Status Update: New gTLD Program: Next Round

New gTLD Program Team

Global Domains and Strategy (GDS)
20 February 2024

ICANN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

This is ICANN org's status report on the New gTLD Program: Next Round. In its 16 March 2023 resolution adopting recommendations from the Final Report, the Board directed ICANN org to "publish a report on the progress and status of implementation until the opening of the next application round of the New gTLD Program, at least two weeks prior to the start of each ICANN Public Meeting, starting with the ICANN77 Public Meeting."[1] Following the publication of the Implementation Plan for the next round of the New gTLD Program in July 2023, regular updates on the plan will be included prior to every ICANN Public Meeting. The previous status report can be found here, as part of the Policy Research and Stakeholder Programs (PRSP) Pre-ICANN78 Briefing.

As outlined in our recent blog post, ICANN org is in the process of putting into practice a new governance model to support the implementation of the New gTLD Program: Next Round. This will result in further detailed reporting and tracking of progress through a new set of program management tools that have been developed. ICANN org is currently in the process of rolling out these tools with an expected completion date by ICANN79. Therefore, we expect that the update prior to ICANN80 will contain further details and information on the progress of implementation.

In the process of putting the new governance model into place, we also further assessed the details of the implementation plan as published in July 2023. This effort has resulted in a further evolution mainly of the primary projects that were originally identified[2] focusing on the following topics:

- Applicant Support Program
- Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program
- Next Round Fee Structure
- TLD Application Management (This project integrates several initiatives, and will address application submission and processing, evaluation, contention resolution, and objections.)
- Contracting
- Post Contracting and Operations
- Engagement, Communications, and Next Round Website

A number of these projects are well under way. Further updates on the status of implementation of the Applicant Support Program and the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program can be found further below. Other projects are still in the process of being formulated, and we anticipate being able to share further details on these in the near future.

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[1] Please note that the 16 March 2023 Resolution is not the latest Resolution of the Board. The latest ICANN Board Resolution of 26 October 2023 can be found here. This Resolution has resulted in an updated scorecard.

[2] The list of primary projects has changed as follows: Project 1 - gTLD Program Foundations scope of work has been reassigned to the overall governance model or the TLD Application Management Project to drive increased efficiency of program operations. The Next Round Fee Structure project was created to evaluate the fee structures across the program, while Engagement, Communications and Website were combined into a new project to provide additional resourcing for the critical work in these areas. Note that further updates may be made to account for additional work that may be directed to the program by the ICANN Board such as, for example, to address name collisions.

As you are aware, several dependencies were also highlighted in the program implementation plan[3]. Some of these have been addressed in the meantime, such as Board acceptance of several of the pending SubPro Final Report recommendations with clarifying statements from the GNSO Council as well as a Board decision on Closed Generics. However, there are still several items that will need to be resolved and subsequently implemented before the Applicant Guidebook can be published and program development can be completed[4]. Significant work is underway by the ICANN Board as well as the ICANN community to make sure these dependencies are addressed in a timely manner, as is also reflected in the different sessions that are planned for ICANN79. These dependencies will be cataloged and tracked within the program schedule to provide additional visibility to how dependencies relate to Next Round program deliverables and timelines.

We sincerely appreciate everyone's efforts and support in delivering this program. Several members of the team will be in San Juan to help support the various discussions. Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of the New gTLD Program: Next Round team members. We look forward to engaging with the community and hope to see many of you either in person or virtually at ICANN79.

Marika Konings
VP, New gTLD Program Lead

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[3] See pages 11-13 at
https://newgtlds.icann.org/sites/default/files/new-gtld-next-round-implementation-plan-31jul23-en.pdf.
[4] As outlined here, Program Development "can partially be completed in parallel, it can only be finalized upon completion of the AGB. The work that cannot be completed in parallel–such as developing internal procedures and finalizing any systems or tools–is estimated to conclude one year after the Policy Implementation work stream has been completed. That is, completion of Program Development work hinges on the completion of the AGB".

2 New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Update

This section provides regular reporting from ICANN org to the community on the implementation of the New gTLD Program: Next Round (Next Round), as requested by the ICANN Board in its 16 March 2023 resolution. Information includes updates on the timeline, scope, and budget for implementation of the Next Round.

In addition to overall program progress, this section provides detailed updates on the four implementation streams[5] as well as the Applicant Support Program and the Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program, which are expected to be launched by Q4 2024.

