

RrSG response to ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021 – 2025

<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/strategic-plan-2021-2025-draft-20dec18-en.pdf>

The Registrar Stakeholder Group (RrSG) was pleased to have the opportunity to review ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021 - 2025. Our comments on ICANN's mission and five strategic objectives are as follows:

Mission

The RrSG welcomes ICANN restating that it shall not act outside of its mission (b) and shall be held accountable to its mission statement. Additionally, as is stated in (c), it's important to have reiterated that ICANN is not a regulator.

1. Security

Whilst the RrSG welcomes this focus, we would be interested to know how ICANN intends on engaging with the registrars and DNS stakeholders to understand and mitigate the mentioned security threats. Engagement on key issues so far has been minimal and focused instead on a small amount of the participating community. How does ICANN intend on reaching the wider community? Another challenge for ICANN is how to create space within its rigid community structure for new participants. If this doesn't happen, the work risks being an empty mantra (like the current 'security and stability of the DNS'), or being tucked into SSAC or the staff OCTO team, and now 'owned' by the ICANN community. The RrSG would welcome the opportunity to further help with registrar outreach and education in the stakeholder group forum on this matter.

2. ICANN's Governance

Volunteer and participation fatigue is a long standing issue within the ICANN community that is not likely to be resolved any time soon and particularly impacts policy development. How does ICANN intend to accelerate policy development when there is a recognised burn-out of participants?

The "closed model" adopted by the EPDP may achieve better speed and efficiency, but it may sacrifice diversity or inclusivity. How does ICANN intend to achieve the seemingly competing goals of increasing diversity and capacity across all parts of its ecosystem and ensuring that work gets done and policies are developed in an effective and timely manner?

Furthermore, the RrSG has seen and is concerned by the use of policy development as a means to push for a singular view or outcome, regardless of the degree to which it is relevant to the policy's central mission. Progress depends upon those participating in policy development being prepared to work towards compromise and mutual gain and the bottom-up multi-stakeholder model does not operate well when time is continually wasted, or discussion halted, by polarized positions that do not represent the collective interest. The RrSG would like to see ICANN actively working towards minimising this kind of behaviour and looks forward to the work by GNSO Council on PDP 3.0 in the hope that improved processes will do the same.

3. Unique Identifier Systems

The RrSG would like to see ICANN looking outside its traditional areas of operation. Potentially, ICANN could play a useful role in coordinating (for example) unique identifiers to the IoT that would guarantee universal resolution.

Two points on this:

- ICANN's actually coming quite late to the party. Other organisations have had ambitions to perform such a role for some time. ICANN will need to earn that role, it won't just be gifted it as it was the IANA.
- Should this come about, it could potentially be a new source of revenue for the ICANN community (arising out of IoT unique identifiers in addition to domains). So, this could help to future proof ICANN's financial sources of income.

The RrSG also believes that allocation of funds to this work would be an appropriate use of auction proceeds.

4. Geopolitics

Recent changes appear to have blindsided ICANN, with a number of key decisions needing to be made hurriedly and without proper time for community discussion and consideration (the Temporary Specification being the most obvious example), so the RrSG welcomes a more proactive approach. The community can certainly be used as an early warning system, but ICANN must be prepared to listen rather than react when it is essentially too late.

5. Financials

The RrSG would like to echo our comments submitted on the FY20 budget. ICANN is surrounded by business experts who must get their financial planning right, especially when reporting growth expectations to the market. Conversely, ICANN budgeting exercises appear to be carried out in isolation, without community input on their own forecasts until decisions are essentially already made. A balance between income growth and realistic expenditure must be sought and the community must do more to limit reliance on ICANN's cash.

In conclusion, the RrSG supports the 5 overall strategic objectives for ICANN, but would particularly like to see increased engagement by ICANN with registrars, and the rest of the community, on security, geopolitics and finances, as well as better addressing the issues derived from volunteer fatigue and agenda-pushing within policy development.