

GNSO Working Groups: Formation and Chartering

Executive Summary

Introduction

- In creating a Working Group (WG), the GNSO Council is expected to follow the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#), unless a compelling reason exists not to do so.
- These guidelines outline “best practices” for the formation, chartering and operation of GNSO WGs. *It is recommended that Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG read these guidelines in their entirety.*
- This GNSO Basics document summarizes only the guidelines regarding the formation and chartering of GNSO WGs. Separate documents summarize the Operations of GNSO WGs and a guide to new GNSO WG Chairs.

Reasons to form a GNSO Working Group

- The purpose of a GNSO WG is to accomplish a task by enlisting both broad and informed participation from throughout the Internet community.

Steps in the GNSO Council's formation of a Working Group

- The standard steps in the Council's formation of a GNSO WG include developing and approving the WG's Charter, circulating a Call for Volunteers, and confirming the WG-selected WG Chair or Co-Chairs.
- The Council may also appoint a Council Liaison to the WG and, in rare cases (in order to ensure neutrality), the WG Chair or Co-Chairs.
- Individual Council members are encouraged to recruit members for GNSO WGs and may also serve on GNSO WGs themselves.

Developing and Approving a GNSO Working Group's Charter

- While the GNSO Council may arrange to develop a WG's Charter in various ways, the Council as a whole is responsible for approving the Charter.
- Primarily, a GNSO WG Charter is expected to provide the WG with clear direction, including a specific objective and timeline.
- See Section 6.2 of the GNSO Working Group Guidelines for specific template elements that should be included in a WG Charter.

Circulating a Call for Volunteers

- The GNSO Council announces any new WG it plans to form and solicits WG members by circulating a Call for Volunteers.
- The Call for Volunteers should be announced and circulated as widely as possible to ensure broad representation from the Internet community within the WG.
- Ideally, the WG should strive to include members from each GNSO Stakeholder Group and Constituency.

Working Group Positions That the GNSO Council May Fill

- The Council is not required to appoint any positions within a GNSO WG.
- However, it has the prerogative to appoint the WG Chair or Co-Chairs (which it may do to ensure neutrality and fairness); to appoint a Council Liaison to the WG; and to request expert advisors or consultants.

Confirming the WG Chair or Co-Chairs

- Typically, GNSO WG members select their own Chair or Co-Chairs, who must then be confirmed by the GNSO Council.

Recruiting GNSO Working Group members

- GNSO Council members are encouraged to recruit volunteers to serve on GNSO WGs.
- Usually, a Council member recruits WG members from his/her own GNSO Stakeholder Group or Constituency but may also recruit from elsewhere in the GNSO or ICANN, as well as from outside of ICANN.

Serving on GNSO Working Groups

- GNSO Council members are encouraged to join GNSO WGs and may serve simply as a participant or in any other capacity within a WG.

Introduction

An ICANN Working Group (WG) can be created by various entities within the ICANN community in order to accomplish a specific task or assignment. Among the entities that regularly create WGs are ICANN's Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs).

The entity that creates a WG is called the WG's "Chartering Organization" (CO). This is because developing and approving a WG's Charter – which ideally sets out the WG's scope, mission and expected deliverables – comprise an important part of creating a WG.

Within the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO), the GNSO Council creates GNSO WGs for various specific purposes. Among these purposes is the development of Internet policies related to generic top-level domains (gTLDs) for proposal to the ICANN Board.

"Best practices" of GNSO Working Groups

In creating a WG, the GNSO Council is expected to follow the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) (found in Annex 1 of the [GNSO Operating Procedures](#)), unless a compelling reason exists not to do so. These guidelines are a set of "best practices" pertaining to the formation, chartering and ongoing operation of GNSO WGs. The objective of these guidelines is to optimize a WG's productivity and effectiveness.

It is highly recommended that both Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG read the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) in their entirety.

Although the GNSO developed and adopted the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) for use within WGs created by the GNSO Council, the guidelines were intentionally written broadly enough to be applicable to and useful for WGs created by other ICANN entities.

This document

This document summarizes only the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) that *pertain to the formation and chartering of GNSO WGs*. The guidelines pertaining to the ongoing operation of GNSO WGs are summarized in a separate document.