Overall program progress since ICANN78

- Board resolution on additional pending recommendations passed on 26 October 2023, reducing the number of remaining recommendations from 13 to 0.
- Implementation of new governance model and appointment of new leadership team (see blog post).
- Development of a program delivery methodology and tools to enable planning and management of program scope, schedule, resources, budgets, issues, risks, and decisions at the project and program level.
- Initiated development of detailed plans for all workstreams, projects and supporting functions utilizing the program delivery methodology and tools. These detailed plans will be consolidated to a detailed program plan, including cross-functional dependencies, resource needs, and an integrated timeline.
- Conducted a planning workshop with the leads and project managers from every workstream, project, and function to support the planning for new projects and identify cross-functional dependencies and resource needs.
- Held several internal workshops respectively for Applicant Guidebook drafting and process developments.
- Board initiated the Community Consultation on Public Interest Commitments (PICs)/Registry Voluntary Commitments (RVCs), by reaching out to the SO/AC chairs.[6]
- On 1 December 2023 the Board was informed that the facilitated Dialogue on Closed Generics had concluded. On 22 January 2024, the Board informed the chairs of the participating groups in the facilitated dialogue that "the Board has considered the GAC Advice and has determined that closed generic gTLD applications will not be permitted until such time as there is an approved methodology and criteria to evaluate whether or not a proposed closed domain is in the public interest."

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[5] For more details about the structure of the New gTLD Program: Next Round, please consult the Implementation Plan.
[6] See 7 December 2023 Board communication for all all fifteen outreach letters.

2.1 Overview of the Four Work Streams

2.1.1   Work Stream 1: Policy Implementation

What is it?

Policy implementation is a catch-all term for the drafting of an updated Applicant Guidebook (AGB) based on the Board-approved outputs from the [Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process](#). ICANN org leads this process in cooperation with the Implementation Review Team (IRT).

The target date for submitting the complete AGB for Public Comment is 31 May 2025; the project is on track. For more information, please refer to the [SubPro IRT workspace](#).

What has occurred since ICANN78?

Since ICANN78, discussions around the [draft policy language](#) for the following topics[7] were initiated with the IRT:

- Topic 3 | Applications Assessed in Rounds
- Topic 6 | Registry Service Provider Pre-Evaluation
- Topic 17 | Applicant Support
- Topic 19 | Application Queuing
- Topic 20 | Application Change Requests
- Topic 28 | Role of Application Comment
- Topic 30 | GAC Consensus Advice and GAC Early Warning
- Topic 31 | Objections
- Topic 36 | Base Registry Agreement
- Topic 39 | Registry System Testing
- Root Zone Label Generation Rules module

In addition, three sub-tracks were launched:
- [Applicant Support Program](#)
- [Registry Service Provider Pre-Evaluation](#)
- [Registry System Testing](#)

An initial Public Comment proceeding was [launched](#) on 1 February 2024 and will stay open through 19 March 2024. It should be noted that more Public Comment proceedings on the proposed language of the remaining sections of the Next Round AGB will be held in the upcoming months, and all proposed language for the AGB will go through a final round of Public Comment prior to the launch of the Next Round. For more information on this proceeding, please refer to the announcement.

Moreover, following a [webinar](#) held on 18 December 2023, a community consultation on Public Interest Commitments/Registry Voluntary Commitments (PICs/RVCs) was launched with the objective to ensure that the framework for implementing the relevant Final Report recommendations, adopted by the ICANN Board on [26 October 2023](#) remains consistent with

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[7] For more information on these and all other relevant topics, please consult the [SubPro Final Report](#).

the ICANN Bylaws. Community groups are invited to submit their feedback through this form no later than 31 March 2024. More information on this community consultation can be found in this blog published 21 November 2023.

Finally, in a letter dated 22 January 2024, the ICANN Board informed the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) and the Generic Names Support Organization (GNSO) Council of its decision that "closed-generic TLD applications will not be permitted until such time as there is an approved methodology and criteria to evaluate whether or not a proposed closed domain is in the public interest."

The IRT will meet three times onsite at ICANN79. In addition, a session on the PICs/RVCs Community Consultation will be held. Please see 'What To Expect at ICANN79' below for details.

What are the remaining dependencies for WS1?

The completion of the Applicant Guidebook is contingent upon several dependencies, as noted in the Implementation Plan:

- GNSO Council issuance of supplemental recommendations, if any, with regard to those outputs that the Board did not adopt[8] and the Board's subsequent consideration of those recommendations.
- Completion and/or Board consideration of the following dependencies:
  - o Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) Expedited Policy Development Process (PDP) Phase 1 and Phase 2 Final Reports
  - o Name Collision Analysis Project (NCAP) Study 2
- Board action on all outstanding Advice pertaining to the Next Round.[9]

2.1.2   Work Stream 2: Program Design

What is it?

