

DRAFT Report: Strategy Meeting Held October 28 2017

Objective:

The aim of this meeting was to better determine the strategic priorities and suggested concentrations of volunteer effort of ICANN At-Large. It sought to test a hypothesis: that there may exist a gap between the policy and process issues of importance to At-Large compared to those put forward as important by ICANN to attendees.

Tactics:

The intention was to ask meeting attendees what they, personally, thought Internet end-users needed from ICANN. The appeal to personal opinion through direct questioning and a more casual meeting style (no speakers' queue, deliberate eye contact with the moderator) was used to circumvent the usual difficulties when using the term "public interest"; respondents reflected on their own understanding of end-user needs related to ICANN's governance and functions, in some cases informed through consultation with their ALSs.

Observations:

To use a term used once at an ITU meeting, the "feel of the room" indicated a number of recurring themes emerged, related to the question "what do you believe end users want from ICANN?":

1. Most end users don't (or shouldn't need to) care about ICANN itself. When doing its job properly, its presence should be transparent or invisible to end users;
2. "Stability" seems to be the overriding common interest. In most cases this means little more than the DNS is always working and reliably converts names to destinations. Some participants extended the concept of stability to refer to registrants not easily losing their names for accidental reasons, or that a Top-level domain's name should infer reasonable assumptions about its second level domains;
3. Almost as common was a call for more publicly-targeted end-user information related to the safe use and procurement of domains. This information needs to be jargon-free and aimed at non-technical casual users. Topics would include the basics of how to reliably reach desired Internet destinations, how to shop for a domain if the reader wants one, and how to avoid, prevent and report abuse;
4. Internationalized domain names were considered vital to enable the global community of end users to have full and equitable use of the Internet;
5. Some participants referred to privacy, though this concept was less clear in regard to non-registrant end-users. Privacy for registrants was assumed to refer to protection against abuse of their data by either governments or business. (End user recourse against abuse by registrants, of course, is an issue, though participants were divided on how to do this);

As interesting as the stated areas of concern was issues that were NOT mentioned, including some that may be significant occupations of ALAC during (and between) ICANN meetings, such as:

- Anything related to the expansion in gTLDs (such as cost to acquire, PICs, community applications, digital archery, closed generics, etc) except for matters related to above-stated concerns about stability and reliability of working domains;
- Issues related to ownership entitlement of specific domains (such as whether “amazon” should be controlled by governments or private interest) so long as there is a reasonable connection between names and the Internet destinations that they point to. As such, trademark enforcement mechanisms (or other rights-related domain reservation activities) appear not to be controversial;
- Increasing public awareness of ICANN itself. Non-technical end users should not be expected to get involved into ICANN any more than they should get involved in highway construction, sewage systems or hospitals. That is, Internet names and numbers may simply be seen as public infrastructure, and the greater public at large won't (and shouldn't need to) get involved until they stop working as expected;

Conclusion

A regular re-evaluation of “what is important to At-Large participants at ICANN meetings” (nominally ALAC plus RALO leadership) may reveal important differences with ICANN's own identified “hot topics”. Concentration on demonstrated areas of commonly agreed priorities may prove useful in two ways:

- It may allow ALAC to more effectively allocate its policy-development talent, what appears to be an increasingly-rare resource
- It may make policy engagement more attractive to At-Large participants who are better able to personally identify with the issues and causes at hand