

(Archived) Volunteer Engagement Project

1. ICANN: Improving Contributor Capabilities

At ICANN51 in Los Angeles, A number of leaders from ICANN constituent bodies (SOACSGC) met with the ICANN Global Leadership team and posed this question:

"How can we find ways to improve ICANN's ability to identify and attract new and productive community participation while retaining existing participants who dedicate their time and efforts to ICANN's work?"

Together they proposed a project team, consisting of Tony Holmes, Bill Drake, Rudi Vansnisk, Sally Costerton and Chris Mondini to address this question.

The group agreed to formulate a problem statement and present it to the SOACSGC group with recommended next steps. The group further agreed to provide initial thinking on 1) obstacles and 2) opportunities related both specifically to SO/AC structures and to ICANN generally.

2. Problem Statements:

1. ICANN lacks ways to increase the number of qualified volunteers to invest the time and effort required to conduct bottom up, multi-stakeholder work.
2. Though there currently exist *outreach* programs to bring volunteers into ICANN, there is little *inreach* required to encourage them to stay and be active. [*inreach* can be understood as active cultivation and engagement of those who are already somehow present within ICANN].

3. The Overarching Question:

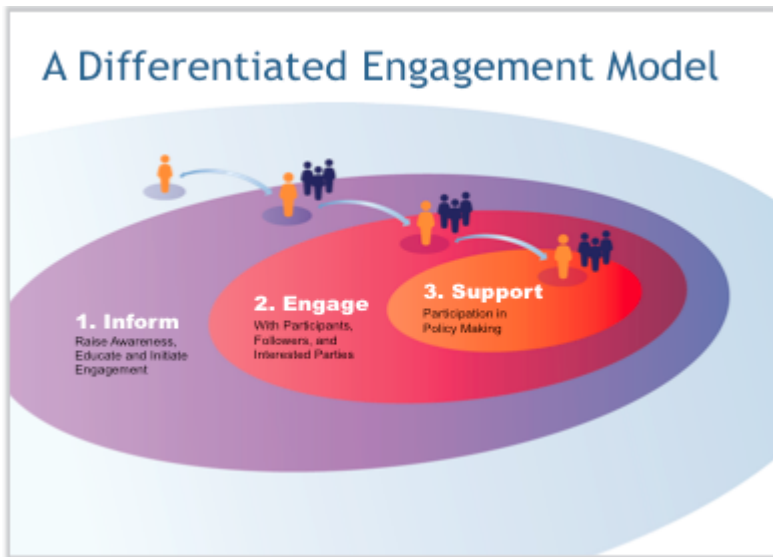
How can ICANN get more volunteers to be more meaningfully involved?

4. A Helpful Analogy:

ICANN is a party host and has succeeded in getting more people to turn up for the party, but is not serving appetizers to make them stay for the main course. [In this analogy the invitations are the *outreach*, and the appetizers are the *inreach*]

5. A Helpful Diagram:

ICANN engagement focus to date has been on the outer circles and now must turn to the inner circles.



6. Input-Gathering 2x2 Matrix

The attached table is for team members to contribute ideas, as follows:

- 1) barriers to fuller engagement,
- 2) possible solutions,
- 3) general considerations applicable across SOACSGCs, and
- 4) considerations that are specific to particular SOACSGCs.

Key for inputs:

Tony Holmes = TH

Rudi Vasnick = RV

Bill Drake = BD

Chris Mondini = CM

Sally Costerton = SC

	Barriers/Problems	Solutions/Opportunities
Generally Across ICANN (all SOACSGCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICANN's value proposition is hard to state and to convert into an exchangeable asset. i.e. "I understand ICANN is important, and I am glad it exists, but what do I (or my organization) personally get out of participating actively?" (CM) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the limited public acknowledgment of tenure, leadership awards, etc. (CM) Invest in and provide training on enabling tools and platforms: Language Services, remote participation, Wikis etc. (CM) Buddy scale/system at constituency level. (TH) Identify existing issue leaders as point people to answer newcomer questions. (TH)