Program Design focuses on the development of business rules ICANN will need to apply to deliver the program in accordance with the approved policy recommendations and the AGB (as the outcome of Work Stream 1 policy implementation). The team will be deployed across the relevant projects that make up the program to provide input to the development of the AGB, document business rules and requirements to support systems development (Work Stream 3), and ICANN's preparations for operating the program (Work Stream 4). For details please refer to the Implementation Plan.

What has occurred since ICANN78?

- Installed new leadership and resources for Work Stream 2.
- Established methodology to develop and document business rules.
- Created inventory and development schedule of program processes.

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[8] Please see September 2023 Scorecard and October 2023 Scorecard.
[9] See Implementation Plan for more details.

- Collaborated with several key internal functions to establish alignment on overall approach to program design.
- Developed requirements documents for several baseline shared activities across Registry Service Provider, Applicant Support Program (ASP), and new gTLD applications to enable the start of systems development.
- Completed work on high-level business rules for ASP.

2.1.3   Work Stream 3: Infrastructure Development

What is it?

Infrastructure Development at ICANN org involves crafting essential systems and tools to efficiently deliver the required services for supporting the Next Round. For details please refer to the Implementation Plan.

What has occurred since ICANN78?

- Development of an integrated governance approach between the new program leadership, technical services, and E&IT leads to ensure alignment of program oversight and controls across functional and technical aspects of the program.
- Work on RSP Evaluation system design started and is on track.
- Work on Registry System Testing (RST) system design started and is on track.
- Work on operational dependency projects started and is on track.
- Work on strategic dependency projects started and is on track.

2.1.4   Work Stream 4: Operationalization

What is it?

Operationalization involves the design of business processes, the development of procedures, and the hiring and training of staff to prepare ICANN org for the opening and operation of the Next Round. This work stream works closely with Work Stream 2 (Program Design) and Work Stream 3 (Infrastructure) and focuses on making the program functional and efficient.

A good part of the effort in this work stream, such as developing procedures, hiring resources, training staff and vendors, and conducting operational program tests, will occur later in the implementation, once processes and systems have been developed. Please refer to the Implementation Plan for more details.

What has occurred since ICANN78?

- Solidified leadership and resources for Work Stream 4.
- Established methodology to design and document processes, based on business rules developed by Work Stream 2.
- Collaborated with several key internal functions to establish alignment on overall approach to operationalization of the program.
- Supported the design of the Registry Service Provider (RSP) Evaluation system from an operational perspective.

3 Applicant Support Program

Next Round-Related Sessions ICANN79 Prep Week
New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update
Wednesday, 21 February 2024
14:00-15:30 AST (18:00-19:30 UTC)
https://sched.co/1ZUzx

What is it?

The Applicant Support Program (ASP) was initially developed for the 2012 round of the New gTLD Program. The SubPro Operational Design Assessment (ODA) stated that the goal of the ASP is to provide financial and non-financial assistance to gTLD applicants that require and qualify for support. The GNSO Guidance Process (GGP) for ASP, initiated in August 2022, was tasked with, among other things, articulating what constitutes success for the ASP–including the method for resource allocation. The GGP for ASP also proposed data and metrics for success to inform the post-program evaluation.

As noted in the SubPro ODA, the ASP application window is separate from the New gTLD Program application window, occurring before the opening of the New gTLD Program: Next Round application submission period. The ASP application requires submission of specific information related to financial need, financial stability, and eligible entity status. Applicants will be able to apply for support approximately 18 months before the New gTLD Program application submission period opens (SubPro ODA: 331). Based upon the current timeline, this would mean the ASP application submission period commences in Q4 2024.

ASP applications will undergo General Business Due Diligence evaluation before proceeding to an independent third party managed Support Applicant Review Panel (SARP) to further evaluate ASP applications. Applicants seeking support will be notified whether they qualify prior to the New gTLD Program application submission period opening in order to give a sufficient period of notice. Please refer to the New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Plan for more detailed information.

Applicants that qualify for support will be eligible for reduced gTLD application evaluation fees; have access to a list of pro bono service providers to assist with the development of applications and related content including registry policies; and a bid credit or multiplier if the supported applicant participates in an ICANN Auction of Last Resort (SubPro ODA: 331).

