ICANN78 | Prep Week – Applicant Support Program: Exploring Research Findings from Other Global Programs
Tuesday, October 10, 2023 – 4:30 to 5:30 HAM

LEON GRUNDMANN: Hello and welcome to this ICANN 78 Prep Week session on the Applicant Support Program, exploring research findings from other global programs on the 10th of October at 14:30 UTC.

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Finally, as we have quite some content to cover, could we please ask you to keep your questions until the end of the session when they will be either read aloud or spoken by yourself, if you so choose, when your question is addressed. With that, I will hand the floor over to Jessica Villaseñor.

JESSICA VILLASEÑOR: Thank you, Leon, and thank you everyone for joining us. Today we will be sharing findings from a survey of globally recognized procedures for programs that are similar to the Applicant Support Program. And we will also be discussing the potential implications of these findings for the design of the Applicant Support Program in the next round. Next slide, please.

So I'll start off by sharing a bit of background information for this project before moving into key findings from the four research questions we explored. Then I will pass it over to Kristy, who will share

more information about how these findings might inform the design of the Applicant Support Program in the next round. And then we'll open it up for some questions, and we hope to start what is an ongoing fruitful discussion. As Leon mentioned, there's a lot of information to be covered. So this is a high-level summary of our findings. If you are interested in diving deeper into any of the findings presented here today, or learn more about the program examples offered, a link to the paper can be found on the session page, along with a copy of this deck. Next slide.

So we'll start with some background information and a quick glimpse into research design. Next slide. In 2016, ICANN org published the Program Implementation Review Report, which documents the experiences of ICANN staff members charged with executing the new gTLD program. This report recommended that ICANN consider researching globally recognized procedures that could be adapted for the implementation of the Applicant Support Program. This recommendation was later supported by the Subsequent Procedures PDP Working Group and Implementation Guidance 17.7 of the Subsequent Procedures Final Report. ICANN Org initiated this research during the operational design phase so that findings would be available to the Implementation Review Team for consideration during implementation. Next slide.

Now, there are many different facets of program design or implementation that could have been explored. So to narrow the focus of this research, we first conducted preliminary research of ICANN documents, like the Subsequent Procedures Final Report, to identify

any themes that we could find in the challenges associated with the Applicant Support Program in the 2012 round. We also explored best practices and academic literature to identify common barriers that new entrants face in application processes. Next slide.

What we found was that there are four main areas of research to be explored. The applicant pool, eligibility criteria, methods of assessment, and ongoing applicant success. And these here became our four guiding questions. And we'll dive into each of these research questions individually in this presentation. Next slide.

Now, as you can imagine, there is no one-to-one comparison with the Applicant Support Program. The program itself is quite unique. But we did look at peer-reviewed research, best practice guidance materials and philanthropy, and procedures of similar programs focused on promoting accessibility, inclusion, and diversity, whether they were grant programs, loan programs, or international development projects. And while not everything is a perfect fit for the Applicant Support Program, these resources did offer us a lot of information about procedures employed by other programs and best practices that could be further explored in the context of the Applicant Support Program. And again, the paper offers a more in-depth discussion of research methods and program examples if you would like a deeper dive in that area. Next slide.

Here's just a quick note on terminology that we'll be using this presentation. An applicant for financial support is an individual or entity that is interested in or has applied to a financial assistance program. A provider of financial support is an entity that provides financial

assistance to individuals or other entities through a dedicated program, including a grant, a loan, or aid. Next slide. With that, we'll move into the findings. Next slide.

So here's just a general overview of the findings and structure of the paper. And here we'll be exploring each of these sections individually in this presentation. Next slide.

So this is our first guiding question. 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? An applicant pool consists of the total number of applicants who apply for consideration of a job, a grant, or program during an application submission period. And a wide, diverse applicant pool is key to selecting strong candidates from diverse backgrounds because you have more potential applicants to choose from. To expand and diversify the applicant pool, research suggests that there are three main areas that should be targeted. Applicant awareness, application accessibility, and applicant capacity. And we'll speak a little about each here. Next slide.

So the first is applicant awareness. Awareness plays an important role in shaping the size and makeup of an applicant pool because without knowledge that a program exists, a potential applicant will not know to apply to the program. Efforts aimed at increasing awareness focus on expanding outreach and particularly outreach to previously overlooked groups. The first step in this process is identifying target groups for these outreach efforts. Once target groups have been identified, the second step is reaching out and connecting with these new groups.

