Applicant Support Program: Exploring Findings from a Survey of Other Global Programs

Presenters

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Agenda

- Background and Research Design (Jessica Villaseñor)

- Research Findings (Jessica Villaseñor)

- What might these findings mean for the ASP in the Next Round? (Kristy Buckley)

- Q&A (Kristy Buckley)

Background and Research Design

Background

The SubPro Final Report on Applicant Support includes **Implementation Guidance 17.7** that "...supports Recommendation 6.1.b in the Program Implementation Review Report, which states: "Consider **researching globally recognized procedures that could be adapted for the implementation of the Applicant Support Program**.""

- The SubPro Final Report envisaged that the Implementation Review Team (IRT) would play a role in furthering efforts to identify other comparable global procedures to inform the Applicant Support Program (ASP).
- Considering ASP is one of the first areas of policy implementation work, ICANN org initiated this research so that findings would be ready and available to consider during implementation.

Developing Guiding Questions

ICANN org conducted preliminary research to inform guiding research questions. In doing so, it examined:

- Existing ICANN documents for themes (e.g., Program Implementation Review Report and SubPro Final Report).
- Best practices and academic literature to explore common areas where new entrants face potential barriers in application processes.

Guiding Questions

1. **How does a Provider of Financial Support widen and deepen its applicant pool**? That is, how can it increase the number and diversity of qualified applicants to its financial assistance program?

2. **What factors do other Providers of Financial Support consider in assessing an applicant's eligibility** for a financial assistance program, paying particular attention to the high-level criteria of public interest, financial need, and financial capability?

3. **What methods do other Providers of Financial Support employ** to equitably and objectively **assess applications** from applicants of diverse backgrounds?

4. **What strategies do Providers of Financial Support use to support applicant** success beyond the application process?

Research Design

Considered for this paper:

- Procedures of other financial assistance programs.

- Procedures of similar grant, loan, international development projects, and social investment programs aimed at promoting diversity.

- Best practice guidance materials.

- Peer-reviewed research.

Terminology

Applicant for Financial Support: an individual or entity that is interested in or has applied to a financial assistance program.

Provider of Financial Support: an entity that provides financial assistance to individuals or other entities through a dedicated program, including grants, loans, and aid.

Findings

Outline of Findings

The Applicant Pool

1. Applicant Awareness
2. Application Accessibility
3. Applicant Capacity

Eligibility Criteria

1. Public Interest Benefit
2. Financial Need
3. Financial Capability

Evaluating Applications

1. Review Panels
2. Process
3. Scoring
4. Selection

Ongoing Applicant Support

1. Financial Support
2. Non-financial Support
3. Mixed Support

1. The Applicant Pool

How does a Provider of Financial Support widen and deepen its applicant pool? That is, how can it increase the number and diversity of qualified applicants to its financial assistance program?

Key barriers and areas of focus:

- Applicant awareness

- Application accessibility

- Applicant capacity

Applicant Awareness

To apply for a program, potential Applicants for Financial Support must be aware of the program.

Efforts in this area focus on **outreach**.

Best practices and recognized procedures include:

- Identifying new audiences.

- Considering the needs of these new audiences.

- Providing information about potential costs and benefits of participation in the program in outreach materials.

Application Accessibility

The application itself can act as a barrier to applying.

Efforts in this area focus on **increasing accessibility of the application**.

Uncovering bias
- Using data to determine patterns that lead to disparate outcomes.
- Creating institutional mechanisms to reduce bias.

Tailoring the application
- Understanding the needs of the applicant.
- Streamlining the application process (e.g., making the application concise, using lay language, eliminating duplicative questions, allowing applicants to submit necessary documents in language of origin).

Providing application support
- Offering additional support during the application process (e.g., optional informational sessions, providing examples of successful applications, offering to review draft applications before the deadline).

Applicant Capacity

Application processes require that potential Applicants for Financial Support possess certain capacities to complete the application successfully.

Efforts in this area focus on supporting **applicant capacity development**.

Training
- Fact sheets or workshops, courses, webinars, and/or conference sessions

Technical Assistance
- Creating separate technical assistance grants.
- Connecting potential applicants with technical assistance providers.
- Providing a list of potential technical assistance providers.

Pipeline Preparation Programs
- Required participation in a single training session.
- Working with a technical assistance provider to develop the application and/or participation in separate and distinct training program.

2. Eligibility Criteria

What factors do other Providers of Financial Support consider in assessing an applicant's eligibility for a financial assistance program, paying particular attention to the high-level criteria of public interest, financial need, and financial capability?

Key areas of interest:

- Definitions

- Criterion elements

- Evaluating eligibility criteria

Public Interest Benefit

Defining "Public Interest Benefit"
Commonly defined by the objectives of the financial assistance program or development goals (e.g., UN Sustainable Development Goals).

