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# Geographic Names Review

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# 1. Geographic Names Review

Applications for gTLD strings must ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the interests of governments or public authorities in Geographic Names. The requirements and procedure ICANN will follow in the evaluation process are described in the following paragraphs. Applicants should review these requirements even if they do not believe their intended gTLD string is a Geographic Name. All applied-for gTLD strings will be reviewed according to the requirements in this section, regardless of whether the application indicates it is for a Geographic Name.

The Geographic Names evaluation will have two processes: the geographic string check, which is a string-level review conducted during the application submission and processing phase of the next round of the program, and the geographic verification for those names determined to be geographic, which is a substantive review of submitted application responses conducted during the evaluation phase of the next round of the program. Refer to Section 2.4 for a more detailed and comprehensive explanation of the evaluation processes.

## 1.1 Treatment of Country or Territory Names<sup>1</sup>

Applications for strings that are country or territory names will not be approved, as they are not available under the New gTLD Program in this application round. A string shall be considered to be a country or territory name if:

- i. it is an alpha-3 code listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
- ii. it is a long-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard, or a translation of the long-form name in any language.
- iii. it is a short-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard, or a translation of the short-form name in any language.
- iv. it is the short- or long-form name associated with a code that has been designated as “exceptionally reserved” by the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency.

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<sup>1</sup> Country and territory names are excluded from the process based on advice from the Governmental Advisory Committee in recent communiqués providing interpretation of Principle 2.2 of the GAC Principles regarding New gTLDs to indicate that strings which are a meaningful representation or abbreviation of a country or territory name should be handled through the forthcoming ccPDP, and other geographic strings could be allowed in the gTLD space if in agreement with the relevant government or public authority.

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- v. it is a separable component of a country name designated on the “Separable Country Names List,” or is a translation of a name appearing on the list, in any language. See the Annex at the end of this module.
  - vi. Permutations and transpositions of the following strings are reserved and unavailable for delegation:
    - long-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
    - short-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
    - short- or long-form name association with a code that has been designated as “exceptionally reserved” by the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency.
    - separable component of a country name designated on the “Separable Country Names List, or is a translation of a name appearing on the list, in any language.”

Strings resulting from permutations and transpositions of alpha-3 codes listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard are available for delegation, unless the strings resulting from permutations and transpositions are themselves on that list<sup>2</sup>.

- vii. it is a name by which a country is commonly known, as demonstrated by evidence that the country is recognized by that name by an intergovernmental or treaty organization.

## 1.2 Geographic Names Requiring Government or Public Authority Documentation

The following types of applied-for strings are considered Geographic Names and must be accompanied by documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant governments or public authorities:

1. An application for any string that is a representation, in any language, of the capital city name of any country or territory listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
2. An application for a city name, where the applicant declares that it intends to use the gTLD for purposes associated with the city name.

City names present challenges because city names may also be generic terms or brand names, and in many cases city names are not unique. Unlike other types of geographic names, there are no established lists that can be used as objective references in the

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<sup>2</sup> Permutations include removal of spaces, insertion of punctuation, and addition or removal of grammatical articles like “the.” A transposition is considered a change in the sequence of the long or short-form name, for example, “RepublicCzech” or “IslandsCayman.”

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evaluation process. Thus, city names are not universally protected. However, the process does provide a means for cities and applicants to work together where desired.

An application for a city name will be subject to the Geographic Names requirements (i.e., will require documentation of support or non-objection from the relevant governments or public authorities) if:

- a) It is clear from applicant statements within the application that the applicant will use the TLD primarily for purposes associated with the city name; and
  - b) The applied-for string is a city name as listed on official city documents.<sup>3</sup>
3. An application for any string that is an exact match of a sub-national place name, such as a county, province, or state, listed in the ISO 3166-2 standard.
  4. An application for a string listed as a UNESCO region<sup>4</sup> or appearing on the Geographic Regions section of the “Standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49)”.<sup>5</sup>

Translations of regions included on the list mentioned above will be limited to the languages specified on that list. Region names that do not conform to the framework of DNS permissible characters will be converted into DNS labels that contain only letters, digits and hyphens as noted in the Root Zone Label Generation Rules (RZ-LGR)<sup>6</sup>.

In the case of an application for a string appearing on either of the lists in this item 4, documentation of support will be required from at least 60% of the respective national governments in the region, and there may be no more than one written statement of objection to the application from relevant governments in the region or public authorities associated with the continent or the region.

Where the 60% rule is applied, and there are common regions on both lists, the regional composition contained in the “Standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49)” takes precedence.

