Track 1

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CC2 Review – Applicant Support

WG Discussions to date:

Possible reasons that may have contributed to the limited number of applications for the ASP program:

- The measures introduced to prevent gaming of the ASP may have discouraged possible applicants.
- There was a short trajectory from the JAS WG Final Report, implementation of the recommendations, and the launch of the New gTLD Program, inclusive of the ASP.
- The lack of, or otherwise inadequate, outreach efforts for the ASP.
- The lack of financial support beyond the application fee reduction for other aspects of the program, like objections, string contention resolution, post-delegation operations, and other expenses associated with running a gTLD registry including backend registry services, escrow services, marketing and sales.

Suggestions on how to address some of the issues identified above, hopefully increasing utilization of the ASP or similar program, such as:

- Improving the outreach for the ASP as well as improved outreach in general for the New gTLD Program in Developing Countries.
- Creating a round dedicated to applicants from Developing Countries, which is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2.16 on Application Submission Limits.
- Making the assistance more comprehensive, so that it extends beyond just the application fee reduction.

CC2 Review – Applicant Support

1.2.1 - Some have suggested it could be beneficial to expand the scope of the Applicant Support (AS) program by: 1. Broadening support to IDNs or other criteria 2. Allowing the Applicant Support program to include the "middle applicant", defined as struggling regions that are further along in their development compared to underserved or underdeveloped regions. The "middle applicant" is intended to be an expansion and NOT intended to be at the exclusion from applicants in underserved or underdeveloped regions. The "middle applicant" provides a balance between opportunities while considering the economic and developmental realities and priorities for potential applicants. Do you believe there is value in the above suggestions? Do you feel there are other areas in which the Applicant Support program could be extended to benefit other regions?

Feedback re AS for IDNs:

"There is a **good argument to be made around the need for additional support for IDNs**, but this would need to be wrapped together with two broader areas that are needed: **more community technical resources** to help applicants get started (IDNs might just need more assistance) and **more overall visibility** in the marketplace for the program itself." – BC

"Registries believe that the focus on support for underserved underdeveloped regions is a priority. **Registries would support the eligibility of IDNs if those applicants also meet the other criteria for the ASP and do not believe IDNs would require a specific or special category of support**." – RySG

"The origins of the AS program were always intended to include IDN support. **This is not readily evident to be a problem that needs fixing**. . ." -- ALAC

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Feedback on concept of "middle applicant":

In many ways, truly underserved regions may not yet have the appropriate market conditions for participation – they may lack the infrastructure (sales or technical) to provide for sustainable new applicants and may not have the demand. **"Middle Applicant" areas could make sense**, but we would **need to identify which areas to target and which services to offer**." – BC

"While, the proposal of a "middle applicant" category **could afford greater access to the ASP, it could also increase costs** of the program. Registries would be curious as to **how this expanded category would be defined**, the **specifics of the proposal's implications** such as overall cost and anticipated number of potential recipients. . ." – RySG

"**Expanding a too-restrictive program to operate in richer economies will not, we believe, result in benefits consistent with the original aims of the program.** Rather than expanded to other regions, the AS program must be modified so it can be more-readily exploited in the regions it was originally intended to serve. Expansion to richer economies should not proceed until the AS is evidenced to be functional in the originally targeted regions." – ALAC

"Am **against a Middle Man solution** (if understood correctly). Instead, ICANN should allocate funds from the profits from the 2012 round. Then **"industry experts" and RSPs etc. should be able to assist applicants from such regions to apply for funding** for application writing, application fees, SLA fees and Operational costs (RSPs, WHOIS Escrow, Anti Abuse Monitoring Software etc.)" – Jannik Skou

CC2 Review – Applicant Support

Feedback on ways to improve the Applicant Support Program
1. Focusing on other areas of the New gTLD ecosystem

"**Bringing down the application costs and simplifying the application process** (and timeframes!) will be the most effective way of levelling the playing field in terms of supporting, in general terms, ALL applicants." – Nominet

