New gTLD Program: Next Round

Engagement and Outreach Plan

16 May 2024

ICANN

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1. Introduction

As part of its mission to help ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifiers, ICANN is expanding the Domain Name System (DNS). Through the New Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLD) Program, qualified entities will be able to apply for and, if successful, operate new gTLDs, as recommended by the ICANN community and approved by the ICANN Board.

In its Final Report on the New gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process (Final Report), the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) underscores the importance of creating early awareness with as many potential applicants around the world as possible with sufficient time to prepare and apply for a new gTLD. In line with Recommendation 13.2 of the Final Report, this document provides an overview of the objectives, approach, targets, anticipated messaging, and expected deliverables of the engagement and communications activities.

The approach outlined in this document demonstrates that capacity development, communications, and outreach with a focus on global inclusivity are key to fostering diverse participation in the next round of new gTLDs. The ICANN organization (org) has designed a campaign that encompasses five phases, each with a distinct focus and activities. Each contributes to the overall goals of the New gTLD Program: Next Round, that is, **to foster diversity, encourage competition, and enhance the utility of the DNS.**
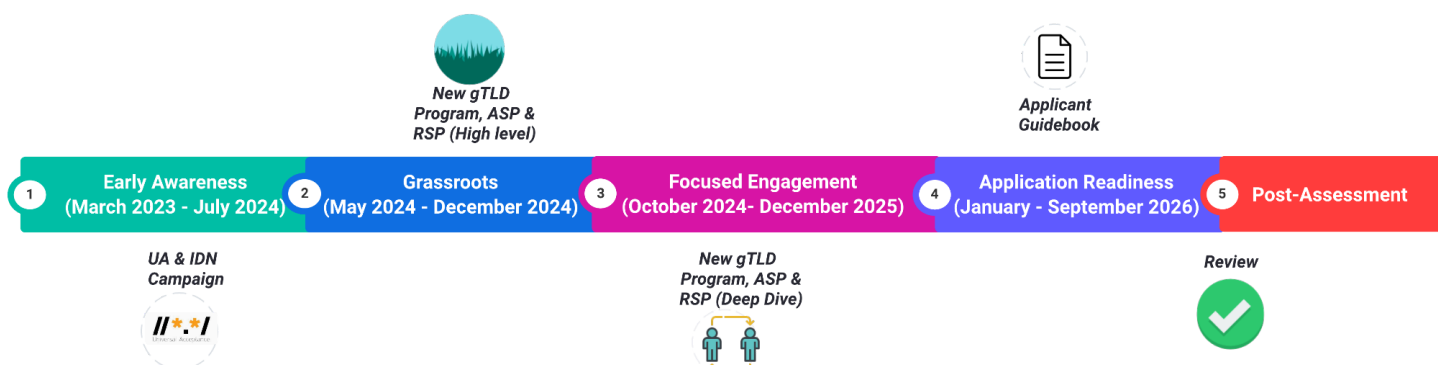
Note, some of these phases will flow into each other and may not have strict start/cut off dates as the graphic may suggest.

Phase 1: Early Awareness
ICANN org launched a targeted awareness campaign in March 2023 highlighting the importance of Universal Acceptance (UA) and Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) in creating a more inclusive Internet. This ongoing effort, which will conclude at the end of July 2024, addresses the Final Report Recommendation 11.3[1]. The effort consists of a series of mini-campaigns targeting a mix of audiences and developing countries. These campaigns focused on countries in which users would benefit from IDNs and UA and where there is limited familiarity with the DNS.

