

Discussion Paper on:

ALAC – At-Large (AAL) Volunteer Performance Management

Introduction

The ICANN At-large hierarchical structure is complex and the responsibilities of the volunteers at the various levels are not well understood. As a result, there have been a number of situations where some individuals have been put into jobs for which they are not well suited, or in which they have little interest. The result has been that they have not performed adequately resulting in the parts of the organization that they represent not being well served, targets not being met, and other parts of the AAL having increased workloads to compensate.

As a first step to addressing this problem, a Job Description has been written covering ALAC members and its Liaisons to other groups. A Job Description should also be written for RALO Chairs and Secretariats.

These Job Descriptions should help ensure that people who are appointed or elected into AAL positions understand ahead of time what is expected of them.

Nevertheless, it is expected that occasionally, there will still be performance issues, and a process is required to address these in a fair but effective manner.

Context

Virtually all ALAC members are talented, successful, busy individuals. Poor performance in ALAC seems to largely be a mis-alignment of personal interests and ALAC needs. Put another way, the work that needs to be done in ALAC is either insufficiently interesting to the person, or not sufficiently important (compared to other non-ALAC demands) to justify the time allocation.

In addressing performance problems, we must be sensitive to cultural issues. Some cultures (or professions) can handle confrontation and conflict well. Others cannot. Our procedures cannot depend on all people being able to handle personal conflicts well. Moreover, many AAL members need to interact with other AAL members outside of the ICANN environment (perhaps in IGF, or in regional activities), and those relationships may be very important - we must be careful not to endanger them. This leads to the conclusion that we cannot force all members of the ALAC or AAL to openly confront others and to act as their judges in any public or even semi-public way. And therefore we need a more private way of discussing performance with those who seem to be under-performing.

Combining the previous two items, if there is such a mismatch of performance and expectations, we need to address it, but to the extent possible, we want to avoid public embarrassment of the people involved.

Metrics

Metrics can be an important way of recognizing performance problems. Nevertheless, metrics are not definitive indicators of problems. Specifically, a metric can tell whether a person attends meetings, but someone can attend all meetings and yet either not contribute or be very disruptive. The number of posts to a mailing list does not correlate directly to the contribution made. However in both cases, low metrics may well indicate a problem.

To the extent possible and practical, At-Large staff will maintain and publish metrics for the following:

- Attendance at various meetings and teleconferences (both AAL and where practical the target Liaison meetings).
- Mailing list postings
- Voting records (for ALAC members)
- Responsibilities taken on and a measure of their fulfillment.

Clearly creating and using these metrics will be a “work-in-progress” and we will need to learn which are useful and which are not.

It is important to understand and agree that metrics will not be the sole indicator of performance problems, nor will they be the prime indicator. The prime indicator will be the perception of others involved in AAL.

Remediation

The preferable result of remediation is to have the person perform according to the expectations of the community, both the community that put them there (if applicable) and the rest of AAL. It is not an issue of punishment. But ultimately, if the person cannot or will not perform according to reasonable expectations, then some action must be taken.

Terminology: Within this document:

- the person who is identified as having a performance problem will be referred to as the “Subject of the complaint”, or simply the “Subject”;
- the raising of the performance problem will be referred to as the “Complaint”;
- the person or persons identified to intercede in an attempt to address the problem will be referred to as the “Focal Point”.

The Focal Point for receiving reports of unsatisfactory performance will be the Chair of ALAC and the Chair of the applicable RALO in the case of ALAC members. If the Subject of the complaint or report is the Chair of the ALAC, the Focal Point should be one or both of the ALAC Vice-chairs. If the Subject is a RALO chair, the Focal Point should be one or more of the RALO Secretariat or ALAC members for the region. The position of Focal Point can be delegated if deemed appropriate.

Should the Focal Point deem that the Complaint is not justified, the Complaint will be referred to the Officers of the ALAC for a decision on whether it is valid. If deemed valid, an alternative Focal Point will be identified.

As a first step, the Focal Point will meet with the Subject of the complaint (in person or telephonically), identify the performance issues, and either agree that the Complaint is unfounded, or put in place a plan for correcting the problem. This step may require one or more interactions.

In the event that the Complaint is either disputed by the Subject, or there is no path to solution acceptable to both the Focal Point and the Subject, the Subject will be requested to resign and given no more than one month to take such action.

If a resignation is not obtained, for ALAC RALO appointees, the RALO leadership will be approached with a request to recall their appointee within a specified deadline (to be negotiated).

Should the RALO leadership not act, or in the case of Nominating Committees appointees, or ALAC Liaisons, a special closed meeting of the ALAC will be convened. Such meeting will explicitly include the leadership of the concerned RALO, if any, a delegated Focal Point if there is one and who is not already included, and the Subject of the complaint. There shall be at least three weeks notice of such a meeting. This meeting will be presided over by the ALAC Chair, unless the Chair is the Subject of the complaint, in which case the ALAC will select an alternate meeting chair. ICANN At-Large staff will be included as advisors and/or observers, but can be explicitly excluded at the wish of the group. Both the selection of an alternate chair and the exclusion of staff require a simple majority of the ALAC.

This meeting will present the case for dismissal with an opportunity the Subject of the complaint to present his/her position. A secret ballot of the ALAC, excluding the Subject of the complaint if he/she is an ALAC member, will be taken on the removal of the subject from the ALAC or the Liaison position. A vote of at least 2/3 of the remaining ALAC is required for removal.