Proposal for Multi-Year Planning of At-Large 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, we conduct significant on-boarding and training, but as a key component, 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 an all-region meeting, called an 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 is a general understanding and acceptance of their benefits. 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 ICANNN 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 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, 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. 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

35 ALAC, supported by regional ICANN staff, identified local groups within each region to form At-Large
36 Structures (ALSes). Representatives of these new ALSes were funded to meet together to create the
37 rules for their prospective ALSes and ultimately to sign Memorandums of Understanding with ICANN
38 (2006-2008).

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

3. Integration Solution

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

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

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

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[1] Showcases have proven so popular that we now often hold one even when there is not a GA or Summit.

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

4. Importance of Face to Face Meetings

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

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

87 • 100% volunteer body - Volunteers come and go in the structures that make up At-Large,
88 depending on their personal time availability and priorities. Volunteering is a very cyclic activity;
89 • No commercial interest in domain names, the number of At-Large volunteers whose work life
90 involves domain names and related ICANN issues is very small;
91 • A geographically very diverse membership:
92 o Conference calls are bound to clash with working day or middle of the night for some;
93 o Technology in some parts of the world makes remote participation very challenging and
94 sometimes very expensive, and indeed seriously hinders the opportunity for
95 involvement. This is not only true for technologically complex tools such as Adobe
96 Connect, but for simple voice communications as well;
97 o Language issues – The majority of At-Large members have a mother tongue other than
98 English and the majority of ALS members do not speak any English.
99 o Cultural issues – Some regions of the world have a cultural need to meet face to face
100 and see the people they work with in order to build a working relationship. Other
101 regions have a culture where it is incorrect to express oneself with force. The diversity
102 of cultures appears to be exacerbated in remote participation, with potential for conflict
103 being heightened.
104 • Sustained knowledge and skills gap - Although the ALAC has done extensive work in organising
105 capacity building webinars, the arrival of a significant number of new ALSes (over 50 new ALSes
106 in the last four years) and natural cycle of ALS representative replacement, means that there is a
107 sustained need for more capacity building and raising of awareness of ICANN policy issues.
108 Much of ICANN's work takes place at an ICANN meeting and it is well understood that it is nearly
109 impossible to work out ICANN's complex ecosystem without actually attending an ICANN
110 meeting. General Assemblies and Summits have proven a vital component in sustaining a
111 reasonable level of interest and involvement.

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

119 ## 5. Need for Multi-Year Planning

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

123 This has given rise to several problems:

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

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

151 Multi-year planning will result in:

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

172 6. Proposal

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

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

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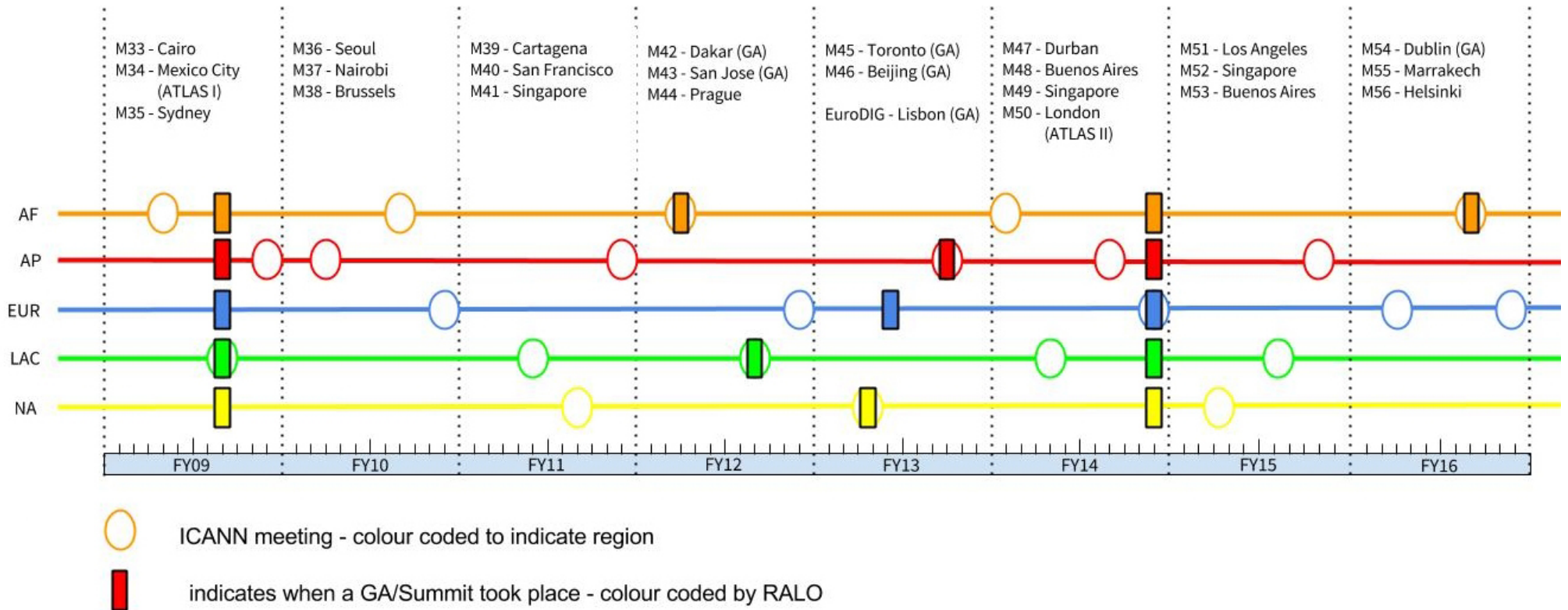184 is recommending continue going forward.

185 Conclusion and Next Steps

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

191   A multi-year schedule rotating General Assemblies and a Summit satisfies the need of At-Large for a

192   predictable way to actively involve its ALSes in ICANN activities, while providing more planning and

193   transparency incumbent on a maturing ICANN. It sets medium and long term community goals whilst

194   ensuring fairness across all regions and sets good accounting practice to enhance efficiency across

195   ICANN. It also allows for a stricter regime of budget management which will include performance

196   measurements that can tie in with the mainstream ICANN key performance indicators, a significant

197   improvement over the ad-hoc system that has been used thus far.

198   If this proposal is accepted by ICANN, the ALAC and ALAC Staff are prepared to work with other ICANN

199   staff to integrate it into the ICANN operational plan and budget.

Historical At-Large General Assembly and Summit Timeline

M33 - Cairo
M34 - Mexico City
(ATLAS I)
M35 - Sydney

M36 - Seoul
M37 - Nairobi
M38 - Brussels

M39 - Cartagena
M40 - San Francisco
M41 - Singapore

M42 - Dakar (GA)
M43 - San Jose (GA)
M44 - Prague

M45 - Toronto (GA)
M46 - Beijing (GA)

EuroDIG - Lisbon (GA)

M47 - Durban
M48 - Buenos Aires
M49 - Singapore
M50 - London
(ATLAS II)

M51 - Los Angeles
M52 - Singapore
M53 - Buenos Aires

M54 - Dublin (GA)
M55 - Marrakech
M56 - Helsinki

AF   AP   EUR   LAC   NA

FY09   FY10   FY11   FY12   FY13   FY14   FY15   FY16

○ ICANN meeting - colour coded to indicate region

▮ indicates when a GA/Summit 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-VSVw4COnj5MxrD13tWi15gnMTYlc/edit?usp=sharing. Worksheet two of the table provides a legend describing the columns and data in detail.