

Middle East Space
ICANN 63 in Barcelona, Spain
Monday 22 October 2018

Applicant Support Program for the new gTLD Subsequent Rounds
Statement

We, the Middle East (ME) community members participating in the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers' (ICANN) 63 public meeting in Barcelona, Spain, and attending the Middle East Space session on Monday 22 October 2018, discussed the Applicant Support Program (ASP) for the new gTLD subsequent procedure.

We consider the applicant support as a very important tool for underserved regions and disadvantaged communities, such as the Middle East and Adjoining Countries to have a chance to apply for new gTLD strings. We are aware of the failure of the ASP for the 2012 round that wasn't efficient and resulted in no applicants being supported.

We also understand that one of the reasons of the failure was the tough eligibility criteria* developed by the Joint Applicant Support (JAS) working group under the preconception that a more flexible criteria will lead to the ASP being gamed by applicants not in need of support.

The awareness in the ME region and among many of the communities about the opening of the 2012 new gTLD application round and the availability of the applicant support program was limited; as we note that most of the very few Middle Eastern applications came from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and of these applications most of them were submitted by international companies operating in the GCC or through expat consultants.

We believe that for the program to be accessible and of benefit to applicants in need of support, the ASP for subsequent rounds should satisfy the following requirements:

- The proposed gTLD string must serve an underserved region and/or an underserved community wherever it is located.
- Support shouldn't be limited to the elimination (or reduction) of application fees although it is of great importance, but must be extended to other kinds of support such as:
 - application writing fee, related attorney fees, and ICANN registry-level fee;
 - pre-application support, to encourage contribution of insightful experts who understand relevant regional issues and potential ramifications on the related business plan, along with provision of tools and expertise in how to evaluate and develop a business case with a marketing strategy for gTLD registry;
 - mentorship related to the managerial, legal, operational and technical aspects of running a registry. In addition making use of the expertise of the existing registries/registrars within the region to develop in-house know-how to help ensuring a viable long term business.

*<https://archive.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/draft-applicant-support-criteria-10dec11-en.pdf>

- Applicants for support from underserved regions and/or communities who do not meet the eligibility criteria of the ASP should be allowed to transfer to the normal application process, granting them a sufficient period of time that does not unreasonably delay the program, but allows them to pay the full application fee.
- In case of string contention, the application that passed the support criteria and qualified for the ASP must have the priority for the string over unsupported applications.
- Outreach and awareness are key factors for the success of the ASP. Real outreach for both the new gTLD program itself and the ASP should be taken seriously in areas where underserved people and/or communities live.
- If gaming of the ASP is proven, the concerned application should be rejected from the current round and the applicant should be denied to apply for new gTLDs for 10 years (or the 2 upcoming consecutive rounds).
- One of the indicators of the success of an Applicant Support Program is that it leads to a significant number of supported applications referred to the number of delegated applications.

That said, we believe that the underserved regions and communities deserve to have a dedicated round exclusively for them to be able to apply for and get their preferred new gTLD string. This proposal could be piloted for one round to analyze and study the outcome.

Finally we would like to highlight that the experience of 2012 round shouldn't be a reason for giving up and abandoning the efforts of supporting applicants from underserved regions and/or communities in need of assistance to apply for and operate a new gTLD.