning process:

- *Should the policy development activities be planned?*
- *What should be planned collectively by the SO/AC, if anything?*
- *What should be planned by the GNSO and ccNSO?*

RySG comment:

Yes. The GNSO and ccNSO should continue to oversee the policy development process and any integration with the planning cycle should not restrict these organizations from having the flexibility to initiate a PDP if warranted. But where PDPs (or IRTs) are in progress or where it is possible to plan them in advance, then integrating policy development activities into the planning process could be beneficial.

Q5 - What activities, other than policy development, should be planned and by whom?

Examples:

- *Reviews*
- *Cross community working groups,*

- *Engagement activities outside ICANN meetings,*
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RySG comment:

The RySG is struggling with the concept of 'planned' and how it's being used in this consultation paper. Is the assumption that reviews and cross community working groups are not currently planned?

The timing of specific reviews is currently dictated in the ICANN bylaws and therefore should be planned for activities in any given year or period. Organizational reviews should similarly be planned. It is the RySG's hope that including reviews in the planning process will help alleviate issues with volunteer burnout (or a lack of volunteer resources) and also help facilitate a smoother implementation process for the ICANN Board and org.

Cross community working groups have traditionally been organic in nature, but it may be helpful to establish criteria associated with instigating a CCWG effort that would include budget and resource implications and an assessment of whether there is an immediate need to commence such work, balanced with ongoing efforts.

Engagement activities outside ICANN meetings seem to refer to face-to-face meetings for WGs or perhaps attendance at ICANN or DNS related events. Similarly, these activities should be evaluated against set criteria for expected benefits, budget and resource implications and whether there's an immediate need for engagement activities outside of ICANN.

Q6 - Should the planning process include a formalized dedicated phase to plan for SO/AC activities? If so, how many years should be planned for?

RySG comment:

With the exception of the GNSO, each SO/AC should be encouraged to develop a workplan for a 12 month or two year period, and identify areas or issues that are a priority. This work plan should, in some way, be connected to ICANN's Strategic Plan or mission and also capture other activities that the SO/AC is working on.

The GNSO's Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies should be encouraged to do the same, while the GNSO Council should conduct a separate effort associated with the management of Council business and the policy process.

The GNSO Council has, in the last two years, held strategic planning sessions and the outcome of these sessions could be informative for the rest of the community in determining resource requirements for policy development efforts.

There is a challenge in understanding the budget implications and the distribution of funding.

Process Questions:

- *Would it be beneficial to insert, in the early part of the planning process, a phase of activity planning resulting in a document submitted for a first public comment period, and follow it by an operating plan and budget development phase which would be the subject of a second public comment period?*

- *What are the barriers to community engagement in the planning process?*
 - *Lack of available time?*
 - *Complexity of the information produced?*
 - *Complexity or length of the planning process?*
 - *Lack of relevance or interest?*

RySG comment:

It is difficult to comment on the first question as it is not clear what the “activity planning” would entail, what the expectations for volunteers would be, or how the input would be considered. While such a step could be productive, we caution that an open call for input into “activity planning” could further exacerbate problems that exist around setting priorities effectively, as well as push ICANN into pursuing initiatives outside of its remit.

As explained in our overarching comment we believe that the lack of a documented overview and understanding of the many projects underway is a barrier to community engagement in the planning process.