Phase 2: Community-level Awareness

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[1] "Recommendation 11.3: Applicants should be made aware of Universal Acceptance challenges in ASCII and IDN TLDs. Applicants must be given access to all applicable information about Universal Acceptance currently maintained on ICANN's Universal Acceptance Initiative page, through the Universal Acceptance Steering Group, as well as future efforts". – see
https://gnso.icann.org/sites/default/files/file/field-file-attach/final-report-newgtld-subsequent-procedures-pdp-02feb21-en.pdf

A grassroots campaign (May–October 2024) to generate interest in and excitement about the next round within the ICANN community and among industry participants. This effort will heavily leverage existing relationships through our GSE and GE networks across the regions.This will include communicating strategically about the availability of support through the Applicant Support Program (ASP) and the opportunity for potential registry services providers (RSPs) to be evaluated to serve new gTLD applicants in the New gTLD Program: Next Round.

Phase 3: Strategic Engagement
Beginning in October 2024 and continuing through December 2025, ICANN org will begin generating awareness about the importance of the DNS and interest in new gTLDs *outside of the ICANN community*. This phase will include developing materials to inform and educate potential applicants, including brands, local and regional governments (geographic names), and civil society.

Specifically, this effort will consist of:
- Conducting global awareness campaigns, leveraging a multichannel strategy of public relations, social media, speaking engagements, and event participation to reach top-tier media, influencers, and potential applicants.

- Working collaboratively, Global Communications, Stakeholder Engagement, Government and IGO Engagement, and Technical Engagement, will identify a short list of target countries and regions in which to raise awareness based on various factors, including domain name market maturity; availability of qualified TLD operators, including ccTLD Registry Operators (e.g., RSP program candidates); potential IDN, .geo, or .brand applicants, as well as thriving gTLDs from the 2012 Round, among other factors.

- Recognizing that in many underdeveloped or underserved regions, there may not be a well-established domain name industry that can support a new registry, ICANN org must partner with the ICANN community, particularly the current players in the Domain Names industry to establish a network to support those that may have an interest in becoming registry operators (i.e. new market entrants).

Phase 4: Application Readiness
Focus on preparing entities to submit their gTLD applications[2].

Phase 5: Post-Assessment
Assess whether the campaign has achieved its objectives to allow for course corrections for future rounds.

This plan will be implemented as a collaborative effort involving ICANN org's Global Communications, Global Stakeholder Engagement, and New gTLD Program leadership teams. A dedicated project has been set up under the umbrella of the New gTLD Program to allow for proper planning, resourcing, tracking and reporting of progress.

The success of the New gTLD Program also relies on the support of and collaboration with the ICANN community. The community is an important ally in identifying and engaging with the audiences it had in mind when developing the Final Report recommendations.

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[2] Note, for ASP and RSP pre-application, this type of activities will take place at an earlier stage.

2. Overall Goals

The overarching objectives of the New gTLD Program, as set forth by the GNSO in the Final Report, are to foster diversity, encourage competition, and enhance the utility of the DNS. In support of these objectives, the goals of engagement and communications activities are to:

Promote inclusive participation
Build awareness and interest in the New gTLD Program among brands, local and regional governments (geographic names), industry insiders, civil society, and the broader Internet community.

Facilitate engagement
Work with influencers and thought leaders within the domain name industry to amplify messaging and encourage participation in the program.

Highlight the value of gTLDs
Communicate the benefits of operating a customized gTLD, such as increased brand visibility, greater control over online presence, and potential revenue generation opportunities.

Convey the importance of diversity and representation in the domain name space by promoting opportunities for creating linguistic, cultural, and geographic diversity through new gTLDs.

Communicate the broader socio-economic benefits of domain names, including their contributions to economic growth, innovation, and digital empowerment in local communities and regions

Collaborate
Build partnerships with industry associations, government agencies, community organizations, and ICANN's contracted parties to leverage collective knowledge and resources in promoting the New gTLD Program.

Work with organizations and advocacy groups focused on promoting diversity and inclusion in the digital space to support outreach efforts and amplify messaging, and to address specific challenges faced by applicants in different regions.

3. Proposed Delivery and Approach

Beginning in May 2024, ICANN org will kick off a grassroots effort to socialize key messages and begin generating a buzz about the next round. This will entail leveraging local, regional, and community relationships to generate awareness of this global program among businesses and organizations that possess the industry knowledge to be registry operators.

