

# Proposal for multi-year budget planning of RALO Face to Face meetings

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## 1. Executive Summary

At-Large, in its current incarnation of the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), Regional At-Large Organizations (RALOs) and At-Large Structures (ALSes), came into being in 2008. Since that time, in an effort to ensure that the ALS organizations based around the world were familiar with ICANN, its structure, its processes and its policy activities, representatives of ALSes have periodically been brought together, generally at ICANN meetings. These gatherings take on two forms - representatives of ALSes from within a single region or representatives from ALSes in all regions. The pattern that has evolved is that the all-region meetings, called at At-Large Summit occurs at five-year intervals, and in the intervening years, each region has a gathering of its ALSes – a General Assembly (GA). There have been two Summits, one in 2009 in Mexico City, and one in 2014 in London.

Although the funding process has evolved as has general ICANN budgeting, the GAs have been funded through the Community Special Budget Request Process, and the Summits through special requests to the Board Finance Committee.

The pattern of GAs and Summits is now well established and there seems to be a general acceptance of their benefits. The ALAC is proposing that ICANN integrate them into its normal planning and budgeting processes and do so in such a way as to allow these meetings to be scheduled and planned over multiple years, much as ICANN meetings themselves are planned ahead of time.

## 2. Background

The ALAC is currently receives travel funding to ICANN meetings for 27 people, the 15 ALAC Members, 2 leaders per RALO and the ALAC Liaisons to the GNSO and ccNSO.

At-Large attendance at ICANN meetings is generally limited to those participants who are explicitly funded, with occasional other participants who are part of a particular funded work group, review team or the ICANN Fellowship. Unlike other parts of ICANN where many SO or AC members attend based on funding from their employers who are either part of the domain name industry, do business with the industry, are involved in national or regional government or are involved in civil society organisations which focus professionally on Internet Governance, virtually all At-Large participants participate in ICANN purely on a volunteer basis and have no access to funding at a level which would support ICANN attendance.

The ALAC came into being in 2003 as the Interim ALAC. At that time, there were 10 ALAC Members selected by the Board, and 5 by the NomCom. RALOs did not yet exist. From 2003-2008 the Interim ALAC, supported by ICANN staff, identified local groups within each region to form At-Large Structures

(ALSes). Representatives of these new ALSes were funded to meet together to create the rules for their prospective ALSes and ultimately to sign Memorandums of Understanding with ICANN (2006-2008).

As new ALSes joined At-Large, it quickly became apparent that without having been to an ICANN meeting, or having met with their peers, or having contact with ICANN staff (who had ceased recruiting efforts once the RALOs were formed), these new groups and their representatives would have a nearly unsurmountable problem being integrated into the At-Large Community and becoming productive participants. ALAC, RALOs and Staff on-boarding and capacity building programs address part of the problem, but there is still a need to “touch and feel” ICANN in order to become effective. The fact that the native and often only language of many ALS members is not English significantly exacerbates the problem (in part addressed by extensive interpretation and translation services).

### 3. Integration Solution

By 2009, there were approximately 100 ALSes, and funding was requested and received to bring one representative from each ALS together for a “Summit” to be held during the ICANN 34 meeting in Mexico City. This meeting was seen as a turning point in building an effective At-Large Community, with the ALAC, RALOs and ALSes all working towards a common goal.

As promising as this Summit was, it was intuitively obvious that we would not have the volunteer, staff or financial resources to repeat it very soon. The ALAC, together with RALO leaders and ICANN Staff developed a plan under which we might have a Summit every five years, and in the intervening four years, we could have one General Assembly (GA) per region, bringing together one representative from each ALS in that region, preferably at an ICANN meeting held within that region. These meetings were seen as essential to discuss key policy issues within the region and develop strategies for the future. In conjunction with a GA, the concept of a “Showcase”<sup>1</sup> was developed to publicly highlight the achievements of the RALO and its ALSes. Such General Assemblies require far less resources (factoring in five of them) than a Summit. Additional travel costs are solely within a region. Since the number of attendees is much smaller than for a Summit, the planning required is far reduced and volunteers local to the region and city where the meeting is to be held can handle most of the arrangements and even fundraising (for special meals, showcase entertainment). This diverts no resources from the ALAC itself or volunteers from other regions. Staff resources are needed for both General Assemblies and Summits. However, there is an exponentially higher level required for a Summit.

