

AT-LARGE COMMUNITY POLICY ISSUES – WHY END USERS SHOULD CARE

The [At-Large Community](#) is a growing global community of over 200 [At-Large Structures \(ALSes\)](#) and individual members. Its membership is diverse, ranging from Internet-related consumer rights groups, academic organizations, computer clubs, technical communities, to civil society and capacity-building organizations. Members of the At-Large community share a passion for furthering the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and contributing to policies that influence the technical coordination of the Domain Name System to better serve end users.

Within the At-Large Community's global, bottom-up, tiered structure, the [At-Large Advisory Committee \(ALAC\)](#) is the primary organizational home for the voice and concerns of the individual Internet user. Representing the At-Large Community, the 15-member ALAC consists of two members selected by each of the five [Regional At-Large Organizations \(RALOs\)](#) and five members appointed by ICANN's Nominating Committee. Acting on the interests of end users, the ALAC advises on the activities of ICANN, including Domain Name System (DNS) policies developed by ICANN's Supporting Organizations; it also participates in ICANN's outreach and engagement programs.

The purpose of this document is twofold. Firstly, it outlines the key policy issues of the At-Large community. Secondly, it sets out why end users should care about the specific policy issues.

This document has been approved by the ALAC.

[WHOIS / Registration Directory Services¹](#)

Summary

- Every year, millions of individuals, businesses, organizations and governments register domain names. Each one must provide identifying and contact information which may include: name, address, email, phone number, and administrative and technical contacts. This information is often referred to as “WHOIS data.”
- WHOIS service is not a single, centrally-operated database. Instead, the data is managed by independent entities known as registrars and registries. Any entity that wants to become a registrar must earn ICANN accreditation.
- WHOIS data is key for fixing system problems, maintaining Internet stability, and enhancing the accountability of registrants.

Why should end users care?

- The “one-size-fits-all” disclosure of identifying information may also expose registrants, especially individual registrants, to potential spam, phishing, and identity theft.
- Due to its implication in privacy, data protection, policing, security, and malicious use and abuse, WHOIS matters to end users, especially individual registrants.

¹ Each topic title is linked to the At-Large website that provides more information.

IANA Functions & Stewardship Transition

Summary

- The IANA functions are comprised of domain names, Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, and a standard set of protocol parameters. They work together to enable your computer to reliably find and connect to other devices, things, or information sources on the Internet no matter where you are physically located in the world.
- ICANN has been performing the domain names related IANA functions under a contract with the US government (specifically, the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration - NTIA](#)), along with [the Internet Engineering Taskforce \(IETF\)](#) for IP addresses and the [Internet Architecture Board \(IAB\)](#) for protocol parameters. In March 2014, the US government announced its intent to end the contract with ICANN and [transition its stewardship role](#) to the global Internet community.
- Various groups were set-up for the design of the transition plans. At-Large community appointees in each of the groups not only actively participated, but also often held Chair or Vice Chair positions in leading the work and shepherding the processes.
- The ALAC coordinated the action of its appointees through [its own working group](#) on IANA Stewardship and ICANN Accountability by holding weekly calls with its stakeholder community.
- The [transition proposal](#) has been approved by the ICANN community and NTIA, and the post transition [implementation](#) is currently underway.
- In the proposed transition plan, an ALAC Liaison is involved in the operational oversight, previously performed by the NTIA and will then performed by a [Customer Standing Committee \(CSC\)](#), as it relates to the monitoring of ICANN's performance of the IANA naming functions.
- The ALAC will also appoint representatives to the IANA Functions Review Process as per the proposal's requirements.

Why should end users care?

- Although the IANA functions are operational functions, they do require global governance and stewardship, in which end users play an important role.
- Within the ICANN's multistakeholder environment, end users don't have any vested commercial interests or political agendas in the IANA transition. They simply want the DNS to remain secure, resilient, and interoperable. End users are a stabilizing influence in the transition process.
- Ultimately, the Stewardship Transition matters to every end user, as its success will allow for the continued expansion, diversity, and innovation of one open, unified, and interoperable global Internet.