The messaging around the New gTLD Program: Next Round will serve as the foundation for all communications and outreach activities. Tailored messaging for each audience is being created with the overarching goal of communicating the opportunities associated with the program with clarity and impact.

Implementation Guidance 13.3[3] from the Final Report stated that communications activities should begin no less than six months before the opening of the next round application submission period.

While the first phase is near completion and the second phase is in its infancy, the global campaign that the GNSO references in its report will formally launch in October 2024—18 months before the application submission period opens. This effort will continue until April 2026, providing for frequent and timely community updates during this period.

These activities are expected to align with Recommendation 13.2, and Implementation Guidance 11.4, 13.2, 13.3 and 13.5 in the Final Report[4].

Materials and Content
ICANN will provide informational resources and other materials tailored to address the specific needs and challenges of different applicant groups. Applicant groups have been identified as:

- **Registrars,** especially those in developing and underserved regions, that may be interested in operating a gTLD.

- **Civil Society,** including nongovernmental organizations, advocacy groups, philanthropists, and community stakeholders focused on promoting inclusivity, diversity, and cultural preservation that may be interested in doing so online through the adoption of new gTLDs.

- **Businesses, entrepreneurs**, and organizations operating in regions with limited access to digital infrastructure and online resources, and those looking to differentiate their product or service; enhance an online brand; and compete more effectively in the global marketplace using gTLDs.

- **Local governments, public authorities, and IGOs** interested in asserting independence, promoting local culture, and enhancing digital representation through geographic or community-specific gTLDs.

- **Businesses and brands**, including companies and entrepreneurs using customized gTLDs.

To communicate with these groups, ICANN org will use these tools:

New gTLD Program website, to include the following resources:
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) addressing common concerns about the New gTLD Program.

- An option to sign up to a publicly archived mailing list to receive the latest information and updates on the next round of new gTLDs.

- Downloadable fact sheets providing concise information on key aspects of the program, such as eligibility criteria, evaluation processes, and applicant support options.

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[3] Implementation guidance 13.4 – see
https://gnso.icann.org/sites/default/files/file/field-file-attach/final-report-newgtld-subsequent-procedures-pdp-02feb21-en.pdf
[4] See
https://gnso.icann.org/sites/default/files/file/field-file-attach/final-report-newgtld-subsequent-procedures-pdp-02feb21-en.pdf

- An "Applicants Corner" that provides potential applicants, especially those from outside the DNS industry, information to better understand technical requirements, financial obligations, and legal considerations.

- The Applicant Guidebook, which serves as the rulebook for the New gTLD Program and the anchor piece for detailed information. Prior to publication of the new guidebook, visitors to the website may peruse the 2012 version which also is a useful tool for potential applicants.

Case Studies
Case studies and testimonials that showcase the impact and benefits of operating a customized gTLD and highlight successful gTLD operators, with a specific focus on brands and geographic names.

Webinars and Training Modules
Webinars covering relevant topics related to the new gTLD application process, including program updates, status updates and case studies.

Outreach and Engagement Materials
Online promotional materials to communicate the benefits for brand TLDs, geographic name TLDs, and IDN TLDs.

Outreach toolkits containing customizable templates, messaging guidelines, and social media assets for use by ICANN's stakeholders (e.g., ALAC) as they engage within their own networks.

Support during the Application Process (*once the Applicant Guidebook is approved and published).
Leave-behind materials (infographics, FAQs, etc.) that describe the new gTLD application process, requirements, and timelines, including guidance on selecting a gTLD string and the Applicant Journey.

Guidance and instructions for completing the application form and associated documentation.

Program Messaging
As stated earlier, tailored messaging for each audience is being developed with the objective of communicating the opportunities associated with the program with clarity and impact. Messages will be crafted to generate interest in and excitement about the next round of applications for new gTLDs and seek to address each group's needs, challenges, and opportunities.

