
1.1 Application Submission

1.1.1 Introduction

Three main activities occurred during the period of time between the opening of the application window on 12 January 2012 and the publication of the applications on 13 June 2012:

- Applications submitted
- Administrative completeness check performed
- Applied-for TLDs published on Reveal Day

Collectively, these activities are referred to as application submission in this report. This section of the Program Implementation Review report discusses these activities.

1.1.2 Relevant Guidance

The following guidance is relevant to the topic of Contracting and will be discussed in further detail in Sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 of this report:

- GNSO Principle A: “New generic top-level domains (gTLDs) must be introduced in an orderly, timely and predictable way.”¹²
- GNSO Recommendation 1:

ICANN must implement a process that allows the introduction of new top-level domains. The evaluation and selection procedure for new gTLD registries should respect the principles of fairness, transparency and non-discrimination.

All applicants for a new gTLD registry should therefore be evaluated against transparent and predictable criteria, fully available to the applicants prior to the initiation of the process. Normally, therefore, no subsequent additional selection criteria should be used in the selection process.

- GNSO Recommendation 9: “There must be a clear and pre-published application process using objective and measurable criteria.”
- GNSO Recommendation 13: “Applications must initially be assessed in rounds until the scale of demand is clear.”
- GNSO Implementation Guideline A: “The application process will provide a pre-defined roadmap for applicants that encourages the submission of applications for new top-level domains.”

¹² ICANN. (8 August 2007) ICANN Generic Names Supporting Organization Final Report Introduction of New Generic Top-Level Domains, Part A. Retrieved from <http://gns0.icann.org/en/issues/new-gtlds/pdp-dec05-fr-parta-08aug07.htm>

- GNSO Implementation Guideline E: “The application submission date will be at least four months after the issue of the Request for Proposal and ICANN will promote the opening of the application round.”
- Applicant Guidebook, Module 1: Introduction to the gTLD Application Process¹³

1.1.3 Background

GNSO Implementation Guideline E specified that “the application submission date [would] be at least four months after the issue of the Request for Proposal.” The “Request for Proposal” referenced in this Implementation Guideline is the Applicant Guidebook (AGB). In accordance with this Implementation Guideline, on 19 September 2011, version 8 of the Applicant Guidebook was published, which set the dates for the application submission period as 12 January 2012 through 29 March 2012. The submission closing date was later pushed to 30 May 2012.

During the application window, interested parties were able to submit gTLD applications via the TLD Application System (TAS). See Section 8.1: Program Processes, Systems, Resources of this report for more discussion on TAS. The required steps to submit applications in TAS are illustrated in Figure 1.1.i below.

Figure 1.1.i: Required Steps to Submit Applications in TAS



To create a user account and profile, applicants answered Questions 1 through 12 of the questionnaire in Module 2 of the AGB. Once the user account and profile were created, applicants paid the USD 5,000 registration fee via wire transfer. Upon confirming receipt of the USD 5,000 registration fee, ICANN provided applicants with access to the application form in TAS. With access to the application form, applicants could then answer Questions 13 through 50 of the questionnaire in Module 2 of the AGB. Concurrently, applicants had to pay the remaining USD 180,000 evaluation fee. Both the completed application form and the remaining USD 180,000 evaluation fee must have been submitted by the scheduled close of the application window on 30 May 2012. To ensure applicants had sufficient time to pay the USD 5,000 registration fee, complete the application form, and pay the USD 180,000 remaining evaluation fee, ICANN set a deadline date of 29 March 2012 to create user accounts and profiles.

