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## **HSTLD Advisory Group Position Statement – Mikey O'Connor**

My position with regard to the HSTLD program is “I don’t have the basis to support a position because there are some profound questions that still need to be answered.” This statement will attempt to lay those questions out and offer suggestions for how to proceed.

I want to be very clear on one point. This document can be read as criticism. It should not be. I firmly believe that all participants did their work with the best of intentions and to the best of their ability. We experienced difficulties along the way, but we did the best that we could with the tools we had available.

### **Problem Statement**

Probably the biggest barrier to getting this project done was our fuzzy problem statement. The repeated efforts to resolve questions like “what the heck is HSTLD doing?” and “Goal of this group” on the email list are an indication of this. Our problem-statement could have been framed in a number of ways, eg:

1. Address the “Malicious Conduct” overarching issue that’s been raised during reviews of the DAG
2. Describe a way to deliver (and designate) a high-security TLD
3. Describe a way to deliver (and designate) a high-trust TLD

Here’s the current goal-statement: “Evaluate the viability of a voluntary program, supporting control standards and incentives to provide an enhanced level of trust and security over the baseline registration-authority controls.” But we are far from consensus on what “an enhanced level of trust and security” means.

### **Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- What is the problem (or puzzle) to be solved?
- How does not solving this problem get in the way of achieving the organization's objectives?
- What value does the organization gain from solving this problem?
- What is the chronology of the situation - how did we get here?
- Are there trends at work - social, industry, financial, economic?
- Is this a 'solution' that has turned into a problem - if so, what is the original problem that this solution-turned-problem was supposed to solve?
- What alternatives to doing this project have we explored?

### **Stake Holders**

Since we didn’t have a clear definition of the problem we were trying to solve, describing the stakeholders who might be impacted was difficult. This project suffered because a) we couldn’t define who should be involved, b) those who were involved were a far from representative group and c) even that group dwindled as the work proceeded so that by the end there were only a small handful of active participants.

The project also suffered because it had no clear champion within ICANN. Thus, we had no “customer” who could promote and defend the effort to the wider community. Nor is it clear to whom we report. Unlike GNSO Working Groups (upon which our work was modeled), we have no formal chain of command (or control) linking us to the organization.

**Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- Who will be affected by the problem (which employees, stakeholders, customers, others)?
- Have they been involved sufficiently up to this point?
- Should they be brought in to the project? When?
- To what degree do they share the belief that this is a problem that needs to be solved?
- Who ought to 'champion' this project?
- To whom should the project team report?
- Do we need a Steering Committee to provide resources and resolve disputes?
- Has a project leader been selected yet?

### **Scope, Size and Perspective**

The “scope” question was another one that caused the group a lot of trouble, and was never resolved. Here again the email archive reveals lively discussions around whether or not registrants (and sometimes end-users) were “in scope” for our effort. Another scope issue was which industry verticals (beyond the financial-services industry) should be addressed. We discussed the difference between technical security of the DNS vs. operational security of people using domains in a high-security zone. And even the discussion of “security” vs. “trust” impacts the scope of the work.

Toward the end of the project the Board raised another scope question – whether it is within ICANN’s remit to sponsor, manage or deliver services like we were describing in our snapshot reports.

**Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- What written definition clearly distinguishes between what is inside this project, and what is outside?
- What is the level of detail and precision involved in this effort - is this a sweeping global effort (like a vision or strategy) or is this a project to produce specific outcomes (like install a system, or build a house)?

### **Goals & Objectives**

Our charter says that we were supposed to deliver a feasibility study, without much definition as to what that feasibility study should contain. A quick Internet search reveals a possible list of topics – financial, operational, technical and management feasibility.

But clearly this is very difficult to do given the lack of agreement about the problem-statement or scope.

**Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- What tangible, deliverable things do we want to see when this project is completed?
- How will this project increase revenue, reduce costs, increase quality and/or make us more nimble?
- How do we know when the project is done?

## **Critical Success Factors**

This is a forward-looking piece of my position-statement. I would very much like to see questions like these answered before ICANN kicks off a policy-making initiative. All too often we kick projects off and leave it to the team to struggle through this on their own. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don't but it's clear that policy-making people aren't necessarily the right people to address questions like these. Out in the world, project-managers, sponsors and steering committees (rather than project-team members) address these questions. We should not expect ICANN to be any different.

### **Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- What things do we need to do well in order for this project to succeed?
- What are the attributes of projects like this that have succeeded in the past?
- Describe some projects of this type that have failed.
- Do we have any doubts about our ability to do this project? Are we doomed before we start?
- What can we do to avoid those problems this time?
- Should we do this project at all, or should we kill this one right now?

## **Preferred Problem-Solving Approach**

Rather than belabor the point of this section, I'll just leave this series of questions in for the next-project chartering people. We had tasks and milestones on this project, but they were arrived at ad hoc rather than in advance.

The newly minted form (Advisory Group) that was used to organize this project further hampered answering these questions. With crystal clear hindsight, we should have insisted that this project be chartered under one of the existing organizational structures (Board, SSAC, GNSO) and been bound by the work structures that are already in place. We suffered because we were doing a brand new thing without any support or guidance as to how that new thing should be operated.

Our solution to that puzzle was to use the GNSO Working Group as a guide for how we would operate, but that didn't address the void that existed above us (no steering group, no chartering authority, no sponsor, no customer).

### **Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- Who will do what tasks, with whom, by what date?
- What are the intermediate milestone events and deliverables that we can use as checkpoints to monitor the progress of the project?
- Are they more than 1 or 2 weeks apart?
- Do we need more (or fewer) tasks and milestones to keep the project under a reasonable level of control?
- Who is responsible for monitoring progress?
- What's the mechanism for getting things back on track if the project is missing key dates?
- Do we have a project organization chart with roles and responsibilities defined for;
  - the project team members,
  - the project leader,

- the steering committee,
- any advisory groups that need to be formed?

## **Readiness**

This project also suffered from a variety of “readiness” problems that should have been addressed prior to launching the effort. Probably the biggest readiness issues were the wide dispersion of opinion as to whether a high security TLD designation is useful or needed at all, and what a “high security TLD” would look like. But there were a number of other things that needed to be addressed before the project was launched.

### **Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- How dissatisfied are people with the current state of affairs?
- How clear is the vision?
- Do people think this project needs to happen?
- Do people have the tools and training they require in order to perform their role in the project team?
- What do people in the organization need to do in order to “get ready”?
- Does the project team need some time to establish how they are going to work together, or have they succeeded as a group before?
- If they need “get ready” time and resources, are they in the budget?
- Does the project have an appropriate sponsor, who’s really committed to seeing the project through?

## **Resource Requirements**

This project struggled a bit with resources. Most of the members are volunteers (even if they work for ICANN). In the early days of the project, Andy Welch served as the support resource but it appeared (from the outside looking in) that the budget ran out at about the mid-point of the project and from that point on we were operating on a shoestring.

### **Recommendation: answer these questions before launching the next effort.**

- What do we estimate this project to take? Examples include;
  - people
  - time
  - money
  - access-to-decision-makers
  - technology
  - space
- How well do people understand the resources required to solve the problem?
- Are those resources available, or do we need to redirect from somewhere else?
- Is there wide support, and willingness to commit the resource, across the whole organization?
- Do people think the change is worth the investment?
- What are the organizational impacts (how broad, how deep)?