Contracted Party Agreements (i.e. Registry Agreement, Registrar Accreditation Agreement)

Summary

- A registry operator of a top-level domain (TLD) must enter a contract (i.e. [Registry Agreement - RA](#)) with ICANN in order to operate and maintain a generic TLD (gTLD).
- Registrars that offer domain name registration services with a direct access to TLD registries are also required to obtain accreditation from ICANN (i.e. [Registrar Accreditation Agreement - RAA](#)).

- ICANN's [Contractual Compliance Department](#) ensures registries and registrars are in compliance with those agreements.
- The RA and RAA are also subject to changes by consensus policy developed through the [Generic Names Supporting Organization \(GNSO\)](#)'s bottom-up, consensus-based [Policy Development Process \(PDP\)](#).

Why should end users care?

- Policy changes to the RA and RAA directly affect individual registrants' rights, obligations, and overall experiences using the domain name registration services.
- As contracted party agreements are critical to the security and stability of the domain name system and have implications to the public interest, they also affect end users who do not have domain registrations.
- Individual registrants and end users can contribute to shaping contracted party agreements, specifically the RAA, through GNSO processes.

[Internationalized Domain Names \(IDNs\)](#)

Summary

- IDNs give users around the world the ability to access the web in their native tongue, making it easier for them to discover/remember websites and promote local content via service providers likely in their own countries.
- It is expected that IDNs will increase the Internet penetration in emerging economies of Asia Pacific, Africa, and Latin America where English is not the primary language.
- Due to the lack of [universal acceptance](#), using IDNs can be challenging across browsers, emails, and mobile apps.

Why should end users care?

- ICANN's work on the universal acceptance, [Label Generation Rules](#), and other key IDN issues will ultimately improve user experience, increasing the IDN uptake and making the Internet truly multilingual.

[New Generic Top-Level Domains \(gTLDs\)](#)

Summary

- A TLD is the rightmost label starting from the last dot in a web address (e.g. .com, .net, .biz). The domain namespace originally had eight TLDs. In 2000, seven new TLDs were introduced, and in 2004, eight more were made available. In 2012, ICANN launched the [New gTLD Program](#) which resulted in the massive expansion of the domain namespace. As of today, more than 1,000 new gTLDs have been delegated to the root zone.

Why should end users care?

- New gTLDs offer greater flexibility for individual registrants to create memorable, innovative names for their websites. They also ease the overcrowding in the legacy gTLD domain market.
- As New gTLDs open up opportunities for new registries and registrars to enter the domain name industry, individual registrants have more choices when purchasing services.
- New gTLDs also could cause widespread confusion, as users may have to learn the new addresses of websites that they are using.
- In addition, users may be exposed to fraud, counterfeiting, and identity theft when criminals take advantage of this confusion to create hostile sites with new gTLDs.

Public Interest

Summary

- Discussions on the topic of “public interest within ICANN’s remit” has been ongoing for years within the ICANN Community. Some community members are advocating to devise mechanisms that will more effectively address the public interest.
- The Public Interest is a key topic of the At-Large Community. It has established a [Public Interest Working Group](#). In particular, the European Regional At-Large Organization (EURALO) has advocated for related principles such as Open Access, Free Software, and Creative Commons since its inception.
- One sub-topic that At-Large cares deeply about is the Public Interest Commitments (PICs), especially pertaining to the Category 1 TLDs related to sensitive strings as defined by the GAC, such as .doctor and .bank.

Why should end users care?

- The Internet has become a critical part of the global public sphere. As the influence of commercial interests and state powers has been increasing, stakeholders need to work together and form a comprehensive vision on the Internet that addresses the protection of civil liberties, such as free speech and privacy.

Internet Governance

Summary

- Underrepresentation of any stakeholder in Internet Governance will adversely affect the Internet's smooth operation. End users' freedom to innovate is at the core of the Internet's success.
- At-Large Community members are very active in various Internet Governance fora at national, regional, and global levels.

Why should end users care?

