

Proposal for Multi-Year Planning of At-Large Face-to-Face meetings

1. Executive Summary

The At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) is charged with representing the interests of individual Internet users by integrating users and user organizations world-wide into the ICANN ecosystem. To help in this endeavour, the ALAC conducts on-boarding and training. As a key component, representatives of At-Large Structures (ALSes) are periodically brought together, generally at ICANN meetings. These gatherings take on two forms: General Assemblies (GAs) where representatives of ALSes from within a single region attend an ICANN meeting held within that region¹; and At-Large Summits, where representatives from ALSes from all regions are brought together at an ICANN meeting to hold both At-Large wide plenaries as well as regional General Assemblies. The pattern that has evolved over the past years is that At-Large Summits have occurred at five-year intervals, and in the intervening years, each region has a General Assembly. There have been two Summits, one in 2009 in Mexico City during ICANN34, and one in 2014 in London during ICANN50. Five GAs (1 per region) were held in 2010-2013, and one GA has been held since 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 is a general appreciation of their benefits among the ICANN Community. **The ALAC is proposing that ICANN integrate these meetings 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 currently receives travel funding to ICANN meetings for 27 people, the 15 ALAC Members, 2 leaders per Regional At-Large Organization (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. In other parts of ICANN, many SO or AC members attend meetings based on funding from their employers who are either part of the domain name industry, business with the industry, involvement in national or regional government or in civil society organisations which focus professionally on Internet Governance. Virtually all At-Large participants participate in ICANN purely on

¹ As a slight variation, we have also discussed the possibility of future GAs being near the region where travel costs would not be impacted. Examples might be a LACRALO GA in Puerto Rico and or an AFRALO GA in Abu Dhabi.

a volunteer basis, have no professional connection to the domain industry or Internet Governance, 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 (10 ALAC Members selected by the Board, and 5 by the NomCom). ALSes and RALOs were just a concept. From 2003-2008 the Interim ALAC, supported by regional 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, having met with their peers, or having contact with ICANN staff (who had ceased or greatly reduced 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 the extensive interpretation and translation services provided by ICANN).

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 ICANN34 meeting in Mexico City. This meeting, attended by 92 ALS representatives (including those who were at the meeting as ALAC Members or regional leaders) produced a substantive [Declaration](#) and 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, however, 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 a Summit would be held every five years, and in the intervening four years, one General Assembly (GA) per region would be scheduled, bringing together one representative from each ALS in that region, preferably at an ICANN meeting held within that region. In conjunction with a GA, the concept of a “Showcase”² was developed to publicly highlight the achievements of the RALO and its ALSes.

Such General Assemblies require far less resources (even factoring in five of them) than a Summit. 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, etc.). This diverts minimal resources from the ALAC itself or volunteers from other regions. These meetings are however, seen as essential to discuss key policy issues within the region, develop strategies for the future acquaint new representatives with ICANN, and reinvigorate those who

² Showcases have proven so popular that we now often hold one even when there is not a GA or Summit. Showcases receive limited funding from ICANN augmented by corporate donations.

had previously attended. 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 skip one year 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.

A second Summit³ was held during ICANN 50 in June 2014 in London with 150 ALSes in attendance. An ATLAS II Declaration was prepared during a series of Face-to-Face (F2F) 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](#). Although the IANA transition has slowed progress on other projects, it is worthy of note that the ATLAS II outputs were substantive enough to still be in the implementation phase nearly two years later. The Summit was, according to its participants, others within the ICANN community, and many ICANN leaders, judged to be an outstanding success.

3. 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 Internet 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 Internet end-users world-wide, but it has been extremely challenging to keep the At-Large Structures focused on At-Large and ICANN activities over a number of years without regular F2F meetings. This is not due to a lack of remote meeting opportunities. For example, in 2015, At-Large held 234 1-2 hour teleconferences, and that does not count the many CWG, CCWG, GNSO PDP WGs and various ICANN-wide meetings that At-Large volunteers participate in.

There are many reasons for this difficulty, some obvious, some less so. F2F meetings address many of the problems and provide a number of strong benefits.

- 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;
- 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, particularly in the absence of compelling business motivations;
- A 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 sometimes very expensive, 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;

³ The Summits have gone under the name ATLAS and ATLAS II, ATLAS being an abbreviation of AT-Large Summit.

- 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 F2F 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.
- Growth in At-Large Working Groups. The concept of At-Large Working Groups emerged from the preparatory work for the first Summit and from the working sessions at the Summit. Those WGs now form the basis for much of the work that At-Large does.
- Increased participation. Because of the interest born at F2F meetings, we see a significant increase in the number of people on RALO teleconferences and At-Large WGs after these meetings. Although this interest does somewhat decrease over time, the number of ALS representatives and members regularly attending meetings has markedly increased over the last several years.
- Opportunity for At-Large Community 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;
- Opportunity for ICANN networking. In addition to networking opportunities within At-Large, there are also benefits of providing ALS representatives with an opportunity to network with their counterparts in government, ccTLDs and regional registrars. It is quite common for alliances to be formed at ICANN meetings even though the individuals live in the same country and often the same city.
- Source of new At-Large members. 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.

It must be noted that the need for F2F meetings is not unique to the At-Large. ICANN hosts periodic meetings for Registrars and Registries, the GNSO Non-Commercial House has met intersessionally a number of times, AoC Review Teams and other ICANN-wide groups meet outside of ICANN meetings, and of course the Board regularly meets outside of ICANN meetings. Each of these groups does this for a wide variety of reasons, but all find such meetings beneficial.