Providers of financial support can reach new groups by utilizing their networks and asking connections if they know of potential candidates who might be interested, using the networks of peer organizations that might be better connected in target regions, publishing materials in local outlets, and hiring local consultants in the target communities to support outreach activities. Best practice guidance recommends that outreach efforts consider the audience needs when presenting information to new audiences like language skills, knowledge base, and geographic location. For example, the provider of financial support should not assume knowledge of U.S.-based systems or organizational norms. Outreach should also provide enough information for the potential applicant to make an informed decision. This includes any potential costs and benefits to participate participation as well as potential costs that won't be covered by the program. Next slide.

So, the application itself can act as a barrier to applying, especially for potential applicants for financial support from underserved communities or markets. These potential applicants for financial support may be deterred from applying as they may not possess the particular knowledge, skills, and/or resources required to complete the application. Efforts in this area focus on increasing accessibility by uncovering bias, tailoring the application to the applicant's needs, and providing support during the application process.

Now, when thinking about uncovering bias, we think, without being intentional, organizational processes and procedures, including the application, can be laden with implicit or unconscious bias that limits the size of the applicant pool. To combat this, providers of financial

support can use data to determine any patterns that lead to disparate outcomes and can create institutional mechanisms to reduce bias, like slowing down decision-making procedures or involving a cross-section of decision-makers in any decision-making process.

Many recommendations aimed at making the application process more accessible focus on understanding the needs of the potential applicant and adjusting the application process or tailoring the application process to be responsive to those needs. This might include accepting applications in a different format or streamlining the application to be more accessible for those applicants with less resources, like making the application more concise, eliminating duplicative questions, or using lay language.

Our research shows that offering application support during the application process is another way to make the application accessible. This can include offering optional informational sessions to answer any questions and clarify processes or offering to review draft materials before the deadline. Next slide.

The third focus area to widen and deepen the applicant pool is applicant capacity. Now, application processes require that applicants possess certain capacities, for example, skills, knowledge, financial, and non-financial resources to complete the application successfully. This disproportionately affects applicants with less developed capacity in key areas, particularly those from underserved markets or communities.

To combat this issue, providers of financial support have begun to offer capacity development for potential applicants as a way to make their funding efforts more equitable and to prepare a more diverse pool of potential applicants.

In this area, funders have employed training programs to teach specific skills that can be learned for short-term use. This can include offering training fact sheets, courses, or specific workshops to help support an applicant's ability to complete an application.

This can also include technical assistance. Technical assistance is broadly defined as support to help organizations acquire any specialized service or skill that is not currently resident within the organization, but which it may need in order to operate more effectively or strengthen sustainability.

Now, technical assistance involves consultation, coaching, or mentoring by a specialist or consultant. And this can take place in one-on-one sessions or small group facilitation. Providers of financial support can provide technical assistance grants or connect potential applicants with providers of technical assistance during the application process. To be most effective, technical assistance should be ongoing to promote learning and reinforce skill uptake.

Another way to strengthen applicant capacity is through pipeline preparation programs. These are a more comprehensive approach to capacity development for potential applicants. Providers of financial support may require potential applicants to participate or engage with

various capacity development resources to be eligible for consideration in their financial assistance program.

The requirements and demands of the pipeline can vary across a broad spectrum. They can include a requirement for participation in a one-off training session prior to applying to the program, or they can be more demanding, even requiring participation in a separate and distinct cohort-based program in order to be eligible to apply.

Pipeline approaches can be beneficial for both the applicant and the provider of financial support as the applicant strengthens capacity and is offered additional support necessary to complete the application. And the required training works to limit the number of less developed applications received by the provider of financial support. This helps to decrease the burden placed on both parties. Next slide.

And this brings us to our second guiding research question, which is, 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, as these were the eligibility criteria for the applicant support program in the 2012 round. We've looked at each of the criteria to explore how other organizations define each criterion and the criterion elements or what they looked at to probe applicant eligibility for each of these areas. We also looked at the process used by other providers to evaluate applicants for each of these criteria. Next slide.

Here we have public interest or public interest benefit. So, public interest benefit is a broad term that can be defined in many ways. Broadly speaking, public interest benefit can be defined as anything which is beneficial for or in the interest of the welfare and well-being of the general public and/or society as a whole.

