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## AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### ALAC Statement on Revised Community Travel Support Guidelines

#### Introduction

On 13 February 2020, Public Comment opened for [Revised Community Travel Support Guidelines](#). On the same day, an At-Large [workspace](#) was created for the statement. The At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG) and the ALAC Finance and Budget Subcommittee (FBSC), decided it would be in the interest of end users to develop an ALAC statement on the Public Comment.

A drafting team was formed, including Judith Hellerstein, Secretariat for the North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO), Sarah Kiden, Secretariat for the African At-Large Regional Organization (AFRALO), and Maureen Hilyard, ALAC Chair.

On 03 April 2020, Judith Hellerstein, NARALO Secretariat, shared the first draft of the ALAC statement on a Google Doc prepared by staff. Sarah Kiden, AFRALO Secretariat, updated the statement with comments. After feedback on subsequent CPWG meetings, it was determined the FBSC would meet to discuss the ALAC statement.

ICANN Policy staff in support of the At-Large community sent a request for an extension to submit the ALAC statement 1 week later (20 April) than the ICANN Public Comment deadline, to provide the FBSC the opportunity to discuss and update the ALAC statement.

On [14 April 2020](#), [the FBSC](#) discussed the ALAC statement, and the comments of the ALAC subcommittee were incorporated into the statement by Maureen Hilyard, Judith Hellerstein, and Sarah Kiden.

During the [15 April 2020 CPWG](#) meeting, the final draft of the ALAC statement was presented by Judith Hellerstein. A final call for comments was sent by staff to the CPWG and FBSC mailing lists.

On 20 April 2020, the drafting team finalized the ALAC statement.

On 20 April 2020, 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.

## ALAC Statement on Revised Community Travel Support Guidelines

The At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed Travel Support Guidelines. At-Large is unique within the ICANN Community in that virtually all volunteers in At-Large activities including those involving travel do so as true volunteers. None do so in support of their employers, few are employed by what could be considered the domain name industry or in activities supporting it, and many are not even employed in jobs supporting the Internet.

Without ICANN travel support the number of active At-Large participants at ICANN meetings would be few in number - in vast contrast to many others who regularly attended ICANN meetings and events, even before there was any general ICANN travel funding.

### Wire Transfer and Foreign Exchange Fees/Losses

ICANN uses wire transfers because it is the most practical and presumably the cheapest way for ICANN to distribute per diems and reimbursements. Providing a \$25 USD credit for foreign exchange fees, while helpful, still leaves many people at a loss. There should be some provision for reimbursement above the \$25 for those participants who are charged higher fees, upon submission of proof of charges.

We are aware of a growing marketplace of services (such as TransferWise, Zelle, Paypal, Western Union, etc) that provide international money transfer both more quickly and less expensively than wire transfers. They may also facilitate service to participants in some countries who are not able to receive wire transfers. We request that ICANN investigate these services and implement a solution that will reduce the cost to both ICANN and cash recipients.

### Visa Reimbursement

In an earlier Public Comment (2018), [At-Large stated](#) that it felt that the \$200 limit on visa reimbursement was not reasonable. We continue to think so. Visa costs can be quite expensive, and courier fees, which are often mandatory, can easily exceed the ICANN limit as well.

Visa reimbursement fees should be **the actual costs** of the visa and not some arbitrary figure that ICANN has determined should cover the cost. Obtaining a visa may require participants to travel to another city in their country or even outside of their country, to obtain a visa. Some visa offices may require applicants to return several days later. We understand that ICANN Travel Support can and has made exceptions for these special circumstances but it should be standard practice if this is required, that ICANN should take into account any special circumstances and reimburse their costs.

This increasing concern relates mainly to those participants who are known to be regularly and actively engaged in At-Large activities between meetings. It demeans the value of their efforts on behalf of ICANN in between meetings, when they are left to fend for themselves against government officials of countries where ICANN has chosen to hold their meetings and who may be, for whatever reason, resistant to offering visas to applicants from particular countries.

ICANN claims it wants to be inclusive and encourage diversity. At-Large would encourage ICANN to work with host Governments to ensure that visa applicants are supported with their applications in an expedited manner and hopefully without the expedited fee needing to be paid.

At-Large would advise ICANN not only to encourage host Governments to expedite visa applications but also that if they cannot do that then these countries should inform ICANN at the outset so that participants can make the choice as to whether the time and expense spent on the application process would be worth the effort. Furthermore, there must be a specific and realistic timeframe given for participants to make that decision and to go through the visa process if that is what they choose to do. If we are to increase diversity and participation within ICANN, which was one of the recommendations of the CCWG-Accountability WS2 and in the Multistakeholder model, we need to be realistic about the personal effort and costs incurred by certain parts of the world, and in particular the underserved regions of the world, for visas.

### **Travel Insurance**

At-Large feels strongly that ICANN Org should reimburse travel insurance expenses (including medical) for all travelers who are not already insured. Many organizations already provide medical insurance for their supported travelers and At-Large would advise that ICANN Org could do the same. Some visa applications for certain passport holders require travel insurance in addition to the medical insurance provided by ICANN.

