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COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN ICANN ORGANIZATION AND THE CPE PROVIDER

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I. Introduction

On 17 September 2016, the Board of Directors of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN organization) directed the President and CEO or his designees to undertake a review of the “process by which ICANN [organization] interacted with the [Community Priority Evaluation] CPE Provider, both generally and specifically with respect to the CPE reports issued by the CPE Provider” as part of the New gTLD Program.¹ The Board’s action was part of the ongoing discussions regarding various aspects of the CPE process, including some issues that were identified in the Final Declaration from the Independent Review Process (IRP) proceeding initiated by Dot Registry, LLC.²

On 18 October 2016, the Board Governance Committee (BGC) discussed potential next steps regarding the review of pending Reconsideration Requests relating to the CPE process.³ The BGC determined that, in addition to reviewing the process by which ICANN organization interacted with the CPE Provider related to the CPE reports issued by the CPE Provider (Scope 1), the review would also include: (i) an evaluation of whether the CPE criteria were applied consistently throughout each CPE report (Scope 2); and (ii) a compilation of the reference material relied upon by the CPE Provider to the extent such reference material exists for the evaluations which are the subject of pending Reconsideration Requests (Scope 3).⁴ Scopes 1, 2, and 3 are collectively referred to as the CPE Process Review. FTI Consulting, Inc.’s (FTI) Global Risk and Investigations Practice and Technology Practice were retained by Jones Day on behalf of its client ICANN organization in order to conduct the CPE Process Review.

On 26 April 2017, Chris Disspain, the Chair of the BGC, provided additional information about the scope and status of the CPE Process Review.⁵ Among other things, he

¹ <https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/resolutions-2016-09-17-en#1.a>.

² *Id.*

³ <https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/minutes-bgc-2016-10-18-en>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/disspain-letter-review-new-gtld-cpe-process-26apr17-en.pdf>.

identified eight Reconsideration Requests that would be on hold until the CPE Process Review was completed.⁶ On 2 June 2017, ICANN organization issued a status update.⁷ ICANN organization informed the community that the CPE Process Review was being conducted on two parallel tracks by FTI. The first track focused on gathering information and materials from ICANN organization, including interviewing relevant ICANN organization personnel and document collection. This work was completed in early March 2017. The second track focused on gathering information and materials from the CPE Provider, including interviewing relevant personnel. This work was still ongoing at the time ICANN issued the 2 June 2017 status update.

On 1 September 2017, ICANN organization issued a second update, advising that the interview process of the CPE Provider's personnel that were involved in CPEs had been completed.⁸ The update further informed that FTI was working with the CPE Provider to obtain the CPE Provider's communications and working papers, including the reference material cited in the CPE reports prepared by the CPE Provider for the evaluations that are the subject of pending Reconsideration Requests. On 4 October 2017, FTI completed its investigative process relating to the second track.

This report addresses Scope 1 of the CPE Process Review and specifically details FTI's evaluation and findings regarding ICANN organization's interactions with the CPE Provider with respect to the CPE reports issued by the CPE Provider as part of the New gTLD Program.

⁶ See *id.* The eight Reconsideration Requests that the BGC placed on hold pending completion of the CPE Process Review are: 14-30 (.LLC) (withdrawn on 7 December 2017, see <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/dotregistry-llc-withdrawal-redacted-07dec17-en.pdf>), 14-32 (.INC) (withdrawn on 11 December 2017, see <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/reconsideration-14-32-dotregistry-request-redacted-11dec17-en.pdf>), 14-33 (.LLP), 16-3 (.GAY), 16-5 (.MUSIC), 16-8 (.CPA), 16-11 (.HOTEL), and 16-12 (.MERCK).

⁷ <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/process-review-update-02jun17-en.pdf>.

⁸ <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/process//newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/podcast-qa-1-review-update-01sep17-en.pdf>.

II. Executive Summary

FTI concludes that there is no evidence that ICANN organization had any undue influence on the CPE Provider with respect to the CPE reports issued by the CPE Provider or engaged in any impropriety in the CPE process. This conclusion is based upon FTI's review of the written communications and documents described in Section III below and FTI's interviews with relevant personnel. While FTI understands that many communications between ICANN organization and the CPE Provider were verbal and not memorialized in writing, and thus FTI was not able to evaluate them, FTI observed nothing during its investigation and analysis that would indicate that any verbal communications amounted to undue influence or impropriety by ICANN organization.