". . . **Efforts to help underserved or underdeveloped regions will be better served at providing support in other parts of the ecosystem - the RO or registrar programs** - rather than create conflicting technical or operational requirements. While these are commendable goals, any Program must prioritize rigorous technical standards that ensure trust through the Internet. . . **If ICANN wishes to expand the Applicant Support program, it must find suitable partners with the relevant global reach to deliver the message to the appropriate audience**, e.g., Internet Society chapters, global university networks who have numerous international campuses and programs, or aid organizations that specialize in technology and communications in underserved markets." – Afilias

2. Collect additional information through research and studies

"Our view is that **further information and a better understanding is required**. Suggested next steps include **research and studies into understanding needs of any program and current weaknesses**. Potential areas for expansion include (1) Broaden support to IDNs or other criteria." – Valideus

CC2 Review – Applicant Support

Opposition to expanding Applicant Support

"No, **do not expand**, if anything eliminate "applicant support." **Registrants don't want or need "needy" unqualified applicants**. . ." – John Poole

". . . if an applicant does not have sufficient capabilities they should not be applying in the first place. . ." – John Poole (excerpted from response to 1.2.5)

1.2.2 - The Applicant Support Program for the 2012 round was mainly focused on financial support and application submission. Should funding be extended to other areas of the process or for ongoing operational costs? Are there other support mechanisms that should be explored?

"Shorter and simpler **'plain English' documentation and publicity / education** should both be looked at. There are other areas such as hardware, software, IT skills and Internet accessibility, but suggest these are outside ICANN's scope in terms of the new gTLD programs." – Nominet

"Applicant support should **focus on the application process and assisting those who want to apply to submit and see their applications through the process**. Continuing operational costs are outside the application period and outside the bounds of the ASP. ICANN could, however, **facilitate introductions and engagement with RSPs that are willing to support discounted services for ASP participants**." – RySG

". . .**Registries support continuation of the Applicant Support Program (ASP)** in the next round of gTLDs to the benefit of applicants and the community. Unfortunately, use of the ASP in the 2012 round was very limited. Based upon the findings of the discussion group it seems that **primary hurdles to use of the ASP were awareness, timing, and education**. Further, it was particularly **burdensome for applicants from underserved and middle-served regions to provide required financial documents for a continuing operations instrument (COI)**. Reconsidering ASP requirements to account for this may be beneficial. **Registries support improved outreach and publication of the ASP and the resources it provides**. Registries feel that an ASP with well-defined criteria, clear engagement processes, and increased awareness has the potential to serve the full community of potential applicants." – RySG (excerpted from response to 2.1.1)

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". . .Considering that there were zero successful applicants from under-served or under-developed economies, attention should be focused to **learning from that and making criteria less stringent** for applicants from these areas. This involves potential **expansion of the traditional definition of community applications, as well as the enabling of for-profit entities in under-served and underdeveloped economies to participate in the program**. This could include major **technical training** (for example, to increase the number of registrars in these regions) as well as **knowledge and capacity building** and access to appropriate resource personnel who could assist under-served and underdeveloped economies to better understand appropriate business models that would help them to successfully implement new gTLDs based on lessons learned from previous new gTLD experiences. **Proactive consultation with key personnel from these economies** to ascertain what their needs are in order to create a more successful development of new gTLDs for this targeted group would be helpful." – ALAC (excerpted from response to 2.1.1)

"The primary focus of any changes to the Applicant Support program should be in the **eligibility criteria or in supporting potential applicants to be able to meet appropriate eligibility standards** as in 1.2.1. But also, there is a **strong need for mentorship and continued support** to be built into the support programme so that potential builders of new gTLD operations are not just left to their own meagre resources after training to fend for themselves, as is usually the case with a lot of development programmes. Addressing the benefits in other areas is premature unless the rate of successful applications to rejections is dramatically improved." – ALAC

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"Generally, the **BC does not agree with subsidizing registry businesses**, especially with the behavior we experienced in the last round. However, **there may be sound reasons for helping a registry under the right circumstances**.