More specifically, outreach and engagement efforts will:
- Highlight the importance of new gTLDs in promoting digital inclusivity and potential in preserving and promoting digital cultural diversity.

- Highlight the built-in safeguards to protect intellectual property rights in the DNS (e.g., the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy, Uniform Rapid Suspension, and Trademark Post-Delegation Dispute Resolution Procedure).

- Showcase how operating a .brand TLD can enhance and extend brand identity.

- Emphasize the control and security benefits of operating a .brand TLD, including brand defense and protection, and mitigation of cyber threats.

4. Applicant Support Program

Creating Awareness of the Availability of Applicant Support

The ASP provides financial and in-kind support to eligible applicants seeking to participate in the next round of the New gTLD Program. The ASP is intended to provide qualified candidates (especially those in underserved regions, small businesses, non-profits, and indigenous and tribal communities) the opportunity to pay reduced New gTLD Program application and evaluation fees (see Section 4).

The program also provides successful applicants with access to a package of non-financial support to assist applicants in submitting a gTLD application.This includes training, mentorship, and other resources, including access to volunteer (i.e., pro bono) professional services.

As part of the grassroots phase of the campaign, ICANN org plans to launch an awareness campaign for the ASP within the context of the next round of gTLD applications beginning in May 2024. The plan prioritizes outreach to applicants from developing and/or underserved regions across the globe and will include conducting in-person awareness events and capacity-development sessions across these regions that promote the economic and social benefits of operating a gTLD.

This phase will include:
- Taking an inventory of conferences, events, and other opportunities to present information about the New gTLD Program: Next Round;

- Identifying appropriate communications vehicles for each audience group defined below; and

- Using consistent and compelling messaging.

Goals

The goals for the ASP outreach and engagement activities are to:
- **Increase Awareness**
  Raise awareness about the ASP among potential applicants, including brands, local and regional governments (geographic names), civil society organizations, and other stakeholders interested in participating in the next round of new gTLD applications.

- **Promote Inclusive Participation**
  Encourage participation in the ASP, especially among underserved or underrepresented regions, by providing assistance, guidance, and resources to potential applicants throughout the application process.

- **Facilitate Engagement**
  Foster engagement between potential applicants and industry stakeholders, the ICANN community, org, and Board through collaborative outreach efforts, such as the pro bono initiative described above.

- **Collaborate**
  Provide information on collaborations and partnerships with industry associations, government agencies, community organizations, and contracted parties to amplify messaging, reach a wider audience, and ensure effective engagement with the ASP and, more broadly, the next round of the New gTLD Program.

ASP Target Audiences

In line with the GNSO Guidance Process Recommendations[5] and the ASP evaluation criteria, target applicant groups include:

- **IGOs, registered non-profits, and other charities**
  These organizations can benefit from ASP by receiving financial and non-financial assistance to apply for, and, to an extent, manage a gTLD. With a gTLD, nonprofits and charities may enhance their online presence, credibility, and recognition. They can use their gTLD, for example, to promote causes, engage with supporters, and raise funds.

- **Indigenous/Tribal Peoples' Organizations**
  These organizations may participate in ASP to receive financial and non-financial assistance to apply for, and, to an extent, manage a gTLD. Operating a gTLD may help indigenous and tribal communities preserve and promote their identities and heritages online.

- **Social Impact or Public Benefit Micro- or Small Businesses**
  Micro-sized or small businesses with a social impact or public benefit focus can benefit from ASP by accessing support to apply for and operate a gTLD tailored to their name, region and/or mission. A gTLD may help these businesses to enhance their online visibility, and more effectively convey their commitments and missions.

- **Groups and potential applicants from Underserved and Developing Regions and Nations**
  Groups from underserved and developing regions can utilize ASP to receive assistance for applying for and operating a gTLD that represents their interests and aspirations. A gTLD may empower these organizations to amplify their voices, promote local development initiatives, and connect with wider (global) audiences.