An applied-for gTLD string that falls into any of 1 through 4 listed above is considered to represent a Geographic Name. In the event of any doubt, it is in the applicant’s interest to consult with relevant governments and public authorities and enlist their support or

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<sup>3</sup> City governments with concerns about strings that are duplicates, nicknames or close renderings of a city name should not rely on the evaluation process as the primary means of protecting their interests in a string. Rather, a government may elect to file a formal objection to an application that is opposed by the relevant community, or may submit its own application for the string.

<sup>4</sup> *The 5 regions recognized by UNESCO include: Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean (as of September 2023).*

<sup>5</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/> published as of September 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Root Zone Label Generation Rules Version 5: <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/root-zone-lgr-2015-06-21-en>

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non-objection prior to submission of the application, in order to preclude possible objections and pre-address any ambiguities concerning the string and applicable requirements.

Strings that include but do not match a Geographic Name (as defined in this section) will not be considered Geographic Names as defined by section 2.2.1.4.2, and therefore will not require documentation of government support or non-objection in the evaluation process.

For each application, the Geographic Names Panel will determine which governments or public authorities are relevant based on the inputs of the applicant, governments, and its own research and analysis. In the event that there is more than one relevant government or public authority for the applied-for gTLD string, the applicant must provide documentation of support or non-objection from all the relevant governments or public authorities. It is anticipated that this may apply to the case of a sub-national place name.

It is the applicant's responsibility to:

- identify whether its applied-for gTLD string falls into any of the above categories; and
- identify and consult with the relevant governments or public authorities; and
- identify which level of government support is required.

Note: the level of government and which administrative agency is responsible for the filing of letters of support or non-objection is a matter for each national administration to determine. Applicants should consult within the relevant jurisdiction to determine the appropriate level of support.

The requirement to include documentation of support or non-objection for certain applications does not preclude or exempt applications from being the subject of objections on community grounds (refer to subsection 3.1.1 of Module 3), under which applications may be rejected based on objections showing substantial opposition from the targeted community.

## 1.3 Documentation Requirements

The documentation of support or non-objection should include a signed letter from the relevant government or public authority. Understanding that this will differ across the respective jurisdictions, the letter could be signed by the minister with the portfolio responsible for domain name administration, ICT, foreign affairs, or the Office of the Prime Minister or President of the relevant jurisdiction; or a senior representative of the agency or department responsible for domain name administration, ICT, foreign affairs, or the Office of the Prime Minister. To assist the applicant in determining who the relevant government or public authority may be for a

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potential Geographic Name, the applicant may wish to consult with the relevant Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) representative.<sup>7</sup>

The letter must clearly express the government's or public authority's support for or non-objection to the applicant's application and demonstrate the government's or public authority's understanding of the string being requested and its intended use.

The letter should also demonstrate the government's or public authority's understanding that the string is being sought through the gTLD application process and that the applicant is willing to accept the conditions under which the string will be available, i.e., entry into a registry agreement with ICANN requiring compliance with consensus policies and payment of fees. (See Module 5 for a discussion of the obligations of a gTLD registry operator.)

A sample letter of support is available as an attachment to this module.

Applicants and governments may conduct discussions concerning government support or non-objection for an application at any time. Applicants are encouraged to begin such discussions at the earliest possible stage, and enable governments to follow the processes that may be necessary to consider, approve, and generate a letter of support or non-objection. Applicants should request the letter of support or non-objection from the appropriate government or public authority no more than 18 months prior to the submission of an application. If the letter of support or non-objection is dated more than four months from the opening of the New gTLD Program application window, a fresh letter of support or non-objection will be required. However, applicants should provide contact information for a designated person in case the Geographic Names Panel (GNP) needs clarification or has questions.

It is important to note that a government or public authority is under no obligation to provide documentation of support or non-objection in response to a request by an applicant.

It is also possible that a government may withdraw its support for an application at a later time, including after the new gTLD has been delegated, if the registry operator has deviated from the conditions of original support or non-objection. Applicants should be aware that ICANN has committed to governments that, in the event of a dispute between a government (or public authority) and a registry operator that submitted documentation of support from that government or public authority, **ICANN will comply with a legally binding order** from a court in the jurisdiction of the government or public authority that has given support to an application.

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://gacweb.icann.org/display/gacweb/GAC+Members>

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## 1.4 Review Procedure for Geographic Names

A Geographic Names Panel (GNP) will determine whether each applied-for gTLD string represents a Geographic Name, and verify the relevance and authenticity of the supporting documentation where necessary.