In practice, some similar programs define their public interest criterion around the objectives of the financial assistance program. So, for example, if the goal of the program is to promote poverty reduction, then public interest will be defined as anything which is beneficial for or in the interest of poverty reduction.

Alternatively, programs also align the definition of public interest with an internationally agreed-upon set of goals, like the UN sustainable development goals or the World Bank goals. There are two main ways providers of financial support can support an applicant's public interest eligibility. They either evaluate the impact of the applicant's project or look at the applicant's characteristics.

An evaluation of public interest benefit depends on the was the criteria is framed. Programs focusing on impact probe whether the impact of the applicant's project is in alignment with the goals of the overall program or mission of the organization. When framed as impact, evaluating public interest benefit can be done by asking applicants for a narrative explanation of the potential impact of the applicant's project or how their application is in the public interest.

Here, evaluation can be difficult due to its subjective nature, so it is important for providers of financial support to establish a clear rubric to be used by the review panel for evaluation.

Programs that frame public interest benefit around applicant characteristics target support to applicants with specific characteristics that are clearly established, either specific types of organizations, communities, or sectors. Identified target groups are those whose funding has been determined would promote or benefit the public interest. Targeted groups should be established after consideration of the objectives of the larger program, the context of the field, and/or the mission of the organization. The World Bank, for example, targets specific groups and sectors that align with its World Bank strategy and sustainable development goals, including those that have been largely excluded from finance, like developing countries, micro, small, and medium enterprises, and women-owned enterprises.

Evaluation of public interest benefit for those programs targeting specific applicant characteristics include asking applicants for documented proof that they meet established definitions for the target groups. Next slide.

Financial need. Most programs employ definitions of financial need that focus on a shortfall of actual financial resources and/or a limited potential to access financial resources in the future. Criterion elements are consistent with this definition.

Current financial situation can be determined by asking applicants for recent financial statements, yearly budgets, balance sheets, or a

business plan. Best practice guidance recommends determining financial need using a simple and straightforward method, like a formula, or establishing a threshold that considers the applicant sector and operating context.

When an applicant's potential to access financial resources is being used to determine financial need, the provider of financial support explores whether the applicant belongs to an underserved market that may make it difficult to secure future funding due to certain organizational characteristics and/or operating environments. This commonly includes those applicants that operate in geographic areas where there may be less funding opportunities, like in a developing country or in rural areas, and organizational characteristics that may limit the applicant's funding network, like a non-profit or a women or ethnic minority-led organization that tends to be under-resourced. Next slide.

Okay. The last eligibility criteria we explored is financial capability, which refers to an organization's financial health or sustainability. Now, financial capability is both backward-facing and forward-facing, assessing an applicant's past financial performance and gauging current capacities to forecast an applicant's future financial success.

Similar financial assistance programs examine financial capacity or capability by auditing an applicant's financial statements to ensure that there are no irregularities and that the company is on solid financial footing. This can include exploring the debt-to-income ratio, return on equity, profitability of assets, and business profitability.

This can also be accomplished through more qualitative means, like through a capability statement, which is a narrative that proves an applicant's successful implementation of similar projects. Capability statements should be evaluated based on an applicant's technical and programmatic experience, expertise, and previous successes in implementing an effective project.

With these capability statements, applicants can also be asked to submit general organizational documentation, like annual reports or past grant reports. It is common practice in philanthropy to consider both quantitative and qualitative indicators to determine financial capacity, where balance sheets and income statements are complemented with more qualitative components.

Here, best practice guidance suggests that the assessment of criteria related to financial or organizational capacity and capability is largely based on risk and the level of risk a provider of financial support is willing to tolerate. Many times, this means that providers favor applicants that are larger, have stronger organizational and/or financial capacity or capability, and that have a strong record of success. This has the potential to disproportionately impact applicants from underserved communities because they tend to be under-resourced or have less developed organizational or financial capacity. These guidance materials recommend that providers of financial assistance ensure that their risk tolerance is aligned with the overall goals of the program. Next slide.

Okay. The third guiding question that we explored was what methods do other providers of financial support employ to equitably and

objectively assess applications from applicants of diverse backgrounds? Here, we looked at recommendations for review panels, evaluation processes, scoring, and selecting candidates. And we'll do a quick run-through of what we found for each of these areas. Next slide.

Findings suggest that reviewers should come from diverse backgrounds and have the knowledge and expertise necessary to adequately evaluate candidate applications. To do this, many programs, especially in philanthropy and the public sector, use two separate review panels in the evaluation process. One to review the project's charitable goals or impact, and another team with expertise in private equity or venture capital to evaluate candidates.