On 5 May 2024, the [Board accepted GAC advice](#) on the ASP communications and outreach plan. The GGP also identified community organizations from underserved[6] and developing regions and nations, and noted that communications and outreach efforts should include private-sector entities serving these audiences.

Leveraging our GSE and GE teams, ICANN org has begun an ASP audience (stakeholder) mapping process. This includes identifying nonprofit sector audiences with focus on charitable alliances, partnerships, conferences, and associations in each of the ICANN regions that have the potential to reach larger and more diverse audiences. ICANN org will also explore options for events, conferences, and speaking opportunities that focus on nonprofit and charitable audiences. The org plans to share these opportunities for

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[5] Note that the Final Report is currently under ICANN Board consideration.
[6] The working group agreed to cite from the Initial Report the GAC's definition of under-served: https://gac.icann.org/working-group/gac-working-group-on-underserved-regions-usrwg, specifically "An under-served region is defined as one that: Does not have a well developed DNS and/or associated industry or economy…"

community input, for example by allowing members to alert the org to events missing from our calendar.

ICANN org intends to target social enterprises in a similar fashion. These efforts will be aimed at assessing stakeholders' interests, motivations, and challenges in relation to how the ASP, gTLDs, IDNs, UA, and the next round of applications for new gTLDs is relevant for each of these groups.

ASP High-Level Messaging
ASP is designed to make the New gTLD Program accessible to more qualified applicants, by providing resources and know-how.

ASP offers a range of financial and nonfinancial assistance to qualified applicants, including access to volunteer professional services, training, resources, and reductions in base gTLD application and evaluation fees.

The ASP Handbook is a user-friendly, step-by-step guide for applicants seeking support, offering detailed information on application deadlines, criteria, processes, and evaluation.

Through the ASP, ICANN enables potential applicants to pursue their ambitions and seize the opportunity to innovate, differentiate, and contribute to the evolving digital landscape via a new gTLD.

The ASP promotes equity in the DNS by providing assistance to future applicants that may face barriers or disadvantages in accessing resources and funding to apply for and operate a gTLD.

5. Registry Service Provider Evaluation Program

Building Awareness of Registry Services Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program
ICANN org expects to launch the Registry Services Provider (RSP) Evaluation Program in November 2024. Registry Services Providers deliver critical functions on behalf of the registry operator, including Registration Data Access Protocol, Extensible Provisioning Protocol, and DNS Security Extensions. The program is intended to reduce the cost and time required for evaluating new gTLDs by separating the assessment of the technical aspects of operating a gTLD from the application for the gTLD label. Through the RSP Evaluation Program, RSPs need only be evaluated once, regardless of the number of gTLDs they support. The program will evaluate RSPs both before (i.e., pre-evaluation period) and during the application process for new gTLDs.

In order to raise awareness of this program, ICANN org plans to launch an awareness campaign in May 2024.

RSP Program Target Audiences
The number of active RSPs in the New gTLD Program is approximately 45 worldwide. The awareness campaign will focus on these active RSPs. We note that country code (cc) TLDs also are likely capable of meeting the required technical capabilities to perform this function; thus they are another target audience for this program. Nevertheless, the program is open to all and qualified organizations are encouraged to apply.

RSP Program High-Level Messaging
Messaging to RSP audiences will focus on the benefits of the program and the potential advantages of participating in the pre-evaluation period of the RSP Evaluation Program. The pre-evaluation period allows RSPs to be assessed in advance of the New gTLD Program opening. These RSPs will be listed as evaluated providers to next round applicants. RSPs may find it advantageous to be publicly identified as an evaluated provider before the opening of the application submission period to signal to potential customers that they have the technical capabilities to run a gTLD.

6.   Communication Channels and Tactics

To reach global and local audiences, ICANN org will employ a variety of tactics, including media relations, event participation, and the development of website content, social media assets, infographics, and presentation materials. ASP applicants (e.g., nonprofits, IGOs, etc) will be engaged via webinars, online, and print communication. RSP applicants will be engaged via targeted communications, webinars, and online messaging.