The intended audience for this document is GNSO Council members and anyone interested in joining a GNSO WG. Other members of the ICANN community might also find this document useful, since the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) apply not only to WGs created by the GNSO Council but often to WGs created by other ICANN COs, as well.

Reasons to form a GNSO Working Group

According to the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#), the *general* purpose of a GNSO WG is to enlist community-wide participation to accomplish a task, resolve an issue or develop recommendations. “Community” here refers to the broadest Internet-using and Internet-interested community worldwide.

Of course, the *specific* purposes for which the GNSO Council creates WGs vary widely and include both substantive (policy) and administrative (process) goals. The following are just a few examples of the many specific reasons that the Council has previously created WGs:

- To develop a substantive Internet policy regarding “domain tasting” for proposal to the ICANN Board;
- To develop implementation advice for ICANN’s New Generic Top-Level Domain (gTLD) Program; and
- To revise the GNSO policy development process (PDP), as part of the [GNSO Improvements](#) project.

How Working Groups Accomplish Their Goals

The [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) allow a WG much freedom regarding how it goes about accomplishing its goal.

Note that a GNSO WG assigned to develop substantive Internet policies known as “Consensus Policies for recommendation to the ICANN Board, must follow specific steps under the GNSO PDP. This PDP is described in [Annex A of the ICANN Bylaws](#) and the [Policy Development Process Manual](#).

Steps in the GNSO Council’s Formation of a Working Group

The [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) outline a number of steps in the GNSO Council’s formation of a WG. These include:

- Developing and approving the WG’s Charter;

- Circulating a Call for Volunteers;
- Selecting volunteers for certain WG positions, if the Council wishes to do so; and
- Confirming the WG-selected WG Chair or Co-Chairs.

In addition to the steps required of the GNSO Council as a whole in its formation of a WG, individual Council members are also encouraged to:

- Recruit members for a new WG; and
- Serve on WGs in which they are interested or for which they can provide valuable expertise or experience.

After a GNSO WG has been formed

The GNSO Council's responsibilities regarding a GNSO WG do not end once the WG is formed. In its role as manager of the policy process, the Council is responsible for helping a WG resolve any problems or questions that may come up throughout its lifetime. (For more detail, see Sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.7 of the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#).)

Not every collaborative team is a formal Working Group

Not all collaborative teams within the GNSO community need to be formal GNSO WGs. Hence, not all collaborative teams need to be created – or operate, for that matter – according to the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#). Informal drafting teams and other forms of collaboration are often utilized as appropriate by the GNSO.

Developing and Approving a GNSO Working Group's Charter

The GNSO Council may create a WG's Charter in any way it sees fit. In the past, the Council has assigned small groups of its members to draft WG Charters or has enlisted WGs themselves to draft their own Charters.

Ultimately, however, the Council is responsible for approving a WG's Charter.

Contents of a WG Charter

Primarily, a WG Charter provides the WG with clear direction, including a specific objective and timeline.

There is additional information that a GNSO WG Charter should ideally contain. This information includes the following three components.

First, a GNSO WG Charter should list any individuals whom the Council chooses to appoint as the WG's Chair or Co-Chairs, Liaison to the Council, expert advisors or ICANN Staff. (For details, please see "Working Group Positions That the GNSO Council May Fill" below.) It is only in rare circumstances, however, that the Council chooses to appoint an independent WG Chair (or Co-Chairs); typically, a WG typically appoints (or elects) its own Chair or Co-Chairs, subject to confirmation by the GNSO Council.

Second, a GNSO WG Charter ideally should specify any atypical procedures that the GNSO Council would like the WG to follow. For example, a WG is required to use any of a series of

preset indicators to describe the level of agreement it reaches regarding each of its formal recommendations. While the [GNSO Working Group Guidelines](#) recommend a procedure for WGs to use in assigning these preset indicators, it does not require its use. In the rare case in which the GNSO Council would like a WG to use an alternative procedure, it should explicitly indicate so in the WG's Charter.

Third, a GNSO WG Charter usually includes guidelines regarding the information that the Council expects each prospective WG member to include in his/her Statements of Interest (SOIs). Submission of an SOI is the only requirement of a prospective member. For further details, see Chapter 5.0 of the [GNSO Operating Procedures v2.4](#) and the [GNSO Statements of Interest \(SOI\)](#) main wiki page.