For example, the new gTLD Program could support applicants that are targeting registrants in underserved/underdeveloped regions, particularly for **proposed TLDs using the language and script of that region**.

In the last round, ICANN set aside $2 million for applicants who needed financial support, yet the **criteria was so high that no applicants were accepted** into the Applicant Support Program (ASP). Further, applicants that did not receive funding also lost their initial fees. . .

There are lessons to be learned from the Joint Applicant Support (JAS) program in the last round. The JAS team included just one consistent business representative (Andrew Mack).
- It needed to **tackle more directly the idea of creating a "business model"** for potential applicants in order to know which kind of support to provide.
- The assumption was that we could/should **focus on pricing, but in the end this likely was only one of a number of issues.**

CC2 Review – Applicant Support

- Other factors impairing the previous applicant support effort include **lack of awareness** of the JAS program, the limited information available in most markets about the new gTLD program generally, and the lack of connection to technical information and support.
- Underserved/disadvantaged communities need much more **technical support** in deciding whether and how to go forward as well as some targeted financial support.

Future support mechanisms for applicants serving qualifying regions **should not just be limited to the application process, but should also address the TLD operator's needs in areas such as escrow backup and ICANN annual fee relief**—at least for a time period sufficient for market development and adoption." – BC

"**. . .** Possibly work with **local/regional experts** who could provide support for applications." – BC (excerpted from response to 1.2.5)

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1.2.3 - Do you have any suggestions for improving publicity and outreach to potential applicants who would benefit from the Applicant Support program? Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the process to apply for support?

"**Engage with ccNSO/GAC Members/ALAC** on how to create awareness /education in such regions. Allocate funds from profit from 2012 round. Create an ICANN department/team who can **(phone) answer (in multiple languages)** questions related to applying for/operating new gTLDs." – Jannik Skou

"ICANN to **produce a video** explaining Benefits, How to Apply, (Including planning/funding phases), How to Operate new gTLDs." – Jannik Skou (excerpted from response to 1.2.5)

"The **regional IGF networks** could be effective here?" – Nominet

". . . As noted above Registries support **improved outreach and publication** of the Applicant Support program to overcome the lack of awareness about the program and the resources it can provide. Registries would encourage ICANN to **build relationships and share information about future new gTLD releases in a timely manner with business associations**, such as national and regional Chambers of Commerce, in order that they can disseminate this to their members to raise awareness." – RySG

"As noted in 1.2.1, it is incumbent on ICANN to **identify appropriate partners** to assist in this effort." – Afilias

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"**Simplify** the process, and add these improvements:

1. If our community is serious about supporting applicants, we need a major **effort to help potential applicants learn about the process and understand – early – what kinds of support might be available**. Too little was offered too late.
2. Provide **support not just to committed applicants, but also to groups considering/evaluating whether to apply**. Provide the tools to help them evaluate their idea and its potential before looking at applying for support.
3. **Be present in potential markets**. Showing up once or twice won't get it done. This is still a new field in many countries and it takes time/presence to build awareness." – BC

"The Applicant Support program was barely mentioned in the original ICANN promotion of the 2012 gTLD round, so **any new communications will be an improvement** and is critical to any successful outcomes for potential applicants in under-served or under-developed economies.

Referring to 1.2.1, and **expanding training and awareness opportunities** to be more inclusive of their needs in this area, primarily in facilitating and enabling these opportunities which requires funding and other resources to make them effective enablers for new gTLD development in their regions. **Inclusion of the Applicant Support program in all promotional activities related to new TLD applications** would be sensible." -- ALAC

1.2.4 - The WG has noted that even if the Applicant Support program is well-funded, well-communicated and comprehensively implemented, potential applicants may still choose not to apply for a gTLD. What other metrics could be used to evaluate the success of Applicant Support initiatives beyond the volume of applications? A study conducted by AMGlobal Consulting, 'New gTLDs and the Global South' determined that there was limited awareness of the New gTLD Program and the benefits in applying amongst potential applicants; Would additional metrics on future Applicant Support program(s) and its ability to raise awareness be helpful? Do you have any other metrics that would be helpful measuring the success of the program?