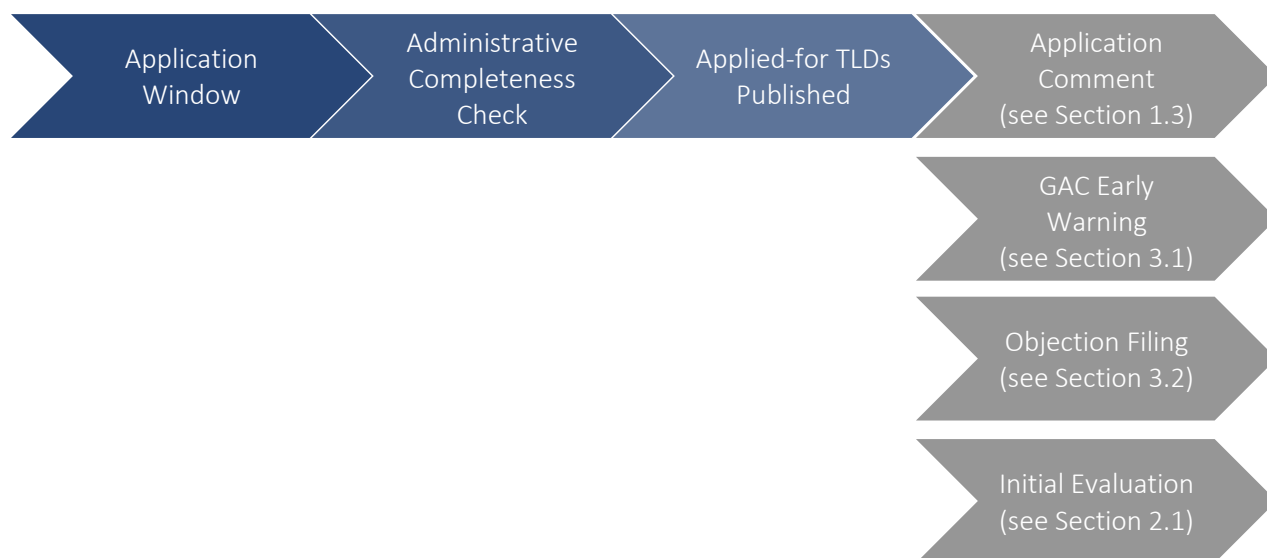
¹³ ICANN. (4 June 2012) gTLD Applicant Guidebook Version 2012-06-04. Retrieved from <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agb/guidebook-full-04jun12-en.pdf>

At the close of the application window, there were 1,268 user profiles created to submit 1,930 applications. Once the application window closed, ICANN performed an administrative completeness check on all applications in preparation for publication of the applied-for TLDs.

The final list of 1,930 applied-for TLDs and corresponding applications was published to the New gTLD microsite on 13 June 2012, also referred to as “Reveal Day.”¹⁴

The publication of the applied-for TLDs on Reveal Day triggered several Program processes. Figure 1.1.ii provides a summary of Program processes triggered by the publication of the applied-for TLDs.

Figure 1.1.ii: Summary of Program Processes Triggered by the Publication of the Applied-for TLDs



1.1.4 Assessment

1.1.4.1 APPLICATION WINDOW

Timeline

As per the AGB, the application window opened on 12 January 2012, six months after the ICANN Board approved the New gTLD Program.¹⁵ During this six-month period, ICANN performed operational readiness activities as described in the AGB, such as engaging a third-party provider to perform background screening¹⁶ and launching the New gTLD microsite.¹⁷

¹⁴ ICANN. (13 June 2012) Announcement: New gTLD Reveal Day – Applied-for Strings. Retrieved from <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/announcements-and-media/announcement-13jun12-en>

¹⁵ ICANN. (20 June 2011) Approved Board Resolutions. Retrieved from <https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/resolutions-2011-06-20-en>

¹⁶ ICANN. (30 August 2011) Announcement: Safe Stable, and Secure TLDs, ICANN Seeks Global Background Screening Provider. Retrieved from <https://www.icann.org/news/announcement-2011-08-30-en>

The close of the application window was set as 12 April 2012 by the AGB. While ICANN intended to close the window on the date specified in the AGB, the window was extended to 30 May 2012 due to the unanticipated unavailability of TAS for an amount of time during the application period (for more information, see Section 8.1: Processes, Systems, and Resources of this report). When TAS was taken offline on 12 April 2012, hours before the scheduled close of the application window, there were 1,268 registered user accounts and profiles and 2,091 application forms submitted or in progress. At the final close of the application window on 30 May 2012, there were 1,930 applications submitted.

Application Submission

In alignment with Section 1.1.2.1 of the AGB, applicants could submit as many applications as desired. However, TAS placed a limit of 50 applications per user account. To submit more than 50 applications, applicants had to create multiple user accounts. Although there was no limit to the number of user accounts that could be created and thus the number of applications, a limit of 50 applications per user account required some applicants to create and manage multiple user accounts. Some applicants reported that this created some inefficiency for them, as they had to maintain multiple system credentials for the various user accounts and keep track of which applications were associated with which user account.

Application Form

A standard online application form was used for all applications to support fairness and consistency in the application submission experience.

The application form itself was modeled after the questionnaire in Module 2 of the AGB. The form restated the questions as they appeared in the AGB and provided a space for open text responses to the questions. For those questions where the AGB specified a page limit for the response, the application form applied a conversion of 4,000 characters per page. For those questions where the AGB did not specify a page limit, the application form set a reasonable character limit. The character limit for all 50 application questions was communicated to applicants prior to the opening of the application window in the Customer Service Center's knowledge base.¹⁷ For questions that allowed attachments, the application form provided the capability to attach files. Acceptable file formats were also communicated to applicants prior to the opening of the application window in the Customer Service Center's knowledge base.