III. Methodology

FTI followed the international investigative methodology, which is a methodology codified by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), the largest and most prestigious anti-fraud organization globally and which grants certification to members who meet the ACFE's standards of professionalism.⁹ This methodology is used by both law enforcement and private investigative companies worldwide. This methodology begins with the formation of an investigative plan which identifies documentation, communications, individuals and entities that may be potentially relevant to the investigation. The next step involves the collection and review of all potentially relevant materials and documentation. Then, investigators interview individuals who, based upon the preceding review of relevant documents, may have potentially relevant information. Investigators then analyze all the information collected to arrive at their conclusions.

Here, FTI did the following:

- Reviewed publicly available documents pertaining to CPE, including:

⁹ www.acfe.com. FTI's investigative team, which includes published authors and frequent speakers on investigative best practices, holds this certification.

1. New gTLD Applicant Guidebook (the entire Applicant Guidebook with particular attention to Module 4.2): <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agb>;
2. CPE page: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe>;
3. CPE Panel Process Document: <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/panel-process-07aug14-en.pdf>;
4. CPE Guidelines document: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/guidelines-27sep13-en.pdf>;
5. Updated CPE FAQs: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/faqs-10sep14-en.pdf>;
6. Contract and SOW between ICANN organization and the CPE Provider, available at: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe>;
7. CPE results and reports: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe#invitations>;
8. Preparing Evaluators for the New gTLD Application Process: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/blog/preparing-evaluators-22nov11-en>;
9. New gTLDs: Call for Applicant Evaluation Panel Expressions of Interest: <https://www.icann.org/news/announcement-2009-02-25-en>;
10. Evaluation Panels: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/program-status/evaluation-panels>;
11. Evaluation Panels Selection Process: <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/about/evaluation-panels-selection-process>;
12. Application Comments: <https://gtldcomment.icann.org/applicationcomment/viewcomments>;
13. External media: news articles on ICANN organization in general as well as the CPE process in particular;
14. BGC's comments on Recent Reconsideration Request: <https://www.icann.org/news/blog/bgc-s-comments-on-recent-reconsideration-request>;
15. Relevant Reconsideration Requests: <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/accountability/reconsideration-en>;

16. CPE Archive Resources:
<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe#archive-resources>;
17. Relevant Independent Review Process Documents:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/accountability/irp-en>;
18. New gTLD Program Implementation Review regarding CPE, section 4.1:
<https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/program-review-29jan16-en.pdf>;
19. Community Priority Evaluation Process Review Update:
<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/process-review-update-02jun17-en.pdf>;
20. Community Priority Evaluation>Timeline:
<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/timeline-10sep14-en.pdf>;
21. Community Priority Evaluation Teleconference – 10 September 2013, Additional Questions & Answers:
<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/podcast-qa-10sep13-en.pdf>;
22. Community Priority Evaluation Process Review Update:
<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/process//newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/podcast-qa-1-review-update-01sep17-en.pdf>;
23. Board Governance Committee:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/governance-committee-2014-03-21-en>;
24. ICANN Bylaws:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/governance/bylaws-en>;
25. Relevant Correspondence related to CPE:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/correspondence>;
26. Board Resolution 2016.09.17.01 and Rationale for Resolution:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/resolutions-2016-09-17-en>;
27. Minutes of 17 September 2016 Board Meeting:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/minutes-2016-09-17-en>;
28. BGC Minutes of the 18 October 2016 Meeting:
<https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/minutes-bgc-2016-10-18-en>;

29. Letter from Chris Disspain to All Concerned Parties, dated 17 April 2016: <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/disspain-letter-review-new-gtld-cpe-process-26apr17-en.pdf>; and
 30. New gTLD Program Implementation Review Report: <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/program-review-29jan16-en.pdf>; and
 31. Case 15-00110, In a matter of an Own Motion Investigation by the ICANN Ombudsman: <https://omblog.icann.org/index.html%3Fm=201510.html>.
- Requested, received, and reviewed the following from ICANN organization:
 1. Internal emails among relevant ICANN organization personnel relating to the CPE process and evaluations (including email attachments); and
 2. External emails between relevant ICANN organization personnel and relevant CPE Provider personnel relating to the CPE process and evaluations (including email attachments).
 - Requested the following from the CPE Provider:
 1. Internal emails among relevant CPE Provider personnel, including evaluators, relating to the CPE process and evaluations (including email attachments);
 2. External emails between relevant CPE Provider personnel and relevant ICANN organization personnel related to the CPE process and evaluations (including email attachments); and
 3. The CPE Provider's internal documents pertaining to the CPE process and evaluations, including working papers, draft reports, notes, and spreadsheets.