The GNP will review all applications received, not only those where the applicant has noted its applied-for gTLD string as a Geographic Name. For any application where the GNP determines that the applied-for gTLD string is a country or territory name (as defined in this module), the application will not pass the Geographic Names review and will be denied. [No additional reviews will be available.] [*Note: Language will be revisited and may be revised when addressing Topics 27 and 32*]

For any application where the GNP determines that the applied-for gTLD string is not a Geographic Name requiring government support or non-objection (as described in this module), the application will pass the Geographic Names review with no additional steps required.

For any application where the GNP determines that the applied-for gTLD string is a Geographic Name requiring government support or non-objection, the GNP will confirm that the applicant has provided the required documentation from the relevant governments or public authorities, and that the communication from the government or public authority is legitimate and contains the required content. ICANN may confirm the authenticity of the communication by consulting with the relevant diplomatic authorities or members of ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee for the government or public authority concerned on the competent authority and appropriate point of contact within their administration for communications.

The GNP may communicate with the signing entity of the letter to confirm their intent and their understanding of the terms on which the support or non-objection for an application is given.

[In cases where an applicant has not provided the required documentation, the applicant will be contacted and notified of the requirement, and given a limited time frame to provide the documentation. If the applicant is able to provide the documentation before the close of the Initial Evaluation period, and the documentation is found to meet the requirements, the applicant will pass the Geographic Names review. If not, the applicant will have additional time to obtain the required documentation; however, if the applicant has not produced the required documentation by the required date (at least 90 calendar days from the date of notice), *the applicant will have additional time and/or opportunities* [Note: language pending review of Topic 27 and will be revisited] The applicant may reapply in subsequent application rounds, if desired, subject to the fees and requirements of the specific application rounds.]

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If there is more than one application for a string representing a certain Geographic Name as described in this section, and the applications have requisite government approvals, the applications will be suspended pending resolution by the applicants. If the applicants have not reached a resolution by either the date of the end of the application round (as announced by ICANN), or the date on which ICANN opens a subsequent application round, whichever comes first, the applications will be rejected and applicable refunds will be available to applicants according to the conditions described in section 1.5.

However, in the event that a contention set is composed of multiple applications with documentation of support or non-objection from the same government or public authority, the applications will proceed through the contention resolution procedures described in Module 4 when requested by the government or public authority providing the documentation.

If an application for a string representing a Geographic Name is in a contention set with applications for similar strings that have not been identified as geographical names, the string contention will be resolved using the string contention procedures described in Module 4.



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## Annex — Relevant Recommendations

1. Consistent with Section 2.2.1.3.2 String Requirements, Part III, 3.1 of the 2012 Applicant Guidebook, continue to reserve all two-character letter-letter ASCII combinations at the top level for existing and future country codes.

This recommendation is consistent with the GNSO policy contained in the Introduction of New Generic Top-Level Domains policy recommendations from 8 August 2007.

2. Maintain provisions included in the 2012 Application Guidebook section 2.2.1.4.1 Treatment of Country and Territory Names, with the following clarification regarding section 2.2.1.4.1.vi:

Permutations and transpositions of the following strings are reserved and unavailable for delegation:

- long-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
- short-form name listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard.
- short- or long-form name association with a code that has been designated as “exceptionally reserved” by the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency.
- separable component of a country name designated on the “Separable Country Names List.”

Strings resulting from permutations and transpositions of alpha-3 codes listed in the ISO 3166-1 standard are available for delegation, unless the strings resulting from permutations and transpositions are themselves on that list.

The 2012 Applicant Guidebook provisions contained in section 2.2.1.4.1 are inconsistent with the GNSO policy recommendations contained in the Introduction of New Generic Top Level Domains from 8 August 2007. This recommendation would make the policy consistent with the 2012 Applicant Guidebook, and therefore represents a change to the existing policy recommendation.

3. Maintain provisions included in the 2012 Application Guidebook section 2.2.1.4.2 Geographic Names Requiring Government Support, with the following update regarding section 2.2.1.4.2.4:

The “Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical subregions, and selected economic and other groupings” list is more appropriately called the “Standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49).” The current link for this resource is <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49>.

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The 2012 Applicant Guidebook provisions contained in section 2.2.1.4.2 are inconsistent with the GNSO policy recommendations contained in the Introduction of New Generic Top Level Domains from 8 August 2007. This recommendation would make the policy consistent with the 2012 Applicant Guidebook, and therefore represents a change to the existing policy recommendation.