On expanding the scope of financial support to applicants (Recommendation 17.2), the Board resolved the following:

> The Board reiterates its previous concerns about Recommendation 17.2, which calls for ICANN to "expand the scope of financial support provided to Applicant Support Program beneficiaries beyond the application fee to also cover costs such as application writing fees and attorney fees related to the application process." As previously noted, the Board is concerned that the expansion of applicant support to affirmative payments of costs beyond application fees could raise fiduciary concerns for the Board. For example, such expansion of support could raise the possibility of inappropriate use of resources

(e.g., inflated expenses, private benefit concerns, and other legal or regulatory concerns). For these reasons, the Board has determined that its adoption of this Recommendation would not be in the best interests of the ICANN community or ICANN. The Board recognizes and appreciates, however, that some potential gTLD applicants may need or benefit from these other types of financial assistance. As a result, the Board is conducting ongoing work relating to expanding the scope of financial support. (SubPro Scorecard 10 September 2023: 18).

In November and December 2023, the GNSO Small Team Plus worked on a supplemental recommendation 17.2 to address the Board's concerns that, following a community consultation at ICANN79, is expected to be submitted to the GNSO Council for consideration before submitting to the ICANN board.

What has occurred since ICANN78?

Following its review of Public Comment (which ran from 31 July - 11 September 2023), the GGP for ASP completed and submitted its Final Report to the GNSO Council on 8 December 2023. The GNSO Council accepted all of the GGP's Guidance Recommendations on 21 December 2023.

On 18 January 2024, the GNSO Council approved the Recommendations Report (Regarding Adoption of the Final Guidance Recommendations from the (GGP) for Applicant Support) and asked that it be sent to the ICANN Board.

The SubPro IRT ASP Sub-Track is responsible for ensuring that the draft ASP Handbook language accurately reflects the SubPro Final Report recommendations. The ASP-IRT kicked off on 30 November 2023, and has so far been reviewing and discussing the Draft ASP Handbook in its sessions. The ASP Handbook will be published before ICANN79 for Public Comment, with the Public Comment period lasting from 12 February 2024 - 02 April 2024. Interested parties are encouraged to submit their Public Comments.

ICANN org will issue a request for proposal (RFP) to identify a vendor to assemble a Support Application Review Panel (SARP) that will conduct a review of all ASP applications received for the Next Round. The ASP vendor's goal will be to identify ASP applicants that meet the criteria of the program. The vendor may choose to conduct the review process with in-house expertise, if available, or assemble and manage a Support Application Review Panel, an outsourced panel of qualified reviewers with relevant expertise. See more about the RFP here.

What to expect at ICANN79

On 21 February 2024, ICANN org will hold a Prep Week session to provide an implementation status update on the New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation. Among other topics, the state of implementation of the Applicant Support Program will be covered, and a reminder about the ongoing Public Comment proceeding.

Further information

Useful documents:

- [SubPro Final Report](#), especially Topic 17: Applicant Support (p. 71), outputs summarized also in the table, pp. 251-257
- SubPro [Operational Design Assessment (ODA)](#)
- [ODA Assumptions](#)
- [GNSO Guidance Process (GGP) on Applicant Support Working Group - Final Report](#)
- [Next Round Implementation Plan](#)
- [SubPro IRT ASP Sub-Track Wiki](#)
- [ASP Handbook Public Comment](#)
- **Previous Webinars:**
  - [ICANN76 Subsequent Procedures Operational Design Phase Status Update](#)
  - [ICANN77 New gTLD Program Next Round Update](#)
  - [ICANN78 Applicant Support Program: Exploring Research Findings from Other Global Programs](#)
  - [ICANN78 GDS: Subsequent Procedures IRT Working Session (3 of 3)](#)
  - [ICANN78 New gTLD Program Next Round Update](#)

4   Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program

What is it?

The Registry Service Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program is to be developed to comply with Recommendation 6.2 of the [Final Report on the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process](#) that instructs ICANN org to create such a program.

Per Topic 6 of the Final Report on the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process:

> *The Working Group reviewed the fact that where a single RSP provided registry services for multiple TLD applications in the 2012 application round, the RSP was subject to duplicative evaluation and testing (in some cases hundreds of times). The Working Group agreed that this duplicative evaluation and testing could be reduced by establishing a program in which RSPs are evaluated in advance of an application round opening.*

The RSP Evaluation program is part of the New gTLD Program Next Round and should be ready before the next round of gTLD application submission period opens.