The intent was that we would take a year off after the Summit. and then schedule the five regional GAs over the next three fiscal years (perhaps 1 GA in one year, and 2 in each of the other two years). This pattern reduces the draw on ICANN funds in the year after a Summit, and allows time for Summit action items to be implemented. Although we met the overall target in FY10-FY13, in practice, flexibility is and will be required due to the regional rotation of ICANN meetings, whether funding is available in any given year and regional issues and region- and venue-specific issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Showcases have proven so popular that we now often hold one even when there is not a GA or Summit.

As hoped and planned, a second Summit - ATLAS II (for AT-LArge Summit) was held during ICANN 50 in June 2014 in London. An ATLAS II Declaration was prepared during a series of face to face plenaries and workshops and presented to the ICANN Board. The At-Large Community is currently finalizing the [implementation of these recommendations](#), through an [Implementation Taskforce](#) . The Summit was, according to its participants, others within the ICANN community, and may ICANN leaders, judged to be an outstanding success.

## 4. Importance of Face to Face Meetings

At-Large is a very heterogeneous community which represents an extremely geographically, culturally, and socially diverse set of organisations. All of these organisations have one thing in common - they have a very strong end user component in their mission, aims and governance. The diversity is certainly a strength given the At-Large mandate to represent the interests of all users world-wide, but it has been extremely challenging to keep the At-Large Structures focused on At-Large activities over a number of years without regular face to face meetings.

There are many reasons, some obvious, some less so. Face to Face (F2F) meetings address many of the problems.

- 100% volunteer body - Volunteers come and go in the structures that make up At-Large, depending on their personal time availability and priorities. Volunteering is a very cyclic activity;
- No commercial interest in domain names, the number of At-Large volunteers whose work life involves domain names and related ICANN issues is very small;
- A geographically very diverse membership:
  - Conference calls are bound to clash with working day or middle of the night for some;
  - Technology in some parts of the world makes remote participation very challenging and indeed seriously hinders the opportunity for involvement. This is not only true for technologically complex tools such as Adobe Connect, but for simple voice communications as well;
  - Language issues – The majority of At-Large members have a mother tongue other than English and the majority of ALS members do not speak any English.
  - Cultural issues – Some regions of the world have a cultural need to meet face to face and see the people they work with in order to build a working relationship. Other regions have a culture where it is incorrect to express oneself with force. The diversity of cultures appears to be exacerbated in remote participation, with potential for conflict being heightened.
- Sustained knowledge and skills gap - Although the ALAC has done extensive work in organising capacity building webinars, the arrival of a significant number of new ALSes (over 50 new ALSes in the last four years) and natural cycle of ALS representative replacement, means that there is a sustained need for more capacity building and raising of awareness of ICANN policy issues. Much of ICANN’s work takes place at an ICANN meeting and it is well understood that it is nearly impossible to work out ICANN’s complex ecosystem without actually attending an ICANN meeting. General Assemblies and Summits have proven a vital component in sustaining a reasonable level of interest and involvement.

- Opportunity for networking - The incentive offering for volunteers in the At-Large community might be considered as quite limited for people who have no commercial interest in domain names. The ability for participants to network with other like-minded individuals from their region and across the world has been a key component need of this community;
- The combination of exposure to the workings of ICANN coupled with the networking has allowed these meetings to be major source of the new dedicated volunteers who support our day to day work.

## 5. Need for Multi-Year Planning

Although the process has varied over the years as the ICANN budgeting process has evolved, the At-Large GAs have been funded through annual special budget requests and Summits through ad hoc requests addressed to the ICANN Board Finance Committee.