After selection of appropriate evaluators, recommendations suggest it is important to ensure standardized evaluation and quality assurance through adequate preparation and training of reviewers. And this can be done through briefing sessions or orientation sessions, and guidance suggests this training should also include diversity, equity, and inclusion components to ensure reviewers are aware of their implicit biases and are prepared to consider the cultural, geographic diversity of applications.

To promote diversity, best practice guidance recommends that financial assistance programs use a multi-stage evaluation process. This includes a screening process before full evaluation of application materials, and this can be done through either a short preliminary application or letter of intent.

In order to synthesize and compare assessment of proposals under evaluation or applications, it is recommended to assign a scoring scheme to each eligibility criteria. This can include weights to give more importance to certain criteria or criterion elements when calculating an overall score. Of course, any weights should be in alignment with the objective of the program and should only be used to focus on the most important criteria.

Lastly, providers of financial support can also consider ranking and comparing applicants when making a final award decision to ensure that those with greater demonstrated need receive the appropriate level of support. Next slide.

And this brings us to our last guiding question, which is what strategies do providers of financial support use to support applicants beyond the application process? Now, one of the biggest limitations to the impact of funder investments or return on investments is ongoing sustainability of applicant organizations. This is usually attributed to weaknesses in capacity or lack of access to funding. As a result, many funders, many providers of financial support have turned their attention to extending support post-award. Next slide.

To promote ongoing sustainability, providers of financial support can provide financial support, nonfinancial support, or a mix of both. Now, here research suggests that providers can provide ongoing financial support directly in the form of follow-on grants or indirectly by connecting applicants to other organizations in its network. Providers can also provide ongoing non-financial support through technical assistance to promote applicant sustainability. Funders can also

facilitate ongoing capacity development post-award by connecting successful applicants and other stakeholders to each other through knowledge networks to promote peer learning. Knowledge networks bring individuals together to share resources and information, create collective strategies, and help one another strengthen skills.

Most funders engaged in ongoing support to ensure sustainability post-award offer a mix of both financial and non-financial support. This is usually some sort of additional financial support in addition to access to technical assistance or pro bono services. Next slide.

I know that was a lot of information, but I hope that was informative to give you a sense for what we found when we explored globally recognized procedures of similar programs. I'll turn it over to Kristy, who will now discuss what these findings might mean for the Applicant Support Program in the next round.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Thank you so much, Jessica, for that presentation. And hello, everyone. My name is Kristy Buckley, and I serve as the Director of the Applicant Support Program for the next round. As with any research, it's important to take the findings of that and to think about how they might apply to your specific context.

In the case of the Applicant Support Program, it's a unique program, and it's not necessarily a one-for-one that we could follow what other programs do. But we hope that the research that Jessica conducted on other global programs can serve to provide insight into how we might think about the design and implementation of the Applicant Support

Program or considerations for areas of improvement. So that's what this next section will cover here, looking at how might these findings be useful in the context of the program that we are running.

So we will follow the same organization that Jessica used for her slides. So the first section here is the applicant pool and looking for ways to deepen, widen, diversify the applicant pool. Some of the opportunities that we think may be worthy of further exploration in particular are to look for ways to engage in efforts to better understand the needs of target groups. For example, this could be working with local partners or conducting research with potential applicants and collecting feedback surveys.

We may also wish to explore opportunities to streamline the applicant support or ASP application process to make it more accessible to potential applicants. We could also look for ways to facilitate connections between pro bono service providers and potential applicants to provide capacity development and application support.

With regards to the eligibility criteria, we could assess opportunities to streamline the process to evaluate public interest benefits, for example, by asking applicants for a narrative description of their public interest benefit or proof that they belong to an identified target group.

We may wish to explore an enhancing understanding about how ICANN Org and its evaluators will assess financial need by sharing the method or the threshold for determining that. We could also consider assessing other organizational capacity areas in addition to finances in order to determine capability.

In terms of evaluating applications, other opportunities for further exploration here could be utilizing differentiated review panels with specific expertise regarding eligibility criteria. For example, the financial need evaluation panel could be distinct from the public interest evaluation panel, recognizing that these may be two different skill sets and areas of expertise.

We could also consider developing training materials for review panel members so that there are consistent approaches to doing those evaluations. And we could also potentially explore the possibility of a multi-stage review process to streamline the application evaluation.