Within the ICANN community, the org will leverage the program website, blogs, announcements, webinars, and presentations at public meetings.

Consideration of both traditional media, including broadcast and print, and digital channels (social media, podcasts, blogs, etc.) will be based on identified stakeholder preferences and on industry best practices.

7.   Working With the Community

By collaborating with the ICANN community, ICANN org will enhance communication and engagement around the next round of new gTLDs, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and effectiveness. Specifically, ICANN org will pursue the following strategy in its engagement with the ICANN community:

Conduct community surveys and consultations
ICANN will conduct community surveys and consultations to gather feedback and preferences regarding interest in the program, preference communication and engagement methods, and other relevant data points. This will ensure that the strategies align with the community's needs and expectations.

Surveys can be conducted online, and consultations can be organized during ICANN meetings and through virtual platforms, including Prep Week, to reach as many members of the ICANN community as practicable.

Collaborate on messaging development
Where practicable, ICANN org will collaborate with the IRT to ensure messaging resonates with each audience and that implementation is in line with policy recommendations.

Leverage community expertise
ICANN org will work with community members to leverage their expertise and networks. Interested community members could serve as ambassadors to disseminate information about the next round of new gTLDs within their respective networks and geographic regions. This approach will facilitate a broader reach than ICANN org is able to accomplish by itself.

Collaborate on regional events

ICANN org, via its GSE function, will collaborate with community members to organize regional events and conferences focused on the next round of new gTLDs.

Where practicable, ICANN org will support these events by providing speakers, relevant material and content as well as promotional materials.

8. Reporting and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The community will be regularly updated through quarterly engagement reports that will be posted on the New gTLD Program: Next Round website. These will provide outcomes of communications and outreach activities across various regions and audiences, as well as challenges encountered.

ICANN org will leverage its new Community Engagement System, which is used to track and report on the org's community engagement activities. Using this system, ICANN will track engagement activities by stakeholder group, region, and number of participants. We will use the reporting and analytics to develop a regular report on engagement by region, number of events focusing on the next round of new gTLD applications (including ASP, RSP), number of participants, and stakeholder categories involved. This summary report can be extrapolated to represent specific periods of time such as quarterly, half yearly, or annually, and will be regularly shared with the community, primarily at ICANN public meetings and via the New gTLD Program website.

High-Level Performance Indicators

Thematic Area	KPIs for Outreach and Engagement
	● Media reach, social media and engagement metrics (including the number of media pick-ups and geographic distribution), and speaking opportunities outside of GSE capacity-building efforts. ● Conversion rates proportional with industry standards for online campaigns and in-person events, with specific metrics and pre-agreed to be determined in consultation with ICANN org Communications and applicable contractor(s), including: ○ Metrics to measure success, including click-throughs, inquiries, registrations to get more information, etc.
ASP	● Number of ASP applications received. ● Diversity of applicants (both geographic distribution and stakeholder categories). ● Number of engagements held with ASP target audiences. ● Number of pro bono service providers, including assessment of qualitative factors such as their geographic location and areas of coverage, language representation, and selection of services provided.

RSP	● Number of RSP applications received. ● Diversity of applicants (both regional and stakeholder categories). ● Number of engagement activities with RSP target audiences.
Next Round	● Number of gTLD applications received. ● Diversity of applicants (both regional and stakeholder categories) ● Number of engagement activities with target audiences and high-level allies in ministries and governmental departments to be champions for IDNs, UA, and new gTLDs. ● Queries received about the new gTLD next round and other related programs such as the Applicant Support Program and the Registry Service Providers Evaluation Program