The RSP Evaluation Program aims to evaluate potential registry service providers independent of gTLD applications to streamline the gTLD application process. RSP Evaluation incorporates the registry services and technical evaluation subprocess of the 2012 round of new gTLDs. In addition to the technical evaluation, RSP evaluation will include automated technical tests, and the possibility to link additional registry services (including IDN Tables) to RSPs by establishing registry service descriptions for those registry services that may be incorporated into Exhibit A of the registry agreement during the contracting process. RSP evaluation can happen either before or at gTLD application evaluation time.

Per Recommendation 6.8 of the Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process, the program must be funded by those seeking evaluation on a cost-recovery basis.

What has occurred since ICANN78?

- On 28 November 2023 and 12 December 2023, ICANN org held IRT RSP Sub-Track sessions to discuss the questionnaire to evaluate RSPs, Registry Services, and IDN services.

- On 19 January 2024, the first phase of the RSP Portal (the system to be used to receive RSP applications) was completed. A second phase of development started on 22 January, and is estimated to be finalized by the end of March.

- On 25 January 2024, ICANN org published a draft version of the [RSP Handbook](#) based on the feedback received from previous sessions with the IRT RSP Sub-Track.

- ICANN will hold an IRT session on 8 February 2024 to discuss the draft version of the RSP Handbook.

- On 22 February 2024, ICANN will hold a second IRT session to review the changes to the RSP Handbook resulting from the input received at the first meeting.

- The RSP Handbook is planned to go for public comments in early March 2024.

What to expect at ICANN79

No specific RSP Evaluation Program meetings will be held at ICANN79, as ICANN org expects to receive the necessary input and feedback on the RSP Handbook before ICANN79.

Further information

Useful documents:
- SubPro Final Report, especially Topic 6: Registry Service Provider Pre-Evaluation, pp. 29-34
- SubPro Operational Design Assessment (ODA)
- ODA Assumptions
- Next Round Implementation Plan

5   What to Expect During ICANN79 for the Next Round?

Next Round-Related Sessions During ICANN79 Prep Week

New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Status Update
Wednesday, 21 February 2024
14:00-15:30 AST (18:00-19:30 UTC)
https://sched.co/1ZUzx

GNSO: New gTLD SubPro Supplemental Recommendations Community Update
Thursday, 22 February 2024
16:30-17:30 AST (20:30-21:30 UTC)
https://sched.co/1ZUnf

Next Round-Related Sessions During ICANN79

GNSO: IDN EPDP Working Session
Saturday, 2 March 2024
9:00–10:00 AST (13:00-14:00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a15s

GDS: SubPro IRT Work Session (1 of 3)
Saturday, 2 March 2024
10:30-12:00 AST (14:30-16:00 UTC)
Agenda
https://sched.co/1a161

Community Consultation on Public Interest Commitments/Registry Voluntary Commitments (PICs/RVCs)
Monday, 4 March 2024
10:30-12:00 AST (14:30-16:00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1AR

Name Collision Analysis Project (NCAP) Discussion Working Group Meeting
Monday, 4 March 2024
13:15 - 14:30 AST (17:15-18:15 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1E3

Name Collision Analysis Project (NCAP) Discussion Working Group Meeting
Monday, 4 March 2024
15:00-16:00 AST (19:00-20:00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1E6

GDS: Subpro IRT Work Session (2 of 3)
Monday, 4 March 2024
16:15-17:30 AST (21:15-21:30 UTC)

[Agenda](#)
https://sched.co/1a1CH

New gTLD Program Next Round: Planning for String Similarity Review Work Session
Tuesday, 5 March 2024
15:00-16:00 AST (19:00-20:00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1Cz

GNSO SubPro Supplemental Recommendations Community Consultation
Wednesday, 6 March 2024
10:30-12:00 AST (14:30-16:00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1Cf

GDS: Subpro IRT Work Session (3 of 3)
Wednesday, 6 March 2024
16:15-17:30 AST (21:15-21:30 UTC)
[Agenda](#)
https://sched.co/1a1G6

GNSO Council Small Team Plus - SubPro Supplemental Recommendations Work Session
Thursday, 7 March 2024
9:00-10:00 AST (13:00-14.00 UTC)
https://sched.co/1a1Ci

Background documents for the Next Round

- [The New gTLD Program: Next Round Implementation Plan](#)
- [Next Round webpage](#)
- [Final Report on the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process](#)
- [IRT community workspace Wiki](#)

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