- End users' participation ensures that the Internet Governance ecosystem is not dominated by vested interests. Within ICANN, members of the At-Large community advocate for the best interests of end users.
- End user involvement contributes important skills and expertise to the Internet policy making process, as well as establishes a means to rapidly analyze the implementation of Internet governance policy and the impact on end users.
- Given the geographical diversity of the At-Large community, the diverse interests among users worldwide are represented in ALAC policy advice.

ICANN Policy Processes

Summary

- As an ICANN Advisory Committee, the ALAC publicizes, analyzes, and provides advice on ICANN policy proposals and decisions that reflect the views and needs of individual Internet users at regional and global levels.
- The ALAC acts in the best interests of individual Internet users. They include registrants, consumers, and Internet users.

- Not only does the ALAC advise on the DNS policies developed through ICANN’s Supporting Organizations, but it also advises on the work deliverables from ICANN Community, Board, and Staff on a wide range of topics.

Why should end users care?

- The multistakeholder model of ICANN allows individual Internet users to influence the evolution of the critical logistical infrastructure layer of the Internet. They can do so by engaging in both the policy development process within the GNSO and Cross-Community Working Groups, as well as the advice development activities within At-Large.
- The direct involvement of all stakeholders, especially end users, in the development of ICANN policy is unique in the field of Internet governance.

Accountability & Transparency of ICANN

Summary

- End users are an integral part of ICANN’s multistakeholder community. Through the At-Large Community, they play an important role in holding ICANN accountable.
- Their contributions are essential, especially since they are the primary affected party in matters of public interest. Working within ICANN and other Internet Governance fora, they are frequently able to propose innovative solutions.

Why should end users care?

- In the Internet Governance ecosystem, ICANN is the only organization where end users form a critical element within its [structure](#) and have an influential voice. End users cannot effectively impact the evolution of the Internet if ICANN loses credibility and ceases to exist.
- End users’ participation will ensure the legitimacy in the process of enhancing ICANN accountability. Their participation will also strengthen an inclusive, transparent, global, and collaborative model of governance fit for our present and future.

ICANN Operations / Finances

Summary

- End users are able to review and provide comments on ICANN’s [strategic plans](#) and [operating budget](#), as well as monitor and voice issues of concern.
- The At-Large Community can request additional funding through ICANN’s [special budget request](#) process. Once approved, the At-Large Community can apply the resources to advance end user interests.

Why should end users care?

- Since ICANN is the organization that manages the DNS, end users should care about its operational excellence and financial wellbeing and responsibilities.

Reviews at ICANN (Organizational Reviews & AoC Reviews)

Summary

- ICANN’s ongoing commitment to its own evolution and improvement has been incorporated into its Bylaws. In particular, the [Article IV, Section 4 of the Bylaws](#) require the [periodic review](#) of relevant ICANN organizations and committees including each of the Supporting Organizations (SOs), each of the Advisory Committees (ACs), and the Nominating Committee.

- A [review of At-Large](#), focusing on the Regional At-Large Organizations and the At-Large Structures, is currently underway. This Review evaluates the organizational effectiveness of the At-Large Community and how well it has fulfilled its mission of acting for the interests of end users worldwide within ICANN. Inputs from end users are essential.

Why should end users care?

- End users have a critical role in holding ICANN accountable. Their expertise, knowledge and experience are needed in various review processes.
- Specifically, end users are directly impacted by the Organizational Review of the At-Large Community. Recommendations developed from this Review, once implemented, will likely bring about improvements to the At-Large Community, impacting on the representation, participation, and influence of end users in ICANN.

Engagement & Outreach

Summary

- Engagement and outreach efforts are a [focus](#) of the At-Large Community.
- At-Large has been collaborating closely with ICANN Staff on the development and implementation of a variety of programs and events, which aim to get end users involved in ICANN.
- Promoting diversity and inclusion, At-Large leads initiatives that target underserved communities (e.g. the [Applicant Support Program](#) for New gTLDs applications, [Captioning Pilot](#), [Tribal Ambassador Fellowship](#), etc.).

Why should end users care?

- Outreach and engagement efforts are critical for maintaining a sustainable source of end user volunteers from diverse regions, ensuring that they are versed in ICANN policy issues and can effectively engage with other stakeholder groups.