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AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC Statement on Evolving the Multistakeholder Model at ICANN

Introduction

On 25 April 2019, public comment opened for Evolving ICANN's Multistakeholder Model. On 29 April 2019, an At-Large workspace was created for the statement. The At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG) decided it would be in the interest of end users to develop an ALAC statement on the public comment.

During the CPWG meeting that week, members of the working group discussed the public comment, as well as the end user stance on Evolving ICANN's Multistakeholder Model in relation to other ICANN communities. Marita Moll, ALAC Member of the North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO), volunteered as the initial penholder for the statement. During the same CPWG meeting, Greg Shatan, member of NARALO volunteered as co-penholder of the statement.

On 09 May 2019, Greg Shatan presented an "issues identification exercise" for the ALAC and CPWG to consider in their drafting of the comment.

On 15 May 2019, Marita Moll presented key issues for the CPWG and ALAC to consider on the draft statement after input from the prior week's meeting of the CPWG.

On 22 May 2019, ICANN policy staff in support of the At-Large community created a Google Doc for publication and further development of the ALAC statement, and a first draft of the ALAC statement was posted by Marita Moll for community comment. ICANN policy staff in support of the At-Large community sent a call for comments to the CPWG and ALAC mailing lists. Comments were requested by 29 May 2019, and feedback from the community and the co-penholders were incorporated.

On 02 June 2019, a revised draft and call for comments was sent to the CPWG and ALAC mailing lists. The public comment submission deadline was extended to 13 June 2019, so the penholders and ALAC Chair determined the At-Large community could continue to comment on the statement, and the CPWG could finalize during its 11 June 2019 meeting.

On 13 June 2019, the ALAC Chair, Maureen Hilyard, requested that the statement be transmitted to the ICANN public comment process, copying the ICANN staff member responsible for this topic, with a note that the statement is pending ALAC ratification.

On 18 June 2019, staff confirmed that the online vote results in the ALAC endorsing the statement with 15 votes in favor, 0 votes against, and 0 abstentions. Please note 100% (15) of the 15 ALAC Members participated in the poll. The ALAC Members who participated in the poll are (alphabetical order by first name): Bartlett Morgan, Bastiaan Goslings, Hadia Elminiawi, Holly Raiche, Humberto Carrasco, Javier Rua-Jovet, Joanna Kulesza, John Laprise, Kaili Kan, Marita Moll, Maureen Hilyard, Ricardo Holmquist, Sebastien Bachollet and Seun Ojedeji, Tijani Ben Jemaa. You may view the result independently under:
https://www.bigpulse.com/pollresults?code=1337504yVLbQhQtz8uI9A59F3wL

ALAC Statement on Evolving the Multistakeholder Model at ICANN

Executive Summary of ALAC Responses (full statement on following page)

This ALAC contribution to the evolving multistakeholder model condenses the 21 issues developed through the community consultations into 4 more general categories - structural, process, participation and intergroup relations. We have taken this route as we feel this is a more productive way of addressing some of these very interrelated issues.

The structural issues are overarching. In addressing power inequities there will be a need to adjust relationships between the various moving parts in ICANN -- SOs, ACs, the Board and the organization itself. Although it may be beyond the scope of this process, there is a need for a rebalancing of roles and responsibilities. These are not new issues in the ICANN ecosystem and we submit a link to an At-Large paper on future challenges which was submitted in 2013.

We suggest that, beyond the structural issues, there are efficiencies to be found in careful recalibration of the processes which determine the pace and volume of the work that flows into the community. Mechanisms to more effectively direct and manage work flows include more specific scoping, use of external influences, easily retrievable records of discussions and decisions and joint community/staff priority setting. Use of project management tools could be helpful in addressing some process issues.

The credibility of ICANN's multistakeholder system depends on wide participation in the process and it is a fact that wide participation from all regions remains a challenge. We examine various barriers to participation including language, necessary expertise, competing demands on volunteers including day jobs, family and community responsibilities, specific challenges for women, and poor telecommunications services in some regions. Continuing attention to these issues along with resources specifically tailored to address these issues will be necessary into the future.

Finally, issues relating to intergroup relations should be quickly addressed to build trust and break down silos in the community. There will always be disagreements but a culture of positive relations between and among groups must be actively encouraged. This is an area which could see rapid improvement by clarifying concepts and expectations, ensuring that adequate support and resources to do the work are available to all and making some efficiencies in processes and work group management, particularly around heavy volunteer workloads that result in burnout.

AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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The At-Large community has been, and will continue to be, active participants in the multistakeholder model and is committed to engaging with this process to improve the way it works. We realize that the exponential growth of the Internet and complexity of managing the DNS has stretched the current resources to their limits. In this comment, we have clustered the 21 issues derived from community discussions into four groups: structural issues, processes, participation and intergroup relations. We feel that this is a more productive way to proceed, since many adjustments that might be made to address one issue within a cluster will likely also impact other issues within the same cluster.

A. Structural Issues

The current exercise is not designed as a "remake" of ICANN. However, in its deliberations to date, the community itself has put structural issues on the table. The following fall into the category of structural issues that will require some substantive changes to adjust to the current environment:

Holistic view (20), Roles and Responsibilities (15)

Power inequities are incompatible with a decision making process that depends on consensus building and widespread trust. A fine tuned balance is fundamental for the credibility and legitimacy of the system and the multistakeholder worldview and narrative.

Addressing power inequities that lead to underrepresentation will require adjustments to roles and responsibilities. The relationships between ACs and SOs (and their constituent parts) will have to be reexamined as well as the role of the board vis-a-vis the community and ICANN org.

For an example of how our community is affected, At-Large works in the best interests of more than 4 billion end users on the Internet, but has only one seat on the ICANN Board. Although board members are not direct representatives of their communities, end-user perspectives need to be given more profile at this level in order to maintain the principle of balance. ALAC is a widely diverse body. Although one single ALAC Director might well have all the possible knowledge and experience of the different environments and user experiences all over the world, it seems much more reasonable to split the burden over two Directors, that of course should reflect as much as possible the geopolitical, gender, etc. diversity. Also, a Director should have a backup in case of illness or unavoidable agenda conflicts. We have also been underrepresented in the current EPDP, which may well carry through to other applications of the "PDP 3.0" model. Power imbalance resulting from structural issues is a significant contributor to siloing and tribalism (18), trust (14) as well as protracted discussions described in timing (1) -- all serious concerns which have been expressed during community discussions.

The At-Large community has pointed out these issues in the past. They were well documented in a white paper on future challenges called "Making ICANN Relevant, Responsive and Respected". In our view, the contents of this paper are very relevant to the current discussion.

We realize that entering into a discussion that would bring about these kinds of changes may be beyond the scope of the current process but this process should recommend that such discussions need to take place and suggest a way forward. At some point, the structure of ICANN itself and how that structure now stands in the way of a really effective and efficient multistakeholder model must be addressed.

B. Process issues

We note that a cluster of the issues on the community developed list revolve around process -- how we do the work that we do. These include: precision in scoping (10), prioritization (4), efficient use of

resources (16), work processes (19), costs (13) and timing (1). On these issues, comments from the community tell us that some of the processes take too long, consensus remains elusive, financial and personal costs are not sustainable, and volunteer burnout is rampant.

We suggest that more precision in scoping will lead to improvements in the other issues we have grouped in this category. Poor scoping causes unreasonable drifting of issues. Our members report that scoping has been too wide in the past leading to endless discussions but that there has been an improvement in this area in the last few years, progress which needs to continue. One improvement would be to break up large projects into smaller pieces with very specific scoping and very specific expectations of the working group. As an example of expectation setting, the members of the EPDP were required to sign on to a set of expectations which included building toward consensus.

On the issue of work processes, some of our members have pointed out that some processes have benefited from external influences. The EPDP and the cross-community working group building an accountability framework for the transition benefited from external deadlines. The budget veto power process for the empowered community had a default budget that was "undesirable by design" to all parties, thus forcing movement. Although conditions and contexts are not always amenable to the application of such measures, these could be among the tools to be considered when a PDP or other work group is constituted.

Another suggestion that could improve work processes is to ensure that key agreements and decisions along the way are well documented and easily retrievable. This is not meant to inhibit the negotiation process in any way but merely to make it easy to revisit previous milestones. The complex discussions that take place over many months sometimes leave participants confused over how a process arrived at a certain point. This is particularly true when decisions are finalized during a time crunch. Problems have arisen when some thought a position was agreed upon and there was some disagreement or confusion about that position and no easy way to revisit the process. In addition, layman-understandable summaries and a minimum of jargon should be the default standard in ICANN documentation.

