

Draft Joint GAC – ALAC statement on informed participation at ICANN

One of ICANN's core values is to seek and support *“broad, informed participation reflecting the functional, geographic, and cultural diversity of the Internet at all levels of policy development and decision-making to ensure that the bottom-up, multistakeholder policy development process is used to ascertain the global public interest and that those processes are accountable and transparent”* (Bylaws Section 1.2.c.ii)

In the view of the GAC and the ALAC it is not only among ICANN's core values but also critical to ICANN's legitimacy to act in the global public interest to allow non-expert stakeholders to meaningfully participate in ICANN's processes and make their voices, their needs and interests heard and duly take them into account in order to act and take decisions that are in fact in the global public interest.

Informed and inclusive participation is, first of all, conditioned on the existence of and access to relevant information. ICANN today is a remarkably open and transparent organization that produces and publishes massive amounts of information about all aspects of its activities. But paradoxically, the sheer volume of the information has turned into a problem for many stakeholders. The more information is available, the greater the need for a logical and user-friendly document management system. And the more complex the substance matter, the greater effort is needed to present relevant issues – as complex as they may be in their details – in a way that they are understandable for interested non-experts and non-ICANN-insiders.

The prevailing situation is especially challenging for stakeholders who are not employed to deal exclusively with ICANN-related issues, which is in particular but not only the case for many end-user volunteers and government representatives. That is why the GAC and the ALAC are taking up the issue. Of course, improving the premises for informed participation would benefit all stakeholders of the ICANN community.

To address the problem, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. Bringing order to the document management system so that, e.g., every document has a title and a reference number, identifies the author and indicates intended recipients, should be easy and could be considered “low-hanging fruit”.

More effort and strategic thinking will be needed in order re-focus ICANN's communications on enabling informed participation of all stakeholders in the true sense of the core value cited above. At present, there is a wide gap between informing the general public via the website and newsletters, and feeding experts with extensive and complicated documents understandable only by them. For a non-expert stakeholder who wants to be an informed participant, the former material is often not very useful and the latter takes too much time and effort to be of use. If ICANN really wants to maximize informed participation, there should be an effort to arouse the interest from all

stakeholder groups – almost a marketing approach, and to provide relevant information in understandable and concise form.

What are needed are summaries and synopses, infographics, videos, and other innovative ways of presenting information, so that a stakeholder will be able (a) to quickly determine if a particular issues is of concern to him/her and (b) if yes, to participate in the policy process easily and effectively, on equal footing with other stakeholders. To provide for such easy understandable information is particularly needed when an issue is put out for public comment as this would lower the barrier for non-insiders to be able understand what is relevant for them and make their voice heard. In communicating about the process of IANA transition and enhancing accountability, ICANN has proven that it is actually possible to break down complex issues into key elements that are understandable and allow for interaction with a wider community.

As another element, it is not only essential for a sustainable informed and inclusive participation, that people do not only make their voices heard and feed into ICANN's processes - it is also critical that those who are working at the core of ICANN's processes take all input from the wider community into account with an open and non-biased mind, trying to understand the messages that they are receiving, including the views, needs and interests expressed in them and that they do their best to proceed these into follow-up documents that make all participants feel that their input has been understood, taken into account and integrated into follow-up work and documents. It is therefore also important to guarantee certain level of diversity of views and backgrounds, as well as needs and interests among the core teams working on a particular issue.

The GAC and ALAC advise ICANN to make a concerted effort to implement the promise of informed participation of all stakeholders that it has committed to as one of its core values.

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