FTI did not receive documents from the CPE Provider in response to Items 1 or 2. FTI did receive and reviewed documents from ICANN organization that were responsive to the materials FTI requested from the CPE Provider in Item 2 (i.e., emails between relevant CPE Provider personnel and relevant ICANN organization personnel related to the CPE process and evaluations (including email attachments)). FTI received and reviewed documentation produced by the CPE Provider in response to Item 3.

- Interviewed relevant ICANN organization personnel

- Interviewed relevant CPE Provider personnel
- Compared the information obtained from both ICANN organization and the CPE Provider.

IV. Background on CPE

CPE is a contention resolution mechanism available to applicants that self-designated their applications as community applications.¹⁰ CPE is defined in Module 4.2 of the Applicant Guidebook, and allows a community-based application to undergo an evaluation against the criteria as defined in section 4.2.3 of the Applicant Guidebook, to determine if the application warrants the minimum score of 14 points (out of a maximum of 16 points) to earn priority and thus prevail over other applications in the contention set.¹¹ CPE will occur only if a community-based applicant selects to undergo CPE for its relevant application and after all applications in the contention set have completed all previous stages of the new gTLD evaluation process. CPE is performed by an independent provider (CPE Provider).¹²

As noted, the standards governing CPE are set forth in Module 4.2 of the Applicant Guidebook.¹³ In addition, the CPE Provider published the CPE Panel Process Document, explaining that the CPE Provider was selected to implement the Applicant Guidebook's CPE provisions.¹⁴ The CPE Provider also published supplementary guidelines (CPE Guidelines) that provided more detailed scoring guidance, including scoring rubrics, definitions of key terms, and specific questions to be scored.¹⁵ The CPE Provider personnel interviewed by FTI stated that the CPE Guidelines were intended to increase transparency, fairness, and predictability around the assessment process.

¹⁰ See Applicant Guidebook, Module 4.2 at Pg. 4-7 (<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agg/string-contention-procedures-04jun12-en.pdf>). See also <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe>.

¹¹ See *id.* at Module 4.2 at Pg. 4-7 (<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agg/string-contention-procedures-04jun12-en.pdf>).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agg>.

¹⁴ See CPE Panel Process Document (<http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/panel-process-07aug14-en.pdf>).

¹⁵ See CPE Guidelines (<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/guidelines-27sep13-en.pdf>).

Based upon the materials reviewed and interviews with ICANN organization and CPE Provider personnel, FTI learned that each evaluation began with a notice of commencement from ICANN organization to the CPE Provider via email. As part of the notice of commencement, ICANN organization identified the materials in scope, which included: application questions 1-30a, application comments, correspondence, objection outcomes, and outside research (as necessary). ICANN organization delivered to the CPE Provider the public comments available at the time of commencement of the CPE process. The CPE Provider was responsible for gathering the application materials, including letters of support and correspondence, from the public ICANN organization website.¹⁶

The CPE Provider personnel responsible for CPE consisted of a core team, a Project Director, a Project Coordinator, and independent evaluators. Before the CPE Provider commenced CPE, all evaluators, including members of the core team, confirmed that no conflicts of interest existed. In addition, all evaluators underwent regular training to ensure full understanding of all CPE requirements as listed in the Applicant Guidebook, as well as to ensure consistent judgment. This process included a pilot training process, which was followed by regular training sessions to ensure that all evaluators had the same understanding of the evaluation process and procedures.¹⁷

Two independent evaluators were assigned to each evaluation. The evaluators worked independently to assess and score the application in accordance with the Applicant Guidebook and CPE Guidelines. According to the CPE Provider interviewees, each evaluator separately presented his/her findings in a database and then discussed his/her findings with the Project Coordinator. Then, the Project Coordinator created a spreadsheet that included sections detailing the evaluators' conclusions on each criterion and sub-criterion. The core team then met to review and discuss the evaluators' work and scores. Following internal deliberations among the core team, the initial evaluation results were documented in the spreadsheet. The interviewees stated

¹⁶ See CPE Panel Process Document (<http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/panel-process-07aug14-en.pdf>).