This has given rise to several problems:

- No predictability for the ALAC, the RALOs or staff. Effective F2F meetings require concerted planning of several months for a GA and up to a year for a Summit. The yearly budget cycle makes this very difficult. Imagine how difficult it would be to organize the first ICANN meeting of the fiscal year if we didn't know IF there would be a meeting until the budget was approved;
- No predictability for the ICANN Finance and the ICANN Board - The budget for a RALO GA has ranged from \$35K-\$100K depending on RALO size and conference venue. The budget of an At-Large Summit has been in the order of \$700K, which required that it be handled by extraordinary budget requests since the normal special requests could not accommodate it. Although the individual numbers vary highly, the total envelope for a 5-year cycle is more predictable.
- Although the issue will no doubt be reviewed in the forthcoming At-Large Review, the ALAC is comfortable with the 5 year cycle for GAs and Summit meetings. It balances an achievable workload, ALS involvement target with fiscal responsibility. But it is a relatively long cycle from the point of view of volunteer, staff and Board turn-over. We are continually faced with explaining the entire pattern, its history, benefits and requirements over and over again.
- With the limited budget planning cycle and the uncertainty of success until very close to event dates makes it difficult to plan and to set volunteer expectations. The recent occurrences of last-minute meeting venue changes to a different region exacerbate the problem. (Not that such moves are easy on anyone!)
- Volunteer and Staff time – Requesting General Assemblies and Summits has taken countless volunteer time as well as that of staff. Establishing a multi-year budget for these meetings would allow more time to be focused on policy development and community support.

It is therefore clear that coordination needs to be increased for the RALOs and the ALAC but also with ICANN Finance and the Board. Without such multi-year planning, difficulties will continue. In the past, requests to consider such multi-year planning have been simply rejected. The ALAC is pleased that is no longer the case.

Multi-year planning will result in:

- More financial predictability for ICANN at all levels;
- Better ability for the ALAC and RALOs to plan events ahead of time with the added benefit of starting detailed financial planning for an event as soon as venues are announced.
- More efficient use of resources - ICANN keeps on doing things at the last minute and paying through the nose for it. An advance plan for General Assemblies and Summits will allow for the meetings Team to forecast resource requirements when scouting for venues especially in the format of A, B and C meeting types;
- A more prepared community - A General Assembly or a Summit requires extensive preparation with the community so as to take full advantage of face time. An advance plan will allow for the preparation to not be linked to the budget process. For example, a GA or Summit could take place in a Meeting type C in October or November, only 4 or 5 months after budget adoption, but its preparation could start up to a year earlier. Better preparation equals better use of available resources and a more active community;
- More efficiency throughout the process - Budget preparation for a GA or ATLAS is time consuming both for volunteers and staff. Volunteers are more likely to participate constructively in the process of building a budget if they know their efforts will be utilised.
- Better volunteer moral and cooperation - Currently we have regions vying against other regions to make sure they get their GA. And the impact of requesting funding for a GA and then having it requested during the special budget process, perhaps several years in a row, is very demoralizing for our volunteers.

## 6. Proposal

The Chair of the Board Steve Crocker, ICANN's outgoing President and CEO Fadi Chehadé, and other ICANN leaders have gone on record saying that the Summits need to be part of ICANN's regular meeting schedule. Five years has proven to be a reasonable balance of volunteer and staff effort, costs, and benefits. That said, five years is too long in-between RALO General Assemblies. As a result, we recommend that one cycle of RALO General Assemblies could take place in the five year interval between Summits. Ideally this should be spread between the years:

- Year 1: 1 year with no General Assembly post-ATLAS
- Years 2-4: 1 or 2 General Assemblies per year, 5 in total, with a preference for nothing late in year 4 in preparation for the Summit
- Year 5: At-Large Summit

The timeline on page 7 shows the history since the first summit and is the general pattern that the ALAC is recommending continue going forward.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