9. Program Timeline

This is a high-level timeline capturing the various activities. Note that detailed reporting will be available on this project through the new gTLD Program reporting.
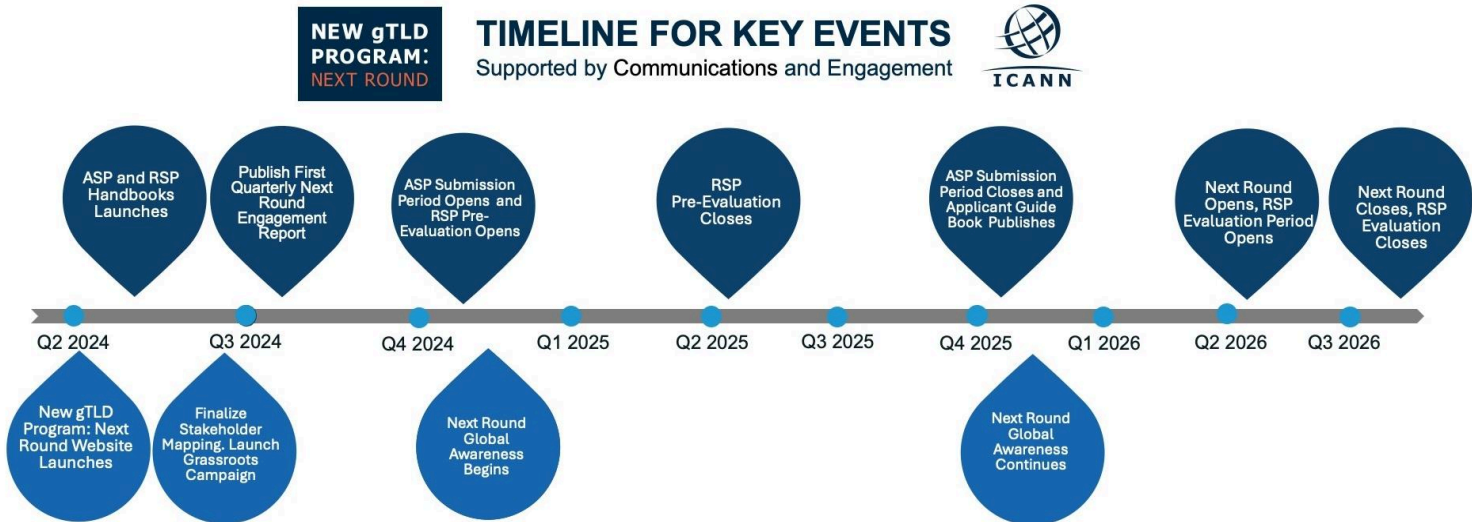
ASP Timeline

May 2024 - Launch Awareness Campaign
- Begin grassroots awareness campaign about the upcoming ASP.
- Introduce the ASP concept and its benefits through ICANN's website, social media channels, and targeted email newsletters.
- Initiate outreach to potential stakeholders, including registered nonprofits, intergovernmental organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations, social impact businesses, and community organizations from underserved regions.

June 2024 (ICANN80) - Stakeholder Consultations
- Conduct stakeholder consultations to gather feedback on the ASP's design and eligibility criteria.
- Engage with potential applicants to understand their needs, challenges, and expectations regarding the ASP.
- Use feedback to refine ASP guidelines and communication materials.

July-August 2024 – Finetune Awareness Campaign
- Based on stakeholder consultation, produce targeted marketing materials, including (but not limited to) flyers, pre-recorded webinars etc. to explain ASP purpose, eligibility requirements and the application process and timeline.

November 2024 - Application Period Opens

- Open the application period for the ASP at least 18 months before the next round of new gTLDs.
- Provide detailed guidance on completing the ASP application, including documentation requirements and deadlines.
- Provide application how-to guides and videos in multiple languages to help ASP candidates completing their application in time.

10. Conclusion

This overview is meant to provide the ICANN community with further insight into the plans and approach for engagement and communications activities in support of the New gTLD Program: Next Round. Further planning will occur over the coming months, with regular reporting to the ICANN community on progress made.

ICANN org invites the community to share suggestions or feedback on this plan via the Subsequent Procedures Implementation Review Team. ICANN org also looks forward to hearing from the ICANN community regarding how it intends to contribute to these efforts, as we work together to meet the objectives of the program.

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