Better workflow management through staff/community led priority setting would be welcomed. There are always more tasks than people to complete them. Volunteers within At-Large are engaged in many different activities including local and regional outreach activities, participating in PDP and cross-community working groups, responding to calls for comments, engaging in reviews, liaising with other ICANN constituencies, improving our own processes as well as preparing for various meetings. Although we are trying hard to onboard new members, there are a limited number of people comfortable taking the lead on some of these activities. During holiday periods, which differ in every part of the world, the workload continues to build.

These are not problems unique to ICANN. These are common management problems in large organizations. Project management tools exist that can help managers of large organizations track progress. It is possible that such tools could be of assistance to ICANN in addressing some of these issues. They should be part of the toolkit for any groups who want to use them.

In the process of implementing any improvements in the way in which we do our work, standards of accountability and transparency must be maintained. But, within this framework, any improvements in this category would help stem volunteer burnout.

C. Participation (Who and How)

There are a number of issues related specifically to participants -- the makeup of our community, concerns that the current system is not meeting the necessary benchmarks and the way in which engagement impacts community members. These issues are: demographics (5), recruitment (6), representativeness (7), inclusiveness (8); terms (21), and volunteer burnout (17). When we look closely at what is expected of engaged volunteers, it is easy to see how volunteers can quickly burn out.

With respect to the issues of representativeness and demographics, we note that the heavy demands of work inside the ICANN multistakeholder system place certain constraints on the kinds of people who can take on that work. In fact, it can be said that the processes are actually designed around the needs and language of full time participants -- leading to bias towards professional experts. As a result, many "volunteers" come from a small pool of people who are either retired and no longer have to meet the demands of day to day work or who are working inside DNS related industries. Language represents a further constraint as many community members may be non-English speaking and most PDP discussions take place in English. More resources need to go towards dealing with that language barrier. It is very difficult to be deeply involved and hold down a job and manage family and local community responsibilities. The pace is relentless, time demands are heavy and it often feels like full-time volunteering.

Another important element that is rarely recognized is that volunteers, whether retired, employed or self-employed, usually require considerable support from their personal networks – families, employers, etc. Conference calls after midnight are not unusual and meeting ICANN deadlines for comments, etc. can cut deeply into personal and family time. The nature of the work disadvantages younger people often starting families or building careers, and it is extremely challenging for volunteers from regions with poor telecommunications services.

It is clear that inclusiveness, representativeness, demographics and recruitment are all tied to this issue of volunteer time demands and they will play out differently in different parts of the world. For example, in parts of the world where household and childcare demands fall more heavily on women, chances that women will be able to take on active volunteer roles at ICANN can be diminished. To have more women involved within ICANN, they may need targeted support at various levels with programs such as mentoring or twinning.

Bringing this back to the concerns expressed under structural issues, volunteers who give up major chunks of time to do ICANN work will want to see that their views are not marginalized as a result of how decision making is structured. They also need to see that they are adequately supported with financial, research and human resources. In the case of At-Large, research into how the billions of Internet end users are impacted by ICANN and how ICANN can best serve their needs is required.

D. Intergroup Relations

The issues we have grouped as relating to intergroup relations are: cultural issues (13), trust (14), silos/tribalism (18), and consensus (9).

The multistakeholder model in ICANN needs to foster a positive intergroup culture. When there are negative intergroup relations the system stalls, there are barriers to working together to solve problems and the system loses credibility.

We offer the following suggestions towards a more positive culture:

- A definition of multistakeholder processes should be developed and it should be front and center in any on-boarding activities.
- Consensus should be clearly defined and all parties to a policy process should commit to the goal of achieving consensus. Methods for finding and determining consensus, including the judgment of the chairs, need to be examined and refined to avoid consensus by capture (or consensus by attrition, consensus by exhaustion, consensus by stubbornness, etc.)
- A culture of trust should be supported by consequences for publicly disparaging other groups.
- Education and mentoring programs are always needed to help volunteers make the best use of their time.
- Power imbalances need to be addressed (see structural issues).
- ICANN must fully address the resources needed (both financial and human resources) to enable non-self-interested community volunteers to make effective and relevant contribution.

As we look closely at how our community works together we need to keep in mind that, although not all community members are volunteers, all participants should commit to some level of altruism in this unique project to make the Internet better for all.

E. Accountability/Transparency

Throughout these four categories, the need for ICANN to be accountable to the multistakeholder community and transparent in all of its processes is overarching.

We believe that the need to fully address the challenges facing the multistakeholder system is urgent and critical. We hope the ideas and suggestions contained herein will be helpful in the process.