- Look at number of domains registered in regional TLDs

  - "**Identify Number of domain names registered in "regional" new gTLDs** compared with the number of internet users in such regions and then compare with same numbers in regions like Europe and North America." – Jannik Skou

- Look at number of workshops offered, events attended & related communications

  - ". . . Agree that there may not be a business case for applying, so I think we should work on that directly by **having workshops** – regionally, in language, at limited cost – to help potential applicants evaluate their ideas and there see if they might qualify for support. The **number of such workshops offered, the number of attendees with ideas, the number of follow-on communications** – all of these could be meaningful metrics." -- BC

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- Look at number of applications & successful applications

  - "In addition to the **number of applications, the number of successful applications (delegation) that come through the ASP** could indicate that the support provided was robust enough for the applicant to prepare and provide what is needed as a gTLD Registry." – RySG

- Looking at the number individuals who participate in and complete training to become registries

  - "ICANN must be sensitive of the dire lack of resources related to Internet connectivity in least-developed economies. **Where basic infrastructure and reliable access continues to be a challenge, ICANN must accept that existing availability of TLDs (ccTLDs and existing gTLDs) may be sufficient in regions where resources may be more effectively applied to critical local Internet infrastructure** . . . One objective could be the development of outreach by registries and registrars into the underserved and underdeveloped sectors - implementing **appropriate training programmes for developing locally situated registries/registrars** that will address and support the needs of potential business, educational and social entrepreneurial LDC end-users. . . At the same time, training and infrastructure is not sustainable if **mentoring and support from knowledgeable technical and management personnel** is not continued as follow-up for local developers, to help them to successfully use their domains to expand their economic and social outreach into global networks, until such time as they are able to fly on their own. In relation to the proposal in 1.2.1, **metrics could be associated with the number of people within LDCs who opt for and are successfully trained as registrars**." -- ALAC

1.2.5 - Do you have any other general recommendations for improving the Applicant Support program?

- Streamlining the application process and improving awareness about the informal support ecosystem

  - ". . . Consider **streamlining the application process** – for all regions, but especially for the global south – based on the experience of the recent round." – BC

  - "There was an **informal support ecosystem established by ICANN as part of the process – where firms could offer to support potential applicants and applicants could ask for support – but nobody knew it existed**. This was a miss. . ." – BC (excerpted from response to 1.2.4)

- Eliminating the rule that prevented failed Applicant Support candidates from resubmitting a standard application

  - "See response to 1.2.2. Improvement which starts at changing and supporting **opportunities for people in under-served and underdeveloped economies to improve their chances to meet the eligibility criteria**, will enable more potential applicants, in relevant regions, to succeed. Specifically, **the rule that prevented a failed 2012 Applicant Support effort from re-submitting as a conventional gTLD (without support) must be eliminated**. This rule was believed to be a significant barrier to entry for many would be applicants." -- ALAC

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- Setting expectations for the program

  - ". . .The **applicant must be able to demonstrate that there is a business case for the TLD**, and if the intent is to raise revenue that there is an actual market that the TLD will serve and that the infrastructure and people with the knowledge and the skills to operate the TLD in perpetuity are accessible." – RySG

- Emphasized importance of applicant support; better advertising or an exclusive round for applicants from developing countries.

  - "Regarding the application process, granting **support for applicants from developing countries, whether it is financial or not, is key** given the fact that it increases global diversity and reduces the disadvantages that may keep applicants from these regions from participating in the New gTLD Program. We believe that either a **better advertisement** of the existence of the Applicant Support Program to these countries or the implementation of an **exclusive round for applicants from developing countries** would raise awareness and eventually result in increasing of the number of new gTLDs applications." – NCSG

From the GAC

- "Please see GAC submission to Public Comment process for the CCT-RT Draft Report." -- GAC

1.9.1 - The WG considers this subject to be mainly implementation focused, but nevertheless, has identified areas for improvement. For instance, the knowledge base could be made more timely and searchable, applicant advisories could be better communicated (e.g., create some sort of subscription service), program information could be consolidated into a single site, ICANN's Global Stakeholder Engagement team could be leveraged to promote global awareness, etc. Do you have suggestions on additional areas for improvement?