- There is no accreditation or level/grading program to identify a volunteer's experience or capabilities (CM)
- Determining people's specific skills and where they fit/can fit within ICANN. (TH)
- Newbies are immediately confronted by a large array of parallel, ongoing and often long-running work streams on complex issues and may feel overwhelmed and unable to see where and how to start. Better information architecture and resources would help, but will not solve the problem without some accompanying human 'sherpa' support. (BD)
- The relatively small sets of 'hard core' volunteers who do most of the work are too often swamped with keeping their groups administratively and substantively in the game for them to take on sherpa service as well. Sub-groups devoted to in-reach and membership support can do a bit, but again rely on volunteers who may be spread thin. The incentives to sustain the effort over time are often largely normative and soft. (BD)
- While ICANN has excellent remote participation opportunities, people who lack opportunities to physically participate in meetings often do not get 'hooked' and drift off unless they have a strong material incentives to stick with it (e.g. business representation). Conversely, people who do get to the meetings seem mostly likely to transition into the 'hard core' participant category (although sustained tourism is not an unknown phenomena). (BD)
- Has ICANN ever done a study on the relationships between purely remote participation vs. physical attendance and sustained engagement? (BD)
- Unpaid administrative work lacks strong appeal relative to substantive policy work, so it can be difficult to get much participation, thus leaving chairs and a few elected reps as the default 'mules'. (BD)
- Volunteer frustration.
- Some people seem to be involved simply for travel support.
- Community leaders with knowledge to impart are too busy to be mentors
- Newcomers complain that discussions within ICANN are repetitive, hard to understand and seemingly not focused on important or impactful topics
- Roles and assignments for volunteers are not aligned with their skill level or experience
- Demographics of existing community leaders is not reflective of global diversity
- Intimidation factor - Incumbent leaders seem to be a closed group
- Too much jargon, too many acronyms, seems very USA-centric
- "Why should I (or my company) care?" is not well articulated. Value proposition is not apparent.
- Silos within ICANN create barriers - newcomers are rushed from overview to specific