Charter template

See Section 6.2 of the GNSO Working Group Guidelines for specific template elements that should be included in a WG Charter.

The GNSO Council may decide that not all of the sections in the template are necessary for every GNSO WG or, similarly, that the Charter of certain WG may require additional sections.

Circulating a Call for Volunteers

The GNSO Council announces any new WG it plans to form and solicits WG members by circulating a Call for Volunteers. Typically, this Call for Volunteers includes:

- The WG's objective(s), expected types of work and expected timetable;
- Links to relevant background documents, including the WG Charter;
- Clear instructions for signing up as a prospective WG member and submitting the required Statement of Interest (SOI); and
- A clear statement that the WG will operate in a transparent and open manner (which includes the public availability of the WG's mailing list archive, meeting recordings and/or transcripts and member SOIs). It is important that prospective WG members are aware of this open nature of the WG.

As an aid to recruitment, the Council may also include in the Call for Volunteers an explanation of why the WG is being formed and why its work is important.

Circulation of the Call for Volunteers

The Call for Volunteers should be circulated as widely as possible to ensure broad representation in the WG from the Internet community. At the very least (with rare exception), the announcement should be:

- Published on all relevant ICANN Web pages;
- Distributed to all appropriate ICANN SOs and ACs; and
- Distributed to all appropriate GNSO Stakeholder Groups and Constituencies.

The Council should also consider distributing the Call for Volunteers further, such as to groups, both within and outside of ICANN, that have a particular interest and/or expertise regarding the WG's subject matter. For GNSO-chartered WG's, it is important to include

members from each GNSO Stakeholder Group and Constituency in order to encourage contribution and participation from those who may be affected by the proposed policy/recommendations arising from the WG.

Working Group Positions That the GNSO Council May Fill

The GNSO Council is not required to appoint any positions within a GNSO WG. However, if the Council wishes, it is free to appoint the following.

WG Chair or Co-Chair

The WG Chair is expected to be neutral, to refrain from promoting any specific agenda and to ensure the fair, objective treatment of all opinions. Typically, the WG itself is responsible for appointing (or electing) such a Chair (or Co-Chairs), who then must be confirmed by the GNSO Council.

However, to ensure the neutrality and fairness of the Chair, the Council may, in certain rare instances, choose to appoint a completely independent Chair (or Co-Chairs) for a WG. Such a Chair would officiate over WG activities and discussions but would not participate substantively in those discussions.

GNSO Council Liaison to the WG

The Council may appoint one of its own members to act as a neutral liaison between it and the WG. Among the Liaison's duties, is to:

- Report to the Council on a regular basis regarding the progress of the WG; and
- Communicate to the Council any questions from the WG regarding its Charter or mission.

Expert advisors or consultants

The Council may, if necessary, invite external expert advisors or consultants to participate in a WG on a volunteer basis. If the participation by such an advisor would incur any cost to ICANN, ICANN a formal request should be submitted to ICANN Staff. Staff would need to follow its standard procedures for retaining the services of any such expert or consultant, including, identifying whether there is any funding available for such purpose.

Confirming the WG Chair or Co-Chairs

Typically, a GNSO WG is responsible for selecting its own Chair or Co-Chairs. The Chair or Co-Chair must then be confirmed by the GNSO Council as a whole.

The WG Chair is expected to be neutral, to refrain from promoting any specific agenda and to ensure the fair, objective treatment of all opinions.

Recruiting GNSO Working Group members

GNSO Council members are encouraged to recruit volunteers to serve on WGs that the Council forms. In this way, Council members assist in ensuring that each GNSO WG contains the needed pool of talents, knowledge and diversity.

Usually, a Council member focuses on recruiting WG members from his/her own Stakeholder Group or Constituency within the GNSO. However, a Council member may recruit any GNSO member, any member of another ICANN SO or AC and any individual from outside of ICANN to serve on a GNSO WG.

Serving on GNSO Working Groups

GNSO Council members are also encouraged to join GNSO WGs. A Council member may serve on a GNSO WG simply as a participant or in any of its officer positions, including that of WG Chair or Liaison.

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