4.2.8 Accreditation Programs

- *4.2.8.1 Explanation of Subject*

  Increasing competition within the registry service provider marketplace was identified as a key driver for the introduction of new TLDs in the 2007 Final Report. Principle C states:

  > *The reasons for introducing new top-level domains include that there is demand from potential applicants for new top-level domains in both ASCII and IDN formats. In addition the introduction of new top-level domain application process has the potential to promote competition in the provision of registry services, to add to consumer choice, market differentiation and geographical and service-provider diversity.*

  In the 2012 New gTLD Round, a substantial number of applicants did indeed employ the use of an existing back-end provider to both provide the responses to the technical requirements questions defined in the AGB and perform the technical operations of the registry.

  The New gTLD Program was designed to be agnostic to what party was provisioning registry services, so long as the technical requirements were met.

- *4.2.8.2 Questions and Concerns Related to Subject*

  The New gTLD Program was not built in a way that would take advantage of applicants' use of back-end service providers, both from an applicant's perspective or operationally for ICANN. The concept of an accreditation program received ample support from the DG, citing a number of issues and reasons for its usefulness.

  Efficiency

  Applicants who decided to use a contracted back-end provider for their RSP were required to enter the technical responses during the application submission period, which were likely to have been responses provided by their provider for the purposes of applying. As noted in other sections, applications were treated individually, so to the extent that an applicant was submitting more than one application with essentially identical responses, responses would need to be applied to each individual field for each application. These responses were in turn presumably evaluated individually for each application by ICANN's evaluators, leading to additional inefficiencies and possibility even increasing the likelihood for mistakes or inconsistencies.

  The PDP-WG could consider whether accreditation of RSPs would be desirable. For example, if there was an accreditation program in place for future New gTLD Subsequent Procedures, an applicant could conceivably "click a box" to say they are using an accredited RSP, reducing time per application for applicants and evaluators, possibly reducing confusion since the application process could presumably be made simpler, and likely reducing operational costs for ICANN. This

would not remove the need to evaluate circumstances where the applicant is intending to introduce additional registry services. Nevertheless, making the process simpler and lowering costs, without compromising the goals of the program, such as fairness and security of the DNS, may result in additional potential applicants (i.e., competition).

<u>Security and Stability</u>

There are several principles and recommendations that identify the importance of ensuring the stability and security of the DNS when expanding the DNS, including:

Principle D

> *A set of technical criteria must be used for assessing a new gTLD registry applicant to minimise the risk of harming the operational stability, security and global interoperability of the Internet.*

Principle E

> *A set of capability criteria for a new gTLD registry applicant must be used to provide an assurance that an applicant has the capability to meets its obligations under the terms of ICANN's registry agreement.*

Recommendation 7

> *Applicants must be able to demonstrate their technical capability to run a registry operation for the purpose that the applicant sets out.*

Per Principle D, assessing an applicant's technical expertise is critical to helping prevent harm to the DNS. The current technical and operational requirements as defined in the AGB allow for some variability based on the type of registry an applicant intends to run, which is important to support in order to promote, or at least allow for innovation. However, it is possible that there is a security and stability benefit to having known-quantity RSPs, that have met certain agreed upon requirements and are intimately familiar with providing registry services.

- *4.2.8.3 Relevant Guidance*

    o Principle D
    o Principle E
    o Recommendation 7
    o Implementation Guideline A

- *4.2.8.4 Rationale for Policy Development*

As noted above, the PDP-WG could consider whether an accreditation program would promote benefits that support ICANN's Mission and Core Values, in particular, Article 1, Section 2.1:

> *Preserving and enhancing the operational stability, reliability, security, and global interoperability of the Internet*

And Article 1, Section 2.6

> *Introducing and promoting competition in the registration of domain names where practicable and beneficial in the public interest.*

As such, a possible PDP-WG on New gTLD Subsequent Procedures may want to consider policy development on the subject of an accreditation program. There are a number of questions that would need to be considered, including the following:

- o Is an accreditation program for RSPs desirable?
- o If yes, what would the criteria be for an accreditation program? How would scalability of the RSP be measured across an unknown number of registries?
- o How would the program be funded?
- o What party would operate the program and perform accreditation?
- o How would the application process be changed? Would questions change? Would costs be different?
- o Would the creation of a simpler, and potentially cheaper path to approval, create unintended incentives?
- o Besides RSPs, are there other areas of the program that might benefit from an accreditation program for service providers?