In terms of ongoing support, we could look for opportunities to support the ongoing financial needs of supported applicants that become registry operators, for example, reducing ongoing fees or connecting applicants to other financial opportunities that might be available. We could also consider looking at ways to support the capacity needs of supported applicants, for example, through a knowledge network for new entrants into this space.

That concludes our presentation, and we thank you for holding your questions and comments. But we now open it up for questions and comments and discussion on the presentation. We would love to hear your reflections and your ideas based upon the research that we've conducted. I will turn it over to my colleague Sam to manage the queue in terms of taking your questions.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Kristy. And I'm not seeing any hands or questions submitted as of yet. We do have a hand now from Alan Greenberg. Alan, over to you.

ALAN GREENBERG: Yeah, thank you very much. First of all, this is a very impressive piece of work and both comprehensive and I think ultimately very informative. The challenge is now to implement it, of course, and figure out how it impacts us. I missed the first couple of minutes, so you might already address this, but is there a list available of who participated in the survey?

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you. Jessica, did you want to handle that one?

JESSICA VILLASEÑOR: Yeah. Thank you, Alan, for your question. So this was actually not a survey. What we did was we did kind of a survey, not a survey, a research of existing programs, the structure of existing programs. We looked at best practice guidance materials and philanthropy, and we looked at academic literature about common barriers faced by new entrants in application processes. So not a survey as a data collection tool, but a survey as kind of surveying the field of literature that exists.

ALAN GREENBERG: Okay, thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you. Anybody else who would like to ask a question, feel free to raise your hand or type into the Q&A pod. I see a hand now from Lawrence. Lawrence, over to you.

LAWRENCE OLAWALE ROBERTS: Thank you. So I also agree that this has been a very informative study that has been done. But with regards to applicant support in ICANN land, maybe Kristy can help answer this. Are we basically looking at supporting a single application from an entity? Because when we say applicant support, it means that we can have more than one group, for instance, [inaudible] making a request to have more than one TLD supported. Is that the intention? Rather, what should we be looking at or should we be considering in the next round [inaudible] application?

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Lawrence. The audio was a bit unclear, but just to restate, was the question whether the applicant support program intends to look at a single application per entity? Please correct me if I misheard.

LAWRENCE OLAWALE ROBERTS: Very correct.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Okay, thank you. Over to you, Kristy, for that one.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Thank you, Samantha. And thank you, Lawrence, for the question. I think this is something that we are exploring in developing the applicant support handbook, which will provide instructions to potential applicants about the rules of the program. And of course, the applicant support handbook and its draft form first needs to go to the implementation review team.

We are planning to work closely with the implementation review team, starting actually at ICANN 78, and then having a sub-track that is focused on the applicant support program starting in November of this year. So, I believe that group in consultation with ICANN Org will be working to determine that, whether there's a restriction on one applicant submitting one application for support, essentially, versus multiple applications for support. So, yeah, I think that will be in development with the applicant support handbook. Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Kristy. I now see a hand from Adebunmi. Over to you.

ADEBUNMI AKINBO: Thank you so much. The presentation is okay, but I would love to ask if there are any applications that have succeeded, or we are still projecting that there will be applications. And so, there has not been any that we have executed. Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Kristy, I'll turn it over to you again for that one.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Okay. Thank you for the question. I just want to make sure that I got it. It cut out a little bit at the end. So, you're asking if any applications have succeeded for the applicant support program?

ADEBUNMI AKINBO: Yes, correct. Correct.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: In the previous round, do you mean?

ADEBUNMI AKINBO: Yes, so that you could cite them and we could study them to know how they succeeded. Thank you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Excellent. Yes, I understood the question. Yeah, excellent question. So, as Rubens notes in the chat, in 2012, one application was successful in applying for the applicant support program. Karen has also included a link to the program results there. Thank you, Karen. And it's a good question about studying them in terms of where the challenges were. It is something that we have taken into consideration as we think about ways to improve the applicant support program. This includes review of the eligibility criteria, which we expect, as was noted in the SubPro

final report, that they would be similar to the 2012 round. But I think there's also opportunities to ensure that they don't present significant barriers to entry, especially based upon the research here that we've done on other global programs on how to make the application process more accessible to diverse applicants. So, it is something that we are looking very carefully at.