¹⁷ *Id.*

that, at times, the evaluators came to different conclusions on a particular score or issue. In these circumstances, the core team evaluated each evaluator's work and then referred to the Applicant Guidebook and CPE Guidelines in order to reach a conclusion as to scoring. Consistent with the CPE Panel Process Document, before the core team reached a conclusion, an evaluator may be asked to conduct additional research to answer questions that arose during the review.¹⁸ The core team would then deliberate and come up with a consensus as to scoring. FTI interviewed both ICANN organization and CPE Provider personnel about the CPE process and interviewees from both organizations stated that ICANN organization played no role in whether or not the CPE Provider conducted research or accessed reference material in any of the evaluations. That ICANN organization was not involved in the CPE Provider's research process was confirmed by FTI's review of relevant email communications (including attachments) provided by ICANN organization, inasmuch as FTI observed no instance where ICANN organization suggested that the CPE Provider undertake (or not undertake) research. Instead, research was conducted at the discretion of the CPE Provider.¹⁹

ICANN organization had no role in the evaluation process and no role in writing the initial draft CPE report. Once the CPE Provider completed an initial draft CPE report, the CPE Provider would send the draft report to ICANN organization. ICANN organization provided feedback to the CPE Provider in the form of comments exchanged via email or written on draft CPE reports as well as verbal comments during conference calls.

V. Analysis

FTI undertook its analysis after carefully studying the materials described above and evaluating the substance of the interviews conducted. The materials and interviews provided FTI with a solid understanding of CPE. The interviews in particular provided FTI with an understanding of the mechanics of the CPE process as well as the roles

¹⁸ CPE Panel Process Document (<http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicant/cpe/panel-process-07aug14-en.pdf>).

¹⁹ See Applicant Guidebook §4.2.3 at 4-9 ("The panel may also perform independent research, if deemed necessary to reach informed scoring decisions.").

undertaken both separately and together by ICANN organization personnel and the CPE Provider during the process.

FTI proceeded with its investigation in four parts, which are separately detailed below: (i) analysis of email communications among relevant ICANN organization personnel and between relevant ICANN organization personnel and the CPE Provider (including email attachments); (ii) interviews of relevant ICANN organization personnel; (iii) interviews of relevant CPE Provider personnel; and (iv) analysis of draft CPE reports.

A. ICANN Organization's Email Communications (Including Attachments) Did Not Show Any Undue Influence Or Impropriety By ICANN Organization.

In an effort to ensure the comprehensive collection of relevant materials, FTI provided ICANN organization with a list of search terms and requested that ICANN organization deliver to FTI all email (including attachments) from relevant ICANN organization personnel that "hit" on a search term. The search terms were designed to be over-inclusive, meaning that FTI anticipated that many of the documents that resulted from the search would not be pertinent to FTI's investigation. In FTI's experience, it is a best practice to begin with a broader collection and then refine the search for relevant materials as the investigation progresses. As a result, the search terms were quite broad and included the names of ICANN organization and CPE Provider personnel who were involved in the CPE process. The search terms also included other key words that are commonly used in the CPE process, as identified by a review of the Applicant Guidebook and other materials on the ICANN website. FTI's Technology Practice worked with ICANN organization to ensure that the materials were collected in a forensically sound manner. In total, ICANN organization provided FTI with 100,701 emails, including attachments, in native format. The time period covered by the emails received dated from 2012 to March 2017.

An initial review of emails produced to FTI confirmed FTI's expectation that the initial search terms were overbroad and returned a large number of emails that were not relevant to FTI's investigation. As a result, FTI performed a targeted key word search to

identify emails pertinent to the CPE process and reduce the time and cost of examining irrelevant or repetitive documents. FTI developed and tested these additional terms using FTI Technology's Ringtail eDiscovery platform, which employs conceptual analysis, duplicate detection, and interactive visualizations to assist in improving search results by grouping documents with similar content and highlighting those that are more likely to be relevant.

Based on FTI's review of email communications provided by ICANN organization, FTI found no evidence that ICANN organization had any undue influence on the CPE reports or engaged in any impropriety in the CPE process. FTI found that the vast majority of the emails were administrative in nature and did not concern the substance or the content of the CPE results. Of the small number of emails that did discuss substance, none suggested that ICANN acted improperly in the process.

1. The Vast Majority of the Communications Were Administrative in Nature.

The email communications that FTI reviewed and which were provided by ICANN organization were largely administrative in nature, meaning that they concerned the scheduling of telephone calls, CPE Provider staffing, timelines for completion, invoicing, and other similar logistical issues. Although FTI was not able to review the CPE Provider's internal emails relating to this work, as indicated above, FTI did interview relevant CPE Provider personnel, and each confirmed that any internal email communications largely addressed administrative tasks.