The goal of this project would be to ensure that no funded community member traveling to ICANN public meetings or any other ICANN approved event would be without basic medical insurance while traveling. At-Large realizes this may be considered by ICANN to be a costly request and therefore suggests a two-pronged approach whose goal would be to determine to what extent community members are, or have been, taking the risk of traveling without medical insurance and what potential remedies are available.

Some suggestions to help to resolve this issue could include seeking a quote from ICANN's current health insurance provider for a group plan based on what they already cover for ICANN staff, This plan could also cover medical expenses for supported travelers to the three ICANN meetings, any Intersessional meetings, mediation meetings or other ICANN designated face to face meetings. It is inequitable that actively engaged volunteers, particularly those who have leadership roles and put considerable effort into their roles should be treated differently from staff, just because they do not receive any recompense for their work. When purchasing in bulk, ICANN can get economies of scale and could offer this to supported travelers either free or at a low cost.

### **ICANN Arranged Travel**

At-Large understands the need for ICANN to insist on economy fares and having travelers adhere to approved dates for arrival and departure. However, there are certain circumstances that must be taken account of when volunteers travel from their homes to an ICANN meeting. Again we are talking more specifically about At-Large leaders or those who put a significant amount of their own time into work on behalf of ICANN

- If an active At-Large participant/leader is a supported ICANN Traveller, then he/she should be supported for the whole journey, not just the part that is from a "major commercial airport".
- If travel is expected from a participant's home to the "major commercial airport", and has luggage and work equipment to bring to the ICANN meeting, then ICANN should be prepared to pay reasonable costs of travel from home to the "major commercial airport" nearest to the supported traveler's home - especially when they live in rural areas or small cities that are not near to these large international airports.
- If necessary, Constituency Travel should pay for the supported traveler to take a domestic flight to that airport or to take a train to arrive there. Insisting that a supported traveler take a bus and

travel an extra 8 hours to reach the nearest international airport is totally unreasonable, especially when a domestic flight would take a little over an hour.

- At-Large is also concerned about the lack of information that is given to travelers regarding hidden expenses that travelers may not realize because they have not had time to read the “fine print” or has NOT been expressly explained to the traveler. This may include, checked luggage, seats, carry on bags and other conveniences that are free on normal international economy fares but are not on basic economy fares. If travelers are not explicitly told about any additional costs that are expected of them, then ICANN is beholden to pay for these due to their not passing on the relevant information to the travelers. Again expecting travelers to cover these costs themselves, as well as to attend a meeting where they will be expected to work full time, is unfair especially when these costs exceed the daily per diem that travelers are given.
- If a traveler is required to stay overnight because of travel routing than Consistency Travel should ensure that that the supported traveler is reimbursed for the cost of the transit visa if such a visa is required to get to the hotel booked by the airline. Some countries will not require transit visas for passing through the airport but may require one if the traveler needs to leave the airport

### **Room Guarantees**

Many of our travelers incur expenses as hotel policy is to require a credit card for incidentals and put through a charge of about “\$50 USD or the equivalent” a night to cover any incidental costs to the hotel. If there are no charges on the final bill the hotel credits and/or returns that amount to the person’s credit or debit card. This is a real imposition and expensive cost to the supported traveler, some examples of these costs are:

- Taking US\$50 per night to cover any costs to the hotel, does not leave much of the daily per diem for the traveler to pay for meals and other expenses during the week of the meeting
- It can take up to 2-4 months before the money is returned to the card, leaving the traveler short on funds. Additionally, the amount returned can be less than that initially taken out because of the exchange fee and foreign transaction costs
- Not everyone has a visa or debit card that will work in the country of the ICANN meeting and this means they have to withdraw cash from an ATM incurs foreign exchange transactions

It would be very helpful if ICANN could figure out a way to help supported travelers in these situations.

### **Forced Overnight Delays**

Should a flight delay require a forced overnight stay, a supported traveler should not have to place themselves at the mercy of the airline, wait hours in line to get a hotel, meal or a new flight routing.

- There should be some process in place whereby ICANN Travel Support can deal or even assist with these arrangements. This is why ICANN pays a fee to these travel companies. It would alleviate the stress of traveling and of the delay and travelers should not have to place themselves at the mercy of the airlines in the early hours of the morning or very late in the evening which is the normal time for these occurrences.
- Any costs incurred by the supported traveler during a forced overnight stay should also be reimbursed by Constituency Travel upon the delivery of a receipt. These costs include any costs for visas on arrival. Some countries will require transit visas for passing through the airport but require a different visa with a fee attached if the traveler needs to leave the airport.

**Early Check-in and Late Checkout**

While ICANN does make provision for early check-in when the person's approved flight is arriving before 8 am, the same consideration should be given to late check-out. It should be given when a person's flight is scheduled after 8:00 pm or 20:00.