The application form provided fields for open text responses to questions in the AGB. Feedback from the Financial and Technical/Operational Capability Evaluation Panels was that a structured way to capture data might have helped applicants provide more complete answers and have eliminated some Clarifying Questions. For example, several of the Technical/Operational Capability questions asked for compliance to several RFCs. Instead of an open text field where the applicant might miss

¹⁷ ICANN. (19 September 2011) Announcement: ICANN Launches New Online Information Center for New Generic Top-Level Domains. Retrieved from <https://www.icann.org/news/announcement-2-2011-09-19-en>

¹⁸ ICANN. (16 December 2011) New gTLD Knowledge Articles. Retrieved from <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/tas/character-limits-11jan12-en.pdf>

providing a response to one or more of the required RFCs, a structured question form specifying each RFC that the applicant must provide a response to would have avoided an incomplete response.

1.1.4.2 ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLETENESS CHECK

After the close of the application window, the AGB called for ICANN to complete an administrative completeness check in preparation for the public posting of application materials.¹⁹ The intent of the administrative completeness check was to ensure that mandatory questions were answered, supporting documents were provided in the correct format, and evaluation fees were received.

The AGB allowed eight weeks for ICANN to complete the check. ICANN completed the check in two weeks, in time for the posting of applied-for strings on 13 June 2012 (Reveal Day).

ICANN was able to complete the check in less time than provided for in the AGB because some of the activities called for during the administrative check period were performed during the application window. The reconciliation of evaluation fees was performed during the application window due to the requirement in Section 1.5.1 of the AGB that the full USD 185,000 evaluation fee must be received by the end of the application window. Checking of the applications to ensure that all mandatory questions were answered was also not necessary as the application form had built-in validations to ensure that all required questions were answered prior to the form being submitted. The application form also had built-in validations to ensure that only attachments with acceptable file formats were accepted. The main checks that ICANN performed during the two weeks prior to the publication of the applied-for strings were:

- Validation of addresses provided to ensure that PO Box addresses had not been submitted.
- Validation of the script and code points of applied-for IDN TLDs to ensure they were accurate.

ICANN performed follow-up with the applicants during the two-week administrative check period to address any identified issues to ensure the publication of accurate information on Reveal Day.

1.1.4.3. REVEAL DAY

“Reveal Day,” 13 June 2012, referred to the day that ICANN published the applied-for strings and the public portions of the 1,930 applications. The questionnaire in Module 2 of the AGB specified which questions were public and which questions were confidential and therefore would not be posted publically.

On 14 June 2012, ICANN published an announcement that the postal addresses of some primary and secondary contacts for new generic top-level domain applications were published and that this information was not intended for publication.²⁰ The addresses appeared as responses to portions of questions 6 and 7 on the application. As a result, ICANN temporarily disabled viewing of the

¹⁹ AGB Section 1.1.2.2: Administrative Completeness Check

²⁰ ICANN. (14 June 2012) Announcement: New gTLD Application Details Temporarily Offline – Update. Retrieved from <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/announcements-and-media/announcement-2-14jun12-en>

application details. ICANN removed the unintended information and the viewing of application details was restored on the same day. This did not impact any of the processes that Reveal Day triggered, as additional time was provided for all of those processes due to the volume of applications received.

1.1.5 Conclusion

Even though some issues and delays (discussed in Section 1.1.4: Assessment above) arose, the application submission phase achieved its intended purpose of allowing applicants to submit applications for TLDs, for ICANN to perform a completeness check of the submitted applications, and for ICANN to post the application information. Overall, while these issues and delays had some impact to the timeline of the Program, the volume of applications received had a more significant impact on the Program timeline. Please see Section 1.2: Prioritization and Section 2.1: Initial and Extended Evaluation of this report for additional discussion on how the volume of applications impacted Program timelines.

There are some valuable lessons learned from the implementation of the application submission phase that could help to inform development of procedures for future rounds. One of the lessons learned is that capturing responses to application questions in open text fields led to incomplete answers that did not fully address the questions and reduced the efficiency of evaluators. A more structured way to capture responses to application questions should be explored to reduce or eliminate incomplete answers from seemingly qualified applicants. Structured data also could have efficiency benefits in the evaluations or other downstream uses of the application answers. The other lesson learned is that placing a restriction on the number of applications that can be submitted under each user account and profile created inefficiency for applicants. Implementing a system that would allow applicants the flexibility to associate as many applications as desired with a single user account should be considered.

In summary:

1.1.a Explore a more structured way of capturing application responses

1.1.b Implement a system that would allow applicants the flexibility to associate as many applications as desired to a single user account