One of the barriers that a number of people noted in the 2012 round, and I think this was documented in both the SubPro final report and the program implementation review, was that there was a significant disincentive to apply for the applicant support program, because if you did not qualify for support, you were disqualified from continuing with your gTLD application at the time. So, there seems to be widespread views that this was a significant deterrent for people even applying for support, which is why we got very few applicants. So, that's something that we are trying to address going forward with the applicant support program. Thanks.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Kristy. I see a question in the chat from Segun. How will the new gTLD impact existing gTLDs in the domain name system? Segun, did you want to raise your hand and speak to that question a little bit more? Not seeing a hand. Kristy, did you want to try and address that question?

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Yeah, I think this is a great question that probably has to do with sort of market indicators in terms of how the next round—because of the

impact to the existing marketplace, right? This is not something that I have expertise on, but we could certainly take it back and consult subject matter experts in that space. I know that there are also some marketplace studies in different regions that are exploring the impact of future rounds on this and the state of the existing gTLD market. So, there may be an opportunity to look at. Yeah, and Rubens has posted a link. So, thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Kristy. I'm not seeing any more hands or questions in the chat or Q&A pod. If there's anyone else who would like to ask a question, please feel free to raise your hand now. I see a hand from Anne. Go ahead, Anne.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Yes, thanks so much for this comprehensive presentation. I was wondering, as I look at the section on ongoing financial support and just reading very quickly some of the issues that arise in other programs in the three to five-year time frame, is it starting to look as though applicants who qualify for applicant support may end up in a position of needing to request grants from other organizations? For example, I noted the Ford Foundation BUILD program. It's almost looking a s though the only way this succeeds is if an applicant can muster financial resources from some other grant program that is outside of ICANN. Is that too conclusory on my part?

EN

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Anne. Jessica or Kristy, would either of you like to take this one?

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Jessica, do you have any thoughts on this based upon the research that you've conducted? And I can add to that if you like.

JESSICA VILLASEÑOR: Sure, I'll jump in here. Thank you, Anne, for the question. So I think looking at the research, it's not conclusive that an organization needs these resources from other organizations in order to, I guess, ensure sustainability, but there are definite impacts to having less developed or less strength in certain capacities, organizational capacities, or resources in an organization that impact long-term sustainability. And so these other funding opportunities or these other capacity development opportunities help organizations ensure sustainability, and less so about being, I guess, as conclusive, but it has been shown to be impactful. So that's kind of the research side of things. I'll let Kristy kind of jump in here to speak specifically to applicant support.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Thanks, Jessica. Yeah, so I think certainly the findings from the research presents a lot of food for thought. And as I mentioned in the portion that I presented, the applicant support program is somewhat unique, right? And so even to the extent that we can learn from other global programs, it is not a one-for-one and it is not a copy-paste, right? So there needs

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to be a fair amount of interpretation about to what extent do these findings really relate to the context that we are working with in the applicant support program and in the new gTLD program, and how might they be applied in that context. Because again, it's not necessarily a one-for-one there.

I would also say that there is a gTLD operating model study that ICANN, through a vendor, conducted, and that this may provide insights into alternative business models for operating gTLDs that alter our ways of thinking about the sustainability or the types of businesses that could be set up, ones that may foster greater innovation in terms of how to sustain them, for example, that may not require ongoing fee reduction or ongoing support in the same way that we currently imagine that based upon some of the business models that are in operation today. So we also look forward to seeing the results of that study to see if there may be some insights that we can garner for the applicant support program as well. Thanks for the question, Anne.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Kristy. Anne, before I turn to Cheryl, was your hand a follow-up to that response?

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: A separate question, but yes, it's a new hand.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: All right. Thank you for clarifying. Cheryl, over to you next.

CHERYL LANGDON-ORR: Thanks very much. And mine is in response to Anne's. That was a good cueing. I just wanted to mention to you all that when we were putting the original applicant support program together, which was very much a greenfield and hypothetical exercise, because as you noted, it's a very unique sort of beast and there are no real easy ways of just looking to outside entities that do similar sorts of things and go, oh, we'll have one of those off the shelf. But we did do a thought exercise on the sustainability aspects. And a number of us at the time were keen to recognize the usefulness, the utility of some type of ongoing support.