Criterion Elements
Programs probe the impact of the applicant's project or characteristics of the applicant.

Evaluating Public Interest Benefit
- When framed as impact, Providers of Financial Support commonly ask for a narrative describing the potential impact of the proposed project.
- When targeting specific applicant characteristics, Providers of Financial Support commonly ask for documented proof that the applicant meets established definitions for the targeted group.

Financial Need

Defining "Financial Need"
Commonly defined as a shortfall of actual financial resources and/or a limited potential to access financial resources in the future.

Criterion Elements
- For shortfall, programs probe an applicant's current financial situation.
- For potential, programs probe an applicant's potential to access financial resources in the future.

Evaluating Financial Need:
- To determine shortfall, Providers of Financial Support can ask for:
  - Financial statements (audited, if available), yearly budgets (with year-to-date numbers), balance sheets, and/or a business plan.
- To determine potential to access financial resources, Providers of Financial Support can ask for proof that an applicant operates in an underserved market.

Financial Capability

Defining "Financial Capability"
Financial capability refers to an organization's financial health or sustainability.

Criterion Elements
Backward-facing, assessing an applicant's past financial performance, and forward-facing, gauging current capacities.

Evaluating Financial Capability
- Providers of Financial Support can ask for:
  - Quantitative measures like debt to equity ratio, return on equity, profitability of assets and business profitability, interest coverage ratio, etc.
  - A capability statement to gauge past performance.

For a more holistic evaluation, Providers of Financial Support in philanthropy consider quantitative and qualitative indicators.

3. Evaluating Applications

What methods do other Providers of Financial Support employ to equitably and objectively assess applications from applicants of diverse backgrounds?

Key areas of interest:

- Review Panels

- Evaluation Processes

- Scoring

- Selecting Candidates

Evaluating Applications

Review panels
- Reviewers should come from diverse backgrounds and possess the knowledge and expertise to evaluate criteria.
- Reviewers should participate in training sessions.

Evaluation Process
- Providers of Financial Support can consider a multistage evaluation process (e.g., Letter of Intent).

Scoring
- Providers of Financial Support can use specific scoring schemes to ensure equitable evaluation (e.g., weights to give more importance to certain criteria or criterion elements when calculating an overall score).

Selecting Candidates
- Providers of Financial Support can consider ranking applicants for equity.

4. Ongoing Applicant Support

What strategies do Providers of Financial Support use to support applicant success beyond the application process?

Key strategies include:

● Financial Support

● Non-financial Support

● Mixed Support

Ongoing Applicant Support

Financial Support

Ongoing financial support can be given directly by the Provider of Financial Support (through follow-on grants) or indirectly by connecting grantees to other organizations in the Provider's network.

Non-financial Support

Funders can provide non-financial support through:
- Technical assistance in specific areas (e.g., strategic planning, marketing and communications, executive coaching, etc.).
- Knowledge networks.

Mixed Support

Funders can provide both financial and non-financial support.

What might these findings mean for the Applicant Support Program in the New gTLD Program: Next Round?

Applicant Pool: Opportunities for Further Exploration

- Exploring ways to engage in efforts to better understand the needs of target groups (e.g., working with local partners, conducting research with potential applicants, collecting feedback surveys).

- Considering how to tailor outreach information to target audiences.

- Exploring opportunities to streamline the ASP application process.

- Considering optional information sessions to provide additional application information and guidance.

- Exploring ways to facilitate connections between pro bono service providers and potential applicants to provide capacity development and application support.

Eligibility Criteria: Opportunities for Further Exploration

- Assessing opportunities to streamline the process to evaluate public interest benefit (e.g., asking for a narrative describing the applicant's public interest benefit or for proof that they belong to an identified target group).

- Exploring ways to enhance understanding about how ICANN org will assess financial need by sharing the method or threshold for determining actual financial shortfall and identifying targeted underserved markets.

- Consider potential to assess other organizational capacity areas, in addition to finances, to determine capability.

- Aligning risk-tolerance with the goals of the ASP.

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Evaluating Applications: Opportunities for Further Exploration

- Exploring possibilities to utilize differentiated review panels with specific expertise regarding eligibility criteria.

- Considering the development of training materials for review panel members.

- Exploring the possibility of a multi-stage review process to streamline application evaluation.

- Considering ways to clarify the scoring scheme used to assess applicants.

- Exploring ways to design an evaluation matrix that is simple but still gives appropriate weight to important eligibility criteria/elements.

Ongoing Support: Opportunities for Further Exploration

- Exploring opportunities to support the ongoing financial needs of supported applicants, like reducing ongoing fees or connecting applicants to other financial opportunities available.

- Consider possible opportunities to support the capacity needs of supported applicants, e.g., through a knowledge network for new entrants.

- Exploring possibilities to provide comprehensive ongoing support that covers multiple aspects of a supported applicant's ongoing needs.

Q&A

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