Jannik Skou, BRG, RySG, Afilias, ALAC, and GAC UK provided specific feedback on ways to improve communications.

- ✓ **"Make a video** explaining what it takes and which data to provide – inform about degree of detail needed – and explain responsibility, challenges and benefits." – Jannik Skou

- ✓ ". . . Due to the different types of registries that applied in 2012, consideration towards **tailored information and processes could be adopted for distinct models**, like dotBrands." – BRG

- ✓ ". . . communication to the masses is an important feature of getting the right messages out about ICANN, the DNS, etc, and the RSP and Applicant Support programmes, and the **GSE team is not being totally successful in getting these out to under-served countries**. . .RALOs are disadvantaged when outreach opportunities funded by ICANN are limited to 5 CROP slots. . . **regional teams need to be organised within underserved regions to more effectively Introduce, educate and inform** people who may be qualified but without the right contacts to learn about the RSP and Applicant Support programmes." -- ALAC

- ✓ "The expansion in the number of national and regional multi-stakeholder **Internet Governance Fora (IGFs) provide valuable outreach opportunities** and close-to-market hub modalities for promoting the next new gTLD application process or round to stakeholder communities worldwide including least developed economies and small island developing states for whom the global digital economy increasingly provides unprecedented opportunity for economic and social growth." – GAC UK

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✓ ". . .ICANN should **provide applicants with an option to be notified of developments** related to the New gTLD Program and related processes and procedures, as well as information that is germane to their own applications. . . The ICANN portals (first the CSC portal and later the GDD portal) provide a workable mechanism to submit questions to ICANN for specific applications confidentially. If a similar mechanism is employed in the future, ICANN should set a **specific, timely deadline for responding to questions**. . . In addition to the portals, ICANN should also create a more general **"help line"** (such as a dedicated email address) for more general questions about all applications or categories of applications. ICANN should consolidate these questions and answers into a published, **searchable FAQ-type page on its website** that applicants and other parties can review. . . In the event that ICANN chooses to use **webinars or sessions** at ICANN meetings to communicate timely information to applicants, it should **publish detailed minutes of these interactions**, complete with questions asked and the responses provided, along with any slides and the recordings transcripts of these interactions. . . Finally, ICANN should develop an **easily accessible and searchable knowledge base** for any new information that is released that goes beyond what is captured in the Applicant Guidebook (or its replacement) and any other informational documents published prior to the opening of subsequent application procedures. . ." – RySG, Afilias

1.9.2 - Metrics to understand the level of success for communications were not established - do you have suggestions on what success looks like?

✓ ". . . mainstream media could be a source to provide metrics, in terms of any **articles referencing ICANN + New gTLDs**, in different languages, across different countries. . .In relation to the communication within the New gTLD Program, **standard metrics should include response times**." -- BRG

✓ ". . . If there is widespread agreement that ICANN should engage in similar communications plans and awareness-building activities in the future, then the RySG believes that the ICANN organization (its staff and Board of Directors) is very ill-equipped to undertake such an effort on its own. If budget is set aside for this type of activity, ICANN should use those funds to **hire an experienced communications firm** with a proven track record of success in conducting global awareness-building campaigns. **The engagement with such a firm should include established metrics for success** against which the performance of the firm is evaluated." – RySG, Afilias

✓ "Success could be measured in the **number of people who apply for the training programmes and successfully achieve its outcomes**, **those who eventually get to set up their own RSP** (or who gather together in a team to do so within a region). Success could also relate to the **number of outreach opportunities within each of the region that results in getting people to apply, and talking to them about the programme**." -- ALAC

➢ John Poole commented that the whole program needs a "revamp."

Thank-you for your Time and Thoughts!

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, September 19, 2017 at 03:00 UTC