But what was seen, and I think this is what's important about the importance of a successful applicant support program for a next round of gTLDs, is that if we have successful applicants and they have success in getting this kickstart of an activity going, that they are then in a better position to seek other support from other entities so that some aspects of sustainability of running the registry is more likely to be successful. It's much harder to go to, insert name of XYZ Bank, and say, "Here is this blue sky concept. Oh, I have this great risk and this long time before I can even know if I get it, but I need this large amount of US dollars to even put my name in the ring to see if we can do it." If you've had the success and a successful applicant, have got at least a year or so and you're up and running and the model, whatever it is, and I'm excited to hear about other models being explored, the business really able to continue but require some sort of funding to do that continuance, then that in itself sets those applicants up for greater sustainability.

So, I know that's a complicated thought exercise, but it seems to me like the time now and based on this research, it's a very good time to explore that further. Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Cheryl, for that comment. Kristy, did you have any response?

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Just to agree with Cheryl. I think those are some great points that you raised, Cheryl. Thank you for sharing them.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you. Anne, over to you.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Yeah, thanks. I was very interested in the reporting that you did with respect to evaluation in connection with business plans, because it seems possible that there would be folks working on this right now in terms of trying to develop a business plan for evaluation in connection with the new gTLD application, even though we're pretty far out from all that. I'm wondering if there are, in your research, were you able to locate model business plans that have been successful when studying other organizations? I keep wondering whether applicants could apply to the ICANN grant program for the purpose of developing a business plan. And even though I was on auction proceeds, I don't recall whether there'd be eligibility by that panel to evaluate a request to develop a

business plan. But my specific question would be whether you ran across model business plans that might be somehow made available in the outreach program that would help people develop a business plan for evaluation.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Anne. Jessica, did you want to handle this one?

JESSICA VILLASEÑOR: Yeah, so I'll touch on kind of what I found in the research, and then I'll pass it to Kristy to speak a little bit more specific to the applicant support program. Thank you, Anne, again for your question.

So in the research, what I was focused on was more about best practices in thinking about what can be applied or what learnings that we can take away in designing an applicant support program for the next round. And so in the research, my focus was mostly about thinking through different components of business plans that could be considered and ways to assess or evaluate business plans in a way to be accessible, inclusive, and kind of think about really focusing on expanding diversity of the applicant pool and applications for the applicant support program. So the research was less about specific business plans that might be able to be applied to the new gTLD program context, but more about those different components that could be considered on the design side. But I think Kristy can speak a little bit more to that.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Yeah, thank you, Jessica. And thank you, Anne. It's a great question. And I think your question also touches upon that gTLD operating model study that I mentioned, which is not yet complete. But I think you're exactly right that there are probably, we hope, insights and findings from that study that could be useful in conducting communications, outreach, engagement, essentially fostering creativity in how people think about what they use a gTLD for, or how they might design their business or operating plan to capture greater ideas of innovation that might be present in the findings of that study. So that is something that we are hoping to use the findings of that study to help inform.

With regards to your question about the grants program, I don't know that we have anyone on this call from the grants program, but that's really more a question for the team that's running the grants program, what eligibility requirements and types of things they'll plan to support with that program. And I unfortunately don't have the answer to that. Thanks.

ANNE AIKMAN SCALESE: Okay, thanks so much and thanks for all the good work. I look forward to reading the report. Thank you.

SAMANTHA MANCIA: Thank you, Anne. Noting we have about four minutes left, so if there's anyone else who would like to ask a question, feel free to raise your

hand. If not, then I think we can turn it over to you, Kristy, for some closing remarks.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Excellent. Thank you, Samantha and Rubens. I noted your comment in the chat too. That's very helpful to know. I would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who joined today. I know that for many of you, it presents an awkward hour of the day, either early or late. So, thank you so much for joining this Prep Week session. We hope that the research findings are interesting to folks and that we have opportunities to further engage with you all in the community and also with the implementation review team going forward on extracting insights from these findings in terms of informing the future applicant support program.

Thank you all again for joining. We hope you have a great rest of your Prep Week. And for those of you that will be in Hamburg in person, we look forward to seeing you there and we look forward to having you all join us virtually. Thank you and we'll close the session for today. Thanks.

LEON GRUNDMANN: Thank you, Kristy. And just before we end the recording, I just wanted to quickly mention that the Policy Research and Stakeholder Programs has a pre-ICANN 78 briefing, which includes a status update for the next round of new gTLDs and also for the first time includes its own section on applicant support.

Thank you, Sam, for putting that in the chat. So, if you click the link, you can have access to the briefing and it also acts in a way as a companion during Prep Week and during the main sessions of ICANN 78. So, happy reading and I hope that can be useful as well. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]