- Effective, sustained in-reach may require having people paid to do the iterative tasks of capacity development for each new set of group members. Immersion in the 'cultural milieu' of a group is essential; outside efforts, no matter how well meaning, may seem off key and become a burden on volunteer leaders. A logical solution would be to enable the groups to hire and oversee part-time staffers drawn from the respective milieus. Even 5 hours per week of someone's dedicated time could make a significant difference. (BD)
- Staff could provide various kinds of informational inputs in easily digested formats with pointers to further info, e.g. 'this week/month in xyz group or area of interest' emails /web material. (BD)
- Make better use of ICANN meeting registration data - share with stakeholder groups. Use more data in general to plot a course from initial website registration or meeting registration through to increasing levels of engagement (e.g. public comment submission, working group membership, joining a CG, etc)
- Call-out or sanction non-contributors.
- ICANN hire policy staff "pen holder/drafters" to support CGs (CM)
- Recruit volunteers who focus 100% on recruitment and support/cultivation of other volunteers. and/or (CM)
- establish a Volunteer Engagement staff position or team (like the GSE team (CM)
- Articulate and publicise the skills developed as an ICANN volunteer so it can be a virtual professional accreditation for CV's and resume-building. (CM)
- Ease the burdens of 'membership management', eg collecting dues, onboarding, maintaining lists. (provide association management software to stakeholder groups)
- Interview people to ask their motivations - both those who are ICANN addicts and those who have not stayed. Conduct exit interviews.
- Find out why people volunteer in the first place: Is it a job requirement, for career development, personal interest? Is the reason they come different from the reason they stay and participate?
- Provide more mentorship and actual mentors.
- Connect policy inputs and outputs so volunteers can see their impact and influence.
- Show how participation generates benefits for a volunteer's career, employers, skill development or personal interests.
- "Lead a path" all the way from being a newcomer to becoming a member of an SOACSGC.
- Form 'outreach committees' with ICANN SOACSGC groups
- Provide staffing or resources to produce summaries, status reports, work product.
- Examine what are the costs and the impacts of participation and work to lower the costs and increase the impacts
- Provide grants to bring people to ICANN meetings
- Publish "Idiot's Guide to ICANN"
- Recruit not only individuals, but rather organizations, NGOs, associations with depth of talent (and people)
- Focus on retention. Not just Global Stakeholder Engagement but also Global Stakeholder Retention.
- Develop guides and training materials, for example "How to Chair a Working Group"
- Explain the value proposition for participation AND the risks of non participation (for example for business)
- Think of volunteers as unpaid employees (human resources), requiring recruitment, retention AND development. Develop good "managers" by identifying high-potential future leaders.
- Use data to track how fellows have become leaders within ICANN.
- Use more data and facts to establish what are the real issues and gaps and what responses and tools are most effective.
- "stratify" or differentiate the community to reflect skill level and experience.
- Use more intuitive descriptors, summaries on documents, tags, headers, accurate dates, "who this document applies to", links to background and primer information.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more welcoming - for example at every meeting session. Provide thirty second set-up of session topic for newcomers, or background reading, explain "who should care about this issue". • Establish a Community Development function or office within ICANN, optimized for each stakeholder category • Start an ICANN guide (mentor) program. Ask former board members to be mentors. • Explain to newcomers and fellows where their path will /can lead to. Ask fellows and newcomers to declare where they see themselves ending up in the organization • Use the ICANNlearn platform to create a curriculum to develop community leaders, establish course requirements, develop curriculum applicable to individual SOACSGCs • Provide more staff to support the work of volunteers, letting volunteers remain in charge but supporting their development of documents, management of members, etc.
Specific to SOACSGC group (s) (if referring to specific group please identify)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constituency leaders lack time for outreach or mentoring and are not trained in these disciplines (CM) • Civil society members usually have less financial 'skin in the game' than their business counterparts to motivate their sustained engagement. If ones' drivers are normative commitments and intellectual/political interest, sticking with iterative and often glacial and procedure-laden work programs that yield small if any gains may seem less compelling than other possible uses of time. This is specially so if one's issues are not officially recognized as salient and institutionalized on the agenda, even if ICANN policies impact these issues. Hence, people can become frustrated at their inability to "get anywhere" in ICANN and exit to other policy spaces. (BD) • Civil society members usually have fewer financial resources to physically attend meeting than their business counterparts. (BD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs such as CROPP and special budget requests could be expanded to fund <i>inreach</i> activities (CM) • NCUC has launched a partial travel support program from its own piggy bank, offering up to two active member \$2,000 each toward attendance at a given meeting, with applications on a competitive CFP basis. ICANN could experiment with a similar micro-grants program geared toward participants lacking the resources to fully self-finance that would cover some but not all the costs of meeting attendance. (BD)

7. Recommended Next Steps

- Share with SOACSGC November 19
- Invite broader participation in 2x2 Matrix idea gathering (how?)
- Gather inputs from those who tried to address this problem in the past
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8. Background (Scene Setting):

The growth and increasing complexity of the DNS and unique identifiers are demonstrated by such innovations as new gTLDs, IDNs, and IPv6. ICANN -- already a complex organization -- faces increasing work streams and demands that draw upon the time and energy of a finite supply of knowledgeable volunteers. Furthermore, ICANN finds itself in an evolutionary phase as an organization: governance and structural concerns, as well as attention to external forces in Internet governance further tax the pool of volunteer stakeholders. The challenges facing ICANN are often unpredictable and usually *sui generis*. No other organization, whether business, government or technical body, has had to grapple with them. As a result, ICANN's imperative of securing diverse, multi-stakeholder attention on key issues suffers. This problem is a shared challenge for staff and community, and is an existential challenge. ICANN's sustainability -- indeed its future -- depends on solving it.

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