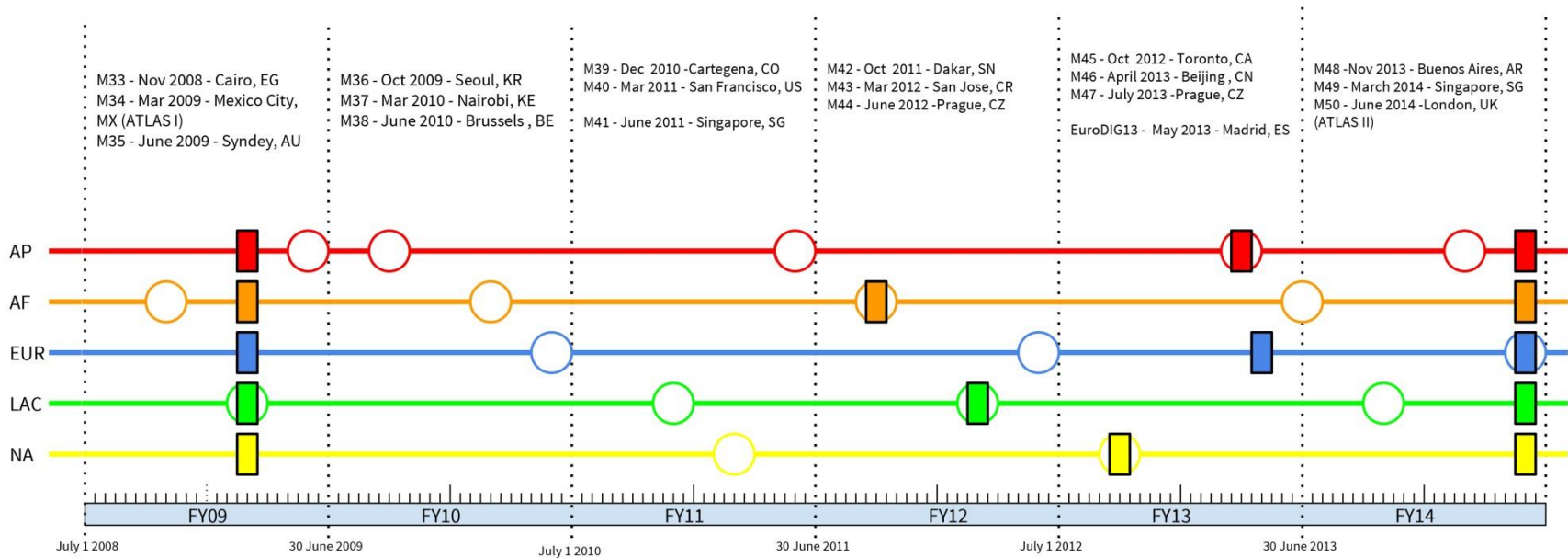
Until now, the ALAC, collaborating with its Regional At-Large Organisations, has filed annual Community Special Budget Requests in order to fund the organisation of RALO General Assemblies and made exceptional Requests for the first and second At-Large Summits. However, this process needs to be aligned with ICANN's strategic and operational planning processes and no longer rely on ad hoc planning and budgeting.

A multi-year schedule rotating General Assemblies and a Summit satisfies the need of At-Large for a predictable way to actively involve its ALSes in ICANN activities, while providing more planning and transparency incumbent on a maturing ICANN. It sets medium and long term community goals whilst ensuring fairness across all regions and sets good accounting practice to enhance efficiency across ICANN. It also allows for a stricter regime of budget management which will include performance measurements that can tie in with the mainstream ICANN key performance indicators, a significant improvement over the ad-hoc system that has been used thus far.

If this proposal is accepted by ICANN, the ALAC and ALAC Staff are prepared to work with other ICANN staff to integrate it into the ICANN operational plan and budget.

## Historical At-Large General Assembly and Summit Timeline

NOTE TABLE TO BE EXPANDED TO FY`16 – COMING REAL SOON NOW!!!



- ICANN meeting - colour coded to indicate region
- indicates when a GA took place - colour coded by RALO

## Annexes

### **Annex A: Presentation of ATLAS II Program**

This Annex contains a copy of the ATLAS II presentation proposal, as used to obtain sponsorship. It provides a full presentation of what an At-Large Summit is. Annex A can be found at [\[provide URL here\]](#).

### **Annex B: Table of Historical and Projected GA/Summit Details**

This table is a comprehensive table of RALO General Assemblies and At-Large Summits, starting with the Summit in 2009 and projecting possible GAs and Summits through to 2020. It provides actual financial details for past meetings, and best estimates of funding required for future meetings. The table, a living document which will change over time, can be found at:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11e1U8ZzOoqwUVG-VSVw4COj5MxD13tWi15gnMTYlc/edit?usp=sharing>. Worksheet two of the table provides a legend describing the columns and data in detail.