2. The Email Communications that Addressed Substance did not Evidence any Undue Influence or Impropriety by ICANN Organization.

Of the email communications reviewed by FTI, only a small number discussed the substance of the CPE process and specific evaluations. These emails generally fell into three categories. First, ICANN organization's emails with the CPE Provider reflected questions or suggestions made to clarify certain language reflected in the CPE Provider's draft reports. In these communications, however, FTI observed no instances

where ICANN organization recommended, suggested, or otherwise interjected its own views on what specific conclusion should be reached. Instead, ICANN organization personnel asked the CPE Provider to clarify language contained in draft CPE reports in an effort to avoid misleading or ambiguous wording. In this regard, ICANN organization's correspondence to the CPE Provider largely comprised suggestions on a particular word to be used to capture a concept clearly. FTI observed no instances where ICANN dictated or sought to require the CPE Provider to use specific wording or make specific scoring decisions.

Second, ICANN organization posed questions to the CPE Provider that reflected ICANN organization's efforts to understand how the CPE Provider came to its conclusions on a specific evaluation. Based on a plain reading, ICANN organization's questions were clearly intended to ensure that the CPE Provider had engaged in a robust discussion on each CPE criterion in the CPE report.

The third category comprised emails from the CPE Provider inquiring as to the scope of Clarifying Questions and specifically whether a proposed Clarifying Question was permissible under applicable guidelines.²⁰

Across all three categories, FTI observed instances where the CPE Provider and ICANN organization engaged in a discussion about using the correct word to capture the CPE Provider's reasoning. ICANN organization also advised the CPE Provider that the CPE Provider's conclusions, as stated in draft reports, at times were not supported by sufficient reasoning, and suggested that additional explanation was needed. However, ICANN organization did not suggest that the CPE Provider make changes in final scoring or adjust the rationale set forth in the CPE report.

Throughout its review, FTI observed instances where ICANN organization and the CPE Provider agreed to discuss various issues telephonically. Emails would then follow

²⁰ The CPE Provider may, at its discretion, provide a clarifying question (CQ) to be issued via ICANN organization to the applicant to clarify statements in the application materials and/or to inform the applicant that letter(s) of support could not be verified. See CPE Panel Process Document (<https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/cpe/panel-process-07aug14-en.pdf>).

these telephone calls and note that the latest drafts reflected the telephone discussions that had occurred. FTI reviewed the drafts as noted in these communications and compared them with prior versions of the draft reports that were exchanged and confirmed that there was no evidence of undue influence or impropriety by ICANN organization, as described further below.

Ultimately, the vast majority of ICANN organization's emails were administrative in nature. FTI found no email communications that indicated that ICANN organization had any undue influence on the CPE Provider or engaged in any impropriety in the CPE Process.

B. Interviews With ICANN Organization Personnel Confirmed That There Was No Undue Influence Or Impropriety By ICANN Organization.

In March 2017, FTI met with several ICANN organization employees in order to learn more about their interactions with the CPE Provider. FTI interviewed the following individuals who interacted with the CPE Provider over time regarding CPE.

- Chris Bare
- Steve Chan
- Jared Erwin
- Cristina Flores
- Russell Weinstein
- Christine Willett

Each of the ICANN organization personnel that FTI interviewed confirmed that the interactions between ICANN organization and the CPE Provider took place via email (including attachments which were primarily comprised of draft reports with comments in red line form) and conference calls.

The interviewees explained that the initial draft reports received from the CPE Provider (particularly for the first four reports) were not particularly detailed, and, as a result,

ICANN organization asked the CPE Provider a lot of “why” questions to ensure that the CPE Provider’s rationale was sufficiently conveyed. The interviewees stated that they emphasized to the CPE Provider the importance of remaining transparent and accountable to the community in the CPE reports. Based on a plain reading of ICANN organization’s comments to draft CPE reports, none of ICANN organization’s comments were mandatory, meaning that ICANN organization never dictated that the CPE Provider take a specific approach. FTI observed no instances where ICANN organization endeavored to change the scoring or outcome of any CPE. This was confirmed by both ICANN organization personnel and CPE Provider personnel in FTI’s interviews. If changes were made in response to ICANN organization’s comments, they usually took the form of the CPE Provider providing additional information to explain its scoring decisions and conclusions.