4. 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 ICANN 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 \$500K-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.
- Setting of expectations. 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 hours as well as those of staff. Establishing a multi-year budget for these meetings would allow this work to be carried out in a more orderly fashion, conserving staff time and allowing volunteers to focus on issues of substance.

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 this 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 regularly does things at the last minute and pays dearly for it. Sometimes this is driven by external events outside of our control, but that is not the case

here. 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 several months after budget adoption, but its preparation could start up to a year earlier. Better preparation equals better use of available resources;
- 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 rejected during the special budget process, perhaps several years in a row, is very demoralizing for our volunteers.

5. Proposal

The five year cycle of General Assemblies and Summits has proven to be a reasonable balance of volunteer and staff effort, costs, and benefits. We therefore recommend that we continue with a Summit scheduled every five years, and a cycle of RALO General Assemblies in the four year interval between Summits and that these meetings be incorporated into the ICANN Operating Plan and Budget. Ideally this should be spread among the years, as follows:

- Year 1: 1 year with no General Assembly post-Summit in order to allow time for implementation of recommendations.
- 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.

This pattern reduces the draw on ICANN funds in the year after a Summit, and allows time for Summit recommendations and 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, funding that is available in any given year and regional issues and region- and venue-specific issues.

The timeline on page 8 shows the history since the first summit and is the general pattern that the ALAC is recommending continue going forward.

This proposal to understand and plan for recurring At-Large meetings is fully supportive of the direction described in the [ICANN Draft FY17 Operating Plan & Budget](#) section 3.4 on how ICANN should address multi-year projects.

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

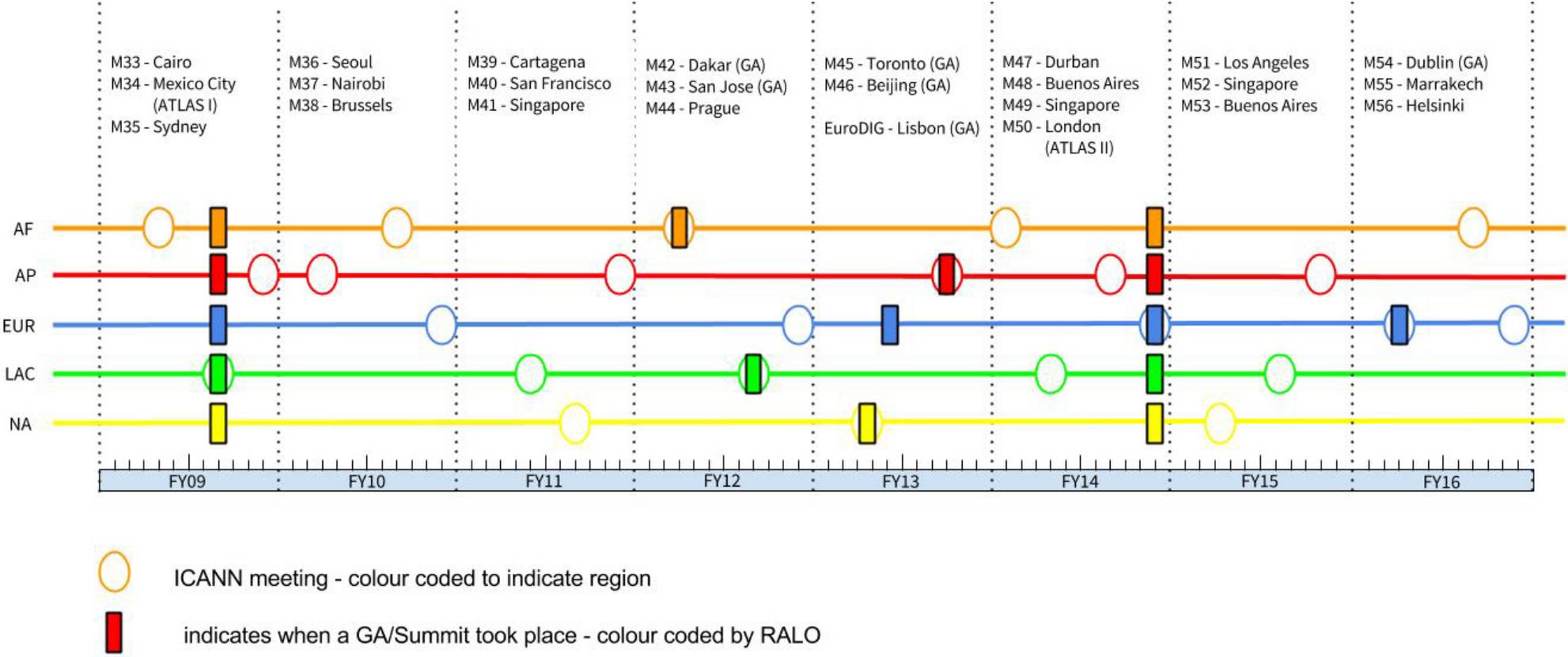
Until now, the ALAC, collaborating with its Regional At-Large Organisations, has filed annual Community Special Budget Requests in order to fund the organisation of RALO General Assemblies and made exceptional Requests for the first and second At-Large Summits. However, this process needs to be aligned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

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. Our proposal builds on that support, and continues the practice of the far less resource-intensive General Assemblies.

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. We firmly believe that such regular GAs and Summits will allow the ALAC and its five RALOs to continue to grow, develop, and contribute to a strengthened multi-stakeholder model within ICANN.

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



Annexes

Annex A: Presentation of ATLAS II

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 https://community.icann.org/x/qE_AAw.

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-VSVw4COj5MxrD13tWi15gnMTYlc/edit?usp=sharing>. Worksheet two of the table provides a legend describing the columns and data in detail.