The CPE reports became more detailed over time. The ICANN organization personnel who were interviewed noted that, over time, the majority of communications took place via weekly conference calls. Most of ICANN organization’s interaction with the CPE Provider consisted of asking for supporting citations to the CPE Provider’s research or that more precise wording be used. ICANN organization personnel noted that they observed robust debate among CPE Provider personnel concerning various criteria, but that the CPE Provider strictly evaluated the applications against the criteria outlined in the Applicant Guidebook and the CPE Guidelines. The interviewees confirmed that ICANN organization never questioned or sought to alter the CPE Provider’s conclusions.

C. Interviews With CPE Provider Personnel Confirmed That There Was No Undue Influence Or Impropriety By ICANN Organization.

FTI asked to interview relevant CPE Provider personnel involved in the CPE process. The CPE Provider stated that only two CPE Provider staff members remained. In June 2017, FTI interviewed the two remaining staff members, who were members of the core team for all CPEs that were conducted. During the interview, in addition to understanding the CPE process described above, see section IV above, FTI

endeavored to understand the interactions between the CPE Provider and ICANN organization.

The interviewees confirmed that ICANN organization was not involved in scoring the criteria or the drafting of the initial reports, but rather the CPE Provider independently scored each criterion. The interviewees stated that they were strict constructionists and used the Applicant Guidebook as their “bible”. Further, the CPE Provider stated that it relied first and foremost on material provided by the applicant. The CPE Provider informed FTI that it only accessed reference material when the evaluators or core team decided that research was needed to address questions that arose during the review.

The CPE Provider also stated that ICANN organization provided guidance as to whether or not a particular report sufficiently detailed the CPE Provider’s reasoning. The CPE Provider stated that it never changed the scoring or the results based on ICANN organization’s comments. The only action the CPE Provider took in response to ICANN organization’s comments was to revise the manner in which its analysis and conclusions were presented (generally in the form of changing a word or adding additional explanation). The CPE Provider stated that it also received guidance from ICANN organization with respect to whether a proposed Clarifying Question was permissible under applicable guidelines.

In short, the CPE Provider confirmed that ICANN organization did not impact the CPE Provider’s scoring decisions.

D. FTI’s Review Of Draft CPE Reports Confirmed That There Was No Undue Influence Or Impropriety By ICANN Organization.

FTI requested and received from the CPE Provider all draft CPE reports, including any drafts that reflected feedback from ICANN organization. ICANN organization provided feedback in redline form. Some draft reports had very few or no comments, while others had up to 20 comments. In some drafts, the comments were just numbered and not attributed to a particular person. As such, at times it was difficult to discern which

comments were made by ICANN organization versus the CPE Provider.²¹ Of the comments that FTI can affirmatively attribute to ICANN organization, all related to word choice, style and grammar, or requests to provide examples to further explain the CPE Provider's conclusions. This is consistent with the information provided by ICANN organization and the CPE Provider during their interviews and in the email communications provided by ICANN organization.

For example, FTI observed comments from ICANN organization personnel suggesting that the CPE Provider include more detailed explanation or explicitly cite resources for statements that did not appear to have sufficient factual or evidentiary support. In other instances, the draft reports reflected an exchange between ICANN organization and the CPE Provider in response to ICANN organization's questions regarding the meaning the CPE Provider intended to convey. It is clear from the exchanges that ICANN organization was not advocating for a particular score or conclusion, but rather commenting on the clarity of reasoning behind assigning one score or another.

In general, it was not uncommon for the CPE Provider to make revisions in response to ICANN organization's comments. As noted above, these revisions generally took the form of additional information to add further detail to the stated reasoning. However, none of these revisions affected the scoring or results. At other times, the CPE Provider did not make any revisions in response to ICANN organization's comments.

Overall, ICANN organization's comments generally were not substantive, but rather reflected ICANN organization's suggestion that a revision could make the CPE report clearer. Based on FTI's investigation, there is no evidence that ICANN organization ever suggested that the CPE Provider change its rationale, nor did ICANN organization dictate the scoring or CPE results.

²¹ Some comments to draft CPE reports followed verbal conversations between CPE Provider staff and ICANN organization; the CPE Provider stated that it did not possess notes documenting these conversations.

VI. Conclusion

Following a careful and comprehensive investigation, which included several interviews and an extensive review of available documentary materials, FTI found no evidence that ICANN organization attempted to influence the evaluation process, scoring or conclusions reached by the CPE Provider. As such, FTI concludes that there is no evidence that ICANN organization had any undue influence on the CPE Provider or engaged in any impropriety in the CPE process.